

**STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN THE TRAVEL AND LEISURE  
INDUSTRY: A SOUTH AFRICAN COMPARISON**

BY

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**DATE OF REGISTRATION: 26 JANUARY 2024**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF

**BACHELOR OF COMMERCE HONOURS (BUSINESS  
MANAGEMENT)**

IN THE

**FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES**

AT THE

**NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY**

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**DECLARATION:**

In accordance with Rule G5.6.3, I hereby declare that the above-mentioned treatise/dissertation/thesis is my own work and that I have not previously been submitted to another University or for another qualification



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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the following individuals, without whom this study would not have been possible.

- First and foremost, I thank God Almighty for his protection and the strength he provided during this academic year.
- My supervisor, Professor Chantal Rootman, I am grateful for her guidance, advice and insightful feedback throughout the research all of which were beneficial in the completion of the study.
- My parents who continuously provided, encouraged and supported me throughout the academic year.
- Lastly my siblings and friends who inspired and supported me throughout the duration of the study.

**ABSTRACT**

Stakeholder engagement is important for the effective operations of firms in the growing travel and leisure industry. As one of the industries that contribute to the South African economy it is important to understand how the firms engage with their stakeholders to generate value. The primary objective of the study is to explore the stakeholder engagement strategies employed in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa. The study employs a qualitative methodology and thematic content analysis to analyse data. Four themes were generated from the findings namely customers, employees, communities and shareholders to represent the stakeholder engagement strategies. The main findings revealed that firms use different strategies to engage with their stakeholders. The recommendations of the study could contribute by improving how the firms engage with their stakeholders.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

There has been a significant shift in society concerning stakeholders and firms must adapt to generate long term value for a variety of stakeholders in order to remain in business (Pfajar *et al.*, 2022). To understand a firms' outcomes and strategies it is helpful to concentrate on the demands and resources of diverse stakeholders (Li *et al.*, 2018:195). Understanding stakeholder expectations and needs is vital for effective corporate social responsibility communication (Cerioni *et al.*, 2023). Engaging with stakeholders is crucial for the success of a firm (Barrane *et al.*, 2021). To ensure success in the travel and leisure industry, firms need to implement effective stakeholder engagement strategies.

The concept of stakeholder engagement has become increasingly common in conducting business (Kujala *et al.*, 2022:1137). Stakeholder engagement has become a popular practice because stakeholders have the power to influence the outcomes of a firm (Mehmood *et al.*, 2023:113). Firms have pursued stakeholder engagement in the development and production of new products and services as a crucial component of gaining sustainable competitive advantage (Seyfi *et al.*, 2024). Research emphasises the importance of stakeholder engagement for firms' social legitimacy and reputation enhancement (Demetrious, 2020). Effective stakeholder engagement improves a firms operational and strategic performance and facilitates risk and reputation management (Kaur & Lodhia, 2019). Engaged stakeholders may give the firm a long-term competitive advantage (Van Tonder & Petzer, 2018). In order to create a strong relationship between stakeholders and the firm, firms are finding that stakeholder engagement is an effective strategy (Ganesan & Kumar, 2024).

One of the most popular destinations in the continent of Africa is South Africa with around 16 million recorded tourist arrivals in 2018 (StatsSA, 2018). According to Garidzirai & Pasara (2020), there is an increase in both domestic and foreign tourists travelling for leisure and business that has had a positive impact on employment and economic growth. As an industry, it has always been an integral part of the economic

and social environment of South Africa. Stakeholder engagement in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa is crucial for sustainable growth (Twum-Darko *et al.*, 2023).

## 1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Stakeholder engagement plays a crucial role in fostering sustainable development within the travel and leisure industry in South Africa (Twum-Darko *et al.*, 2023). However, existing research gaps hinder the industry's ability to effectively address stakeholder needs and ensure long-term success. Other studies emphasise the significance of stakeholder engagement in various sectors, including government service delivery, tourism sustainability (Fabiola, 2023), construction projects (Ebekozi *et al.*, 2023), tourism development and branding, and health economic modelling (Gibbs *et al.*, 2023). These studies highlighted the benefits of stakeholder engagement, such as enhancing collaboration, improving project delivery, and building positive relationships. However, it is clear that limited stakeholder engagement strategy research in the industry exists.

