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The Role of Selected Social Media Platforms in Travel to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, Uganda

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THE ROLE OF SELECTED SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS IN TRAVEL TO BWINDI IMPENETRABLE NATIONAL PARK, UGANDA.

A Thesis
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science
Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management

by
Ingrid Nyonza Nyakabwa
May 2017

Accepted by:
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Dr. Kenneth Backman
Dr. James Sanderson
ABSTRACT

In recent years, numerous sources of social media have increasingly played an important role in tourism marketing, and have had a profound effect on Destination Management Organisations’ ability to effectively promote their destinations. With the emergence of more social media platforms, there are more tourism stakeholders recognising the increased importance to access information for tourists related to their destinations of interest. For example, tourist destination managers use Social media to provide information about their travel and tour packages, specific tourist attractions, accommodation costs, guiding services, and all other travel related information. Tourists use social media in their planning process to help them identify destinations of interest, to get feedback on what they should expect, as well as to make contacts with the service providers involved in their travel plans. Tour operators use it to market their tour packages, as well as for pre- and post-tour interactions with tourists.

However, little is known about the influence that Social Media has on the decisions of tourists who travel to specific destinations of interest, and the use of social media in their travel plans and activities. Tourism suppliers have limited knowledge of the tourism market and the opportunity for tourism growth in destinations. The aim of this study therefore, is to explore the role that selected social media platforms serve in the travel of tourists to visit, and their overall experience in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park in Uganda (BINP), which is well known for its gorilla tracking experience. The primary interests and activities of most of the tourists who visit the park is to track gorillas, birdwatching, and forest hikes. This qualitative study applied semi-structured interviews, which were face to face with thirty-four participants. Participants in this study included tourists visiting BINP, the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) that manages
BINP, lodge managers, and tour operators who link tourists to the park and have the greatest potential to influence tourist decisions. This study also used Radian6, a social media monitoring software to retrieve Facebook and Twitter posts. In addition, this study analysed forum posts from the BINP TripAdvisor page.
DEDICATION

To the memory of daddy, and to mummy, for instilling the values of education, constant pursuit of knowledge and all the countless fingerprints imprinted on my life.
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First, I would like to thank God for his steadfast faithfulness and for giving me the faith in myself, and the ability to keep going even in the days when faced with seemingly insurmountable difficulties.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

According to Panteno and Preta (2013), the internet is one of the most important sources of information for tourists, with the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2012) reporting that the number of travellers using it as an information source increased by more than 300% over the past five years. In particular, modern travellers require connectivity between the tourism supplier and themselves during their travel experience (Gretzel, 2010), something that Barwise and Strong (2002) suggest is currently provided to a large degree by smartphones. Influenced by their availability and use, the tourism and hospitality industry has responded to the needs of the modern tourist by developing social media platforms for use during the travel experience. Thus, social media has also become a key form of communication in travel planning, decision-making and post trip reflection for both tourists and tourism suppliers.

As Hays, Page, & Buhalis (2013) pointed out, this communication change has restructured the relationships between the tourists and the tourism organizations, in part because tourists are in constant need for information through all phases of their travel experiences. According to Minazzi (2015), the key to building these relationships is to provide the right amount of information at the right time and in the right place. Gretzel et al. (2006) argued that the interactive communication offered by social media along with other technological developments has made it easier for organizations to meet this expectation of information. This increase of information available online in conjunction with the advent of social media has led to the increasing use of the internet by travellers to search for information related to their travels (Xiang & Gretzel, 2010).
Tourists also contribute to this information by providing user-generated content (UGC) as they share their knowledge of travel and destinations. In this context tourism suppliers have lost control of their marketing programs as travellers share their opinions and complaints using their own UGCs. The research conducted by Knights and Wilmott (2007) and Pantano et al. (2007) supports the importance of these comments on tourist decision making. In addition, past research has established the importance of websites in the tourism communication process (Gretzel & Fesenmaier, 2006; Wang & Fesenmaier, 2006) as well as focusing on tourists’ use of social media in an attempt to gain insights into how it is transforming the travel experience (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2008). According to Inversini, Cantoni & Buhalís (2009), many tourists’ suppliers have adopted social media as a component of their marketing programs, emphasizing its impact on the industry. However, one of the challenges to tourism marketers in this context is how to handle the negative comments that may be posted on Facebook as well as on other online travel review sites.

As Xiang and Gretzel (2010) point out, tourism marketers can no longer ignore the importance of social media in distributing travel-related information as well as providing a space for tourists to generate content. Modern tourists feel that they need to be connected to tourism suppliers as well as other tourists, with Wang & Fesenmaier (2013) demonstrating that some tourists consider their smartphone as a travel companion, one that is integral to their experience. Gretzel, Kang and Lee (2008) have predicted that the impact of social media on travel will be tremendous, a prediction supported by research indicating that tourists use social media throughout their travel experience, from the planning process to help them identify destinations.
of their interest to obtaining feedback on what they should expect, as well as to make contacts with the service providers involved in their travel plans (Buhalis & Law, 2008).

Thus, the use of social media has had a significant impact on the travel and tourism sector for both the suppliers and the consumer: tourism organizers need to communicate to consumers and the consumers need information related to travel destinations (Leung, Law, Van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013). The internet provides an efficient and cost-effective platform for the tourism industry to reach out to their consumers, acting as both an informational and a marketing tool (Pontano & Pietro, 2013). Given its impact, it is important to study the use of social media by travellers to ascertain how much they rely on it for information to travel destinations and also to advance knowledge on how to address their changing online behavior (Pontano & Pietro, 2013). Further, there is also a need for scholars to explore social media consumption by consumers, the value they derive from it and its impact on their interactions (Minazzi, 2015). This need is especially critical for tourist destinations in developing countries such as Uganda, where tourism suppliers (tour operators, lodge owners, the Uganda Wildlife Authority, and all other hospitality industry players) are in the infancy stage of utilizing Web 2.0, not yet fully realizing and utilizing its interactive features.

Currently, each of these players is using a website limited to one-way communication, and furthermore, each of the tourism suppliers, particularly tour operators, accommodation providers and the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), has a limited social media marketing program, even though they realize its importance in addressing the needs of tourists and all have various social media platforms. However, currently, little is known about tourists’ comments on social media about the UWA even though this UGC is critical in the development of marketing plans to attract tourists to destinations such as the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP), a
popular destination known for its gorilla tracking. UWA is limited to infrequent responses to posts because of its lack of staff, with only one staff member being dedicated to updating its website and social media platforms for marketing. Furthermore, currently a social media strategic marketing plan does not exist; to develop one, it is necessary to understand the wants, needs and opinions of tourists as expressed in their UGCs.

Tour operators selling packages to the BINP are the suppliers using social media the most to promote their products and services. However, they too are limited to primarily posting their packages and promotions for the season and irregularly and infrequently interacting with the tourists who share posts on their sites. This situation is further complicated by the fact that their existing social media programs do not meet the needs of tourists who expect more active participation and more user content. The lodge owners in the BINP area also use social media but not as extensively as the tour operators. Occasionally, they respond to queries and comments from clients and post events and photos of the day. However, they are limited by the poor quality of the internet in this area; as a result, many do not update their social media pages regularly.

While past research has found that tourists are generally active participants on social before, during and after the travel, Buhalis & Law (2008) pointed out that little attention has been paid to the use of social media by tourists and tourist suppliers in specific types of tourism, such as the gorilla tourism and tracking found in the BINP, which generates the highest revenue among all the national parks in Uganda (UWA, 2014). The mountain gorilla, *gorilla beringei beringei*, is listed as a critically endangered species (IUCN, 2006). As such, these gorillas have become a popular attraction because they are only found in the Uganda, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo. In tracking these gorillas, the tourists hike though the forest to see the them
in their natural habitat. Due to the health risks involved in exposing the gorillas to humans, only groups of eight people are allowed go into the forest to view the them at a time, and upon sighting the primates, they are allowed a maximum of one hour with the gorillas. In addition, the tourists must maintain a seven-meter distance between themselves and the gorillas at all times.

This study investigated the use of social media among tourists planning to visit the BINP during the trip-planning phase of the tourist experience, looking at three social media platforms: Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor. It also examined the role social media plays for tour operators who plan the tourists’ visits as well as for the Protected Area Management of the area (UWA). The participants included groups of tourists visiting the BINP, the Park Management, lodge owners and tour operators who link tourists to the park and have the greatest potential to influence tourists’ decisions. Tour operators use it to market their tour packages as well as use it for pre and post tour interactions with tourists.

Social exchange theory (SET) was used to guide the development of this research because it adequately explains the relationship between the supply of and demand for tourism services. One of the most basic principles of this theory is that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal and eventually into mutually beneficial commitments (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This is particularly typical of the services provided to tourists by tour operators and the trust in and the commitment of both parties to deliver their part of the bargain.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this exploratory research was to begin to identify the use of social media by tourists visiting Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. More specifically, it focused on identifying how travellers use social media in planning their trip to BINP and how selected
tourism suppliers, both in the private sector, in particular tour operators and lodge owners, and in the public sector, i.e. UWA, use social media. The findings from this study were used to suggest improvements in the social media marketing campaigns.

Significance of the Study

Social media has enabled tourists and travelers to communicate and interact directly with tourism suppliers through the use of Web 2.0 (Minazzi, 2015). As a result, tourists increasingly desire tourism information and interaction before, during, and after their trips (Gretzel, Kang and Lee, 2008). While previous research (Buhalis & Law, 2008; Gretzel, Kang & Lee, 2008; Pontano & Pietro, 2013) has shown the impact and importance of communication and interaction between tourism suppliers and tourists, very little is known about how both use social media in relation to the BINP. According to the Pew Center, 87% of the people in Europe use smart phones (Pew Research Center, 2016), important because these countries are the targets markets of Uganda’s tourism marketing programs. Hence, in order to be competitive with other destination marketers, the country’s tourism suppliers must engage in strategic social media communication with potential and existing target markets.

This research explores the use of social media in travel to an ecotourism destination, particularly a niche gorilla tourism market, and to investigate how the relevant stakeholders are using it. The findings from this study may further shed light on how social media can be used for communication with potential tourists, and how to meet their expectations and provide the right customer service in order to improve satisfaction levels. The findings from this study will also provide tourism suppliers (tour operators, lodge owners, and the UWA) with information that describes the use of three social media platforms--Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor--by
gorilla tourists. Service providers like tour operators and lodge owners may benefit from the findings of this study, particularly on how best to use social media to meet the needs of the tourists that they wish to attract to this destination, and additional content the tourists desire can be utilised in the development of suppliers’ social media platforms to make their decisions to visit.

Specifically, the objectives of this study are to:

a) Examine the use of social media in the trip-planning phase of the tourist experience, focusing on how it may be used in decision-making with regard to travel to BINP and which types of social media platforms are being used.

b) Investigate the use of social media by both private and public sector stakeholders in promoting their services and destinations.

c) Examine the potential for the use of social media by tourism suppliers.

Research Questions

The research questions addressed by this research are listed below:

1. Are tourism suppliers (tour operators, lodge owners, the UWA) using certain social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor) to communicate with tourists?

2. Are tourists aware of the BINP’s presence on social media and how are they using it in relation to their travel?

3. Has BINP’s presence on social media (Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor) influenced gorilla tourists’ decision to visit the BINP?
4. Does the use of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, TripAdvisor) by tourism suppliers inform gorilla tourists’ expectations of BINP?

Delimitations of this Study

This study involved several limitations. It focused on identifying the users of social media in the supply and demand chain within the context of the BINP and only before and during the trip planning process. However, it could not cover the entire spectrum of the supply chain due to its extensive multi-sector nature.

In addition, this study covered only a section of the tourists and lodge facilities in the northern sector of the BINP due to its size and the challenges of accessibility and poor road infrastructure in the park. In the future, research on social media use in the entire park could be more representative and informative by including a wider range of tourists and lodge facilities.

Data collection was also affected by the limited detailed reports available regarding visitor numbers and the general data related to managing the tourism operations of the BINP. The reports did not extensively cover the demographics of the tourists visiting the park, their nationalities, and their backgrounds, meaning the researcher was not able to obtain a comprehensive profile of the visitors.

Interviews were conducted in various locations, including the BINP Visitor Center, various lodges and tour operator offices, and sometimes at cafes because of the unpredictable availability and movements of the study population. Some of the appointments made with tour operators had to be rescheduled several times because of their busy schedules and constant travel.
Definition of Terms

**DMOs:** Destination Management Organizations that promote travel to particular destinations.

**Gorilla Tracking/Tourism:** A popular activity where visitors hike through the forest to view habituated mountain gorillas, *gorilla beringei beringei*, in their natural habitat, in this case in the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. These gorillas are considered a critically endangered species (IUCN, 2006).

**Facebook:** A social media networking site that enables users to create profiles to interact with and send messages, photos, and videos to friends and family. It also allows public features such as public profile pages, events, forums, and groups, among others.

**TripAdvisor:** A large travel website that provides travel-related reviews and an extensive range of social travel forums. Travelers write their opinions of hotels, attractions, activities and restaurants at various destinations, sharing their first-hand experiences.

**Twitter:** A free public social online networking site where users post short 140 character messages called tweets and follow other users.

**Radian6:** A social listening tool dedicated to the listening to, analyzing of and engaging in information being shared publicly online especially through social media.

**Social Media:** Technologies allowing individuals, companies, NGOs, governments, and other organizations to view, create and share information, ideas, career interests, and other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks.
Tourist: A person who travels for pleasure or culture, in this study travellers who came to the BINP for the gorilla tracking experience.

Tour Operators: Professionals who typically combine tour and travel components to create a package holiday. They advertise and produce brochures to promote their products, holidays and itineraries.

Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA): A semi-autonomous government agency that manages the wildlife in Uganda, including in the national parks and game reserves.

User Generated Content (UGC): "a variety of new and emerging sources of online information that are created, initiated, circulated and used by consumers intent on educating each other about products, brands services, personalities and issues” (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006).

Web 2.0: The second iteration of the World Wide Web, characterized by the change from static web pages to dynamic or user-generated content and the growth of social media.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is comprised of three chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, includes a general description of social media followed by the purpose statement, the objectives and the significance of the study. Next, Chapter Two reviews the literature on social media in the travel and tourism industry and in destination marketing, eco-tourism, tourist planning of travel and decision-making, the impact of social media on the travel and tourism industry and the Social Exchange Theory. Finally, the third chapter presents the methodology used for this research, including a description of the study site, the sample size, and the data collection methods used before concluding with an analysis of the results and support for the validity of this study.
CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to the WTO (2015), more than one billion tourists travel to international destinations every year, with this industry being the leading income generator in the global economic sector, contributing 10% to the GDP and representing 6% of the world’s total exports. With this recent growth, tourism marketing has evolved based on the changes in the tourism and hospitality industry. In this context social media, which has increasingly played an important role in promoting tourism destinations, is being used by destination managers, tour operators, tourists, destination management organizations, and various other players in the industry for information sharing. To form the basis for the investigation of the role selected social media platforms play in tourist travel to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP), the research conducted for this dissertation, this literature review focuses on the three topics of tourism destination marketing, social media in travel and tourism, and social media and tourist choices.

Tourism Destination Marketing

Many tourism authorities and organizations have not yet realized the current changes in marketing, relying on the traditional techniques that focus on price to attract tourist arrivals (Dinan, 2000). However, many destinations today are faced with various challenges on how to market their destinations in light of the numerous changes in tourists and their environment; the destinations that recognize these issues and adapt to the new markets will be able to stay competitive (Soteriades, 2012).
Marketing a destination and building a brand can become a reality even for the smallest niche players since the evolution of the internet has made international communication and global marketing efficient and cost-effective, making it possible for developing countries to create and/or change their image (Morgan, Pritchard & Pride, 2004). Palmer and McCole (2002) suggest that the development of electronic commerce has increased opportunities for collectively marketing tourism destinations to potential tourists on a wider range of websites, thus providing information that can create an image of the destination as well as the potential tourist experience.

