

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter provides the most essential aspects of the research. It debates literature from related research work while it dwells on what the knowledge base has in common and also highlights the gap in the canon of scholarship. The chapter exhaustively examined the results of former related research giving some scrutiny of that reviewed literature and recognises the significance of the SME's in the tourism sector in Zimbabwe.

According to Vithal and Jansen (2014), literature review helps by giving originality to the study, test the theories, apply theory, then design and conduct the study. The present study reviewed academic and professional publications regarding hospitality industry readiness to adopt digital media technology for consumer engagement.

Digital technological adoption is fast being implemented by the organisations to react positively to consumers preferences while on the same vein, improve consumer side operations. It augments those desires of customers and corporates while on the same note, helping propel both sales and efficiencies through reduction of costs. Information density is easily passed on because of digital technology (Watson *et al.*, 2006). Corporates are heavily reliant on digital technology use to increase the quality of information availed to their stakeholders (Foroudi *et al.*, 2016).

In simple terms, technology innovation is taken as the deployment of a service or product with enhanced capability appearances in a way to disseminate fresh or upgraded services to the consumer (Oh and Teo, 2010; Gorla *et al.*, 2010). Best quality information conveyed through the best channel or format has a big effect on consumer behaviours and marketing (Oh and Teo, 2010). Information density comprises of integrated promotions which, among other issues, involve consistency

on branding to support consumers. It also talks to the product and pricing history which guarantees reliability on product portfolio and pricing through retail outlets. Finally, it allows for information dissemination which is the collation of consumers' on-line purchases which are held by retailers which helps provide customized information and services (Oh and Teo, 2010).

Service convenience is the customer's desire in preserving time and effort. Bin and Teo (2010) allege that the processes of integrated information access and customer service" plays a crucial role in benefiting service convenience. Information access via on-line stores enables the customer to acquire pertinent information that relates to product availability and location (Ray *et al.*, 2005; Tallon, 2010). On the same note, order fulfilment allows tearless order management to the customer by giving product availability, seamless and fast purchase resulting in instant delivery (Porter, 1980). Integrated customer service provides best customer treatment and support while at the same time online products purchases can be exchanged or surrendered back to the shop (Banker *et al.*, 2006).

Digital technological adoption acts a crucial role in virtually most corporates. (Setia *et al.*, 2013) It has also enabled partnership across firms; provide information storage and analysis which has greatly improved client service deliverables (Ray *et al.*, 2005). It has had a huge influence on client service delivery (Ray *et al.*, 2005). Further this has enhanced management services convenience (Pavlou and El Sawy, 2006).

Gretzel (2011) contends that undoubtedly smart tourism is a brainchild of ICT. Similarly, Sigala, Koo, Xiang and Gretzel (2015) argued that smart tourism is taken to be a rational development from yester year tourism and e-tourism, showcasing the extensive use of ICT. To put things into perspective, smart tourism is an ICT integrated tourism

platform, such as artificial intelligence (AI). (IoT) the Internet of Things and cloud computing (Wang *et al.*, 2016).

However, another author Li *et al.* (2017) observe how smart tourism is the recipient of ever-present traveling information flow by travellers with specific personal requests through any form of medium. Therefore, according to Li. (2017), Kim and Kim, 2017) checking up with the dynamics in technology is the ultimate concern of tourism entities, including travellers.

Thus, Rudas and Fodor (2008) argued that smart tourism is expected to comprehend, gain from experience, absorb and retain knowledge and respond quickly and positively to new situations. Accordingly, employees' personality traits are central in the automation of digital media technology. Essentially, the goal is to give all tourism stakeholders adequate and correct information, improved direction supports greater mobility and finally exciting tourism experiences (Sigala and Chalkiti, 2014).

Currently, attempts have been done to make use of Augmented Reality (AR) and Big Data technology for smart tourism. According to Del Vecchio, Mele, Ndou and Secundo (2018) all this is used to assist in establishing tourism brands, support travel making decisions and supporting participation by tourists

Digital media technology is there to support travellers by predicting the user's preferences depending on several issues and suggesting possibilities with respect to the consumption preferences which among other things will include points of entertainment, dining & recreational facilities, interactive services and enhanced travellers' site experiences. By offering this rich information, it revives and reinforces traveller

experiences and also build personalised image and a strong social network image.

As things currently stand, the (IoT) Internet of Things has the ability to fast turn into a new norm as infrastructural technology, thus by (Atzori *et al.*, 2010). Of late this has been observed as a primary cornerstone for services that are to be offered by smart tourism towns (Guo *et al.*, 2014; Perera *et al.*, 2014). The general idea of the Internet of Things is the prevalent appearance among us of a varied number of things such as (RFID) thus Radio-Frequency-Identification tags, actuators, mobile devices, sensors etc. All these can interact with each other and cooperate with their neighbouring facets to achieve the same purpose (Want *et al.*, 2015).

All these gadgets are joined to the internet which resultantly closes the opening between the actual world and the digital sphere. As such the internet of things enables the creation of diverse spheres which are able to cast a wide range and different forms of data making use of participatory sensing systems (Gutiérrez, *et al.*, 2013). Significantly the eruption of the IoT provides a change of service delivery which has leapfrogged from the contemporary image of always on services which is typical of the web era, to a new norm which is always responsive situated services that is moulded and constructed to answer to a particular need while at the same time accounting for the user's context.

These innovations controlled by the internet of things have major implications on tourism growth due to the fact that tourism involves passage through period smart environment which grows to be cognisance of and be able to address, the tourist's personal needs in a convincing and yet subtle way. A good example is of sensors installed in tourist attractions which enable tourism corporates to track their client's locations and spending patterns to provide them with personalised and location-based services.