There is competition between firms within the travel and leisure industry for domestic and foreign stakeholders, thereby utilising different mediums to capture stakeholders (Guerrero-Villegas, 2019). With different stakeholders involved such as communities, governmental firms, and tourists, there exists a need to develop strategies that are suited to the sociocultural, economic, and environmental context of South Africa (Rogerson, 2013). This calls for strategies to promote stakeholder engagement and collaboration to maintain sustainable growth, improve destination competitiveness and promote inclusive development.

Analysing the stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms will provide insights whether the firms in travel and leisure industry engage with most of their stakeholders or only specific stakeholders. This study's aim is to explore the stakeholder engagement strategies used by four firms in the travel and leisure industry across various stakeholder groups.

### 1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This section will provide the primary and secondary objectives of the research.

#### 1.3.1 PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To explore stakeholder engagement strategies in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa.

#### 1.3.2 SECONDARY OBJECTIVES

In order to achieve the primary objective, the following secondary research objectives have been constructed:

SO<sup>1</sup>: To identify the stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the industry of travel and leisure.

SO<sup>2</sup>: To compare the stakeholder engagement strategies of different firms in the industry of travel and leisure.

SO<sup>3</sup>: To provide conclusions and recommendations to improve stakeholder engagement in the industry of travel and leisure.

#### 1.3.3 METHODOLOGICAL OBJECTIVES

The research's primary and secondary objectives will be achieved by achieving the following methodological objectives:

MO<sup>1</sup>: To conduct a literature review on stakeholder engagement strategies in South Africa's travel and leisure industry including previous research findings and appropriate theories.

MO<sup>2</sup>: To determine the research methodology that best suits this study in addressing the research problem and objectives.

MO<sup>3</sup>: To collect and analyse data from integrated annual reports, websites, and social media pages of selected firms to understand the strategies used to engage with stakeholders.

MO<sup>4</sup>: To build a framework, based on the findings of this study, to inform firms on how they can improve their stakeholder engagement strategies.

#### 1.4 SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The study's aim is to explore and compare stakeholder engagement strategies that are used in the travel and leisure industry. The research findings of this study could help firms in the industry understand different stakeholder groups and help these firms to incorporate strategies that enhance stakeholder engagement.

The industry is part of the South African tourism sector which benefits South Africa's economy. The findings in this study can help firms understand stakeholder engagement strategies, possibly enhancing the benefits of tourism to various role players and improving overall economic growth.

The findings will help firms in the travel and leisure industry gain a competitive advantage by understanding stakeholder engagement strategies, as firms that engage with their stakeholders are more likely to retain stakeholders, improve and innovate as well as foster loyalty from stakeholders.

#### 1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH

The layout of this study will consist of:

**Chapter one:** The chapter provides an overview of the background and introduction to the study. It presents the problem statement and lays out the primary objective, secondary objectives, and methodological objectives. It further provides the significance of the study.

**Chapter two:** The next chapter offers a literature review which provides the definition of marketing as well as a discussion on the evolution of marketing and marketing strategies. The chapter provides a literature review of stakeholder theory, stakeholder engagement and stakeholder management. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of travel and leisure industry.

**Chapter three:** This chapter discusses the research design and methodology that was used in the study. Chapter three concludes by highlighting ethical issues relevant to this research.

**Chapter four:** This chapter presents and discuss the study's empirical findings.

**Chapter five:** The final chapter offers an outline of the information covered in the previous chapters. In light of the findings, the attainment of the research objectives will be explored. Conclusions, recommendations, and a framework derived from the literature review and empirical investigation, are presented in this chapter.

**CHAPTER TWO**  
**MARKETING AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN PERSPECTIVE**

**2.1 INTRODUCTION**

Chapter two will assist in the attainment of the primary objective of the study which is to explore stakeholder engagement strategies in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa. In addition, chapter two will carry out a theoretical study in order to achieve the first methodological objective which is to conduct a literature review on stakeholder engagement strategies used in the travel and leisure industry including previous research findings and appropriate theories.

Chapter two will provide a theoretical overview of the existing literature on marketing and stakeholder engagement. In the chapter, a theoretical overview will be provided by first defining marketing and the evolution of marketing. Secondly, it will explain marketing strategies, the stakeholder theory and stakeholder management. The final sections will give a brief overview of the travel and leisure industry and conclude with a summary of the chapter.