Further, there is currently an increased recognition and understanding of the role marketing plays in sustainable tourism management, emphasizing the need to communicate with tourists before they travel to national parks and during their visits to point out the exceptional qualities and the appropriate behavior while there (Sharpley & Pearce, 2007). Curtin (2013) observes that wildlife tourism offers the tourism consumers benefits including the unique experience of nature, diverse landscapes and the beauty of searching in the wild, all of which serve as motivation for the eco-tourist. In order for such destinations to be competitive, all stakeholders involved in the tourism chain need to coordinate their marketing efforts by involving one another in the provision of activities and services and improving the attractiveness of the destination inter-relationships (Soteriades, 2012). In this context, destination managers and international tour operators play a crucial role in influencing tourist travel purchase behavior and decision making through their portrayals of the destination image (Kokkranikal, Cronje & Butler, 2011). “Since the 1980’s, information communication technologies (ICTs) have been transforming tourism globally, creating applications and solutions that are often termed ‘Tourism’” Wang & Pizam, (2011, p.205). This use of e-marketing and clustering are strategic approaches towards destination marketing that can make a significant contribution to the
tourism value chain by providing opportunities for various stakeholders to partner and improve their visitors’ experiences (Soteriades, 2012). Tourism service providers are now able to quickly provide information, profile their consumers, and provide services that suit their needs because of the increasing availability of information on the internet (Palmer & McCole, 2000).

The increased use of the internet and more specifically social media marketing may help attract in-bound tourists; however, some companies and areas, particularly developing countries, may not be interacting with these customers online effectively (Chan & Guillet, 2011). According to Kang and Schuett (2013), tourism marketers realize that social media is a platform used by consumers to search for credible and useful destination information; however, its impact depends on the user’s ability to share this information, to make it meaningful for subsequent use by interested parties. The consumers may refer to this information in their decision-making process to inform their choices, depending on the level of interaction with this content. Uganda, the area explored here, illustrates how tourism marketing and development can play a vital role in sustaining local communities and places, supporting their identities during the dynamic change from a post-conflict country to a tourist destination (Ringer, 2002).

Social Media in Travel and Tourism

Kaplan and Haeinlein (2010, p. 61) define social media as a “group of internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, which allows the creation and exchange of Web generated User Content.” Brake and Safko (2009, p. 6) give a similar definition, saying, “Social media refers to activities, practices, and behaviours among communities of people who gather online to share information, knowledge and opinions using conversational media.” Conversational media include web-based applications that make it
possible to create and easily transmit content through text, pictures, videos, and audio recordings. Because of the current rate of technological development and innovation, many social media sites or platforms are expanding, with a particular focus on the tourism and travel industry due to its multi-sector nature. According to the Pew Research Center, social media use has increased dramatically, growing to 65% of American adults using it today compared to only 7% ten years ago when the Center began tracking social media usage (Perrin, 2016). Currently, for example, Facebook (2016) is reported to have 1.86 billion monthly active users and Twitter (2016), 313 million.

Specific to the travel and tourism domain, many blogs, applications, content sharing websites, and interactive user sites have been launched in the social media marketing mix, with TripAdvisor being the world's largest travel site enabling travellers to plan their trips; it offers trusted advice from travellers and a wide variety of travel choices and planning features with seamless links to booking tools that check hundreds of websites to find the best hotel prices. Its branded sites make up the largest travel community in the world, reaching 390 million unique monthly visitors through more than 465 million reviews and opinions covering more than 7 million accommodations, restaurants, attractions, and checking more than 200 websites to help travellers find the lowest hotel prices (TripAdvisor, 2016). One of the leading travel consumer websites in the world, it provides more than 50 million travellers with information related to travel reviews, opinions, feedback and more (Fotis, Buhali & Rossides, 2012). Stakeholders in the tourism industry can then track this and other social media to follow through on the tourists’ patterns of travel, their core interests for visiting a site and more importantly to access their feedback after a visit, particularly key for destination marketers to determine decisions concerning repeat visits.
Further, electronic commerce has facilitated the growth of virtual organizations in the tourism industry, particularly small businesses that can quickly and efficiently provide services with limited bureaucracy (Palmer & McCole, 2000). Many marketers and management companies now recommend incorporating online management as a key component of daily operations because of the potential financial impact of online reviews (Teixeira & Kornfeld, 2013). However, tour operators still play a crucial role in the tourism industry by pre-packaging and organizing components of trip planning that would otherwise be difficult for travellers to arrange individually (Palmer & McCole, 2000).

Social Media Use by Destinations

Social media is a global phenomenon, which can be used by suppliers to build their brands through direct contact with the consumers, who then benefit because they receive authentic information (Lange-Faria & Elliot, 2012). According to Hudson (2013), this use of social media for brand imaging is effective in promoting specific travel destinations. The challenge of many destinations, then, is to develop a marketing strategy that can benefit them by making them attractive niche markets (Hoppen, Brown & Fyall, 2013), important because the content shared on social media about a destination may not be filtered and synthesized to suit the target market. Social media has become an affordable global communication and marketing tool for destination marketing organizations in the face of marketing budget cuts because it can help them reach global market audiences (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013).

On the one hand, the demand side of the tourism industry involves the tourists, and on the other hand, the supply side involves a cross section of stakeholders that include among others tour operators, hotels, airlines, transporters, travel agents and a host of other service providers.
Both the supply and demand stakeholders share information on various social media sites: tour operators post their packages online, and tourists look for destinations of interest while destination management organizations also promote their destinations on social media. Sirakaya and Woodside (2005) emphasize the complex nature of travel-related purchases because of the high risks involved and the lengthy information searches and inquiries on travel products and services. As a result, many organizations now have interactive websites, which provide an opportunity for various tourism service providers to give access to information on the various components of their destinations of interest (Palmer & McCole, 2000).

Online word of mouth has become increasingly influential, with social media creating an environment in tourism where users can share information, opinions, thoughts and content, as a result changing the dynamics of communication and information flow in today’s society (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013). A growing number of social media platforms have created an opportunity for users to share information, for example TripAdvisor, Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Flickr, among others. According to Teixeira and Kornfeld’s study of 2012 (2013), people who read consumer reviews online had an 81% chance of making a purchase. Since nearly all social media sites are free, many marketing organizations have taken advantage of the free publicity, relieving them of some of their marketing costs. For example, social media provides Destination Management Organizations (DMO’s) with a cost-effective marketing tool that allows them to be creative in the information they provide tourists, allowing them to benefit from its interactive nature (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013).
Social Media Use by Tourists

Palmer and McCole (2002) suggest that the development of electronic commerce has led to increased opportunities for collectively marketing tourism destinations to potential tourists on a wide range of websites, providing not only a large amount of information to them but also creating an image of the destination and the potential tourist experience. Specifically, information communication technology has had much influence on the tourism industry, particularly as the internet has rapidly become the fastest source of information for travellers and other tourism stakeholders (Wang & Pizam, 2011). According to Gretzel, Yoo and Purifoy (2007), online reviews and ratings posted on travel websites increase the traveller’s knowledge, awareness of risks and ability to make decisions on where to go and the accommodation to use (Fotis, Buhali & Rossides, 2012), and as Minazzi (2015) found, not only has the number of business and leisure travellers searching for online reviews before their travel increased significantly but the content they find online also has more influence on their travel planning.

Furthermore, social media use has advanced, with for example, TripAdvisor becoming integrated with Facebook and users being invited to make comments and to pin their visited cities, meaning their opinions about the destinations they have visited reach an increasingly wider audience (Pantano & Di Pietro, 2013). On TripAdvisor, the most visited online travel website in 2013, consumers are motivated to write reviews and opinions about their personal experiences at the tourist destinations they have visited (Teixeira & Kornfeld, 2013). In particular, tourists’ use this website as well as other social media platforms to complain about the tourism and hospitality services they have received, and by sharing these thoughts with their family and friends, they highlight the unsatisfactory services they experienced (Pantano & Di Pietro, 2013).
Social Media and Tourist Choices

Understanding tourists’ leisure travel behaviour, needs and actions prior, during and after travel is important for marketing strategists for the analysis of the various customer segments and the development of the appropriate niche markets in the overall tourism consumption system (Woodside & Dubelaar, 2002). Tourists are increasingly in need of accurate information to help inform their decisions, and in this climate of an evolving web, the information about various destinations may not clearly capture the specific market segments as it may focus on a mass tourism approach. Thus, understanding the patterns used by travellers as they search for information and its impact on their decision-making process can help marketers design appropriate marketing strategies in order to tailor the products and services to suit individual needs (Wang & Pizam, 2011).

Tour operators, through the images they display in their promotional brochures and advertising content, may be able to influence the type of tourist they will attract to the destination they are marketing, thus playing a role in the chain of influence (Kokkranikal, Cronje & Butler, 2011). The images that are displayed in the media through news and the advertising of a target tourist destination can create awareness and perceptions in the minds of audiences who may be beginning their travel decision-making process (Sealy & Wickens, 2008). More recently, travellers have increasingly turned to multiple websites in search of information to help them with their decision-making process about travel to a particular destination (Wang & Pizam, 2011). In addition, social media is also being used by DMO’s and tourism marketers to engage customers, increasing their presence online which should reinforce their consistent engagement
with tourists as well as build the brand image and strength and help to target tourism consumers at the various stages of their decision-making process (Hudson & Thal, 2013).

Travel experience shared on social media by individuals is often seen as more valuable information than that posted on websites by tourism organizations and tour operators as this platform provides an opportunity for tourists to share their stories, experiences, complaints and various other pieces of information (Kang & Schuett, 2013). With the evolution of social media, many of the sites now can allow tourists to share videos, pictures, comments, feedback and experiences with other online users in real time or after a trip. The relevance and quality of this content are important elements in forming the perceptions and images of a travel destination and as such are useful to the consumer (Shu & Scott, 2014). For this reason, social media has become a crucial tool in tourism and hospitality management in the areas of promotion, communication, product development, management and marketing research (Leung, Law, Van Hoof & Buhalis, 2013). Planning trips based on the information provided is beneficial to visitors, and destination managers need to ensure that user-friendly information is readily available to visitors through various media channels (Giver & Stanford, 2013).

The level of participation on social media sites depends on the usefulness of the information found there and the benefits the users perceive they will receive (Parra-López, Bulchand-Gidumal, Gutiérrez-Taño & Díaz-Armas, 2011). Because of competition and since destination marketers target similar consumers, there is a need to find innovative ways of using social media to provide accurate and useful information that is both appealing and addresses the needs of the tourism consumers. Destination management organizations and tourism promoters aim at designing the right marketing packages that will influence tourists’ behaviour and decision
making to choose their destination (Kokkraniakal, Cronje & Butler, 2011). Currently, these consumers are increasingly turning to such sites as TripAdvisor and Facebook where most of the information posted is generated by the users themselves (Miguéns, Baggio & Costa, 2008). Users search for an extensive range of information, ranging from locations, maps, photos, videos, and shared experiences online to the ratings of the destination, and according to Fotis, Buhalis and Rossides (2012), research has found that social media is used in varying degrees not only before a trip but also during and after as well. Furthermore, as Schroeder and Pennington-Gray (2014) point out, frequent international travellers have a higher possibility of using social media to look for information related to their travel destination and the issues they may encounter in order to be prepared. In particular, tourists who are visiting a destination for the first time may conduct extensive research to find the travel information they may need, turning to social media to do so.

Their perception of this destination, which is based on information they have been exposed to, will impact their choice and subsequent decision to visit (Woodside & Lysonski, 1989), and this information will also guide them through the various stages of their trip, from planning until they return home. Like most tourism and hospitality industry products and services, trips like the ones to the BINP are not tangible but rather experiences and dreams, and, therefore, consumers usually take a longer period of time to search for the right information to inform their decision before purchasing these products and services (Wang & Pizam, 2011). Gorilla tourism is important to the private sector, the tourist industry and the Ugandan economy, with the economic benefits of this eco-tourism trip going beyond the collection of visitor fees to investment in services like hotels, transportation, tour operator services and many other facilities that support the tourism industry (Adams & Infield, 2003).
Social Exchange Theory

Many researchers have advanced the use of the Social Exchange Theory in a multitude of disciplines. Although different definitions of this theory have appeared over time, most theorists agree that social exchange involves a series of interactive actions that generate obligations (Emerson, 1979). According to Blau (1987), the Social Exchange Theory is based on the foundation that the exchange of social and material resources in a relationship is a vital form of human interaction. One of the most basic principles of the Social Exchange Theory is that relationships evolve over time into trusting, loyal and eventually mutually beneficial commitments (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). People engage in an interactive process when they enter a relationship, and they weigh the costs and benefits that they stand to gain from this interaction (Nunkoo, 2016).

The Social Exchange Theory in the tourism industry context suggests that local communities are likely to support tourism activities and its developments as long as its benefits outweigh its costs (Yoon, Gursoy & Chen, 2001). Several factors are exchanged among the various tourism industry players and stakeholders, and the mutual benefits range from economic, social, development and political ones. In order for relationships to have trust and be mutually beneficial, both parties need to abide by certain rules and regulations during the exchange process (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Figure 1 below illustrates the fundamental principles of the Social Exchange Theory: that is trust, expectations, costs and benefits and how they relate to the exchange of services between tourists and tourism suppliers in the tourism and hospitality industries.
Figure 1: Proposed conceptual framework based on Social Exchange Theory Blau (1987).

There are many costs involved in the development of the tourism industry, with residents perceiving that tourism increases the cost of goods and services and has a negative impact on the environment in general (Nunkoo, & Ramkissoon, 2012). Past research suggests that the value associated with the elements of the exchange will often influence the host community’s perception of tourism and their willingness to participate in its development (Nunkoo, 2016). According to Nunkoo & Ramkissoon (2012), in the tourism context, the Social Exchange Theory suggests that local communities are more likely to support and participate in tourism if the benefits of the industry outweigh the costs. Furthermore, after trust is established, partners become more willing to invest in the relationship and spend more time and resources in developing and nurturing the relationship (Nunkoo, & Ramkissoon, 2012). As applied to tourism, tourists and tourism suppliers establish contacts, and once the relationship is established, information is shared until the point that goods and services are exchanged.
According to Blau, (1987), in a social exchange, expectations are set and associated with the rewards people expect to receive after incurring costs. For example, during the trip planning process, tourists pay for the services of tour operators and lodges; in return, they expect quality services delivered to them and a good experience at the destination. Likewise, tourism suppliers expect tourists to honour their obligations and pay for the services being supplied.

Due to the advances in the internet and electronic social media, consumers are able to exchange information and to share travel-related stories about and experiences of their destinations of interest (Munar & Jacobsen, 2013). Trust and satisfaction are important elements for online consumers when they are navigating the internet for transactions and evaluating online relationships (Kim, Chung, & Lee, 2011). Trust is particularly important in the tourism industry as tourists and tourism suppliers communicate online frequently, sharing information about the destination and eventually engaging in transactions involving their travel to the destination. This application of the principles of the Social Exchange Theory is appropriate for the services provided by tourism suppliers, the trust the travellers have in them to provide a good experience, and the commitment from both parties to deliver their parts of the bargain.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction to the Study

The purpose of this exploratory research is to identify social media use by tourists both when planning for and during their visit to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. In addition, it is focused on identifying how selected tourism suppliers (both the private sector tour operators and lodge owners, and the public sector agency, the UWA) use social media as the findings of this study will be used to make recommendations for the refinement of social media marketing campaigns. This qualitative study, which was conducted between June and August 2015, collected four primary types of data:

1. Semi-structured interviews with supply-side stakeholders (e.g., tour operators, lodge owners, and managers of the Uganda Wildlife Authority) and tourists to the BINP
2. User posts to two social media sites – Facebook and Twitter – using a specialized social media software, Radian 6, to analyse their content from June 1 through August 31, 2015
3. User (e.g., tourists who post reviews on social forums, reviews) and supplier posts (e.g., tour operators and lodge owners that describe their tourist product, attractions, activities, and/or destinations) on the BINP TripAdvisor website
4. Participant observation and field notes collected during the data collection process, including notes from informal conversations with stakeholders, personal
reflections while participating in gorilla tracking with tourists, and pictures taken of the important tourist attractions and sites.

