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Abstract

The hospitality industry is increasingly utilizing Information Communication Technology (ICT) for product and service development, serving a discerning customer base. The dynamic and complex business environment demands constant innovation and adaptation of management concepts and emerging technologies. This study aimed to assess the influence of ICT staff marketing and the growth of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County, Kenya. A descriptive design research method was adopted and focus on serviced accommodation facilities within Kwale County. The data mainly used primary data and supported by some secondary which was collected using a semi-structured questionnaire (closed and open-ended questions). The questionnaires were dropped and collected at a later time to owners, supervisors, and managers of the serviced accommodation facilities. The sampling was done through simple random sampling and the size was 254 respondents. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as regression analysis was used and the former presented using mean, percentages, graphs, and frequencies. Thematic analysis was used to present qualitative aspects and help group data for statistical analysis. Findings from the study indicate a strong correlation between ICT marketing and the growth of SAFs in Kwale County. (R = 0.698). Some of the barriers to ICT adoption identified include high costs, lack of infrastructure, insufficient training, and resistance from staff. Strategic Recommendations for Improving ICT marketing include; more government support, more incentives, and continuous training among staff. The findings of this study were useful to various stakeholder groups including academicians, policy makers, hotel managers, and potential investors.

Keywords: *ICT marketing, serviced accommodation facilities, hospitality Industry and Tourism Growth.*

1.1 Background of the Study

The hospitality industry has experienced a technological revolution, propelled by the embrace of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). The advent of ICT has significantly transformed the hospitality industry over the past three decades, enhancing guest service delivery and introducing new communication methods (Srimal & Thilina, 2023). The transformation has

remodelled business operations, increased market competitiveness, and enhanced customer experiences (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). In the current digital economy, serviced accommodation facilities—comprising lodges, hotels, and resorts—are increasingly leveraging the ICT for online bookings, revenue optimization, driving customer satisfaction, improving efficiency, and customer relationship management (CRM) (Tussyadiah & Miller, 2019).

In Kenya's coastal region, particularly Kwale County, serviced accommodations are expanding, with performance evaluations aligning with international standards (Ongore & Kobonyo, 2017). With growing competition in the sector, operators of SAFs in Kwale County are progressively acknowledging the need to implement ICT solutions to sustain competitiveness, improve guest experiences, and enhance operational efficiency. ICT Marketing has significantly influenced the growth of serviced accommodations in Kwale County.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The rapid evolution of ICT has had significant impact on several sectors, which include the hospitality sector (Buhalis & Leung, 2018). The acceptance of CRM systems, AI, data analytics, and digital booking platforms has transformed SAFs by enhancing customer satisfaction, improving operational efficiency, and increased revenue (Law et al., 2020). Nonetheless, regardless of the well-documented advantages of ICT marketing in hospitality, many SAFs in emerging economies lag in the adoption of ICT (Mungai & Njenga, 2021). In Kwale County, the low rate of ICT integration in SAFs generates concerns regarding competitiveness, business sustainability, and service delivery (KNBS, 2022). The irregular digital revolution in the industry is linked to resistance to change, infrastructure limitations, low digital literacy, and financial constraints (Sigala, 2020). The inadequacy in a structured model for understanding the drivers, barriers, and extent of ICT adoption in Kwale's SAFs compels further investigation.

The COVID 19 pandemic highlighted ICT's transformative role in enhancing service speed and quality in hotels (Tushabe & Sylivia, 2024). Despite this, many lodging facilities struggle with ICT innovation, especially in integrating websites with Property Management Systems (PMS), hindering growth (Tesone, 2016). Slow ICT adoption has contributed to declining performance in serviced accommodations (Ministry of Tourism, 2018; Cytonn Real Estate, 2017). Portolan, Ana, and Stanković (2023) stress the need for digital transformation readiness in the hotel industry, highlighting mobile technology's role in creating competitive advantages. However, Çınar (2020) points to operational challenges due to a lack of ICT and failure to meet consumer expectations. In Kenya, the tourism sector, including lodging, faces significant challenges, worsened by the pandemic, which drastically reduced serviced accommodation occupancy rates from 80% in mid-2019 to 13% in 2020 (KNBS, 2023). The gaps remain regarding ICT adoption and its effects on serviced apartments in Kwale County.