**2.2 DEFINING MARKETING**

Marketing is the process of creating, advertising, and distributing goods, both tangible and intangible products to meet consumer demands (Dhavaputhalvi & Sorman, 2020). It is the process by which a firm generates satisfied customers which boost sales and profits of the firm (Mulder, 2004:220). According to Czinkota *et al.* (2021), marketing is a particularly practical firm discipline that view the customer as the centre of decision making and describes the dialogue that occurs between the firm and the customer which is increasingly taking place in the global context.

Marketing communication and advertising media have experienced a significant transformation as new technologies have made it easier for firms to contact customers (Leung *et al.*, 2017:241). Firms use marketing to attract new customers and keep hold of existing ones for its goods and services (Jadhav *et al.*, 2023:76). The purpose of

marketing is to persuade customers to take actions that support the objectives that individuals and firms have set forth (Ribeiro & Soares, 2015).

Marketing is made up of 4P's known as product, price, place and promotion that assist a firm in reaching its target market, achieving its marketing goals, and boosting sales (Xia, 2023). Product refers to tangible or intangible goods that can be sold, as well as some benefits that can be applied to satisfy customer demands (Bahador, 2019:2). Price refers to what is charged for the product and the customer's willingness to pay for a good or service (Xia, 2023:167). Place refers to the actual or virtual site where a product or service is offered for sale (Xia, 2023:166). Promotion refers to the influential communication strategy employed to elicit a response from the intended audience (Costello *et al.*, 2022:3). Long-term and short-term firm performance as well as profitability is usually enhanced with an effective use and understanding of the 4P's (Bahador, 2019:9).

The level of competition in the travel and leisure industry has led to an unprecedented level of significance for the sales and marketing department (Bilgihan & Ricci, 2024:124). However, marketing has changed over the years.

### **2.3 THE EVOLUTION OF MARKETING**

New technology has had a disruptive effect on many other firm fields, but the changes in new technology has also brought transformation in the practice of marketing, and these changes have been evolutionary rather than revolutionary (Webber, 2013:291). The evolution of marketing has been significantly influenced by digital transformation, market segmentation, integrated marketing communication and the impact of digital marketing on small and medium sized firms (Ismail & Zainol, 2018).

The dynamic nature of marketing evolution emphasises the need for firms to adapt to technological advancements and changing consumer behaviours (Ismail & Zainol, 2018). Digital marketing has revolutionised traditional marketing approaches leading to a global reach of customers, for firms (Durmaz & Efendioglu, 2016).

### **2.3.1 TRADITIONAL MARKETING**

The most common methods for marketing and focusing on a specific audience were billboards, printed advertisements, television, radios, and newspapers (Kapoor & Kapoor 2021:200). Traditional marketing is usually associated with outbound marketing where the intention is to make the advertisement or billboard difficult to ignore by putting it right in front of the customer making the customer unable to engage with the advertisement (Lehnert *et.al*, 2021:3). Traditional marketing engages more with the brain function of customers through a variety of mental and nervous processes that influence behaviour and decision making thereby influencing preference and purchasing decisions differently compared to digital marketing (Chan *et al.*, 2018).

While it was relatively simple, the traditional marketing process usually took a long time to draw in customers (Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021:200). Traditional mass media has gradually been replaced by new media, like social media, the internet, and mobile phones (Leung *et al.*, 2017:241). The internet's rapid development has drastically altered how people communicate with others, encouraging customers to use online platforms rather than traditional platforms (Matikiti, 2018:1). In the last few years there has been a noticeable shift in marketing from traditional to digital marketing, creating a new definition of the term marketing (Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021:201).

### **2.3.2 DIGITAL MARKETING**

The advent of internet technology has caused a global redefining of the concept marketing, transforming how brands interact with their customers on the internet (Kaur, 2017:72). Digital marketing refers to the use of digital technology to enable the firm to work with stakeholders to create value through brand promotion, communication, customer acquisition, customer retention and sales growth (Kannan, 2017). According to Sandhya & Srikanth (2019:9), the promotion of any product through digital technologies or media primarily using the internet is known as digital marketing. Digital marketing is the process of promoting brands through all digital advertising mediums available in order to reach the intended audience (Mandal *et al.*, 2016).