Qualitative research such as this study requires permission from the relevant authorities including institutions, college review boards and the necessary officials to ease the collection of data (Creswell, 2012). Thus, the researcher obtained a research permit from the Uganda Wildlife Authority to conduct interviews in the BINP as well as gorilla tracking permits to participate in the tracking exercises with the tourists. In addition, she obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) certification from Clemson University, allowing her to conduct the research.

Study Site

This study was conducted in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) in Uganda, which is one of the country’s 10 national parks and 12 game reserves. BINP, a UNESCO World Heritage site, is well known as the habitat for more than half of the world’s remaining endangered mountain gorillas, and as such, attracts many international tourists, researchers and conservationists each year. This park was selected for this research study because it involves many of the country’s tourism system stakeholders, the Uganda Wildlife Authority, tourists, tour operators, lodge owners, and the local communities living in the area.

The BINP, which is located in south western Uganda on the edge of the Rift Valley, is part of one of Uganda's oldest and most biologically diverse rainforests, dating back 25,000 years and containing almost 400 species of plants. More famously, this forest also protects an estimated 320 mountain gorillas, approximately half of the world’s population, including several habituated groups which can be tracked (Uganda Wildlife Authority, 2015). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) recognized Bwindi Impenetrable
National Park for its outstanding universal value as a prime site for biodiversity on the continent, and its rich diversity of species makes it an exceptional phenomenon of nature (UNESCO, 1994).

This National Park, which is characterized by steep hills and narrow valleys and is adjacent to some of the highest local community population densities in Africa (Guschanski, Vigilant, McNeilage, Gray, Kagoda, & Robbins, 2009), hosted 21,695 visitors in 2013 and 20,611 visitors in 2014 (Uganda Wildlife Authority, 2014), making it the highest income generating National Park in Uganda, primarily due its core attraction of gorilla tracking. Gorilla tracking requires a tracking permit, the fee for international visitors being $600, for foreign residents, $500 and for East Africans, Uganda Shillings 250,000, or approximately $80.

This study focused on the northern sector of Buhoma because it has more tourist accommodations surrounding the park than the southern areas as well as a high local community population and the most accessible road network. This sector was also the first area where gorillas were habituated for tourism and tracking purposes in Uganda, meaning that the initial accommodation for tourists were established here, explaining why it has the most such facilities. There are also more tour operators in this sector because of the easier access to the park. A map
of the park can be seen in the figure below.

Figure 3.1 Map of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park
Semi-structured Interviewing

According to Kvale & Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews are conducted to obtain first-hand data on the lived experiences of the interviewee in order to understand the meaning of the described phenomena. Such interviewing necessitates that researchers establish contact with potential participants that may inform their research topics including those they may have never met (Seidman, 2013). The resulting interviews provide an in-depth understanding of the research topic because they allow for follow-up questions to further enhance the rich data already provided by the interviewee. As they were best suited to give a detailed description of these services, the semi-structured interviews for this study were conducted with the key players involved in the supply and demand tourism products and services, particularly in gorilla tourism, specifically tourists, tour operators who market the BINP as a destination, lodge managers and UWA staff. These interviews focused on their use of social media, specifically the social media platforms they frequently use--Facebook, Twitter, and TripAdvisor--and their influence on the tourists’ choice of the BINP as their travel destination.

Tourists

Tourists visiting the BINP were particularly significant to this study because they had already made the decision to visit the park, and the researcher wanted to establish the role and influence social media played in this decision. Social media and its rise have been associated with increased active participation and a strong level of network connectedness, both of which are reflected in changes in consumer behaviour (Hennig-Thurau, Hofacker, & Bloching, 2013). These tourists were approached randomly with a request to interview them on site in the BINP and selected only after confirmation that they use social media. The participants included both males and females, primarily professionals ranging in age from 18 to 66 and representing a cross
section of various countries, including the USA, Australia, the United Kingdom and various other European countries; no local tourists were approached nor interviewed for this study.

Tour Operators

In this category, a select number of Ugandan tour operators who market the BINP as one of their tour packages and who were conducting tours in the park at the time of data collection were also interviewed. These tour operators, who belong to the Association of Uganda Tour Operators, are well established, selling tours not only to the BINP but also to the other National Parks and tourism attractions in Uganda. The nature of this industry is such that they travel with the tourists, providing them with guide services. This study focused on establishing if these tour operators use social media to promote their services, the online content and the resulting relationships and contacts, if any, that bring tourists to the BINP.

Purposive sampling was used to select those participants who use social media to promote their services. The final group interviewed included six (6) tour operators who provide services throughout East Africa, 2 of whom are among the oldest and largest tour companies in Uganda. Three of these companies also have accommodation facilities to complement their tour services, while one specialized in birding services, particularly in the Uganda National Parks of the BINP, Murchison Falls National Park, Kidepo Valley National Park and Semuliki National Park.

Lodge Owners

This participation group consists of accommodation facility providers in areas within and around the BINP. The study wanted to learn how these providers use social media to contact their guests before, during, and after their visits as well as if they manage customer service through social media. These participants included owners of 6 of the 11 lodges in the Buhoma
sector, only one of which is inside the BINP, with the remaining 5 located within a kilometre of the park. Four of these lodges—Sanctuary Gorilla Forest Camp, Mahogany Springs Lodge, Silverback Lodge and Volcanoes Bwindi Lodge—are considered high-end, while the remaining 2, Buhoma Lodge and Buhoma Community Rest Camp, are considered medium range lodges. Buhoma Community Rest Camp particularly prides itself on being the first community-based lodge that brought together more than 7,000 community members to sustainably develop and improve the livelihoods of the local communities around the BINP.

The room rates of these lodges range from $72 to $620 per night, per room, and in most cases the rooms can be shared by 2 people. The lodges offer various packages, with some including a full-board rate with meals while others have separate billing for rooms and meals. In addition, the rates charged by the lodges interviewed were different for the low season and the high season, typically June, July, August and December when they record the highest number of tourists especially from Europe and North America.

Uganda Wildlife Authority

The Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), a semi-autonomous government agency that conserves and manages Uganda’s wildlife for the people of country and the world, is mandated to ensure the sustainable management of wildlife resources and supervise wildlife activities in Uganda both within and outside the protected areas (Uganda Wildlife Authority, 2015). Purposive sampling was also used for this category of respondents, as the UWA is the sole organization that manages the BINP. One of the goals of purposive sampling is to select participants who can provide the best data in light of the research questions being explored (Maxwell, 2012).
Semi-structured interviews with the marketing staff of the UWA were conducted to establish their use of social media in promoting visits to the BINP, the level of interaction with it, including the frequency of responses and the number of resulting visit, and the content available on the three social media platforms studied here, Twitter, Facebook and TripAdvisor. In addition, the interview conducted with a marketing and website executive included the usage of social media to market Uganda’s National Parks and to promote conservation efforts. The researcher also looked at the Uganda Wildlife Authority social media pages.

Interview sites

A total of thirty forty (34) face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted with tourists, tour operators, lodge owners and the Uganda Wildlife Authority marketing staff both at the BINP and at the headquarter offices. All the interviews were conducted in English. The interviews with tourists were conducted on site in Bwindi at the visitor center, the lodges where they were staying and at exit points like the airstrip and park gates. In addition, some were conducted immediately after a gorilla tracking experience at the visitor center in the BINP where all tourists are given their tracking certificates. The interviews with the lodge owners and tour operators were conducted at the various lodges around the park where the tourists were staying.

Interview Questions

An interview guide was developed to enable the respondents to elaborate on their use of social media and the content they put on the social media platforms studied here. It was also intended to determine the interaction of the tour operators and lodge owners with interested parties (potential tourists and visiting tourists) and their marketing promotions on social media about the BINP that may affect the decision to visit the park. Sample questions from the
interview guide for the interviews conducted with tourists, tour operators, lodge owners, and the UWA included the following:

1. a) Did you decide to come to the BINP because of the information you saw online?
   b) Was there any specific piece of information or was it a combination of pieces of information that helped you decide?

2. Did you use social media in any way during your trip planning; if yes, what type of social media did you use?

3. How did you learn about the BINP?

4. What was your primary reason for travelling to the BINP?

5. Have you noticed significant changes in your client base in terms of growth or communication since you began using social media?

6. In your opinion, which social media platforms are most useful and effective in the running of your accommodation business and why?

   Social Exchange Theory was used to guide this study and in particular, its’s principles of trust, expectations, costs and benefits were applied to this study. These principles were applied to the following research questions:

   1. Are tourists aware of the BINP’s presence on social media and how are they using it in relation to their travel?

   2. Does the use of social media platforms (Facebook, Twitter, and TripAdvisor) by tourism suppliers inform gorilla tourists’ expectations of BINP?
The interview procedure varied depending on the category of participants. The researcher used different approach methods to request tourists for an interview, based on the amount of time and their availability between activities. The researcher began a conversation with the tourists she accompanied on the gorilla tracking and at the end of the experience; she requested permission to interview them after they received their tracking certificates at the visitor center. For others, an interview was scheduled at a specific time at the lodges where they were staying at the end of the day.

Each of the 6 lodge managers was approached at his/her lodge; some were available immediately for an interview, while for the ones who were busy, an interview was scheduled for a convenient time when the researcher could return to lodge to meet with them. An interview was scheduled and conducted with the Uganda Wildlife Authority Website Manager in the capital city of Kampala. The tour operators, on the other hand, were perhaps the most difficult to interview since June to August, the months the study was conducted, is the peak of the tourism season in Uganda. Many were traveling with their clients on tours or were attending various tourism exhibitions at various local, regional, and international locations. As a result, the researcher made several telephone calls to a number of tour operators who sell tours to the BINP, with some who agreed to an interview subsequently scheduling one. Others who were willing, however, were not available during the period when one could be conducted. The researcher met the available tour operators in their respective offices or in café in Kampala.

A similar procedure was used for all of the semi-structured interviews. First, the researcher introduced herself to the participants and explained the purpose of the interview, expressing her thanks for their participation, especially to the tourists who volunteered to do so.
on short notice. The researcher then asked for their permission to record the interviews for the purpose of accuracy, and all respondents agreed to the audio recordings. For all interviews, the researcher followed the appropriate interview guide, usually following the order of the questions unless the respondent’s answers indicated the need for modification. The interviews typically lasted for between 6 to 16 minutes. The researcher also asked the participants for their email addresses and asked for permission to email them in the future; again, all agreed and provided their email addresses. All the interviews were conducted and transcribed in English. No incentives were provided by the research, and all interviews were freely given.

All interviews conducted with tourists, tour operators, lodge managers and UWA staff, were recorded using an audio recorder, with all participants giving permission for doing so. According to Creswell (2012), researchers should use adequate recording procedures when conducting interviews and the use of suitable equipment is recommended. When such interviews are transcribed, they become the concrete empirical data of both the entire interview process and the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Among the many advantages of audio recording interviews is the fact that the researchers are able to store or keep the data intact, meaning they can refer to the original information in the words of the participants as needed (Seidman, 2013). The researcher can also refer to the transcriptions, which are vital in developing codes and themes throughout the study.

Data Analysis

After transcribing the recordings, data analysis began by translating any responses in the local languages of the tourists or tour operators into English and then reading the transcriptions in order to obtain a deep and thorough understanding of the information collected. Then, the data in the transcripts were coded into the themes and topics that emerged regarding the use of
social media and its influence on tourist trips to the BINP as well as the tour operators, lodge owners and the UWA use of social media to promote their tourism services. Coding is a categorizing strategy used to organize data to give it meaning (Maxwell, 2012).

The data were further analyzed based on the various themes and sub-themes that emerged. While reading and listening, the research took notes articulating what was heard in the data, and then used them to develop categories and the links between them (Maxwell, 2012). Reading and reflecting on the interview transcripts, developing codes and observation notes, and subsequently applying them to the data are all important practices of data analysis (Maxwell, 2012).

Radian6

This study used Radian6 to analyze the online social media content related to the BINP that is shared among users. “Radian6 is a social media tracking software program that allows users to search publicly available social media posts within specific time parameters for user-defined search terms” (Sanderson, & Truax, 2014, p. 338). Since the researcher’s goal was to determine if social media influences the tourists’ decisions to visit Bwindi and what content they post or share in relation to their trip, this study searched for sample content specifically on Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter using the potential key words of *Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, gorilla tracking in Uganda, eco-tourism in Uganda, gorilla tourism, gorilla conservation* and similar search words to see what was trending about the BINP and being shared among social media users. The researcher pretested Radian6 with Facebook and Twitter in the Clemson Social Media Listening Center, the results indicating there was content being shared among users on the BINP, particularly on mountain gorillas.
This content included demographic information, including the age and country of origin of the users, data potentially useful in determining their interest in choosing to visit the BINP. Among the other research questions, Radian6 was primarily used to focus the answers to Question One on if the tourists were aware of BINP’s presence on social media and how they used it in relation to their travel. This question explored the user content available about the BINP, the posts and comments of Facebook and Twitter users, the content the users shared and the potential influence it had on their trip planning process. The suppliers of the gorilla tourism experience also used social media as highlighted in the posts and commentaries obtained from Radian6, especially the tour operators and lodges who marketed their packages and provided discussions on conservation efforts.

Data Analysis of Social Media Platforms (Facebook and Twitter)

Data were also analysed with Radian6 software using the key content or the social media platforms studied here that tourists used to monitor shared content, information that was subsequently compared to the data collected from the interviews and questionnaires. The key search terms entered in Radian6 in order to retrieve Facebook and Twitter posts included mountain gorillas, Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, and mountain gorilla conservation, among others. The researcher analyzed data from Twitter and Facebook social media platforms only for the months of June, July and August 2015, the peak tourist season for the BINP and the same time period the semi-structured interviews conducted for this study. Data were mined from Radian6 in an Excel sheet format from the river of news section of Radian6. This data included details such as the author of the post, its content, its posting date, and the social media platform it was posted on. Some of the samples of these posts are cited in this study. These posts were taken
verbatim and this resulted in some comments not being fully transferable and with spelling and grammar errors, which were left intact.

**TripAdvisor**

The TripAdvisor website was searched for content, particularly the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park page for posts, opinions and reviews related to tourist information, lodging, tour operators who organize tour packages for tourists interested in going to the BINP, information about the park itself and the park management (UWA). This page includes tabs for these key areas, reviews and posts, lodging, flights, things to do, vacation, restaurants and a forum with posts. The researcher analyzed the content on this site to determine if the posts and reviews influenced tourists’ decisions to travel and which content influenced their decisions.

**Field Notes**

The researcher took field notes throughout the entire data collection process, including the time spent at the BINP, in the city, at the various visitor centers, and on the plane with the tourists. In addition, notes were also taken during the interviews and during some of the activities with the tourists, usually at the end of the day. Some of these notes include conversations with the tour operators and lodge managers about their most productive marketing campaigns and memorable events or encounters in their line of work. One of the most interesting of these focused on one of the lodge managers at the Sanctuary Gorilla Forest Camp who commented on a popular YouTube video taken by one of the tourist groups who came across a family of gorillas in their camp. Titled “Touched by a Mountain Gorilla,” it has generated more than 8 million viewers, and according to the manager, has triggered extensive interest in the gorillas in the BINP, bringing many visitors to his lodge.
Trustworthiness

Credibility and trustworthiness are achieved through such techniques as prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources, methods and investigators (Creswell, 2012). This study used various data sources to provide corroborating evidence from a wide perspective of industry players including tourists, tour operators, the UWA/ BINP marketing staff, and Radian6, which was used to monitor the online social media content about the BINP. Triangulation involves using various methods during data collection for corroboration of the information obtained and the resulting conclusions reached (Maxwell, 2012). For example, the posts and comments made by various travellers were analysed and incorporated into this study. In addition, the researcher observed the tourists during their gorilla tracking, noting how they related to this experience. Their emotions were very visible in their reactions in terms of body language, especially excitement and fear, as well during the group discussions after the gorilla tracking.