1.3 Specific Objectives

The general objective of the study was to establish the influence of ICT marketing on the growth of SAFs in Kwale County

1.4 Research Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no significant relationship between ICT marketing and the growth of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County, Kenya.

2.0 Literature Review

The literature review involved theory, empirical and conceptualization

2.1 Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

Resource-Based View theory propose that a firm's sustained competitive advantage is draw from its internal resources, which must be valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) (Barney, 1991). Ccordig to Grant (1991), RBV is a strategic approach where firms achieve success by effectively utilizing their unique capabilities and assets. Another author, Peteraf (1993), reinforced this definition by arguing that resource heterogeneity and immobility are key to long-term performance. RBV suggest that firms should focus on internal resources rather than external market forces to gain a competitive edge. These resources include: Tangible resources such as: financial capital, ICT infrastructure, and physical assets. Intangible resources such as: brand reputation, knowledge, employee skills, and innovation. Essentially, firms that leverage these resources strategically can create sustainable growth and outperform competitors (Teece et al., 1997).

By utilizing internal resources, the Resource-Based View (RBV) hypothesis offers businesses a strategy framework for gaining a sustained competitive edge. Its emphasis on the significance of unique, valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources is one of its main advantages; it aids businesses in creating long-term strategic positioning (Barney, 1991). Furthermore, RBV encourages companies to build on their own strengths rather than just responding to external challenges, which promotes innovation and adaptation (Grant, 1991). The approach is broadly relevant to a variety of industries, including the hotel sector, where retaining competitiveness depends on ICT adoption, a trained labor, and digital infrastructure (Buhalis & Law, 2020).

2.2 Empirical Review

Growth is measured in terms of revenue growth, increased customer bookings, expansion of services or facilities, and improved service delivery among others. These dimensions echo how well SAFs are performing in response to ICT adoption. Njuguna and Kimani (2021) stated that the growth in the hospitality sector is frequently associated with digital transformation. Equally, Munyoki et al. (2020) underlined that service-based initiatives experience growth when ICT tools are effectively applied and reinforced by a supporting environment.

ICT marketing encompasses promoting products or services through digital technologies, including social media and email (Chaffey, 2017). In the hotel industry, technological advancements have transformed traditional marketing, improved customer relationship management and addressing challenges like poor performance and increased competition (Gregory, 2017). Pelet, Lick, and Taieb (2021) highlight that ICT integrates sensory marketing and the Internet of Things (IoT) in upscale hotels, enhancing guests' emotional and sensory experiences, which influences their behavior. The industry is increasingly relying on user-generated content (UGC) on platforms such as Booking, TripAdvisor, Expedia, and Yelp. (Raguseo et al., 2017; Sparks et al., 2016; Lyu et al., 2022; Alarcón-Urbistondo et al., 2023; Guo et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2020). Xia and Zhang (2022) find that the perceived usefulness of mobile apps enhances online experience, brand awareness, and consumer satisfaction.

In the context of Kwale County, ICT marketing provides SAFs with a competitive edge. With the rise of digital marketing, SME-sized SAFs now have the opportunity to contest with larger chains, often overpowering the challenges postured by inadequate budgets (Sigala, 2018). Studies conducted by Sigala (2020) underline that customer view on online platforms considerably influences decisions by potential customers', making digital marketing an essential tool for growth. SAFs can use analytics tools to track website traffic, monitor customer behavior, and analyze trends. This information can then be used to optimize pricing, refine marketing strategies, and tailor offers to meet customer preferences (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2019).