Social media marketing is one of the key strategies used in digital marketing (Mkwizu, 2020). Social media's widespread and increased use in connection with digital technologies has completely changed how firms communicate with their target customers (Degbey & Pelto, 2021). Social media platforms like Facebook have opened new marketing channels and enabled firms to communicate with numerous people about their products and services (Mangold & Fauls, 2009). Digital marketing has become known as potentially a potent kind of marketing revolution that enables customers and firms to establish a network of connections for commercial gain (Apasrawirote *et al.*, 2022:478).

For firms to increase their value and profitability, digital marketing is important especially in the quick technology evolving environment where traditional marketing strategies alone are insufficient (Homburg & Wielgos, 2022). With the aid of digital marketing, firm can attain greater customer satisfaction and more efficient customer management tools (Veleva & Tsvetanova, 2020:3). Digital marketing offers many opportunities to firms making it much easier to access customers (Schwarzl & Grabowska, 2015:195). Thus, new ways of marketing different services to target customers have emerged since the internet's launch (Kaur, 2017:74).

As a result of internet developments, executives in marketing need to base more of their strategic choices on the customer, requiring a standardised method of quickly assembling information (Bala & Verma, 2018:323). Through the use of digital marketing tools, firms can now more effectively and economically connect with their target customer segments than ever before (Kapoor & Kapoor, 2021:199).

To ensure the success of digital marketing of a firm, the firm must understand which social media platforms are used by its customer targets (Bala & Verma, 2018). According to Begho (2019), user experience, combined communications and marketing, block chain innovation, creative content and customer capital were the top five forecasts for digital marketing in 2019 for African brands.

Stakeholder engagement has become important in marketing because of the emergence of digital media (Viglia *et al.*, 2018:404). Digital marketing has been successful because it enables firms to track customer behaviour, engage with

customers and has enabled firms to better understand customer needs than ever before (Kaur, 2017:73). By leveraging online platforms, firms can acquire a competitive advantage (Mandal *et al.*, 2016). Digital marketing is a crucial instrument for increasing visibility, drawing customers, and optimising economic impact because of its capacity to connect with a wide range of customers in real time (Niziaieva *et al.*, 2022). The travel and leisure industry has embraced the power of digital marketing to transform how the industry interacts with visitors, mold perceptions and spur economic growth in a time when connectivity is critical (Kamsar *et al.*, 2023).

For firms in the travel and leisure industry to effectively engage with their stakeholders, they need to understand and use the right marketing strategies.

### **2.4 MARKETING STRATEGIES**

Marketing strategy is defined as a firm's pattern of decisions that specify its key decisions regarding the goods and services it produces, enabling the firm to accomplish particular goals by providing value to its customers (Varadarajan, 2010:119). Kulkarni (2023:2) defines marketing strategies as a firm's logic which creates value for their customers and establishes profitable customer relationships while achieving the firm's objectives, mission, and vision. These strategies enhance sales and customer satisfaction which increases the financial performance of a firm.

According to Harrison (2009:44), the only method to create a firm that lasts and is profitable within an economy with free markets is to develop and carry out appropriate strategies, specifically marketing strategies that are centred around operational strategies considering globalisation. Firms use marketing strategies to influence the behaviour of their customers and to gain a competitive advantage in the marketplace by focusing their marketing strategies on the needs and uniqueness of their customers (Duralia, 2022). Modern and traditional marketing strategies coexist in the African landscape where digital technology is embraced in some areas, but traditional storytelling and community involvement are still important in others (Raji *et al.*, 2024:398).

In many sectors, firms are now adopting marketing strategies that concentrate on digital environments like social networks and digital platforms (Saura *et al.*, 2022). Marketing strategies focused on data and innovation have emerged as essential choices for firms looking to expand their global product and services (Saura *et al.*, 2022). Firms can focus more on gathering and analysing customer data as a result of learning more about how customers behave in digital spaces (Ribeiro-Navarette *et al.*, 2021). Social media is a useful tool that can be used in strategies aiming towards stakeholder communication, especially when it comes to branding, marketing, and advertising (Mohd-Sulaiman & Hingun, 2020).