We have smart watches which are wearable technologies which compile data making use of their sensors and cameras. Furthermore, they also interface with the network and more so the internet of things while supporting higher levels of connectivity without much interference with the experience. Both digital and online marketing technology are to be appreciated in the context of Web 2.0 & Web 3.0 technology and the Internet of Things (IoT) that are all similar ideas in that this all relates to web technology which is ubiquitous and linked to nearly everything and smartly integrated.

There is a series of powers which have emerged relating to either cloud, mobile and social information which are relevant to the present technological business landscape. For enhanced social cohesion and product or service value, clients are eager to engage in marketing activities much more. With the foregoing, organisations need to concentrate on improved and enhanced advanced ways to reach their stakeholders (Gartner, 2015).

Nowadays it is easy for tourists to gather and access information from the internet, WhatsApp and short message services (SMS), portable gadgets, devices you can wear such as smart watches, or other various tour information platforms (Chen and Shang, 2014). Acquiring multi faceted information enables a tourist to prepare both mentally and physically before arriving at the intended tourist destination. The primary purpose of using the concept of smart tourism is to provide total tourist satisfaction while helping to manage resources efficiently and effectively.

Smart tourism involves a marketing platform that is recognised by an efficient and inclusive flow of information exchange among stakeholders which are tourists themselves and the respective tourism entities (Li, Hu, Huang, Duan, 2017). However, it has been noted that there is little research undertaken about smart tourism basing from various academic and practical discussions on hand (Brandt, Bendler, Neumann, 2017). On

the same vein tourist behaviours concerning smart tourism has not been adequately explored. In addition, not much has been researched on users' perception about the negative effects of smart devices utilization during travel.

Sensitive and confidential information that include payment and location status, can be easily leaked during the use of a smart device in a foreign territory (Huang, Goo, Nam, Yoo, 2017). Furthermore, unsolicited records such as digital footprints are easily recorded and stored depending on service usage Gretzel *et al.* (2015). As travellers become increasingly reliant on their smart gadgets, they can pretty much predict their travel expedition hence no more surprises which takes away the travel enjoyment. There will be not any surprises in the travel experience.

Technology innovation is described as the implementation of better systems which achieve latest requirements, new or current market needs (Maranville, 1992). Technology innovation, which includes digital media, is able to avail economic growth through an adoption and mixture of current products (Garcia and Calantone, 2002). Contrastingly, it may encompass repeated refinements and upgrades of current services and products.

We have an example where digital media has brought about the birth of a new involving public domain where everyone can interact and have an alliance in content co-creation (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016). The instant marriage in real time between the public and the entity or institution is one of the prime features of the internet world. Online users are repeatedly being exposed to the organisation's innovative marketing package through the global diffusion of digital software packages such as blogs, WikiLeaks, webinars and electronic fora. These social networks help to facilitate the institutions' communicating with their customers (Camilleri, 2017).

Many large organisations websites have a high level of interaction with a capacity to pass on information and to build relationships among diverse stakeholders and the entities (Capriotti and Moreno, 2007). It must be noted that the use of the Internet has the potential to be unidirectional when it comes to information diffusion. On the foregoing, digital social media parameters enable easy communication as it is viewed as a two-way communication between the organisation and its customers. As such, internet arenas have pointed to a symmetric communication among the various participants thereby removing the usual unnecessary hierarchies (Castelló, Morsing and Schultz, 2013).

As an addition, social media lacks gatekeeping (Morsing and Schultz, 2006; Vorvoreanu, 2009). To that end, communication interaction is shifting the social philosophy (Harrigan and Miles, 2014). Both data and web exchanges have greatly improved the interaction between stakeholders and corporates. The Internet allows organisations to interact with online platform consumers and then take lead of the constructive publicity that emanates from the real time word of mouth marketing strategies (Camilleri, 2017).

It has been noticed that communication via the internet is spirited in comparison to traditional media (Lamberton and Stephen, 2016; Taiminen and Karjaluo, 2015). Digital media has the technological power to hasten communication systems (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010) and increase straight interaction and participation among corporates and various stakeholders (Utz and Göritz, 2011). These reciprocal communications are mostly known as “viral” mainly because these ideas and opinions fast spread like veld fires through the social network verbally. These pathways are considered to be highly reliable sources of information (Schultz and Wehmeier, 2010).

It is critical to note that when small entities share their entrepreneurship and stakeholder engagement information with their online customers, those followers will, in turn, also share their passion for good reasons.

However, in contrast, there are several realistic causes why the communication features that are enabled by digital social media may not be applied efficiently and effectively by the corporate' marketing teams (Tiago and Veríssimo 2014).

As a result, the tourism SME owner-managed entities are encouraged to bring themselves to speed into the digital media arena to raise the impact on their communication status. There is a chance for them to make use of interactive digital technology which can widen the frequency, outreach and effect of their messages (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). The SME top echelons are at a better status to increase the efficiency and impact of their responsible entrepreneurship activities as a result of digital media adoption. They however, should choose on what message content to disseminate, where to communicate it, how to communicate and when to communicate to reach out to the desired consumers.

As a matter of fact, the internet is rapidly growing at an alarming speed of technology adoption. It is the online communication that has fully changed the internet arena through innovation and highly scalable social media networks and product recommendation ideologies. There has been a sudden emergence of user constructed content in newsgroups, social media. Crowd pulling has also proffered numerous windows for researchers and experts alike to pay attention carefully to clients, employees, investors, suppliers, regulatory authorities and the media to mention a few.