Reliability in qualitative research is enriched through good field notes and quality audio recording of interviews coupled with a subsequent careful transcription of them (Creswell, 2012). For this study, all interviews were carefully recorded and transcribed, with the researcher moving between the recordings and the transcriptions multiple times to ensure accuracy. In addition, the researcher took field notes on her observations, including the email addresses of the participants and pieces of related information shared by the various stakeholders.

Validity was addressed by developing detailed codes and themes. Field research appears to provide greater validity than survey and experimental measures as the actual presence of the researcher plays a significant role in analyzing and understanding the complexity of the human
experience (Babbie, 2013). One of the validity issues in this study is that the researcher worked
with the UWA as well as with some of the tour operators and lodge managers in the past.
Triangulation was used to minimise any researcher bias. Being aware of potential researcher
bias and clarifying how it will be addressed in the study are important for ensuring the validity of
the research (Creswell, 2012). More specifically, in this study the data obtained from Radian6
and the TripAdvisor website were used to triangulate and corroborate the information obtained
from the interviews.
CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory study was to identify social media use by tourists both when planning for and during their visit to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and identify how selected tourism suppliers (both the private sector tour operators and lodge owners, and the public sector agency, the UWA) use social media. The findings in this chapter are based on the posts retrieved from Radian6 software on Facebook and Twitter, the content analysed on the BINP page on TripAdvisor website and the responses from the interviews conducted with tourists and tourism suppliers in BINP.

Radian6

A total of 539 posts, 116 tweets and 423 Facebook posts, were retrieved from the Radian6 software from a search conducted on the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park using the terms *Bwindi Impenetrable, Conservation, gorilla tracking* and *gorilla tourism* between June and August 2015, the peak season for gorilla tourism in the Park. Retweets and reposts on the same subject from the same users were deleted and the data cleaned up. The total number of user posts after this clean-up was 448, which included 90 tweets and 358 Facebook posts.

Based on the content, each of the posts was coded and categorized. The data were then further analyzed for common themes and sub-themes. The three overarching themes that emerged included gorilla conservation, tourism marketing and tourist visits, with the first two being seen significantly more frequently than the number of posts from tourists who had visited the park. Table 1 shows the frequency of the user posts and the themes that emerged from their analysis, with examples being kept in their original form and quoted verbatim.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency (% of Sample)</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gorilla conservation</td>
<td>159 (35.5%)</td>
<td>“RT @faralongcom- Park rangers protect our natural heritage. Happy #WorldRangerDay Here is our story from #uganda #bwindi #gorilla <a href="http://t.co/Xjlb1lhkVM">http://t.co/Xjlb1lhkVM</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist visits</td>
<td>19 (4.2%)</td>
<td>The top GEAR_ Winston Churchill famously labeled Uganda as the Pearl of Africa. The country offers some of the most breathtaking wildlife terrain in the world. Uganda’s most famous tourist places include the Ajai Game Reserve, the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, the Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, the Kidepo Valley.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism marketing</td>
<td>270 (60.3%)</td>
<td>“ACHIEVE GLOBAL SAFARIS_ 3 Days Uganda Gorilla Safari The 3 days Uganda gorilla safari, takes you to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park a home to the remaining endangered mountain gorillas in the mist.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Theme 1: Gorilla conservation**

A total of 159 posts (35.5%) were commentaries related to gorilla conservation in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. Three subthemes that emerged include the following:

- Gorilla groups
- Gorilla babies
- Community participation

**Gorilla babies**

Gorilla doctors, tour operators, tourists, and conservationists, among others commented on and discussed the birth, care and welfare of gorilla babies within the various gorilla groups in the park. For examples, several doctors posted about the treatment of the gorilla babies, including “GORILLA DOCTORS--The day after adult female Muhangi gave birth to her first infant in Bikingi group in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, trackers observed her coughing and shivering. Dr. Fred trekked to the group to assess the mother and infant and reports that Muhangi condition has stabilized and both mom and baby are...,” and another posted “GORILLA DOCTORS-- There is a new mountain gorilla infant in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park's Busingye group! Mother Nyambaju, a shy female in the group, recently gave birth to a new baby, bringing the Busingye group up to 10 individuals. Dr. Fred visited the group to assess their health and reports that silverback Busingye....”

Some of the discussion on the gorilla babies focused on expressions of excitement on seeing the babies and the hope for more gorilla families to grow: “ALL ABOUT UGANDA IN A BEETLE--Another baby in Bwindi-- fantastic news Gorilla Doctors” and another posted “22REASONS- GREAT NEWS || Two new mountain gorilla babies! Gorilla Doctors Dr. Fred recently visited Mubare group in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and found two new...
babies.” Another post commented “RENEE VINCENT-HELPING ANIMALS IN CRISIS- visually in good health. Welcome to the world, little one!”

Overall, the posts indicate that the birth of a new baby as well as the follow-up on its health by the gorilla doctors was exciting. Some also posted about the excitement of the growing gorilla population following the birth of new babies, such as this remark: “ENDANGERED SPECIES PROTECTION – RAGES-- We visited this family in Bwindi on our way to climb the Rwenzoris in November 2011, great news to see them growing in numbers. Let us keep them that way. Gorilla Doctors Dr. Fred recently visited Mubare group in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and found two new babies in the group! Both Kikombe and Mitunu...”

Gorilla groups

Posts also commented on the gorilla groups habituated for tracking, specifically monitoring their progress. Some of these posts included “GORILLA DOCTORS-- Two new groups of mountain gorillas are being habituated for tourism and research in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. The groups, named Bushaho and Bikingi, are named for their home ranges and contain some individuals from previously habituated groups. Both groups are led by former Nkuringo group...,” and another post commented that “GORILLA HAVEN - GORILLA FANS-- Gorilla Doctors Bitukura and Kyaguliro groups interacted in mid-June in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park resulting in multiple transfers of group members from Kyaguliro to Bitukura group. During Dr. Rickyâ€™s health check of Bitukura group last week, however, he found that the new group members had returned to....” A third user posted “GORILLA PASSION PROJECT-- Update on the Nkuringo Group, including a new baby!!! Gorilla Doctors Nkuringo, the very first group to be habituated to human presence for tourism in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, is well
known for venturing outside of the park boundaries. True to form, the group members were ranging in the buffer zone....”

Some of the user posts also referred to the various gorilla groups in the park and the sightings of particular individuals in them as well as their health status. These comments included “GORILLA DOCTORS-- The group was calm, though Makara charged once when Binyonko’s infant Nyanjura got stuck in the thick vegetation and cried out. Each individual was observed and was in good health!” and another commented “AMIGOS DE LOS GORILAS-- Gorilla Doctors Dr. Fred recently visited Mubare group in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and found two new babies in the group! Both Kikombe and Mitunu had tiny newborns clutched to their chests during his recent health check. There are now five infants in Mubare group and each baby is visually in good....” A number of individual gorillas within the group were mentioned, including, for example, “GORILLA DOCTORS-- Silverback Makara Habinyanja Group in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park” and “adult female Ruyombo Habinyanja Group in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park.”

Community participation

Some of the user posts were commentaries on the local communities and their initiatives related to their participation in gorilla conservation in Bwindi Impenetrable National Park; for example, “CEPF EASTERN AFROMONTANE HOTSPOT PROGRAM-- /addressing-real-issues-local-village-perspective Addressing the real issues: a local village perspective | BirdLife Both Volcanoes National Park and Bwindi Impenetrable National Park are part of the Virunga Landscape, the transboundary region that spreads over the borders of Uganda, Rwanda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo...,” and “KAITALE HABIMANA INNOCENT-- Mgahinga and Bwindi national parks. We shall go through the sequence of events in developing gorilla tourism
in Bufumbira, which has put our district on world map. Several world dignitaries have come up to Kisoro one of them being Bill Gates, the wealthiest individual on the world. Gorilla tourism in Bufumbira is....”

Other people commented on their support for the doctors who are taking care of the gorillas, ensuring that this species does not become extinct. These comments included “WILDOGRAPHY-- Happy #WorldEnvironmentDay. Do something to give back to this glorious planet: Support the #GorillaDoctors and the work they do in protecting mountain gorillas in Bwindi,” and another posted “WALMARK AFRICA SAFARIS—Gorillas could be Extinct If Not Conserved for Future Generations! Of the few Mountain Gorillas that remain on Earth estimated less than a Thousand, almost half of the population live in Uganda Bwindi impenetrable and Mgahinga National Parks while the rest can be found in the Volcanoes National Park in....”

*Theme 2: Tourism marketing*

*Subthemes*

  i) *Marketing promotions*

  ii) *Touched by a Mountain gorilla advertising*

*Marketing promotions*

The majority of user posts commented on tourism marketing, in particular tour operators advertising their services to the public about the packages they have to offer to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. In addition, some mentioned the activities the Park offered to the visitors: “MBARO SAFARIS COMPANY LIMITED-- Channel. Day 4: To Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Day 5: Gorilla tracking in Bwindi Impenetrable Forest. Day 6: Volcano Climbing in Mt. Muhavura. Day 7: Volcano Climbing in Mt. Sabinyo. Day 8: Visit the equator /
Return to Kampala or Entebbe Accommodation. Accommodation is based on standard double/twin or single...,” and “MARIA PONS SCHMIDT-- chimpanzee trekking and a boat cruise combined with Mountain gorilla trekking in Bwindi National Park, Batwa pymies community events as well as the rare Golden Monkey on the slopes of the volcanoes of Mgahinga National Park. This safari includes crater lakes exploration as well as interacting with the locals through....”

Some of the posts were more specific about the accommodations offered at the Park and the promotions for attracting tourists, including “PRIME UGANDA SAFARIS-- Cheap accommodation at Buhoma community rest camp in bwindi impenetrable national park safari Uganda news Buhoma in the north of Bwindi Impenetrable National” and “SOMAK HOLIDAYS-- This week's top pick has been chosen by Meeta! Gorilla Forest Camp is a luxury camp in Uganda. Located in the heart of the Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, it is a fantastic camp to go gorilla trekking, and see some amazing rainforest! Find out more at; http://www.somak.com/uganda/bwindi-national-park/gorilla”

*Touched by a Mountain Gorilla*

A number of posts mentioned the *Touched by a Gorilla* video, which was filmed in the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park as some of the tour operators were using it for advertising this destination. It describes the experience of tourists who were staying at a lodge when a gorilla family touched one of them. Some of the posts about this video include “HART TRAVEL INTERNATIONAL-- Have you watched this video? If you have not already, you need to stop what you are doing and watch it now! Touched by a Wild Mountain Gorilla (HD Version) An amazing chance encounter with a troop of wild mountain gorillas near Bwindi National Park, Uganda” and “TWENDE EXPEDITIONS LTD-- Touched by a Mountain Gorilla in the
magnificent Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. One in million experience.

https://youtu.be/x2H7zcqijplc Touched by a Wild Mountain Gorilla (short) NEW - - (short version). An incredible chance encounter with a troop of wild Mountain Gorillas in Uganda. Check blog.commonflat...” and “STOP PEOPLE FROM BULLYING AHAR-- Touched by a Wild Mountain Gorilla (HD Version) An amazing chance encounter with a troop of wild mountain gorillas near Bwindi National Park, Uganda” and “RUTH O'DONNELL-- Imagine if these had been Sasquatch: Gorilla kissing Man: Touched by a Wild Mountain Gorilla An amazing chance encounter with a troop of wild mountain gorillas near Bwindi National Park, Uganda”

Theme 3: Tourist visits

A smaller portion (4.2%) of the posts commented on the users’ visits to Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, focusing on their initial sightings in the park and their excitement at seeing the gorillas and the other sights in the park. These posts included “DRBICENTENARIO-- Mountain Gorilla-- Through our two days trekking in the mountain of Bwindi National park in Uganda, we met the family | http://t.co/7r9D5ygdcY,” and “WILDCOUNTRY CONSULTANTS-- unsettling though as everybody from Harare down to Nyanga via the Mutare train said EXACTLY the same thing to us, ‘Be careful what you say!’ I also went Gorilla trekking in Bwindi in Uganda, and that was a jolly day’s walk in the impenetrable forest. In short a magical time. I often think back with....” Other posts also centred on tourist services in the BINP and what an adventure it was for them to see mountain gorillas. These include “THE NEW VISION-- SELLING GORILLAS TO LATIN AMERICA I have travelled to many African countries for adventure, but I have never been this close to a gorilla, said Raul de
Molina, the Emmy Award-winning TV show host with Univision network in the US. This was during his encounter with mountain gorillas in Bwindi Impenetrable....”

TripAdvisor

Because consumers have become increasingly interested in reading and writing reviews of their travel experiences and sharing information, inquiries, opinions and complaints about their personal experiences with hotels and other service providers (Teixeira & Kornfeld, 2013), the TripAdvisor website was searched for content about Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP). This search resulted in 258 forum topics about the BINP, 18 of which were for the period of January to December 2015. These 18 forum topics were analyzed in relation to the topic and purpose of this study, resulting in 123 posts, which were subsequently extracted from TripAdvisor intact and are quoted verbatim here. The three main themes emerging from the analysis of these posts and their frequency can be seen in Table 2 below.

Table 2 – TripAdvisor User posts themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>General preparations for the trip</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorilla tracking</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tour operator and travel services</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Theme 1: General preparations for the trip
People inquired on TripAdvisor about how to prepare for gorilla tracking activities, with some inquiries and discussions commenting on the length of the gorilla tracking hikes and what was needed in order to have a good experience. One of the posts asked, “Hi has any one got any tips for taking good pics of the Gorillas? I have a DSLR camera, and usually just point and shoot! I want to make sure I can get the lighting ect right if possible. Anything appreciated,” and another user posted “We travel next month on a tour of Uganda. I get a bit obsessed with Mosquitoes and have prepared myself with an array of lotions and potions I was wondering if we are allowed to take our own mosquito coils, or are they provided? Any thoughts please.”

Some of the inquiries, responses and discussions focused on safety and security in Bwindi and help in deciding where and when to go gorilla tracking. These posts included “Hi there, I'm supposed to be travelling to Bwindi (as well as Queen Elizabeth National Park) in late May 2015. Recently, the travel warnings have specifically called out that tourists should reconsider the need to travel within 50km of Uganda's border with the Democratic Republic of Congo, including the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park. My understanding is that the areas that usually experience some unrest are further North but it is concerning that the warnings call out Bwindi specifically. I would welcome any feedback from recent travelers or insights from locals as to what the situation is. Thanks, Anita.” One user responded, writing, “I was in Bwindi earlier this month. Both the north and south sectors are considered safe. I actually was hard up against the DRC border at one point and saw nothing to concern me. I then went north to QENP and Fort Portal in total safety. I don't know how up to date these ‘Travel Warnings’ are but whoever writes them needs a lesson in Geography and humanitarian studies. People are going on trips
INTO DRC these days for both Gorillas and to view the erupting volcano in total safety. By far the biggest danger you will face is the crazy traffic in Kampala.”

Theme 2: Gorilla tracking

There were also discussions about gorilla tracking, the key inquiries focusing on how to obtain gorilla tracking permits, which group of gorillas were best to track and how long the gorilla tracking activity typically takes. One such post asked, “Hey Mfuwe. How do you feel about people with disabilities trekking in Rwanda? Have any strong opinions you care to share? Ie... Don't do it? When prearranged with a guide, do you feel its fair for them to ignore and take you on 10 hour trek? Just checking in on your opinion now that you are over 65.” One responder said, “It's not the distance but the climbing that may give you a problem. You can find Gorillas very close but they may need to be accessed up or down steep trails. I have heard that you can hire a 'sedan chair' and your porter is adept at giving a strategic shove in the right place at the right time. You can select an 'area' but the choice of family group is fixed on the day.”