2.3 Conceptual Framework

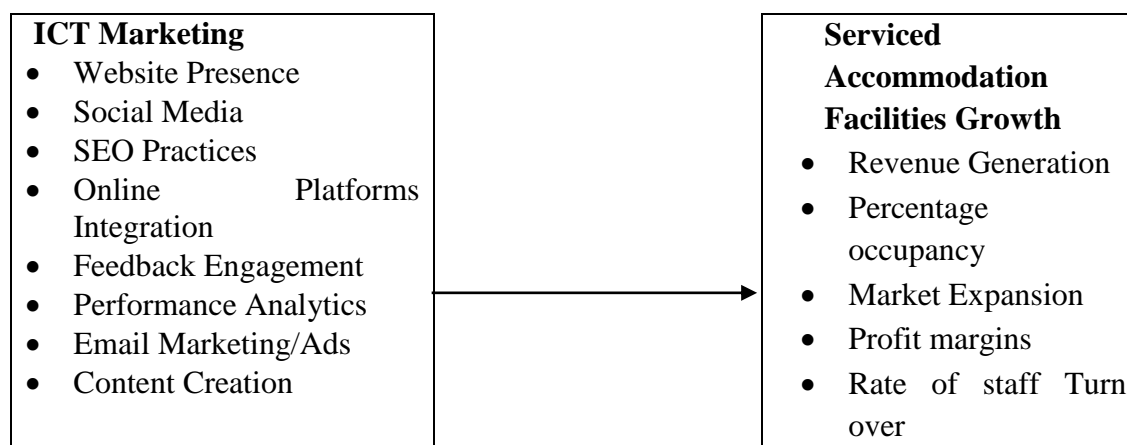Below is a figurative representation of the variables that were explored by this study.

ICT Marketing	Serviced Accommodation Facilities Growth
• Website Presence • Social Media • SEO Practices • Online Platforms Integration • Feedback Engagement • Performance Analytics • Email Marketing/Ads • Content Creation	• Revenue Generation • Percentage occupancy • Market Expansion • Profit margins • Rate of staff Turn over

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 Research Methodology

This study used an embedded mixed-method approach, integrating qualitative insights within a predominantly quantitative framework. A correlational research design was applied to examine the relationship between ICT adoption and the growth of Small Agribusiness Firms (SAFs) in Kwale County, while qualitative data explored the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of SAF operators regarding ICT use and the role of government policies. From a population of approximately 754 licensed SAFs (TRA, 2024), a sample size of 254 facilities was determined using standard sampling procedures at a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. The proportional allocation method was used to distribute the sample across the different strata of SAFs to ensure fair representation.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study based on descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis, followed by a discussion of the results in relation to the research objectives and existing literature.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics for ICT Marketing

The respondents were asked to indicate their assessments on several aspects

concerning ICT Marketing and the responses are analysed as captured below.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics

ICT Marketing	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total	Mean	SD
There is existence of a comprehensive and robust Website	14	28	35	70	40	187	3.50	3.19
There is presence and use of various Social Media platforms and resources	12	21	31	75	49	188	3.68	3.35
There is ease of access to a diverse range of information	15	28	42	64	38	187	3.44	3.13
There is use of digital media both internally and externally	16	19	43	68	42	188	3.54	3.22
There is communication through emails	12	25	43	63	45	188	3.55	3.23
Overall Average	**13.80**	**24.20**	**38.80**	**68.00**	**42.80**	**187.60**	**3.54**	**3.23**

Source: Data 2024

The average proportion of respondents indicating agree position and strongly agree is 68.00 (36.25%) and 42.80 (22.81%) respectively. These two positions account for about 59% of the sentiments on ICT Marketing. This position represent a solid inclination to the concurrence that there is substantial ICT Marketing among organizations represented in the study. An ICT Marketing average mean of 3.54 denotes a moderately high level of ICT Marketing competence among staff in the represented organizations. A standard deviation of 3.23 indicates a wide disparity in the data from the mean. In the current context, the SD suggests that the respondents' perceptions of ICT Marketing levels are spread out, with some respondents seeing their ICT Marketing levels as highly competent, while others rate them lower. The variability on ICT Marketing could point to variations in ICT Marketing skills among employees or departments.

4.2 correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis was performed to establish the strength and direction of association between the study variables.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

		ICT Marketing	Growth of Serviced Accommodation Facilities
ICT Marketing	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		

Growth of Serviced Accommodation Facilities	Pearson Correlation	.648**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0	0
	N	188	188

Source: Data 2024

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

This study employed the Pearson correlation coefficient to assess the relationship between the study variables. The Pearson correlation ranges from -1 to +1, where a coefficient of +1 indicates a perfect positive relationship, meaning that an increase in one variable results in an increase in the other, while a coefficient of -1 indicates a perfect negative relationship, where an increase in one variable results in a decrease in the other. The results indicated that ICT marketing factors—specifically technical skills, training and education, information sharing, digital literacy, and support systems—were positively and significantly associated with the growth of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County, Kenya (r = .648; p < 0.05). This suggests that greater adoption of ICT marketing tools such as websites, social media, information accessibility, data analytics, and email marketing or advertisements is likely to lead to substantial improvements in the growth of these facilities.