The status quo is that digital media enhances the effectiveness and efficiency of the entities engagement capacities with stakeholders. Recent researches exhibit that the businesses implementation of online engagement is neither automatic nor easy (Tiago and Veríssimo, 2014). The dialogue characteristics which are web based enabled such as blogs and other social media are at times very difficult to implement (Etter, 2013).

Latest research has debated on the communication aspects of internet-based stakeholder engagement (Moreno and Capriotti, 2009). However, very limited factual research has managed to measure the companies owner-managers stand point on communicating on ethical, commercial and social responsibility aspects through the platform provided by digital technology

According to Dimopoulou and Moustakis (2014), Technology readiness is conceptualised as a person's mental willingness or readiness to accept the advent of new technologies. On the other hand, Parasuraman (2000:308) considers technology-readiness construct as people's willingness or propensity to accept and make use of new technologies in achieving goals both at home life and work life. However, according to Walczuch *et al.* (2007), it is silent on a person's skills and knowledge in the use of technology but rather the acceptance of it.

Technology Readiness Index has been adopted to understand the state of technology adoption by tourists and also explain the adoption behaviour of new ICT services in the tourism industry (Victorino *et al.*, 2009). TRI is used to enhance the effectiveness of lodges or hotel client profiling for purposes of market segmentation, since it was found to be a very useful tool for segmentation. In addition, it aided supervisors to design segments which have unique characteristics towards demographic attitudes and technological usage formats that enables it to give products and services according to the preferences and tastes of diverse groups on their comfort with technology use (Victorino, Karniouchina, Verma (2009). It was also observed that tourism guests with a high level of TRI score were still young and on most occasions frequent upscale hotels.

Thus, with reference to Parasuraman (2000) individuals exhibit either positive or negative personality feelings towards technology. Consequently, Parasuraman and Colby (2001) argued that Technology Readiness Index (TRI) is a statistical tool which enables the classification

of individuals, at the same time measuring one's propensity to adopt new technologies. In essence, Optimism and innovativeness are regarded as motivators of technology acceptance whilst insecurity and discomfort are inhibitors.

Empirically, Karahanna *et al.* (1999) found that much innovative people are early adopters and exhibit less complex beliefs about new technology. As such, innovators have a correct impression of the usefulness of technology (Walczuch *et al.*, 2007). In addition, optimists do not worry much about the possibility of negative outcomes as they perceive technology to be more useful and relatively easy to use. Accordingly, motivators of TRI have empirically shown that they are positively related to the adoption and use of technology (Walczuch *et al.*, 2007). Essentially, if employees are optimistic and innovative, they are most likely to engage consumers more, than when they have discomfort and insecurity towards new technology use.

Of late research has increased as a result of the birth of innovation technologies in the form of mobile applications and Augmented Reality for tourism industry. For example, Chung *et al.* (2015) have made use of the Technology Readiness Index model to examine the readiness of the mind for the easy use of Augmented Reality in historical sites and to find out whether augmented reality does for sure aid in motivating travellers to visit a specific destination. However, most of the available researches have taken Technology Readiness as an individual trait but without fully debating other personal factors all together. On that vein, the importance of Technology Readiness has been accepted, but being limited only to a debate on the differences in influence in relation to individual characteristics.

Divinagracia (2012) argues that the use of digital media as a communication platform for tourists has significantly grown over the years. Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick (2016) argued that digital media comprise of communication tools such as the web, email, mobile and

interactive TV. Similarly, search engine marketing, digital media technology and display advertising are such digital media communication channels organisations can use to promote their products and services.

Hence, it is worth noting that digital spheres together with digital media technology have changed the ways in which clients communicate and engage with brands mainly tourists when accessing tourist related information (Xiang, Magnini and Fesenmaier, 2015). To a greater extent, when making purchasing decision, a tourist relies mostly on various digital media as information sources (Živković, Gajić and Muharemović, 2013).

It is of primary importance for organisations in the tourism sector to assess social media and act fast and positively from an internet reputation management position. Neuhofer *et al.* (2014:342) strongly advocate that the tourism enterprise must recognise that the personal customer attention has become the focal point of their services and they should align themselves along those lines.

Wang and Qualls (2007:562) observe how tourism organisations have to look for information which scrutinizes and evaluate the expected outcomes and or benefits of adopting the specific innovation. That study further explains that the hospitality sector organisation's decision to absorb latest technology solely depends on its perceived view of digital technology.

The adoption appetite mainly rely on the organisation's analysis and measure of the advantages that technology will bring to the organisation and is mostly adopted in several dimensions which among others include, market share, efficiency cost savings, productivity and customer service. Besides the perceived usefulness, ease of use and technology, companies in the travel domain are equally interested in the gymnastics of the total chain of the technology adoption sequence. Chathoth

(2007:405) agrees that value emanates from improved service and enhanced staff morale through putting in place information technology services for full tourism services.

Baltzan (2009:200) explains some of the positive benefits of digital marketing by organisations which involve global expansion reach, new markets creation costs reduction and improved operations and effectiveness. Kiang *et al.* (2000:386) focuses on benefits for corporates in relation to three channels anchored on functions performed. The first one is a communication channel which relates information switch between sellers and buyers. The second is a transaction channel which relates to sales modalities and movements.

Tikkanen *et al.* (2009:1374) also buttress the notion that success for virtual world marketing involves value that is perceived by customers, greater interactive applications and finally customer management. Leung and Law (2013:34) advise that it is control which remains more crucial as compared to efficiency increase when discussing about the use of information technology.

However, in spite of numerous well-articulated advantages of digital technologies, organisations will still experience barriers to them in one way or the other. The existence of some of these barriers to technological adoption blocks the entity's readiness to technology adoption. A variety of these setbacks will be deliberated next, but they fall within the previous three model frameworks (Fuchs *et al.*, 2010:168; Fuchs *et al.*, 2014:816).

Digital media technology has in a profound manner transformed how travellers search, produce and disseminate information about their experiences, tourism providers and destinations (Sotiriadis, 2017). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) indicate that digital media technology comprises a set of internet-based systems founded on Web 2.0 ideologies which facilitate the creation and switching of user generated content.

Furthermore, Mangold and Faulds (2009:358) have defined digital media technology as “a wide range of online, word of mouth platforms and social networking websites”. Digital media technology is said to persuade users’ opinion (The Economist, 2007) especially in decision-making and tourism planning (Xiang and Gretzel, 2010). Travellers become co producers, co-marketers, co-designers and co-consumers of the tourism expedition, through engaging on digital media technology platforms (Sigala, *et al*, 2012).

Mohammed *et al.* (cited by Gay *et al.*, 2007:06) explain Internet marketing in operation as a system involved in the use of internet activities to build and keep customer relationships through an interchange of products and services to address the intentions of both players. As such, it is not just about marketing but rather also the format in which companies present and showcase their products on-line through different internet mediums. It is also about creating stakeholder satisfaction via their technological capacities. Neuhofer *et al.* (2014:341) also observe how marketing is combined into the full, intensive and emotive customer experience.

Hamill (2005:1) clearly outlines that the world of digital communication has the positive effect of information reduction which help on devices convergence thus devices such as cameras in phones. These accommodate easy and cheap storage of information which is easy to transmit and reproduce at a later stage. Mobile technology allows users to carry the mobile devices in the form of phones, tablets and GPS to receive and transmit digital information.

Kasavana (2011) states that when mobile information is transmitted through digital text messaging and shared between or among users, it is called viral marketing, “Mobile marketing information is split into alerts, coupons, calls to action, chat sessions, contests, polling, voting and peer-to-peer gifting” Kasavana (2013).

Reino *et al.* (2013:418) made a study which confirmed ICT adoption barriers in respect of both firms and their respective stakeholders. This ranged from availability of the requisite technology, costs, security concerns technical knowledge base and actual training. There is also lack of business strategy to align it with technological systems. There is also an issue relating to small tourism players failing to link the necessary ICT applications into integration and maintenance of old and or new systems. Cobanoglu *et al.* (2007:21) assumed that information technology consumption is very slow due to insufficient technology education on managers themselves.

An observation by Watson (cited by Leung and Law, 2013:27) explains that SMEs first look at the return on investment for such types of technology which is one of the main factors that stops them from fully investing just for data consolidation and interfacing with their customers. Leung and Law (2013:27) further buttress that lack of ICT knowledge by SMEs in the tourism sector is one of the major inhibiting factors for its adoption. They also noted circumstances surrounding hotel managers who report to owner managers with very limited technical knowhow who do not see or understand the importance of technology adoption and hence is never followed up or fully. As a result these managers are never given adequate budget for implementing these.

There is an article from Lodging Technology Study (2016) which advises that growing customer quest for advanced digital technology in the tourism landscape is now surpassing budget constraints which proved to be the biggest challenge in 2015.

In addition, Leung and Law (2013:32) study on Electronic Data Interchange adoption says it is influenced by top management's support and the overall company contextual position. The study also deduced that it is those managers with strong IT knowledge who are likely to

invest in the system which then calls for the importance of hi-tech systems to cater for client's needs.

Wang and Qualls (2007:571) argue how technology adoption by hospitality industry is hampered by the information availability which renders influence on public perceptions about it and how the hospitality sector process everything.

On the other hand, O'Connor (2008:71) advises that those interviewed outlined that barriers to IT implementation in the hospitality sector involved lack of adequate technical people, not showing a business case, no vendor companies for support, a general resistance to change, no standards parameters, no infrastructure and high costs implications.

Consumer engagement is described as 'customers' behavioural attitude toward a brand or company over and above purchases only which emanates from inspirational forces that among other things include verbal communication, referrals, customer-to-customer engagements blogging, written reviews and other such activities" (Marketing Science Institute, 2010:4). To the contrary, So *et al.* (2012) take consumer engagement as the customer's personal attachment with a product as exhibited by their behavioural responses outside of the purchase scenario it be cognitive or otherwise.

Generally, it is comprehensively defined by five dimensions which are the enthusiasm, the attention, the absorption, the interaction and finally the identification. Consequently, those people who feel more absorbed are most likely to fall in love, have trust and have quality relationships with the company , thus the higher the engagement the higher the trust in the relationship (Yoo and Bai, 2013; So *et al.*, 2016).

In addition, the industry has been changed by the growing use of new technological systems which involve digital media and sharing economy-based platforms like Airbnb. Enabled by the above

technologies, clients in the tourism industry can positively co-create and mould their own tourism experiences, as supported by Vargo and Lusch's (2016, 2004) and (Chen, Drennan andrews and Hollebeek, 2018). As a result, in a growing competing atmosphere, travel players should see the relevance of coming up with clear destination pictures to assist consolidate their clients' engagement with them and build trust in their destinations that helps them to increase their customer base.

Customer engagement is a term used to refer to a consumers' interaction and experience with a brand (Brodie *et al.*, 2011). This term is fast gathering pace in the tourism language (Dewnarain, Ramkissoon and Mavondo, 2018). Most other similar concepts provide information into specific customer based dynamics whereas customer engagement focuses on the customer's emotional, cognitive and behaviour investments during their association with particular tourism brands (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016).

As a result, consumer engagement tends to form a favourable addition to the traveller's total brand experience which significantly contributes to the firm's performance (Taheri *et al.*, 2014). We note that former research has grossly adopted observational research to understand the tourist consumer's engagement (Falk and Storksdieck, 2005). The above studies have focused mainly on the period of time customers take in a particular tourist facility, as compared to their level of emotional, brand-behaviour - related response and cognitive status during interactions which results in failure to fully capture modern consumers' increasing brand-related participation (Kumar *et al.*, 2017).

Over the past years, consumer engagement studies have been done with greater service on online focus as observed by Nordfält. (2017) and Hollebeek and Andreassen. (2018). Written and published work tried to address customer engagement in virtual brand communities that included mobile phone service providers.

In the hotel and tourism business we look at research studies which address Customer Engagement with online business reviews, social media interactions, heritage places and airline brands among others.

Regardless of these existing insights the purpose of tourism consumer engagement process and its specific conceptual relationships remain unexplored. To correct this gap, we study consumer engagement's denoting principles in the tourism industry. Particularly, we investigate the part of destination authenticity and destination affiliation in pushing CE and establishing its overall effect on customer trust, interaction and brand absorption.

Several thoughts have been studied as customer engagement antecedents in current research, involving customer engagement, atmosphere, self-brand image and value congruity (Islam *et al.*, 2018). However, fun enough, regardless of these studies, not much is known concerning the use of place authenticity and attachment in driving consumer engagement yet they are central to tourism industry. In light of these, this study seeks to empirically test consumer engagement's relationship with these constructs and examine its essence in the building of consumer trust, co-creation and brand acceptance, thereby aiding to insight into the concept's participation in enhancing Tourism Company's performance.

Destination authenticity talks to the level to which the client has a real and true experience in a tourist facility (Loureiro and Sarmento, 2018). Place attachment refers to that notion which signals a person's emotional bond with a geographic location which also has claimed previous tourism-based attention (Bjork and Weidenfeld, 2016). Unfortunately destination authenticity's relationship with place authenticity still remains vague (Ram *et al.*, 2016).

With the foregoing, it is noted that there is little research that tries to address the relationship that exist between customer-perceived place attachment and place authenticity. Therefore this study tries to offer a new investigation on place authenticity and customer engagement. We are of the view that customer engagement is the person's personal emotional, cognitive and behavioural cultivation in tourism brand interactions (Hollebeek *et al.*, 2016).

Chathoth *et al.* (2016) also says we have the poorly understood tourism-based customer co-creation that talks to the consumer who has jointly created value with others. Despite this assertion, there is scope for further developmental insight into this alleged concept which is expected to help give a clear and better understanding of tourism based interactions which will facilitate tourism experience mechanisms (Bailey and Williams, 2011). From an S-D logic stand point, new consumers perform as proactive contributors to their own personal service experiences which will be recognised by their brand related investments that resultantly affect their co-creation.

It should be noted that tourism require a clear understanding the format in which customer interactions are optimized to create positive consumer-based results which are for instance , loyalty (Imand Qu, 2017). Consumer brand loyalty embraces the level at which tourism travellers continue to buy the brand and spread positive brand image which is important for tourism managers (Rather, 2017).

However, it relatively appears not much attention has been accorded to travellers' tourism brand loyalty (Su *et al.*, 2014), yet it is of paramount concern in an increasingly competitive tourism environment where customers are becoming very mobile and fickle as they now have several options of other destinations to choose from. Coupled with modest customer switching costs, it is quite evident that today's tourism

managers need an enhanced understanding of client's loyalty development and work on that.

In addition, the information difference between tourism providers and consumers leaves trust as a crucial element for tourism customer relationship management given that tourism is highly intangible in nature, as has been explored in this study. This research provides new insight through identifying the consequences of customer place authenticity and attachment on the creation of customer engagement and its effect on tourism customer trust, co creation and brand loyalty. It has been examined and noted that fostering customer engagement is likely to foster improved customer referrals and retention which contribute to high company performance.

Rogers (2002) underscore the fact that innovation is the extent to which an entity's level of adoption is relatively faster in grasping fresh ideas compared to other members of a social set up. Midgley and Dowling (1978) also describe it as the zeal of a person to try out any new information technology. Looking at the two definitions above it is now necessary to examine the acceptance level of smart gadgets in the tourism industry and analyse it. If the acceptance level and adaptation to smart devices is high, then, innovativeness can be said to be positively connected with perceived brand identification.

Innovation is positively related with the assumed benefits of smart devices for tourism industry. Kwon and Chidambaram (2001), contend that some people have a fear of new smart devices and technology and hence do not like to use them for travel purposes. There is also the issue of personal security and privacy which are some of the barriers that inhibit people from using smart devices for travel purposes.

Nordin (2003), observe how a competitive driving force in tourism and other industries is innovation. Today there is a drive towards new products to gain competitive advantage and attract new customers in tourism business of

which this drive is innovation. Since the dawn of the new millennium, researchers have begun to increasingly deliberate on innovation in tourism (KlauseggerorSalzgeber 2004, OttenbacherorGnoth 2005).

All the above works vary in their research aims and their purposes of investigation. You find out that some are concerned on the big hotel industry and or destinations whereas others are more interested on small and medium sized tourism enterprises.

Most tourism researches are not linked to a theoretical innovation approach, such as the entrepreneurial approach, the strategic or the Research and design approach, or even use a conceptual procedure. As of now some conceptual works have been made for services (GallouijorWeinstein 1997) and for manufacturing (Storey 2000) but till now there is no conceptual discussion that has been linked to tourism.

Innovativeness of an individual is reflected in their willingness to experiment with new IT, thus it is a trait which describes and individual (Walczuch *et al.*, 2007). Customer brand identification is “the level to which the customers or clients see their own self-image as overlapping with the brand’s image” (Bagozzi and Dholakia, 2006:49). Today’s consumers have turned ‘smart’, thus they increasingly make use of smart technologies to make bookings, navigate their way around a destination and access travel information (Dorcic *et al.*, 2019).

Further, ICT such as online platforms and digital media technology have transformed the global market consequently, availing new opportunities for consumer engagement through feedback and other useful information (Zhang *et al.*, 2015). Increasingly, many tourism organisations have adopted digital media technology, by way of storytelling. This is said to promote engagement, eventually triggering passionate interaction (Tiago, Couto, Faria and Borges-Tiago, 2018). It can be noted, however, that the success of digital media technology and

consumer engagement is greatly contingent on service provider's location (Minghetti and Buhalis, 2010).

As such, developed countries are early adopters of digital media technology and associated technologies and hence perform far much better than competitors (Baghirov *et al.*, 2019). It is worth noting that digital media technology platforms enable consumers to interact with a brand, express themselves, share and build content about companies' products and services in different ways (Camarero and San José, 2011).

Results from a study by Cheung and to (2016) revealed that attitude towards innovation on digital media technology in hospitality services have a significant influence on co-creation intention thus hotel guests tend to adopt such new services developed through co-creation. In light of this, Ainin, Parveen, Moghavvemi, Jaafar and Mohd Shuib. (2015) assert that corporate brand profiles on digital media technology need to be managed to captivate consumer interest at the same time persuading them to build content and exchange information with others. In the context of financial services, Dootson, Beatson and Drennan (2016) argue how adoption of digital media technology for such services will enhance customer relationships through improving their experiences.

Furthermore, as a result of the growing importance of digital media technology to organisations in the interaction with consumers (Van Birgelen, Aksoy, Kunz and Huang (2013) assert that there is a need to continue investigating how consumers derive value. This will help organisations determine appropriate circumstances to exploit as they strive to enhance service delivery through meaningful engagement with customers (Lariviere *et al.*, 2013).

Broadly, digital media technology by way of two-way interaction provides a ground for real-time dialogue between organisations and customers, thus encouraging long-term relationships which lead to brand identification (Farshid *et al.*, 2011; Laroche, Habibi, Richard and

Sankaranarayanan, 2012). According to Smith *et al.* (2012) digital media technology such as Facebook provides an opportunity for marketers to collaborate with consumers, thus enabling business-to-consumer and consumer-to-consumer brand conversations. In turn, the brand is visible and has sentimental value to the customer as they identify with it (Smith *et al.*, 2012).

Technology has fast transformed tourism experiences. However, despite that, research has greatly concentrated on tourist's attitudes and technology adoption as compared to their tourism experiences. The present study focuses on the role played by technology readiness (TR) as a personality trait in moulding travellers' satisfaction availed by travel technologies, in the service sector which includes tourism in the developed economies.

The largest productive industry in any economy is now the provision of services. There is tremendous demand for efficiency in provision of services that is influencing competitiveness be it either in the domestic or international markets. It has been seen that tourism plays a major role in the services sector for economic growth and employment creation in so many countries. As a result (Carvalho and Costa 2011) suggest that innovation in the tourism industry calls for increased competitiveness.

Gronroos. (1990)'s services management theory need to be applied when you look at services in the tourism industry which revolves around social behaviour which has a bearing on individual interaction between the consumer and the respective service provider. There is a high level of competition in the tourism field. (Hall and William, 2008) contend that tourism players need to innovate if they are to keep abreast of the competition. However, the challenge is of copycats since innovation in this industry is difficult to conceal and can be easily replicated as they are highly visible as observed (Hjalager, 2002).

Pivčević and Praničević (2012) came up with empirical evidence which support the position that a greater number of hotels always tend to copy or duplicate innovations from their competitors. The tourism landscape is characterised by some particularities which are similar right through. However, the percentage of tourism consumers has increased and so tourism consumption is equally growing hence these players have to exercise extreme caution because the tourist playground is now very dynamic.

Carvalho and Costa. (2011) advise that today's tourism consumers are more informed and have a sense of independence which enable them to organise their holiday packages. They have become sustainably conscious and demand that the tourism industry be managed in the same sustainable manner in sync with environmental, social and economic dictates.

Schumpeter (1961) gave classifications of inventions and innovations in the form of product or service innovation, managerial innovation, supply chain innovation, process innovation, communications innovation and institutional innovations. As such Hjalager (2011) took these definitions straight into the tourism industry. These are diverse types of tourism innovations which can be concealed simply because tourism is complex and has an interdisciplinary nature.

Scheier and Carver. (1998) describe optimism as where one believes will get a good experience as compared to the negative aspects of life. Employee optimism towards technology is a state in which one is open to new technology, while paying less attention to negative events (Walczuch *et al.*, 2007). An optimist is the one who takes on the new challenges of making use of smart gadgets when traveling and make wise use of those gadgets. He or she considers smart gadgets to be more convenient that offers the user wider mobility while traveling. This point

to a more constructive attitude, behaviour and feeling towards smart gadgets.

As such optimists perceive these smart gadgets as beneficial and most convenient tools to be used by travellers which give no need to be apprehensive about technology. Optimism is affirmatively connected with the assumed benefits of smart gadgets when travelling. Brand absorption occurs when a consumer engages with a brand thus having strong engrossment and effortless concentration and intrinsic enjoyment (So *et al.*, 2012). By being open to new technologies, such as digital media technology, small businesses can spread word of mouth and construct social relationships with customers (Durst and Edvardsson, 2012).

In the hotel industry, Zhu and Morosan (2014) argue how interactive mobile technologies have the potential to invoke consumer curiosity thus immersing them in the experience. This results in brand absorption as consumers develop positive attitudes and behaviours (Zhu and Morosan, 2014). In the context of airports, social media technology adoption is increasingly becoming a crucial component in the captivation of customers' interest thus creating brand awareness (McMullen, 2013).

Arguably, digital media technology has facilitated easy access for consumers as they strive to communicate and gather information about an organisation (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). As a result, organisations have begun to take advantage of digital media technology as it enables segmentation and focusing on consumer needs (Pansari and Kumar, 2017). Consequently, quality relationships are formed as consumers are immersed with the brand through their continued connection to the organisation (Kumar, 2013).

Eid and El-Gohary (2013) argue that an organisation should be geared to invest in the technology and work towards developing a robust e - marketing strategy. In turn, this can enable the fostering of both a two-

way and three-way communication platform between customers and the organisation which in turn help to build strong CRM playground thereby enhancing customer loyalty (Mazzarol, 2015). This will ultimately encourage consumer brand absorption. Interestingly, the proliferation of digital media technology, such as Facebook and Twitter, has created a myriad of opportunities for marketers (Wright, 2016).

Effectiveness of such digital media technology platforms lies in their ability to enable automatic segmentation of the market. Through employee optimism to use digital media technology platforms, consumers are able to participate and customize their social network pages as they streamline information they receive through personalisation of preferences and information, thus segmenting consumers for marketers. Wright *et al.* (2016) therefore encourage marketers to maintain open the lines of communication with customers to enable value co-creation. Being intangible by nature, the tourism product has seen marketers appreciating and adopting digital media technology as fundamental consumer engagement platforms (Harrigan, Evers, Miles and Daly, 2017). Ultimately, positive engagement on digital media technology results in positive experiences that in turn influence brand loyalty or absorption (Bruhn, Schnebelen and Schafer, 2014; Schivinski and Dabrowski, 2016).

Interaction entails online and offline sharing and exchange of information regarding experiences with the brand So *et al.* (2012). Akin to this, empirical evidence shows that the more a customer participates on an organisation's digital media technology site, the more their visit, participation and interaction with the organisation's brands (Rishika, Kumar, Janakiraman and Bezawada, 2013).

In addition, Wattanacharoensil and Schuckert (2015) assert that provision of feedback through digital media technology provides consumers a sense of engagement with products and the organisation itself. In the context of airport, use of digital media technology as a

marketing tool has shown to have implications for intense interaction between marketers and users, turning customers into social advocates. Such interactions are said to have the capability to encourage and intensify loyalty to the brand (Guen, 2013).

Rosenberg and Nathan (1982) put forth that interaction with customers can be considered an antecedent to innovation. Thus it takes innovative employees to be able for consumers to interact with the brand. In addition, Helal (2019) observes that marketers have since embraced the significance of engaging consumers ahead of the escalation of digital social platforms which encourage interaction.

In the same vein, Tuten and Solomon (2013) agree that digital media technology marketing enhances consumer interactions with brands greatly. Furthermore, Kietzmann, Silvestre, McCarthy and Pitt (2012) identify various motives behind the use of digital media technology. Such motives include establishment identities, engaging in interactions which results in exchanging content and development of relationships among other things.

Kietzmann *et al.* (2012) further observe how marketers need to be innovative enough as they design digital media technology channels while stakeholders are encouraged by some or all of the above motivates when joining or subscribing to a particular digital media technology platform. According to Mangold and Faulds (2009) organisations can innovate by instituting financed online communications which enable consumers to exchange information on certain interests in the firm's offering.

This in turn enables interaction through engagement (Mangold and Faulds, 2009). After collecting data on digital media technology, organisations can nurture consumer interactions via online reviews, or recommendation programmes (Broekemier, Chau and Seshadri, 2015).

Furthermore, Araújo and Zilber (2016) add that if an organisation has a Facebook account, it can foster interaction with its consumers.

Lifestyle tracking of potential, current and future customers in the tourism industry can be done through social media feedback. This is done through tracking those followers who share their personal experiences through digital media which can be checked in on position based social media applications. This could be through their twitter platforms, Instagram, LinkedIn, Facebook and others where holiday photos and experiences are likely to be shared. This is all shared on real-time.

Tourists also decide on which holiday places to visit by making use of rating platforms such as TripAdvisor and Booking.com which are used to share holiday experiences. TripAdvisor allows people to discuss globally as the facility provides a review of holiday destinations across the world. The platform provides room for unbiased reviews and comments by other travellers and other expert advisors which facilitates interaction in the tourism industry. It must however, be noted that (Schuckert *et al.* (2016:270) advises that their empirical study found that this feedback is not hundred percent reliable.

The hospitality organisations are also able to do lifestyle tracking of their potential consumers by determining consumer destination desires and target marketing by means of social media platforms in the form of Flickr and Pinterest. Flickr has the capacity to geo-tag pictures and all the stated social media platforms which provides a good indication of tourists shared tastes and preferences.

Potential and future clients can be observed or identified by checking those visiting attractions which are close to tourism centres. It has been discovered that the sub consciousness human mind is controlled by images which have a bigger impact than written messages and

descriptions. As such images and pictures make them greatly ideal marketing tools in the travel industry (Serusi and Pal, 2012).

Guerrero-Solé and Fernández-Cavia (2014:228) argue how Twitter has caused the emergency of new possibilities in travel communication. Faster publication of promotional material and other information of attraction to tourists which include news, weather, events and attractions make it an ideal platform for on-line marketing. Its simplicity and conversational nature has made it more popular.

Bulencea and Egger (2014:469) argue how Facebook is another search tool to be used by tourists when searching information. There is Graph Search on Facebook which is a new product that provides public information and shares it with certain users of Facebook. It is the latest revision Facebooks search feature. It interfaces with the Facebook database and thereby helps users to find and connect people to destinations. It provides personalised search results in real time depending on the individual's graph. It provides better search results and tries hard to mimic the human mind. It acts just and google engine.

Twitter Inc. also provides a latest platform named Periscope. This is a live streaming application giving room to video conversations through the use of smart devices. This is ideal in the hospitality industry as it creates consumers audiences which enhance online visibility. Specials are easily broadcasted to ensure community engagement as these graphical contents are more appealing than plain texts.

In the hospitality industry, Periscope has some applications such as broadcasting the head chef cooking a great meal, the scenic view through your hotel at sunrise, events close to the hotel, Guided tours and many more.

Conclusively, organisational digital media technologies have inevitably become channels for engagement, feedback and comments etc. (Patroni

et al., 2015). In turn, products are promoted, new ideas are developed and relationships are maintained (Patroni *et al.*, 2015). Thus, if employees are innovative, they tend to interact with customers in search of new ideas which lead to innovation and customer interactivity with the brand.

Seemingly, digital media technology is under-researched in tourism studies regardless of its increased usage by travellers (Lu, Ze and Law, 2018). Previous studies have empirically tested how consumers behave online and their perceptions of digital media technology (Kang and Schuett, 2013; Xiang and Gretzel, 2010) including how post-trip experience is shaped by digital media technology (Kim and Fesenmaier, 2017).

However, it is quite conspicuous that research in tourism has focused on a consumer perspective of digital media technology adoption (Ying *et al.*, 2018). An inquiry however, needs to be made on digital media technology adoption by tourism employees and how its adoption influences consumer engagement. Law *et al.* (2016:743) advises that social media acts a crucial role in digital marketing and travellers decision-making priorities.

While Engagement and interactivity is affecting consumer behaviours it must also be noted that it equally affects strategic and operational management. Fotis *et al.* (2011) advises that social media has an impact on the travellers' planning process which makes it more trusted than normal web sites. This is called virtual socialisation. Those responsible for social media platforms designs need to include features and enable status seeking which provides organisations room to capitalize on customer lifestyle activities.

Scholars (Mariani, Buhalis, Longhi and Vitouladiti, 2014; Myat, Sharkasi and Rajasekera, 2019; Styvén and Wallström, 2019) put forth that digital

media are a cost effective way of destination promotion and attraction. Additionally, digital media technology has transformed demand in travel and tourism (Myat, Sharkasi and Rajasekera, 2019). According to Harrigan *et al.*, (2018), a study conducted in the United States (US) has shown that digital media in the form of digital media technology and more specifically TripAdvisor drive consumer engagement tremendously.

Furthermore, Dijkmans, Kerkhof and Beukeboom (2015) revealed in their US study that digital media technology and consumer engagement have a positive correlation. In support of this, Willems *et al.* (2019) put forth that online consumer engagement increases conversion rate through interactions. Following the above discussion, there is no doubt that adoption of digital media propels the level of engagement with consumers, This in turn has managerial implications for hospitality firms, where user generated content has to be managed as organisations interact with their consumers to retain consumers (Willems *et al.*, 2019).

O'Connor (2008:65) made a study which picked that there was no proper communication infrastructure to support the functionality of desired systems which has created a huge challenge in the management of information technology in the hospitality industry. However, this issue is said to be emanating from suppliers who do not give adequate services at either a regional or a global perspective as compared to just the lack of requisite infrastructure in a particular country. As such lack of relevant infrastructure for communication purposes in certain countries is a big problem. However, Parker (2016) indicates that African countries are very ready and eager to adopt and make use of new technologies. The greatest challenge for CIOs in chain hotels comes from data consolidation and interfacing when we discuss of information technology adoption.

O'Connor (2008:66) further explains that this data interfacing and data consolidation are very expensive when it comes to different local

markets that have different vendors providing different products for the same cause. This all is in relation to uniformity requirements and particular country regulations and guidelines.

However, Afolayan and Harpe (2015:144) both look at these issues with the South African Small to medium enterprises in mind. For them to adequately adopt new technology, these businesses require serious research and design to gather relevant information from trustworthy sources through consulting experts in technological advancement and business operations. They can also seek guidance from colleagues and peers whom they are in industry together that will be most willing to share current developments.

SMEs will benefit from an 'information shop'. This is where they can have access to current information about technology. As such the relevant information should be transmitted through this information shop to a wide range of Small to medium enterprises in a well net-woven environment. O'Connor (2008:66) also writes on management vendor issue challenges. These are channel management and budget problems. Channel management problems focus on the use of diverse distribution channels when marketing in different markets which could be countries or regions.

On standardization and vendor issues O'Connor's (2008:66) advises that his respondents indicated that they were very disappointed with the level of Information technology vendor service and support, mainly in a local context. Big hotels which require standardised solutions are not happy because of different implementation packages and ancillary teams in different regions, even though it may be for a similar problem.

Information technology vendors do not give adequate support as they fail to provide tailor made solutions which are able to assist business through a competitive advantage in the business arena. You find out that alternative solutions provide are of using the same technology

which becomes a one size fits all. However, some of O'Connor's respondents during his study gave an indication that there were too few vendors, while some believed there were quite many. However, the majority were of the opinion that vendors were very busy with very limited capacity.

A theoretical foundation of the study was furnished in this chapter and thereafter the chapter went on to critically evaluate the literature to adequately respond to the research objectives. It should be noted that a two-pronged approach was adopted where seminal research on one hand and extant research on the other, was acknowledged in the review. The focus mainly cantered on innovativeness and optimism which have the potential to influence customer engagement in the form of brand identification, absorption and interaction. The preceding chapter will now tabulate the methodology route that was used in conducting the research.