In addition, there were discussions on the size of the gorilla families that the tourists wanted to track, including complaints about the number of gorillas in each gorilla family. Others were curious to hear about the details of which gorilla group or family they would be assigned to track or if they had a choice. One such post said, “Hi everybody, I am planning my next trip to Uganda; being gorilla tracking the highlight of the trip, I want to be sure to spend my 600$ in the best possible way. I have to decide which gorilla group to choose: I know Nkuringo is one of the best choose, because is very numerous (21) and good to see, but has only few permits available (and harder to walk to). Rushaga has a lot of groups and so lot of availability, but I am worried
about the small families size (all except one), my Bradt guide (7th ed. nov '13) says 7,7,7,9,18 elements. The same for Buhoma, if I am assigned to one of the smaller groups (Mubare, 9) Any advices or experiences about this? Is the number of elements in the gorilla family an important factor? Moreover, I discovered that it is not possible anymore to decide the specific family but it will assigned only the morning of the trek, right? Thanks Bye.” One response offered these insights, “Hello, just back from my trip. In the morning at the briefing at Nshongi we were assigned to the Busiynge group, that currently has 10 members; the tracking starts up from Rubuguri, so we moved there by car. The trek was easy and not very rewarding, we had to walk for about 1h on a steep but motorable dirt road to reach the beginning of the forest, then another 1h on the main forest path (quite sparse and not very beautiful I have to say), and then 15min in the forest with machete to reach the gorillas. We saw 7 of them, one silverback, two babies, one child, four females, at a very close distance; at the 2pm we were back to Rubuguri. Overall it has been a very good experience, unforgettable!”

There were also inquiries and discussions of where to go tracking, whether in the BINP Uganda, the DRC or Rwanda. Some people also posted about the cost of gorilla permits, comparing prices and discussing the best option. One such post began, “I'm not exactly sure where to post this question so I'm starting here. Hope no one minds. I'm planning a trip to Africa (solo female 50 yrs). I'm climbing Kili then a few days rest and game drive in Tarangire, Ngorongoro & Serengetti. From there I wanted to do a gorilla trek but can't decide on Uganda, Rwanda or DCR. Of course, I am aware of conflict in DRC so I'm not going in blindly and I am also aware of the different permit prices in each of the countries. What I don't know, would be which would be the better place to view them? It seems that Uganda is overflowing with tourists
wanting to track the gorillas. Rwanda's permit prices are crazy and I thought the DRC would be a nice alternative. Less crowds and a massive jungle, not to mention the volcano. Am I crazy? I went to the visitverunga.org page and they have a lot of great suggestions and options for guides, transport and accommodation. Thoughts? Tips and/or advice? Thanks!” Responses to such questions included “To build on what Canuck says. The actual gorilla trekking is never crowded. The rule is maximum 8 people per group. You must never outnumber the Gorilla family. So don't be concerned that you may be in a huge party jostling for a good view. You won't. There will be your party of up to eight, the main ranger and maybe a helper. Plus the Gorilla family as hosts.” and “My Only experience is in Uganda this year but I would say it was not crowded at all. I did 2 days in Uganda of gorilla trekking. Day one at the meeting point we had about 4 groups of about 8 people each, we all went to different groups, so it never felt crowded. Next day only one group of about 6 of us at meeting place. Although NOT scientific in my conversations with travellers from Rwanda, they seemed to trek quite long distances, in my case in Uganda we hiked about 1 hour each day to arrive at gorillas.

Theme 3: Tour operators and travel services

The majority of the posts and discussion on the BINP forum involved inquiries about and feedback on tour operator services and travel-related services in general. Some were looking for recommendations for tour operators to hire to arrange their trips, asking about the services of the various ones they had read about online or been referred to, and the prices they charge for their services. Examples of these posts include “I don't find much information on this tour operator. I just found it over the internet and I'm a bit cautious since I've never been to East Africa, does anyone have any input on them? or anyone you would recommend?” and “Hi guys! I am
planning a 3-day gorilla tracking tour with my family to Bwindi Impenetrable NP in the first week of April this year. So far I have been given these 3 quotes (for moderate/luxury accommodation): Kori Safaris -- 1157/1448 USD/pp, Wild Whispers Africa -- 917/1175 USD/pp, Insight Safaris Holiday -- 926/1302 USD/pp. Since this was the off-season, I thought that it would be slightly cheaper than this -- do we need to negotiate with these companies or how does it work? I would really appreciate any reviews on these companies and any other suggestions to make the most of this trip. Lastly, what is the best way to make the payments for the tours?

Other posts included reviews of the experiences with the tour operators used, the cost of the services and the overall experience including the accommodations. Examples of such posts included, “I used 1000 shades of green, a local company. They were amazing and my safari was incredibly run! I'd be happy to give you more info if you are interested”; “I used Travelust African Safaris for the trip I just took to Uganda. They handled all lodging, gorilla permits, airport/lodge connections with ease. I would highly recommend,” and “there are a good number of local Tour companies that have a very good, in-depth knowledge of the lodges, parks and other aspects here in Uganda. I would highly recommend Great Lakes Safaris.”

Reviewers also offered advice, opinions, and comments on the services they thought were worth mentioning to other interested travelers, especially transportation and lodging. Examples of these include, “Just contact several of the very good Ground Agents in Kampala and advise them of your requirements. Let them get the permits and organize transport and lodges to your specification. It costs no more and success is guaranteed. But why only 3 venues? Uganda has much more to offer than Gorillas and rafting. 1100 species of birds including 40+ endemics for a start. Look at this www.broadbillforestcamp.com for more detail,” and “I agree. As this is not a
full blown ‘Safari’ but a simple trip to Bwindi the transport can come down to a car and driver although some roads into Bwindi are better done in a 4WD after bad weather. You do not say where you will be based and this will have an effect on your mode of transport. Assuming Kampala is the start point then allow a full day to get to the Gorilla area you are allocated. A full day trek next morning and as Sea-lon says, another day to travel back. This is three days, two nights. You also need to be aware that the Gorilla treks start at various locations often hours apart so don't firm up accommodation plans until you know which area your permit is for. Even then the signing in point may be some km from the start of the trek so transport will be required.”

Interviews

Qualitative research interviews aim at understanding the participants’ opinions of their lived experience of the subject of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2007). This section gives the results of the interviews conducted with the Uganda Wildlife Authority marketing staff, tourists, tour operators and lodge managers. A total of 34 participants were interviewed. As the purpose of qualitative interviews is to draw meaning and interpretations from the participant’s experiences, not merely obtain facts (Warren, 2002), the responses to the interview questions were analyzed, resulting in the themes and subthemes reported here.

Demographics of participants

Of the 34 respondents, 16 (47%) were female, and 18 (53%) were male. Their age distribution can be seen in Table 3.1 below.
Table 3.1: Respondent’s age groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 or under</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-40</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-55</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56 or older</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participants were from a cross-section of countries, with the majority from Uganda (41.2%) and the USA (26.5%) as shown in the table below.
Table 3:2: Respondent’s country of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uganda</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>41.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>34</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Themes

Interviews provide in-depth meaning and context to people’s behavior and perspectives, and lead to an understanding of their choice of action (Seidman, 2013). Themes describe the patterns of information that come from the data collected from research and give it meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The three overarching themes with their respective subthemes that
emerged from the interviews the researcher conducted included trip planning, internet and social media use and gorilla tracking.

**Theme 1: Trip planning**

The majority of respondents said they travelled to the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park (BINP) to see mountain gorillas by participating in gorilla tracking activities. Therefore, their planning process involved preparing for a thrilling and unique wildlife experience. Most of the participants were traveling in parties, together with someone they knew, either a family member(s) or friends. One of the people in the group did most of the active planning of the trip and passed information on to the rest of the group. In some cases where it was a family, the children did not contribute much in the planning process.

**Subthemes**

i) *Reasons for visiting the BINP*

ii) *Use of tour operators*

**Reasons for visiting the BINP**

The majority of participants said they travelled to BINP primarily to see the mountain gorillas, which they had either read about, seen on television or in a documentary or heard through word of mouth. Some of the respondents mentioned that while on their trips to Kenya or Tanzania, fellow tourists talked about the mountain gorillas in Uganda and Rwanda, which led to their finding out more about these destinations in addition to the Congo as possible locations for seeing these primates. When asked for the reason for choosing the BINP and how this decision was reached, Respondent 2 replied:

“Through Abercrombie & Kent which is the agency we used, and last time we went to Kenya and Tanzania they were talking about the gorillas here,” while Respondent 14 said “Ah we knew
purely because we wanted to do gorillas and we were recommended by various people who had been, that Bwidi, and altogether on the Uganda side was just a nicer easier experience if you have been traveling for a while than necessarily the Rwandan side. so I think we ah.”

A minority of tourists decided to visit the BINP for other reasons besides gorilla tracking, with these reasons including accompanying their family or friends or just tagging along for a vacation. Their priority for visiting BINP was not necessarily for or primarily to see mountain gorillas, but to accompany others and do something else of interest, with gorilla tracking being seen as an addition to their trip. In explaining this reason for choosing to visit the BINP, Respondent 5 said:

“That’s a good question because and sort of a lot of people ask me why; it’s not like again for her, it was not on my bucket list to see gorillas, it was never something. Even animals and wildlife in Tanzania on the safari I am going on, I wouldn’t say that is my primary interest in traveling is animals and wildlife. More and more I am interested in culture, and people and places but that said, I am adventurous and when the opportunity came up I was like you know something that would be great--I am interested and I had never been on the African continent and I love the idea also of being active, like that appealed to me. So the idea of seeing uhmm the gorillas in their natural habitat, being active, traveling to a really foreign place so I’d say that sort of appealed to me, but it wasn’t like I knew I really had to see the gorillas.”

Use of tour operators

All the tourists interviewed were internationals who hired the services of tour operators to manage their trip to the BINP since they were not familiar with the destination, with the majority contacting local tour operators whom they had researched on the internet and on TripAdvisor and
heard about from family and friends. Others used tour operators in their home country with connections in Uganda or those that had ground handlers to manage the BINP tours. When asked about the use of tour operators, Respondent 3 said that:

“Yeah, I knew that I wanted to use this company because I had used them before for another trip to Africa in 2006 and had a very positive experience, and trusted that they would do a very good experience. So I looked on their website and I also looked just comparing Rwanda and Uganda gorilla experiences on wherever I could find different blog posts and other tour companies that talk about the 2 countries, and the experience of the gorilla tracking and then decided from there.”

In addition, Respondent 4 said “I travelled with them once before, just because it’s a brand name that I know is recognizable in the United States, because I am traveling by myself with my son and ah I figured it would be good to have infrastructure, good to have someone just there.”

Many other respondents also referred to the usefulness of having tour operators help them plan their trip and cover all the key aspects of the trip like transportation, lodging, booking gorilla permits and all other activities they may wish to enjoy while at the park. The tour operator services also included driver guides and pick and drop-off at the airport.

The majority of respondents were traveling to the BINP in addition to other destinations, so using the services of tour operators helped them connect smoothly to all the places on their itinerary, both local and regional. Respondent 16 mentioned this in relation to their trip: “Ah we are doing a part business and part holiday starting off with Uganda and we have 10 days and I have just got some meetings on Sunday and Monday and then we are going on for 7 weeks to Tanzania, Zimbabwe and South Africa. But our prime reason for coming here was for the gorillas and we did an African tour safari for 6 days which started off at Murchison Falls and
then we saw the Rhino up at the sanctuary which was pretty amazing walking with the rhino and then the main reason for the trip was to do the gorillas here.”

Theme 2: The use of internet and social media

All the respondents said they used the internet in preparation for the trip, ranging from the information from other tourists to information about service providers. The majority used both the internet and social media platforms to find information related to the BINP and the preparations this trip required.

Tourists

Most of the respondents indicated they used the internet to search for detailed information about the BINP especially that related to decision-making and preparation for the trip. The respondents then contacted the tour operators they found while browsing useful information to help them organize their travel plans. The majority of participants used the internet to read about gorilla permits and the cost of purchasing them as well as the other potential expenses related to traveling to the BINP.

These tourists also used the internet to find information about the services related to the trip, such as transportation, airport transfers, accommodations, tour guides and many others. Respondent 1 had this to say about his/her use of the internet during the planning process:

“For visas, passport- a renewal, I looked online at each of the sites we were going, destinations we were going to stay at to see what they looked like, what the accommodations were like, and what people said about them, what the bathrooms were like”

Another respondent explained how the internet played a role in his/her trip planning, saying “tons of social media, tons of internet and tons of tapping friends that had been here and what to do, kind of just starting to read and reading a lot.”
Tourists also used social media to find out about the activities available, the gear they should bring and, most importantly, information about their lodging. Many of the respondents were curious about the state of the accommodations, using social media to read the reviews of previous travellers about accommodation facilities in the BINP. TripAdvisor was most frequently mentioned as the source for this information, using the comments and forums on the site to make decisions about accommodations. As Respondent 16 mentioned, “Yeah I think I probably I find TripAdvisor is probably more accurate and you have to look at some of the comments and make sure you understand what they are saying and where the places are but I am a big contributor as well. Wherever I go I try to give feedback to TripAdvisor; it can be criticism, it can be constructive criticism or I mean if it bad I also say the same.”

Some of the tourists also searched social media for information regarding the safety and security of the BINP and the type of gear to carry to ensure a safe and danger-free gorilla tracking experience. One of the respondents mentioned this in the interview: “I don’t think I read so much about Bwindi but read more just about people’s comments about gorilla tracking in general and about safety precautions, for example about how to behave, what to expect, what to take with you, yeah I saw some photos of people who had done this before and posted somewhere on the internet so we came prepared basically. Except that I didn’t know that it was advisable to come with gloves and carry a stick which was actually quite helpful but you can land that on the spot.”

Some of the participants were interested in knowing how they should handle their movements, if gorilla tracking was safe, if their lives would any way be in danger and generally wanted to know the level of security within and around the BINP. Security is a significant issue for both tourists and tourism suppliers in the BINP because it is a rainforest in a remote area of
Uganda neighbouring Virunga in the Democratic Republic of Congo, which has seen much political instability in recent years. For this reason, safety and the security are frequently mentioned concerns of tourists considering traveling to this destination.

**Tourism suppliers**

The tourism suppliers the researcher interviewed included the Uganda Wildlife Authority Marketing staff, tour operators, and lodge managers, all of whom used the internet and various social media platforms in their tourism marketing efforts to attract tourists to the BINP. The tour operators in particular mentioned that they actively use their social media accounts and have dedicated staff to post and respond to queries and comments on a daily basis.

All these participants had websites for their companies and organizations, which included specific information related to the BINP. For example, the Uganda Wildlife Authority, which manages the BINP and other national parks, has a park page on its website dedicated to the BINP. It shows its location, activities, the flora and fauna species found in the park, community conservation programs, partners of the park and other general information related to this destination.

Some of the participants, for example tour operators, mentioned that they had their websites synched to their social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter so that users or potential tourists could click on a link on the website that sent them to the social media platforms, and vice versa. Bwindi Impenetrable National Park has received accolades and a certificate of excellence for its wildlife attractions from TripAdvisor in the past. This certificate is awarded to accommodation facilitates, restaurants, and attractions that consistently get good reviews from travellers, with some of the lodges around the BINP receiving them for excellent service in their various categories. Below is an excerpt of the interview with Respondent 26:
“The one we most focus on I would say is basically our Facebook page and our TripAdvisor page, those two we actually focus on them quite a lot. But then also our website is interlinked into most of these and that happens normally, for that happens more often for what we have to offer, where we display our products, what our special packages we have at hand. But that said, we use it as well for communicating what our clients’ experiences have been, because we believe through the interaction with our clients and our clients posting their experiences, it’s actually a much better marketing tool for us, it’s more genuine marketing for any of our customers out there. So in these stages, basically at the stage of creating interest but also after the actual consumption of our products we try and follow up more with the clients posting their experiences and us backing up these opinions from their experiences with what our abilities are.”