Content marketing is a strategy that produces and disseminates pertinent and valuable content to draw in, acquire and establish a connection with a target audience that is well defined and comprehended (Lou & Xie, 2021). Customers are engaged and develop a positive relationship with the brand when the content is infused with the essence of the brand, therefore increasing the likelihood that the products will be purchased (Lopes & Casaias, 2022). Social media marketing is another marketing strategy that firms use to coordinate a series of actions that change relationships and conversations on social media into practical tactic instruments to accomplish targeted marketing outcomes (Li *et al.*, 2021:54). The effective use of social media marketing requires an understanding of the benefits, obstacles, motivators and impacts of marketing perceived by the intended audience (Costello *et al.*, 2022:3).

To boost customer awareness and satisfaction, firms in the travel and leisure industry need to implement marketing strategies (Ganatra *et al.*, 2021). For marketing to be effective, a firm has to understand its stakeholders.

### **2.5 STAKEHOLDER THEORY**

Stakeholder theory is a framework that is used to identify and categorise a firm's stakeholders, as well as to better understand the importance of each stakeholder group and how to manage the various interests of these stakeholder groups (Fontaine *et al.*, 2006). Stakeholders are those who have power that can directly impact a firm commonly known as customers, suppliers, employees, the community as well as the

environment (Franklin, 2020). Any person, entity or group that is interested in a firm's operations because they are impacted by them directly or indirectly is considered a stakeholder (Osei-Tutu *et al.*, 2024).

Freeman *et al.* (2020:217) argue that stakeholder theory is not about the technical knowing that specific firm practices are effective for all firms, it is about understanding how to engage with stakeholders and provide value that is beneficial for them. Accounting for stakeholders frequently enhances a firm's performance primarily through enhanced stakeholder trust, enhanced reputation, an enhanced license to operate and reciprocal actions from stakeholders (De Gooyert *et al.*, 2017:404). Freeman *et al.* (2020:217) further explain that firms can be thought of systems that are embedded with larger systems and every stakeholder in an interdependent system needs to act as a tool by contributing to and influencing the firm's objectives as stakeholders, and as a goal by ensuring that their expectations as stakeholders are met. A firm's survival and success are in many respects jointly determined by its stakeholders due to their interdependence with and on the firm (Bundy *et al.*, 2018:477). Freeman *et al.* (2020:219) argue that what distinguish unique aspects of stakeholder theory is the relationships between human role players, part of a firm's environment and operations, in the process of creating and exchanging value in an unstable world.

One of the main characteristics of stakeholder theory is that it helps firms understand that stakeholder relationships are the best unit analysis available for firms in comparison to economic transactions which are primarily used to measure a firm's success (Freeman *et al.*, 2020:225). In order to establish fruitful relationships between a firm and its stakeholders', managers must consider the entire spectrum of stakeholders within the firm's operational environment (Todd *et al.*, 2017:496).

### **2.6 STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT AND ENGAGEMENT**

According Fassin (2012:83), stakeholder management is a strategic tool that encourages firms to think about how their decisions and actions will affect different stakeholders. Stakeholder management centres on how fairly the firm treats its many

stakeholder groups, effectively managing them, enlisting their participation, and maximising project output through thoughtful planning (Tarode & Shrivastava, 2021:78). Stakeholder management is essential to achieving a firm's objectives and gaining satisfaction of stakeholders (Eyiah-Botwel *et al.*, 2015).

Social media's widespread usage, real time reporting systems, and increased awareness among the public have all contributed to the actions of firms becoming meaningful and accessible to every stakeholder (Crane, 2020:279). To balance treating stakeholders fairly and managing their claims and preferences, the firm needs well defined procedures to produce the right amount of joint value (Harrison, 2020). Firms can capture and generate value for a variety of stakeholders at the same time and achieve superior performance by utilising a stakeholder value framework (Tommaso & Borini, 2023).

It is the responsibility of the firm to manage stakeholder interactions in a way that makes trustworthiness evident because information from interactions with single stakeholders may yield unclear and insufficient information (Crane, 2020:265). For firms to manage their stakeholders effectively they need to understand their stakeholders by engaging with them.

Stakeholder engagement assists in the construction and implementation of effective dialogue as it encourages firms and stakeholders to participate more frequently in the challenging, but beneficial activity of listening to each other and sharing knowledge (Kaur & Lodhia, 2018:340). According to Noland and Phillips (2010), stakeholder engagement is the process by which a firm involves stakeholders in its firm operations in order for the firm to truly be successful.

Effective stakeholder engagement is essential for addressing concerns, aligning diverse interests, and improving service delivery (Twum-Darko *et al.*, 2023). Due to the increased ease of collaboration and increased dissemination of co-creation in the digital age, stakeholder engagement in projects is essential for a firm's success (Barrane *et al.*, 2021).

A significant body of literature on stakeholder engagement has resulted from the recognition of the stakeholder theory regarding the significance of misperceiving stakeholder interests (De Gooyert *et al.*, 2017:404). In order to create long lasting value for everyone, a firm must believe in relationships with stakeholders in the nations and communities they operate in (Rodriguez-Solera & Silva-Laya, 2017). Firms can show that they care about a stakeholder when they respond to their needs, and when they show lack of enthusiasm, one could assume that it is acting only in its own best interests (Crane, 2020:274).

As a result of stakeholder engagement in the digital age, a firm as a whole, the firm's decisions made through engagement, and the process of engagement itself are legitimised (Lane & Devin, 2018). Stakeholder engagement has increased as a result of firms using social media since the platforms inception (Viglia *et al.*, 2018). Social media is currently one of the most popular platforms for engaging with stakeholders in various industries concerning several issues and topics (Mehmood *et al.*, 2023:111).

Stakeholder engagement is the result of a successful communication strategy that promotes symmetric, two-way communication between stakeholders and a firm (Giacomarra *et al.*, 2020). In the case for engaged customers, they are less likely to switch, rather frequently participate in the development of new products and services and are less price sensitive than non-engaged customers (Kumar *et al.*, 2019). Firms with strong stakeholder engagement benefit from low costs of acquisition and higher stakeholder lifetime value, both which are essential for the long-term success for firms (Braze, 2021).

The new marketing era has highlighted how important it is for firms to maintain stakeholder engagement (Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Thus, firms can now engage with stakeholders through social media and electronic communication thanks to advancements in information and communication technology (Mohd-Sulaiman & Hingun, 2020). Malaysian firms use social media to post job openings, solicit feedback from customers, and share general information like directors' and mission statements (Mohd-Sulaiman & Hingun, 2020). Firms listed in the Dow Jones Sustainability index prioritise stakeholder engagement through various communication tools, with a prevalent use of social media for two-way communication (Mahlangu, 2022). Different

aspects of shared posts on social media have an impact on the positive outcome of stakeholder engagement for firms (Mehmood *et al.*, 2023:122).

Stakeholder engagement is not only relevant to firm-customer relationships, but also in a firm's relationships with other stakeholders such as employees, communities and shareholders. Employees that are engaged know their roles thoroughly, exceed expectations in their performance and they motivate their colleagues to contribute to the success of the firm (Liu *et al.*, 2022:4632). Employee engagement is preceded by lower absenteeism and turnover rates, on the other hand when there is no engagement it results in low output, lack of creativity and high labour turnover rates (Vakira *et al.*, 2023:820). Community engagement frequently takes part when a firm uses a wide range of corporate social responsibilities that are beneficial to the community (Barnett *et al.*, 2020:938). Firms that engage with their communities using corporate social responsibility initiatives gain financially, relationally and achieve an improved finance reputation (Barnett *et al.*, 2020). Shareholder engagement is whereby shareholders try to influence environmental, social, corporate practices and policies through a variety of strategies such as private communications and shareholder proposals (Beccarini *et al.*, 2023). Investors require transparent information to ascertain the impact of a firm's performance on their investments (García-Sánchez *et al.*, 2019). Engaging with shareholders helps manage disagreements, develops solutions to problems and shapes effectiveness (Beccarini *et al.*, 2023).

The strategies and initiatives employed to engage with stakeholders towards the goal of creating beneficial shared value are captured by a firm's stakeholder strategy (Gamache *et al.*, 2020). Through engaging stakeholders' firms can improve trust, transparency and accountability, yield stakeholder expectations, come up with innovative solutions and communicate more effectively (Kaur & Lodhia, 2019). Therefore, stakeholder engagement is one of the necessities in the travel and leisure industry to ensure success of firms.

## **2.7 THE TRAVEL AND LEISURE INDUSTRY**

The travel and leisure industry is within the tourism sector and includes hotels, restaurants, and a range of services (Ganatra *et al.*, 2021). The industry is represented by the organisation, distribution, and various patterns of economic activities of lodging, shopping, dining and scenic events (Zhao & Liu, 2021). The travel and leisure industry is known for its ability to create jobs, raise the economy's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and produce foreign exchange (Bodhanwala & Bodhanwala, 2022:1251).

The travel and leisure industry in Africa has experienced tremendous growth over the past few decades, and the tourism sector has played a significant role in the development of African economies (Monnier, 2021). Due to the intense competition brought about by this growth, firms using innovative management and marketing techniques are able to thrive (Woo *et al.*, 2018).

### **2.7.1 THE ROLE OF THE TRAVEL AND LEISURE INDUSTRY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN ECONOMY**

The tourism sector is among the most important sectors of the global economy, making significant contributions to the growth of the economy, creation of jobs and firms' generation of revenues (Bazargani & Kiliç, 2021:73). The travel and leisure industry includes a variety of firms that depend on tourism such as travel agencies, hotels, tour operators, restaurants, rental car services, theme parks, museums and art galleries (Bodhanwala & Bodhanwala, 2022:1253). According to Sarpong *et al.* (2020), the quality of life of citizens is improved by the industry in a number of ways including job creation and more services from and to the citizens of the country. Any community that forms part of a popular tourist destination has its residents' quality of life greatly impacted by the arrival of tourists (Woo *et al.*, 2018:260).

The travel and leisure industry in South Africa has a positive impact on South Africa's economy by fostering investment, job creation and foreign exchange as well as impacting the social environment (Akyürek *et al.*, 2023). Additionally, the industry has emerged as a vital economic sector in South Africa, surpassing traditional industries like mining, and contributing significantly to the country's economy (Anderson & Moipolai, 2023).

South Africa is one of the most visited countries in Africa that attracted nearly 3.8 million foreign visitors in 2020 (Cowling, 2024). The tourism sector which the travel and leisure industry is part of, employed nearly 1.08 million employees in 2021 compared to the previous year and the number of jobs created increased by 1.9% (Cowling, 2024). In 2022, the sector's share of the GDP directly increased to 3.5% and contributed more to GDP compared to the gas, electricity, and water supply industry (StatsSA, 2024).

### **2.7.2 MARKETING AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN THE TRAVEL AND LEISURE INDUSTRY**

The influence of digital marketing has been substantial on the travel and leisure industry, turning it into a smart sector that is technologically advanced and creative (Pencarelli, 2020:459). The tourism board of South Africa launched the #MeetSouthAfrica campaign that used social media to highlight the nations varied attractions, and this created a pool of user generated content by travellers (Dineva, 2023). Social media's extensive worldwide reach has emerged as a crucial instrument for marketing research and the tourism sector (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Marketing using social media is essential for creating successful strategies in the industry (Aljuhmani *et al.*, 2023).

As a result of major sporting events such as the rugby and soccer world cups, there were a lot of tourists in South Africa who made use of the nation's lodging, accommodation, and dining facilities (Garidzirai & Pasara, 2020). According to firms in the travel and leisure industry, those who attract and keep their customers are more likely to have a higher percentage of customers and survive in the industry (Mjongwana & Kamala, 2018:3).

The travel and leisure industry has noticed that since the pandemic, customers are seeking unique experiences and customers are using a variety of internet search engines to make hotel reservations (Nyathela-Sunday *et al.*, 2022:569). The industry is distinguished by fierce rivalry and quick-changing customer demands, and firms constantly need to create and adapt their sales and marketing strategies to gain and

maintain a competitive advantage (Bilghan & Ricci, 2024:125). In order to implement a core model of collaboration and stakeholder engagement, the tourism sector must be technologically adaptable (Shams, 2016). Travel is an experiential process, and customers want to get a sense of the location's appearance as well as learn about the location's physical attributes, therefore customer engagement is essential (Willems *et al.*, 2019).

A study on customer engagement conducted by Seyfi *et al.* (2024:70) found that engaging customers in tourist destinations may encourage customers to return to the destination, improving the reputation of the place. