

# IS THE TOURISM INDUSTRY PREPARED FOR THE INTERNET OF THINGS?

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Aim/Purpose

The application of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in the tourism industry generally has been acknowledged by many researchers (Law, Leung & Buhalis, 2009; Mxunyelwa, 2016). Hooft (2010) believes that tourism businesses should consider the use of ICT for e-marketing, e-learning, e-rating and e-booking. The application and interpretation of internet of things by consumers is rarely discussed by tourism business owners and marketers, the industry operators rarely read and understand the reviews and comments of consumers. Due to such negligence many tourism businesses and destinations' images have not been improved, service delivery is constantly deteriorating (Pourfakhimi, 2014), while videos or pictures and comments that are taken by customers and posted on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Watsup continuously trending. Arguably so, the internet of things is also criticized for its lack of legal framework especially in the developing countries. Although in some instances comments, videos, and pictures are not verified, lack originality, computer generated or tell one sided story of the event, it is difficult for businesses to prove that the information shared lacks the facts. Either way internet of things has an influence on the consumer buying decision process and ultimately the delivery of service. Consumers are part of businesses stakeholders and play an integral part in the tourism industry, their views are important. The theory of stakeholder supports this. According to Munar (2011), tourists reflect on three Web 2.0 content which is narrative, visual and audio while sharing their experience. This study was aimed to identify and analyse the response of tourism businesses on consumers' use of internet of things as a form of communication.

**Background** Law, Leung and Buhalis (2009) agree that globally tourism businesses increase their application of IT for marketing, distribution and competitive advantage. Boulin (2008) believes that destination marketers needs to take an advantage of Web 2.0 tools, for instance to be able to learn about tourists' views on a destination, through their stories, advises, comments, pictures, which then argued by Lalic (2014) that it increases the service delivery in the destination. According to Shanker (2008), an ICT environment that ensures legal framework should be prioritized while promoting the application of ICT in the tourism industry. In many countries especially developing countries the use of social media lack legal framework. According to Chan and Guillet (2011), some common types of social media may include blogs or micro blogs, social networking sites (SNSs), collaborative projects, and feedback sites. Ball (2010) gives examples of SNSs and Micro blogs as Facebook and of which is the most popular social media used in the tourism industry. Customers use SNSs to communicate with tourism business owners on their experiences. Stakeholder theory supports the importance of customers in the tourism industry.

## **Methodology**

This was a descriptive and exploratory research study that used qualitative approach in order to gather the opinions and views of respondents pertaining to the phenomenon of social media or generally the internet of things. A purposive sampling was drawn from tourism students. Third year School of Tourism Management students at North West University were found appropriate for this study. This group had just completed their Work Integrated Learning (WIL) at various tourism businesses across different provinces in South Africa. Students were asked their opinions on the companies' Facebook pages, Blogs, Twitter, LinkedIn, Watsapp and whether the companies do take reviews and customers comments that are posted on social media into consideration. Data was analysed using stakeholder theory, SPSS was used for quantifying data. Tables and figures were applied for better interpretation.

Contribution	Internet of things especially social media is trending faster than ever. Almost everyone in the society, including those in the developing countries are in possession of smartphone. Tourism businesses should be aware and be responsive towards information, videos or pictures that might harm their businesses.
Findings	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A total of 48 respondents was attained</li> <li>2. A total of 16 businesses; hotels, resorts and B&amp;B were surveyed across four provinces; North West, Northern Cape, Gauteng and Limpopo</li> <li>3. Thirty four of students, (71%) were aware of social media that the company used, while 14, (29%) were not aware of any.</li> <li>4. The results indicate that Facebook dominate among tourism businesses with 54%, followed by Twitter, 0.5%, questionnaire respectively, watsup, blog, webpage, booking.com and TripAdvisor with 0.3% correspondingly.</li> <li>5. The respondents, 73% reported that companies are not reflecting on customers 'social media, 8% mentioned they do.</li> </ol>
Recommendations for Practitioners	As part of a marketing team, a business unit could be assigned to review consumers' comments, videos, and pictures to improve company's image and service delivery. This unit should also review positive social media posts to counter act the negative ones. Public relation office could also assigned for internet of things' feedback.

Recommendation for Researchers	The implication of internet of things among tourism business society should further be investigated. Social media is a new tool at which customers are freely expressing their views and opinions voluntarily, however, it lacks regulations. More studies need to be done on the regulation of internet of things.
Impact on Society	Freedom of speech and the ability to express oneself is something that consumers have been provided for, through social media. In doing so consumers as part of stakeholders are starting to contribute and ensuring that their voices are being heard, ultimately businesses might be cognised with their service delivered to consumers.
Future Research	It is further important to analyse consumers' intention to communicate with businesses via social media instead of traditional ways. Some may argue that seeking attention is main motive, some may look at it as part of freedom of speech. Nonetheless, the impact of such on service quality and business reputation cannot be ignored.
Keywords	Internet of things, social media, tourists, consumers, stakeholder theory.

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

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Dr. Tseane-Gumbi.



Dr Lisebo Tseane-Gumbi completed her PhD in Geography at the University of South Africa (UNISA), her thesis focused on social responsibility of the tourism businesses in South Africa. She completed her M-Tech in Tourism Management at Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). She is a senior lecturer and Deputy Director in the School of Tourism Management and an active member of the North West University E-Agro-tourism CoLab and supervise PhD and masters students. She is a coordinator of the North West School of Tourism Management Tourism Society and represents the school at the Faculty's Community Engagement Committee. Her research interests are: social responsibility (Tourism stakeholders), tourist marketing, tourism development, events tourism, and sports tourism and service quality. Moreover, she participates in external research projects commissioned by various tourism government agencies. Dr Tseane-Gumbi is further actively involved in several tourism industry committees; she represents the school at the National Tourism Career Expo Steering Committee and North West Women in Tourism. She has both academic and industry experience.