The majority of these participants mentioned how they run promotions for products and services on social media with special season packages targeting both local and international tourists. The Uganda Wildlife Authority, for example, periodically advertises its low season gorilla permits on both its website and its Twitter and Facebook platforms. The tour operators also said they feature their special packages on various social media platforms but emphasized they most frequently use Facebook because it allows them the flexibility to use as many words and images as they would like, unlike Twitter which limits the characters at any one posting to 140 words. Respondent 29 made this comparison below about their organization’s use of social media:

“Ah we use Facebook a lot for us, ah I have not worked a lot with twitter but I hear a lot of people do twitter and so if I took it as a general question, I think twitter has also become a very popular social media platform to market. TripAdvisor is certainly one of those that most clients will go to, to look at a review before they make a booking but I think TripAdvisor is also one of
those that needs to be taken with a level of caution because not everyone who goes to TripAdvisor is very objective. There are a lot of emotions things also that go on TripAdvisor but it is one of the mechanisms that we have also seen and appreciate that we need to try an ensure that we have fair reviews by making sure that our clients are happy with whatever services they have got from us and we try to encourage them to review us when they are on TripAdvisor, if they are happy with our service, even if they are not but they can be objective then it can also be another way to actually help you see where you need to make corrective action. So when I look at it, generally looking at it then I think Facebook, twitter and TripAdvisor would be a good platform for any business person to consider, yeah.”

The lodge managers also mentioned that they use social media for promotions for their accommodation facilities, especially during special holidays like Christmas, Easter and New Year’s and during the low season. It is important to note that all lodge managers who participated in this study mentioned that their lodges are affiliated with tour companies that are managed from their head offices in the city of Kampala, and it is these offices in Kampala that primarily handle all marketing including the social media campaigns.

Tour operators and the lodges also use social media to post activities related to the BINP and to interact with the tourists after they have left in order to either receive or give feedback and as a way of keeping in touch for future business or referral business, the majority explaining how they exchange information with the tourists once they have returned home, in particular following up with clients asking them to share photos, videos and feedback in general and addressing any further questions, complaints or comments that they may have. In this way, they have started using some of these social media platforms, especially Facebook and TripAdvisor, as customer relations management platforms.
According to Respondent 11,

“Yes, yes. We do that on Facebook and on the twitter especially when the client wants to follow up on the gorilla group they tracked and how it is doing. I personally do take videos and I go see them or if clients come to trek from certain groups they give me the videos. Some of them, most of the clients at mahogany springs we do tree planting as an activity so we also keep them posted on the progress of their tree; we take photos of how they grow and send to them. Others do also follow up on the progress of the projects they have supported in the community, like they come and support a school or a hospital; they come and ask through the Facebook, inbox how is the school doing, did they purchase the desk that I bought them, did you follow up. I go there and I take photos for them just to keep them posted on the current affairs."

The majority of the participants in the tourism supply category believe that social media is helping them reach demographics of potential tourists that they would not easily have reached given that they operate relatively small offices in Uganda. They mentioned how social media gives them access to a wider global audience, meaning they are able to interact with many people all over the world in real time and inexpensively. They also felt that social media has generated interest with the local domestic tourism market, and even though they have not yet realized significant growth in terms of tourist numbers from social media, they believe it is going to make a difference in the long run. Respondent 26 had this to say in regards to the awareness social media has created:

“Yes there is, ah we would not say certainly in growth but in the level of satisfaction especially for feedback, requesting for feedback but also for them sharing their experiences which in turn, help us to sell better and maybe act as catalysts to convince the rest of the other potential clients on how beautiful this destination is. But that said also, on why they should use us as a company
as opposed to any of the other competition. So there is all the value to be attached to that ah, to the use of social media.”

Many of the participants mentioned the video *Touched by a Mountain Gorilla* that they saw on YouTube. One of the lodge managers mentioned it in the interview and the impact it had on creating awareness for the BINP, including saying that many tourists who stayed at their lodge often mentioned they had seen it prior to deciding to go to the Park. This video is a live-recording of a baby gorilla touching the face and hair of a tourist staying in one of the lodges. Later uploaded on YouTube, it has been viewed by more than three million people to date (YouTube, 2017). Remarking on it, Respondent 17 said:

“It was clients who came through, they were coming down for breakfast and halfway the stairs they bumped into a family of gorillas and of them was filming the whole thing. Filming the whole thing and it was like, it was really ah you could look it up; it is called Touched by a Gorilla, and it’s on YouTube. That YouTube video, I think it made us a lot of money. It hit probably over 3 million or 4 million by today ah,” and Respondent 3 added, “Yeah I think that YouTube video pretty interested me about coming here; I think it was the gorillas came up here and the guy was sitting there and…..have you seen it?”

*Theme 3: Gorilla tracking*

Gorilla tracking, the primary reason the majority of the tourists visit the BINP, is also the Park’s main activity, in addition to birding, forest walks and cultural village experiences. It is also the primary product marketed by tourism suppliers. Gorilla tracking is considered a fascinating and exceptional wildlife experience especially because the only mountain gorillas remaining live in the Virunga areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda and Uganda.
Therefore, those tourists who are travel to the BINP must plan carefully because the number of people allowed to visit each gorilla group per day is limited and the Park is in a remote area. Much marketing and planning occurs on the service providers’/ tourism suppliers’ side because they are aware this experience is a lifetime dream for many people who come from all over the world to see the gorillas and, therefore, they work towards meeting their customers’ expectations.

As a result, expectations are high for both the tourists and the service providers. Many of the participants spoke about their expectations and their elaborate plans for seeing the gorillas. Some of the tourists prepared for a long hike in the rainforest, inquiring about the appropriate gear to wear, while others commented on their excitement at the thought of tracking gorillas, wondering if their expectations would be met. Respondent 4 had the following to say:

“Yeah for sure today was amazing seeing the gorillas. I did expect that we would be walking longer which I didn’t realize that there would be 3 options or 3 distances, and this was some feedback I gave the park people that they should have explained that more, and if it is actually a choice, you know I would have opted for a longer hike. But we have tomorrow thankfully, so if this was my only chance I would have probably been disappointed even though it was amazing seeing the gorillas, and that’s why we were are here, but it was very quick. So am happy that I have tomorrow, and we will go on a longer hike, but they could do that a bit better I think.

The majority of participants had read about the gorilla tracking experience, seen images, watched videos and talked to people who had been there before, so they were curious about their own trip, some mentioning that they were anxious about their accommodations, wondering if they were up to the standards they expected. They also wondered about the tour operator services, their safety and the guides, in particular if they would meet their expectations.
number of participants were curious about the road infrastructure and how long it would take them to get to the Park. To address all of these concerns, they tried to search for information to prepare them for the trip. As Respondent 16 indicated:

“Yeah, we reviewed everything, TripAdvisor and then looked at the individual Bwindi and then we looked at the various pages, but it didn’t really give an indication of the conditions of the roads, and we will probably even give some feedback to the African Pearls and say, look they should take a little bit longer or maybe they should add this or take away this.”

Reflecting on the trip once it was over, the majority of the participants said their expectations were met, with some commenting they were exceeded. Many were happy and excited to see the gorillas, taking about their size, the babies playing and how it felt to be in the presence of mountain gorillas. This researcher went gorilla tracking on two occasions with different groups of tourists, observed the excitement, surprise and sheer glee of some of the tourists on sighting mountain gorillas. Below is an excerpt from the interview with Respondent 34 on being asked if his/her expectations were met:

“Oh A plus, A plus! This, the experience this morning as you know was phenomenal, yeah. So it surpassed my expectations, and the weather held. You know when you read about the rainforest up in here and what it can do as far as the rain, I wasn’t sure we brought thick gloves; we brought a rain coat, a rain poncho I mean not knowing for sure what we were going to get into and it was, everything was like perfect; it was like it as laid out like you guys go and they handed out the gorillas on the platter in the wild; it was wonderful huh, so yeah it surpassed.”

Respondent 5 concurred, saying:

“Well again I didn’t read much, but it exceeded my expectations. Like I said I didn’t know, I was picturing it. People said where in Africa are you going? I would say am going gorilla tracking in
Uganda; I feel like it has been much more than that. I think that is the thing I would say most is that that is the thing that attracts people and brings you, but it has been to me a much broader experience, even in these few days. The days are very long; I feel like we have done so much and it is a broader experience by meeting all the guides. Like I said we went out on that walking tour of the village, like a village tour we went out for 5 hours with this guy, he told us so many interesting things about botanicals but also about himself and his family, and ah I was just so curious. So I would say it exceeded my expectations, it exceeded.”

Some of the respondents were pleasantly surprised by the other services related to gorilla tracking but not necessarily the gorillas themselves. The majority of the participants were happy with their accommodation and transport services; they found the hike easier than anticipated and generally appreciated the professionalism and involvement of the many people involved in gorilla tourism. Below are comments from Respondent 13:

”I think professionalism; I have been impressed by how professional the guides were, the porters were. You know how everyone in the community is kind of so involved with the gorillas and how they actually have used tourism as a tool to kind of preserve these amazing animals, and this is really actually quite wonderful, and how the whole community quite works with it as well. Because sometimes you know you find that the villagers have issues with going to the forest and stuff like that and it doesn’t seem to be that issue, I mean,”

and Respondent 30 agreed, saying “I mean I would say I am completely blown away by how beautiful on the driveways into the local culture village; I am so beyond pleasantly surprised of what I wasn’t aware was that was going to happen while I was here. We just fell in love when we got here, so it is beyond I would say our expectations. Lodge and the Wildlife you know the Uganda Wildlife Group Service are incredible, they are very sweet; they saw us this afternoon.
We were going to walk to town, and on our way, David stopped us. We had a nice chat with him, and he wants to connect; I just love the connection of everybody wanting to stay in touch and hear about everything so it’s beyond nice”.

Summary

In conclusion, this chapter discussed the overarching themes as the findings of this study about the role of social media in travel to BINP, which were drawn from data collected from Radian6 software, TripAdvisor website and semi-structured interviews with tourists, lodge managers, tour operators and Uganda Wildlife Authority.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

General overview

This study collected data through Radian6, the TripAdvisor website, interviews, observations and field notes. The findings from this research are supported by the interviews, which were validated by the social media posts retrieved from the TripAdvisor site, and the Facebook and Twitter posts retrieved through the Radian6 software. Overall, these three social media platforms indicate a conversation focused on the BINP as an attraction and the services related to it. In general, the demand side of the tourism industry, the tourists, are using social media to search for information related to tourism products and services, while the tourism suppliers—the tour operators, park management authority, and lodges--use it to market the tourism products and services they offer. Further, the content retrieved from all the three platforms indicate that both parties are using social media at various points of the trip planning phases, the pre-, during and post-trip stages.

Social media is increasingly playing a role in travellers’ search and exchange of information during their trip planning as they rely on other tourists’ experiences to inform their choice of destination (Fotis, Buhalis, & Rossides, 2012; Minazzi, 2015). The majority of tourists were using these social media platforms to gather information for their trip and to review other users’ experiences while visiting the BINP, including their comments, compliments and complaints. They also viewed videos and images of the Park to give them a visual of the BINP as a destination of interest. The findings from this study also indicate that Facebook and
TripAdvisor are the two social media platforms that both the tourists and the suppliers preferred to use.

Tourism marketers and destination management organizations have realized the importance of using social media as a cost-effective marketing tool for reaching a global audiences (Hays, Page, & Buhalis, 2013; Leung, Van Hoof & Buhalis, D.2013). The majority of the tour operators participating in this study said they believe social media has been helpful in their tourism marketing efforts and that it acts as a catalyst in selling the destination and contributing to the general satisfaction levels of the tourists since they are able to share information and experiences online. The tour operators were also optimistic that in the long run, their social media promotions will yield positive results and potentially grow their client base.

Tourists mentioned that they used social media during their trips, posting photos on their Facebook pages right after their gorilla tracking experience because they were excited to share these pictures with their families and friends. The majority of the tourists said they planned to post a few photos on their social media pages once their trip was over and they had returned home. Others specifically said they would make time to write reviews on TripAdvisor since they found it helpful as they were preparing for their trip and felt that they wanted to share their experiences with others. However, the findings indicate that internet coverage was limited in the BINP and in some of the lodges, and the connection was unreliable, making it difficult for some of the tourists to connect to their social media pages while at the destination.

The findings from this study also revealed that tourism suppliers are using social media for customer relationship management, establishing contact with people who like their pages, and maintaining communication with the tourists who have already visited by following up on their comments, queries and complaints. Lodge managers particularly mentioned how guests left
comments and suggestions on their social media pages, and other tourists reviewed their hospitality services especially on TripAdvisor. All lodge managers who participated in the interviews emphasized the importance of obtaining feedback from the tourists and how it is equally important for them to respond to the it, both the positive and the negative. The tour operators also indicated they keep in touch with some of their clients on social media, sharing photos and videos of their experiences while at the BINP, and some of the tourists tagged their family and friends referring the tour operators’ services. Tour operators and lodge managers emphasised the importance of maintaining communication with the tourists after they returned home, providing them with more information or clarification in addressing their queries or complaints and giving any feedback needed.

Although this study focused on the use of the three social media platforms of Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter, its findings showed that both tourists and tourism suppliers use additional social media platforms, including Instagram and Flickr for uploading their images as well as Pinterest and YouTube. YouTube was particularly mentioned by both tourists and tourism suppliers, with one popular video “Touched by a Mountain Gorilla” being viewed by the majority of the participants. The majority of tourists said they use YouTube to look for videos of the destinations they are interested in while planning their trips and to post and share the videos they took while at the destination, while tourism suppliers said they use the site to post and share videos of gorillas or interesting sightings at the BINP, some of which may be videos recorded and shared by tourists during their trips to the BINP.

The findings from this study showed that the majority of the tourists travelled in groups, either with family members or with friends. In addition, all tourists participating in this study used the services of tour operators to manage their trips. Most of these were locally registered,
while some were international ones affiliated with local tour operators who did the ground handling of the tourists for them. The tourists mentioned that they went on social media, especially TripAdvisor, to look for recommendations of local Uganda tour operators to use in the planning of their trips. Others said they used the services of tour operators from their home country whom they had used on previous trips to help them plan their BINP trip.

In addition to social media, this study found that tourists used other sources of information to plan their trip to the BINP, primarily the websites of various tourism suppliers and guidebooks. The tourists also mentioned that they had initially heard about the BINP from family and friends who had visited the Park, through wildlife documentaries, through tour operators they had used for previous trips and from travel magazines and publications. All participants in this study said they had the BINP in mind as a destination before they went on social media to search for more information about it, and in addition to their tour operator’s websites and social media, they also searched in Google for any related information concerning the BINP.

Based on the findings from this study, the majority of the tourists were happy with the gorilla tracking experience, saying it exceeded their expectations. They were impressed with the interaction with the gorillas and the knowledge of their tour guides. Many of them also expressed that they were impressed with the conservation of the park, the level of professionalism of the guides and the organization of the entire gorilla tracking activity. They also liked that they found the gorillas in their natural habitat, saying that before coming to the BINP they did not realize that the Park was home to other attractions in addition to the mountain gorillas and that Uganda had such an extensive range of wildlife. The majority of the tourists said if they could afford it, they would return to visit the BINP again and to tour other national parks in Uganda.
The implications based on figure 1 conceptual framework of Social Exchange Theory showed that, in terms of trust from their tourist perspective, the research results suggested that tourists who visited BINP placed their trust in tour operators to plan their trip and to deliver a good service. Tourists also to a certain extent trusted the information they found on social media, especially reviews from travellers experiences and they based some of their decisions on activities to do on the information they gathered from these various social media platforms. Tourism suppliers on the other hand, also placed their trust in the tourists to honour their obligations and pay for the services delivered. Tourism suppliers also placed trust in each other, since tourism is a multi-sectoral industry where services complement each other and therefore banked on each other to deliver a quality service. For instance tour operators trusted Uganda Wildlife Authority to deliver a quality gorilla tracking experience to their tourists.

Based on the findings of this study, the principles of costs and rewards were also evident in the results of this study. Tourists who visited BINP had spent a substantial amount in getting the services of tour operators, lodges and paying for gorilla permits. In return, they experienced the gorilla tracking activities which they were happy with and got accommodations services with lodges. Tourism suppliers incurred costs to deliver quality services to the tourists, for instance transportation costs, fuel, insurance services and many other costs. In return, they were rewarded with revenue that they collected from tourists.