4.3 Regression Analysis and Hypothesis Testing

The regression results are as shown in subsequent tables;

Table 4: Regression Model Summary

R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
0.698	0.57	0.568	0.2312

The results show that ICT Marketing has a strong correlation with growth of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County (R = 0.698). This suggests that ICT marketing is a strong predictor of growth among serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County, Kenya. The R-square (0.57) shows that the change in the dependent variable (growth) of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County, Kenya) is explained by the independent variable while the remaining proportion (41%) is explained by other factors.

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to determine the significance of the regression model. The ANOVA outcomes are presented in Table 5 The F statistic value was significant (F = 31.812, P-Value = 0.000 < 0.05) that infers that the overall regression model to determine the effect of independent variables on independent variable was a good fit / significant.

Table 5: ANOVA

	Sum of		

	Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	7.216	4	1.8968	31.812	0.000
Residual	5.125	85	0.058		
Total	**12.341**	**89**			

Source: Data 2024

4.3.2 Regression Model Coefficients

To find the constant, beta coefficients, and their significance, Table 6 shows the regression coefficient results. For the p-values, a variable possessed a significant impact on growth of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County if the value was below 0.05 and critical t value was larger than absolute 1.96. In this context, the null hypothesis was rejected.

Table 6: Regression Model Coefficients

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	**Error**	**Beta**	**t**	**Sig.**
(Constant)	0.874	0.2971		2.812	0.004
ICT Marketing	0.323	0.055	0.441	5.362	0

Source: Data 2024

The regression model indicates that if ICT Marketing is held constant at zero, the Growth is positive at 0.874. However, the introduction of information communication technology causes enhanced growth of serviced accommodation facilities.

H_{01}: Adoption of ICT Marketing has no significant influence on growth of serviced accommodation facilities

Table 6 indicate that ICT Marketing has a positive and significant influence on growth of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County (Beta = 0.323; t = 5.362, > 1.96, = P-Value is 0.000, < 0.05). Because the p-value is below 0.05, the H_{02} is rejected and therefore it can be determined that ICT Marketing has a positive and significant influence on growth of serviced accommodation facilities in Kwale County. Therefore, a unit escalation in adoption of ICT Marketing would result to a positive and significant enhancement in their growth by 0.323 units.

5.0 Conclusions

The descriptive findings show that there is adoption of ICT Marketing by SAFs in Kwale County. Correlation outcomes indicate that ICT Marketing is positively and significantly linked with growth of SAFs in Kwale County. Regression outcome show that an increase in the adoption of ICT Marketing by SAFs in Kwale County would lead to a significant improvement intheir growth. This finding is consistent with that of Wambua (2020) which established that SAFs that adopt ICT marketing strategies encounter faster growth because of the ability to reach a wider audience, respond quickly to market demands, and enhance digital advertising. This is also consistent with a study by Ndung'u (2021) which established that accommodation/boarding facilities in Kwale that use digital marketing tools achieved growth at a faster rate relative to those that depended on traditional approaches.

6.0 Recommendations

The study recommends that accommodation facilities in the County ought to collaborate with ICT service providers to obtain tailored solutions. The approach entail access to affordable and competitive co-development of systems or technology solutions to enhance operational processes and customer experiences. By implementing the above recommendations, SAFs can ensure competitiveness and sustainable growth in a digitally-driven market. – Hotels should leverage social media, search engine optimization (SEO), and automated marketing tools to improve customer engagement.

Recommendations for Further Research

ICT Adoption and Business success: Future research could look at the direct connection between ICT adoption and serviced accommodation facilities' financial success. Function of Automation and AI: Studies should examine how AI-powered solutions, including chatbots and smart room technology, improve visitor experiences and operational effectiveness.

Cybersecurity Issues with ICT Implementation: More investigation is required to evaluate data security threats, privacy issues, and optimal ICT use in the hotel industry. Examine ICT adoption in serviced accommodations in various locations to find best practices, obstacles, and policy gaps specific to Kwale County through comparative ICT adoption studies.

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