One of the principles of Social Exchange theory that was clearly evident from the findings of this study was expectations. Tourists had built expectations of BINP and gorilla tracking based on the information they had read from social media and what they had received from the tour operators arranging their trip. The majority of the tourists were very happy with the services they received from tour operators, lodges and the actual gorilla tracking activity even
exceeded their expectations in some cases. The tourism suppliers’ expectations of tourists arriving for their trip and honouring their obligation to pay for their services were also met.

Conclusions

The findings of this study indicate that social media plays a role in both the supply and demand sides of the travel and tourism industry. According to these results, Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter among others, were used by both the tourists and tourism suppliers involved in the destination BINP.

Tourists are aware of BINP’s presence on social media, searching various sites for information about the park and its main attraction, mountain gorillas. The posts retrieved from Radian6 from the Facebook and Twitter platforms show how tourists post their search for information about the BINP, their travel to the Park, and their gorilla tracking experiences. The TripAdvisor site was also used by tourists to gather information from travellers about the BINP and the services of the tourism suppliers, and to share their experiences during their trip to the Park.

Based on the findings from this study, social media has informed the decisions of the tourists visiting the BINP through the information it provides related to the destination and especially about the activities available at the Park and the services there, including accommodations and tour operator services. However, this study also found that tourists did not decide to travel to the BINP solely because of what they had seen on social media, but rather social media provided relevant information they were seeking about tourism services and activities related to their trip to the Park.
The study findings also showed that the use of social media, in particular Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter, by tourism suppliers helped to shape the expectations of the tourists who went gorilla tracking in the BINP. The majority of the tourists mentioned they had seen photos, videos, reviews and commentaries about the Park on the pages of the tourism suppliers (lodges, tour operators and the Uganda Wildlife Authority), information which apprised of them of the time involved in the gorilla tracking experience, its cost, the gear required, and other activities available in the Park. The majority of the tourists said that the gorilla tracking experience and the services delivered exceeded their expectations, that they hoped to visit again, and that they would recommend the trip to family and friends.

Recommendations

These findings suggest several recommendations for consideration by relevant stakeholders of the BINP. First tourism suppliers should provide more detailed information about gorilla tracking and other activities on their social media pages. Tourists require more real-time updates especially on the tracking activities, such as the estimated length, the gear they should wear, the weather conditions and more details about the gorilla groups they are to track. Since the gorillas are in their natural habitats and their movements cannot always be predicted, regular updates posted in real time on social media enables tourism suppliers to provide information that tourists can rely on.

Based on the findings of this study, tourism suppliers should read more frequently and pay more attention to the tourists’ reviews of their services posted on TripAdvisor. The majority of the tourists mentioned they use this website, relying on it to make decisions about their accommodations. In addition, some of them indicated that when they returned home, they would take the time to write a review of their trip in general and share. It is, therefore, imperative for
tourism suppliers to follow up on these TripAdvisor reviews in order to understand their customers’ needs and be able to meet their expectations.

Tourism suppliers should consider having joint marketing strategies for destination BINP in order to differentiate it from Rwanda. The findings indicate that many of the tourists did not know much about the BINP and the difference between the Rwandan gorilla tracking experience. Tourism suppliers need to highlight the unique aspects and attractions of the BINP in order to strengthen the Park’s brand and differentiate it from the products offered in Rwanda.

Based on the findings from this study and in particular the interviews conducted with tourists, tourism suppliers should intensify their marketing efforts of the other attractions and activities that can be done in the BINP in addition to gorilla tracking. The majority of tourists engaged in gorilla tracking only and some went on cultural village walks, but many were unaware of the birding and the forest hikes. In addition more tourism activities should be developed that are tailored around the forest and the local communities.

Based on the findings from this study, the majority of the tourists expressed an interest in having internet services consistently available in the lodges. In as much as the location and infrastructure of the Park may not currently provide for reliable internet connections, it is recommended that tourism suppliers should address the tourists’ expectations by regularly updating their social media pages about their internet speeds and availability, or their lack of these services.

The findings from the study indicate that social media did not lead to tourists’ decisions to travel to the BINP, but rather supported their decision with information about the destination and the attractions and activities in the Park. Therefore, tourism suppliers in the BINP should include
more detailed information on their social media pages and websites about the activities available to tourists in addition to gorilla tracking, which is their primary reason for visiting the Park.

Based on the findings from this study, the BINP welcomes more international than domestic tourists. More tourism marketing efforts should be focused on directly targeting the domestic tourists and understanding what would motivate them to visit the BINP. Finally, these findings may be useful to Uganda Wildlife Authority, which manages the BINP, in determining the motivations of tourists, both domestic and international, for visiting the Park and their satisfaction levels after these visits. This feedback can be used to improve its services to the public not only in the BINP but also in the other national parks they manage.

Limitations

This study had several limitations, some of which are listed below. This study looked at only Facebook, TripAdvisor, and Twitter, the three social media platforms that the researcher considered most relevant for the tourism and travel industry. It did not consider the entire spectrum of the social media used by both tourist and tourism suppliers in the BINP. Furthermore, this study was limited to a specific group of tourism suppliers, specifically, lodge managers, tour operators and the Uganda Wildlife Authority, but it did not study all the suppliers that operate in the BINP area. Future research could involve more tourism suppliers like the cultural villages, local community cooperatives, transporters and restaurants. Finally, this research was limited to the Buhoma sector of the BINP due to the size of the Park and the difficulties accessing all of it in a timely manner. Future research could conduct studies covering tourists and tourism suppliers in other sectors of the BINP.
Applications

These findings can be used by the tourism suppliers who operate in the BINP to tailor their social media marketing promotions based on the feedback from tourists that this research found. These results are also useful for the Uganda Wildlife Authority, which manages the Park, because of the feedback they provide from tourists about the gorilla tracking activities, including their opinions of the experience and about how it was delivered. These results can also be used by the lodge managers and tour operators to improve their products and services in the areas needing improvement and as an indicator of areas they are doing well, thus allowing them to maintain their strengths and deliver high quality services.

Future research

Since this research was conducted on only three social media platforms—Facebook, TripAdvisor and Twitter—it is important for future research to include other social media platforms that tourists and tourism suppliers are using in order to determine the role they play in travel to the BINP. In addition, the tourists interviewed for this study were visiting the park at the time and they were all international tourists. Future research should also include local tourists in order to conduct a comparative study of the two market segments and their use of social media in relation to their plans to travel to national parks. Finally, this study was conducted in the Buhoma sector of the BINP; additional research should examine the role social media plays in travel to the other sectors of the Park and to other protected areas in Uganda. This research was primarily focused on use of social media in the tourism related to BINP, but future research should also investigate the role social media plays in biodiversity conservation and in the management of other protected areas like the BINP.
APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW INSTRUMENT

Invitation to take part in the interview

Hello,

I am Ingrid Nyonza Nyakabwa, a Masters student in the Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management program at Clemson University, South Carolina. As part of my thesis, I am conducting this study and would greatly appreciate if you participated in this interview, which will take less than fifteen minutes.

Thank you.

Interview Questions

SECTION 1: Tourists

a) Travel history

1. a) Did you arrive here by yourself or as part of a tour group?

   Yes.......       No...

b) If yes which group?

2. When did your trip begin and how long have you been traveling?

3. a) Did you travel to another tourist destination before coming to BINP?

   Yes...  No...
b) If yes where did you travel to?

4. How did you get to know about BINP?

5. What was your primary interest to travel to BINP?

6. a) Did you use tour operator services to manage your trip to BINP?

Yes……… No……………

b) If no, how did you plan your trip?

a) Demographic information

1. What is your country of origin?

2. What is your gender?

Male………………………………. Female……………………………..

3. What is your age?

25 or under…………………………. 26-40……………………………………

41-55………………………………... 56 or older……………………………

4. What is your occupation?

5. What is your marital status?

Single………………………………. Married………………………………

Divorced…………………………….. Widowed……………………………..
6. What is your level of education?

7. What is your annual household income?

c) Internet and social media use

1. How long before your trip did you start planning?

2. a) Did you use internet in your trip planning process?

b) If yes, what did you use it for?

   o Searching for information

   o Checking websites

   o Reading comments and reviews on service providers

   o Other

3 a) Did you decide to come to BINP because of the information you saw online?

   b) Was There any specific information or was it a combination of pieces of information that helped you decide?

4. Did you use social media in anyway during your trip planning and if so what type of social media did you use?

5. Did you use Facebook, Twitter or TripAdvisor?

6. If so, how did you use it and at what stage of your trip did you use it?
7. Are you still using Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor or any other social media during this trip and how?

8.a) What information do you look for or share on Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor or any other social media platform during or in relation to this trip?

b) Did you find the content online about BINP satisfactory for your trip planning or would you wish to see more information online and on social media?

9. Do you intend to use Twitter, Facebook, TripAdvisor or any other social media platform when you return home and what do you intend to use it for?

10. What is the quality of the internet service at your lodge?

11. Did this trip meet your expectations of what you may have read about BINP on social media?

SECTION 2: Tour operators

1. a) How long have you been established as a Tour Company operating in Uganda?

2. b) What is your designation or role at this Tour Company?

3. Which countries do the majority of your clients come from?

4. On average how many tours do you sell to BINP in a year?

5. Does your company have a website?

6. a) Do you get any clients online or with social media?

b) If yes, where do the majority of your online clients?
7. a) Do you use Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?
   
b) How often do you check and update your social media pages?

8. At what stage in your tour planning stages do you use social media and which social media platforms do you use?

9. a) Do you keep in touch with your clients using Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?
   
b) Do you have follow-up communication or feedback with your clients through Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?

10. Have you noticed significant changes in your client base in terms of growth or communication since you started using social media?

11. In your opinion, which social media platforms are most useful and effective in the running of your tour business and why?

SECTION 3: Lodge Owners/Managers

3. a) How long have you been established as an accommodation facility in BINP?
   
b) What is your designation or role at this lodge?

4. Which countries do the majority of your guests come from?

5. On average how many tourists visit your lodge in a year?
6. Does your company have a website?

7. a) Do you get any clients online or through the use of social media?

b) If yes, which countries do most of your online clients come from?

8. a) Do you use Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?

b) How often do you check and update your social media pages?

9. At what point in your provision of accommodation services do you use social media and which social media platforms do you use?

10. a) Do you keep in touch with your clients using Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?

b) Do you have follow-up communication or feedback with your guests through Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?

11. Have you noticed significant changes in your client base in terms of growth or communication since you started using social media?

12. In your opinion, which social media platforms are most useful and effective in the running of your accommodation business and why?

SECTION 4: Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA)

1. a) How long has UWA been in existence?

b) What is your designation or role at UWA?
2. Which countries do the majority of the tourists come from?

3. On average how many tourists come to BINP in a year?

4. Does UWA have a website?

5. a) Do you get any clients online or through the use of social media?

   b) If yes, where do the majority of your online clients from?

6. a) Do you use Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?

   b) How often do you check and update your social media pages?

7. At what point in the day to day operations do you use social media and which social
   media platforms do you use?

8. a) Do you keep in touch with your clients using Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or
   any other social media platform?

   b) Do you have follow-up communication or feedback with your clients through
   Facebook, Twitter and TripAdvisor or any other social media platform?

9. Have you noticed significant changes in your client base in terms of growth or
   communication since you started using social media?

10. In your opinion, which social media platforms are most useful and effective in your day-
     to-day operations and why?
APPENDIX B

Expedited / Full Board Review Application


Clemson University IRB Website

Office use only

Protocol Number:

Approved ☐ Expedited ☐ Full Board Expiration date: ___________________________

______________________________________ ______________________________________

Signature of IRB Chair / Designee Date

Level of Review (Questions 13 & 14 determine if the protocol can be expedited): ☐ Expedited ☐ Full Board

1. Developmental Approval: If you already have developmental approval for this research study (you should know if you do), please give the IRB protocol number assigned to the study. More information available here.

2. Research Title: The role of select social media platforms in influencing tourist decision making process: A Case of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park

If different, title used on
### Principal Investigator (PI)

The PI must be a member of the Clemson faculty or staff. You cannot be the PI if this is your thesis or dissertation. The PI must have completed IRB-approved human research protections training. Training will be verified by IRB staff before approval is granted. Training instructions available [here](#). CITI training site available [here](#).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Dr. Sheila Backman</th>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department: Parks, Recreation &amp; Tourism Management</td>
<td>E-mail: <a href="mailto:BACK@clemson.edu">BACK@clemson.edu</a></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus address: 128 McGinty Court, 263 Lehotsky Hall</td>
<td>Phone: 864-656-5236</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clemson, SC 29634-0735</td>
<td>Fax: 864.656.2226</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Co-Investigator(s)

Co-Investigators must have completed IRB-approved human research protections training. Training will be verified by IRB staff before approval is granted. Training instructions available [here](#). CITI training site available [here](#).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: Ingrid Nyonza Nyakabwa</th>
<th>E-mail: <a href="mailto:inyakab@clemson.edu">inyakab@clemson.edu</a></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Department: Parks, Recreation &amp; Tourism Management</td>
<td>Phone: 8646508003</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Faculty</th>
<th>Graduate student</th>
<th>Other. Please specify.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Undergraduate student</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E-mail:</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phone:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5. **Additional Research Team Members:** All research team members must have completed IRB-approved human research protections training. Training will be verified by IRB staff before approval is granted. Training instructions available [here](#). CITI training site available [here](#).

6. **Research Team Roles:** Describe the role of each member of the research team (everyone included in Items 3, 4 and 5), indicating which research activities will be carried out by each particular member. Team members may be grouped into categories.

   **Description:**

7. **Email Communications:** If you would like one or two of your team members (in addition to the PI) to be copied on all email communications, please list these individuals in the box below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name:</th>
<th>E-mail:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name:</td>
<td>E-mail:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8. **Study Purpose:** Provide a brief description of the purpose of the study. Use lay language and avoid technical terms. IRB members not familiar with the area of research must understand the nature of
the research. Upon conclusion of the study, how will you share your results (e.g., academic publication, evaluation report to funder, conference presentation)?

Description: ______

9. **Anticipated Dates of Research:**

Anticipated start date (may not be prior to IRB approval; may be “upon IRB approval”): 15th June

Anticipated completion date (Please include time needed for analysis of individually identifiable data): 30th July

10. **Funding Source:** Please check all that apply.

☐ Submitted for internal funding

☐ Internally funded

☐ Submitted for external funding

   Funding source, if applicable (Do not use initials): ______

   Proposal number (PPN) for the Office of Sponsored Programs: ______

   Name of PI on Funding Proposal: ______

☐ Externally funded

   Funding source, if applicable (Do not use initials): ______

   Proposal number (PPN) for the Office of Sponsored Programs: ______

   Name of PI on Funding Proposal: ______
☐ Intend to seek funding  From whom? ____
☒ Not funded

11. Support provided by Creative Inquiry Initiative: ☐ Yes  ☒ No

If yes, all Creative Inquiry students will be members of the research team, please see item # 5.

12. Other IRB Approvals:

Has this research study been presented to any other IRB? ☐ Yes  ☒ No

Where? ____  When? ____

If yes, what was their decision? ☐ Approved  ☐ Disapproved  ☐ Pending

Please attach a copy of any submissions, approvals, or disapprovals from other IRBs.

13. Level of Risk: Does this project include any procedures that present more than minimal risk to the participants? (A project is considered to present minimal risk if the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations.)

☐ Yes  ☒ No

If your study presents no more than minimal risk to participants, your study may be eligible for expedited review.
14. **Expedited Review Categories:** The Code of Federal Regulations [45 CFR 46.110] permits research activities in the following seven categories to undergo expedited review. Please check the relevant expedited category / categories.

The Federal Office of Human Research Protections has made Decision Charts available [here](#) to help in determining whether a particular study may be reviewed using Expedited Review Procedures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of Research that May Be Reviewed by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) through an Expedited Review Procedure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Clinical studies of drugs and medical devices only when condition (a) or (b) is met:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. Research on drugs for which an investigational new drug application is not required. (Note: Research on marketed drugs that significantly increase the risks or decrease the acceptability of the risks associated with the use of the product is not eligible for expedited review.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Research on medical devices for which 1) an investigational device exemption application is not required or 2) the medical device is cleared or approved for marketing and the medical device is being used in accordance with its cleared/approved labeling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Collection of blood samples by finger stick, heel stick, ear stick, or venipuncture as follows:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. From healthy, non-pregnant adults, who weigh at least 110 pounds. For these subjects, the amounts drawn may not exceed 550 ml. in an eight week period and collection may not occur more than two times per week; OR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. From other adults and children, considering the age, weight, and health of the subjects, the collection procedure, the amount of blood to be collected, and the frequency with which it will be collected. For these subjects, the amount may not exceed the lesser of 50 ml. or 3 ml. per kg. in an eight-week period, and collection may not occur more than two times per week.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. Prospective collection of biological specimens for research purposes by non-invasive means.

Examples:

a. hair and nail clippings in a non-disfiguring manner;
b. deciduous teeth at time of exfoliation or if routine patient care indicates need for extraction;
c. permanent teeth if routine patient care indicates need for extraction;
d. excreta and external secretions (including sweat);
e. uncannulated saliva collected either in an unstimulated fashion or stimulated by chewing gum base or wax or by applying a dilute citric solution to the tongue;
f. placenta removed at delivery;
g. amniotic fluid obtained at the time of rupture of the membrane prior to or during labor;
h. supra- and subgingival dental plaque and calculus, provided the collection procedure is not more invasive than routine scaling of the teeth and the process is accomplished in accordance with accepted prophylactic techniques;
i. mucosal and skin cells collected by buccal scraping or swab, skin swab, or mouth washings;
j. sputum collected after saline mist nebulization.

4. Collection of data through non-invasive procedures (not involving general anesthesia or sedation) routinely employed in clinical practice, excluding procedures involving x-rays or microwaves. Where medical devices are employed, they must be cleared/approved for marketing. (Studies intended to evaluate the safety and effectiveness of the medical device are not generally eligible for expedited review, including studies of cleared medical devices for new indications.)

Examples:

a. physical sensors that are applied either to the surface of the body or at a distance and do not involve input of significant amounts of energy into the subject or an invasion of the subject’s privacy;
b. weighing or testing sensory acuity;
c. magnetic resonance imaging;
d. electrocardiography, electroencephalography, thermography, detection of naturally occurring radioactivity, electroretinography, ultrasound, diagnostic infrared imaging, Doppler blood flow and echocardiography;
e. moderate exercise, muscular strength testing, body composition assessment, and flexibility testing when appropriate given the age, weight, and health of the individual.
5. Research involving materials (data, documents, records, or specimens) that have been collected or will be collected solely for non-research purposes (such as medical treatment or diagnoses).

6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

7. Research on individual or group characteristics, behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior), or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies.

15. **Study Sample:** (Groups specifically targeted for study)

Describe the participants you plan to recruit and the criteria used in the selection process. Indicate if there are any special inclusion or exclusion criteria.

**Description:** **Tourists**- These will be inclusive of those tourists visiting BINP and this category of respondents are particularly significant to this study because they will have taken the decision to visit the park already and I would like to establish from them if social media played any role and had an influence in their decision to visit BINP.

**Tour operators**- This category will consist of a select number of Ugandan tour operators that sell BINP as one of their tour packages are the ones I shall consider

**Lodge owners**
This category will consist of accommodation facility providers in areas within and around BINP. The study will aim at establishing if these accommodation providers use social media to contact their guests and if they also do follow up communication with them and customer service through social media.

Uganda Wildlife Authority Marketing staff

Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) is a semi-autonomous government agency that conserves and manages Uganda’s wildlife for the people of Uganda and the whole world and is mandated to ensure sustainable management of wildlife resources and supervise wildlife activities in Uganda both within and outside the protected areas. Semi structured interviews with the Marketing staff of UWA will be conducted to establish if their use of social media in promoting visits to BINP, the level of interaction with uses and if they get frequent responses and visits from this interaction, the content available on the selected social media platforms that is twitter, Facebook and TripAdvisor.

Age range of participants: _______  Projected number of participants: 25-30

☐ Employees  ☐ Students  ☐ Minors (under 18 in SC, may differ elsewhere) 1, 2

☐ Pregnant women 1  ☐ Fetuses / neonates 1, 2  ☐ Educationally / economically disadvantaged 1

☐ Minors who are wards of the state, or any other agency, institution, or entity 1, 2  ☐ Individuals who are incarcerated 1, 3

☐ Persons incompetent to give valid consent 1

☐ Other—specify: 18 years and above  ☐ military personnel

1 State necessity for using this type of participant: _______

2 Please note that research involving children (minors) requires submission of a Child Research Addendum. Further information about this addendum is given at the end of this application.
Please note that research involving prisoners (incarcerated individuals) requires submission of a Prisoner Research Addendum. Further information about this addendum is given at the end of this application.

16. Study Locations:

☐ Clemson University       ☐ Other University / College ______

☐ School System / Individual Schools ______       ☐ Other – specify ______

You may need to obtain permission if participants will be recruited or data will be obtained through schools, employers, or community organizations. Are you required to obtain permission to gain access to people or to access data that are not publicly available? If yes, provide a research site letter from a person authorized to give you access to the participants or to the data. Guidance regarding Research Site Letters is available here.

☐ Research Site Letter(s) not required.

☐ Research Site Letter(s) attached.

☐ Research Site Letter(s) pending and will be provided when obtained.

17. Recruitment Method:

Describe how research participants will be recruited in the study. How will you identify potential participants? How will you contact them? Attach a copy of any material you will use to recruit participants (e.g., advertisements, flyers, telephone scripts, verbal recruitment, cover letters, or follow-up reminders).
Description: Participants will be contacted at the key access points in the Bwindi Impenetrable National Park and these include at the visitor centre, lodges and during the tourists activities within the park.

18. Participant Incentives:

a. Will you pay participants? □ Yes □ No
   Amount: $____ When will money be paid?: _____

b. Will you give participants incentives / gifts / reimbursements? □ Yes □ No
   Describe incentives / gifts / reimbursements: _____
   Value of incentives / gifts / reimbursements: $_____ When will incentives / gifts / reimbursements be given?: _____

c. Will participants receive course credit? □ Yes □ No

d. Will participants receive extra credit? □ Yes □ No
   If YES, an equivalent alternative to research participation must be provided and described in your informed consent document(s).

19. Informed Consent:

If all of your participants will be children, please skip this question (19) and complete the Child Research Addendum (available here). If you will have both children and adults as participants in your
a. Will you use concealment or deception in this study? ☐ Yes ☒ No
   If YES, please see guidance regarding Research Involving Deception or Concealment here, submit a copy of the Additional Pertinent Information / Permission for Use of Data Collected in a Research Study form you will use, and request a waiver of some elements of consent below [see 19(e)].

b. Do you plan to obtain informed consent from all your adult research participants (and / or legally authorized representatives for adult participants with diminished capacity)?
   1) ☒ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A
      If YES, please skip to question 19(c).

      Please submit all applicable Informed Consent documents with application (e.g., adult consent forms, informational letters, verbal consent scripts).

      Consent Document Templates

      If NO, please proceed with questions 19(b)(2)-19(b)(4) to request a waiver of informed consent.

      If N/A, please explain and skip to question 20. _____

   2) For what groups will you need this waiver of informed consent?
      ☐ for all participants ☐ for some participants (describe for which participants): _____

   3) Please explain the need for the waiver. _____
4) As provided in 45 CFR 46.116(d), an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to obtain informed consent from research participants if it finds that all of the following criteria are met. Please explain how your study meets each of the criteria below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Waiver of Consent</th>
<th>How is this criterion met within this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The research involves no more than minimal risk to subjects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The waiver will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research could not be carried out practicably without the waiver.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after they have participated in the study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you completed questions 19(b)(2)-19(b)(4) for all adult research participants, please skip to question 20.

c. Who will obtain the participants’ consent? Check all that apply:

- [ ] Principal Investigator  
- [ ] Co-Investigator  
- [ ] Other Research Team Members

- [ ] Contracted / Hired Data Collection Firm: _____

- [ ] Other: _____

d. Will you collect participants’ signatures on all consent documents?

- [ ] Yes  
- [ ] No

  If YES, please skip to question 19(e).

  If NO, please proceed with questions 19(d)(2)-19(d)(3) to request a waiver of documentation (signature).
2) For what groups will you need this waiver of documentation?
   □ for all participants  □ for some participants (describe for which participants): ______

3) As provided in 45 CFR 46.117(c), an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to
   obtain a signed consent form for some or all participants if it finds that one of the following
   sets of criteria is met. Please check ONE box below to indicate which set of criteria is met by
   this study:

   □ That the research presents no more than minimal risk of harm to subjects and involves
     no procedure for which written consent is normally required outside of the research
     context.

   □ That the only record linking the subject and the research would be the consent
     document and the principal risk would be potential harm resulting from a breach of
     confidentiality. If the subject wants documentation linking the subject with the
     research, the subject’s wishes will govern.

e. Do you plan to use all of the consent elements in all your consent documents or procedures (see
   list below)?
   1) □ Yes  □ No
      If YES, please skip to question 20.

      If NO, please proceed with questions 19(e)(2)-19(e)(5) to request a waiver of some
      elements of consent.

2) For what groups will you need this waiver of some consent elements?
   □ for all participants  □ for some participants (describe for which participants): ______

3) Please explain the need for the waiver request. ______

4) A list of consent elements is given below. Please indicate which of these elements you
   would like to have waived. (In the case of a study involving deception or concealment, the
   IRB must waive the requirement to use all elements that are not truthfully presented in the
   initial consent document.)
### List of Elements of Informed Consent

- [ ] participation involves research
- [ ] purposes of the research
- [ ] duration of participation
- [ ] procedures to be followed
- [ ] identification of experimental procedures
- [ ] foreseeable risks / discomforts
- [ ] benefits to subjects or others
- [ ] appropriate alternatives advantageous to subject
- [ ] maintenance of confidentiality
- [ ] for more than minimal risk research, compensation / treatment available in case of injury
- [ ] voluntariness of participation
- [ ] no penalty for refusal to participate
- [ ] may discontinue participation without penalty
- [ ] disposition of data already collected, upon withdrawal of participant
- [ ] contact for questions about research
- [ ] contact for questions about participants’ rights

5) As provided in 45 CFR 46.116(d), an IRB may waive the requirement for the investigator to present all consent elements to participants if it finds that all of the following criteria are met. Please explain how your study meets each of the criteria below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for Waiver of Elements of Consent</th>
<th>How is this criterion met within this study?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The research involves no more than minimal risk to subjects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The waiver will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The research could not be carried out practicably without the waiver.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after they have participated in the study.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Please make sure to submit all Informed Consent documents (i.e., adult consent forms, informational letters, and/or verbal consent scripts) for which elements of consent are being waived.

20. Procedures:

a. What data will you collect? **semi-structured interviews**

b. Please describe in detail the process each participant will experience and how you will obtain the data. **Each participant will be subjected to a semi-structured interview and it will be at free will. I shall intercept the participants in the course of the activities and record the interviews.**

c. How many participation sessions and how much time will be required for each participant, including follow-up sessions? **about 25-30 participants, lasting about 10-15 minutes**

d. How will you collect data?

- [x] in-person contact
- [ ] telephone
- [ ] snail mail
- [ ] email
- [ ] website
- [ ] other, describe ___

Please include copies of surveys, interview questions, data collection tools and debriefing statements. If survey or interview questions have not been fully developed, provide information on the types of questions to be asked, or a description of the parameters of the survey / interview. Please note: finalized survey or interview instruments will need to be reviewed and approved by amendment, before implementation.
e. Will you audio record participants? ☒ Yes ☐ No
f. Will you video record participants? ☐ Yes ☒ No
g. Will you photograph participants? ☒ Yes ☐ No

If you will audio or video record or take identifiable photographs of participants, please consult the IRB’s Guidance on the Use of Audio / Video Recording and Photography here. Please include all the information addressed by this guidance document in the application and, where appropriate, in the consent document(s).

21. Protection of Confidentiality: Describe the security measures you will take to protect the confidentiality of the information obtained. Will participants be identifiable either by name or through demographic data? If yes, how will you protect the identity of the participants and their responses? Where will the data be stored and how will it be secured? Who will have access to the data? How will identifiers be maintained or destroyed after the study is completed?

Description: _____

22. Risk / Benefit Analysis:

a. Describe all potential risks (before protective measures are put into place) and benefits for this study. Risks can include physical, psychological, social, legal or other risks connected with the proposed procedures. Benefits can include benefits to the participant or to society in general.

Description: potential risks include refusal of potential participants to be interviewed due to their hectic schedules

Benefits include mainly an informed marketing team on the value s, uses of social media, including to tourists.

b. Describe the procedures to be used to protect against or minimize potential risks. Assess the likely effectiveness of these procedures.

Description: _____
23. Agreement, Statement of Assurance, and Conflict of Interest Statement by the PI:

I have reviewed this research protocol and the consent form, if applicable. I have also evaluated the scientific merit and potential value of the proposed research study, as well as the plan for protecting human participants. I have read the Terms of Assurance held by Clemson University and commit to abiding by the provisions of the Assurance and the determinations of the IRB. I request approval of this research study by the IRB of Clemson University.

I understand that failure to adhere to any of these guidelines may result in immediate termination of the research. I also understand that approval of this research study is contingent upon my agreement to:

1. Report to the IRB any adverse events, research-related injuries or unexpected problems affecting the rights or safety of research participants (All such occurrences must be reported to the IRB within three (3) working days.);
2. Submit in writing for IRB approval any proposed revisions or amendments to this research study;
3. Submit timely continuing review reports of this research as requested by the IRB; and
4. Notify the IRB upon completion of this research study.
Conflicts of Interest Statement:

Could the results of the study provide an actual or potential financial gain to you, a member of your family, or any of the co-investigators, or give the appearance of a potential conflict of interest?

☐ No.

☐ Yes. I agree to disclose any actual or potential conflict of interest prior to IRB action on this study.

Financial Conflict of Interest Policy for PHS / NIH Supported Research

Financial Disclosure Policy for All Other Sponsored Programs

Disclosure Statement for All Other Sponsored Programs

_____________________________________________  ________________________
Signature of Principal Investigator     Date
24. Statement of Assurance by Department Chair (or supervisor if PI is Department Chair):

I have reviewed this research protocol and the consent form, if applicable. I verify this proposed research study has received approval in accordance with department procedures. I have evaluated the plan for protecting human participants. I have read the Terms of Assurance held by Clemson University and commit to abiding by the provisions of the Assurance and the determinations of the IRB. I request approval of this research study by the IRB of Clemson University.

____________________________________________  ________________________
Department Chair or supervisor if PI is Department Chair (Printed Name)

Signature of Department Chair  Date

Submission Instructions:

*Expedited applications* are processed as received. There is no deadline for submitting expedited applications for review. Please allow three weeks for processing.

*Full Board applications* are accepted according to the schedule given [here](#). Researchers are encouraged to attend the meeting at which their protocol will be reviewed, in order to be available to answer any questions IRB members might have about the protocol.
Please submit this application and all associated documents electronically to the IRB staff. In addition, please submit a signed, hard-copy of the application via mail or delivery to the Office of Research Compliance, 223 Brackett Hall, Clemson, SC 29634-5704. Alternatively, you may fax the signed copy to 864-656-4475 or scan and email to irb@clemson.edu.

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**Child (Minor) Research Addendum:**

If your study involves children / minors as participants, click here to complete the Child Research Addendum. Once completed, please submit the Addendum with your Expedited / Full Board Review Application.

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**Prisoner (Incarcerated Individuals) Research Addendum:**

If your study involves individuals who are incarcerated as participants, click here to complete the Prisoner Research Addendum. Once completed, please submit the Addendum with your Expedited / Full Board Review Application.
REFERENCES


Teixeira, T., & Kornfeld, L. (2013). Managing Online Reviews on TripAdvisor.


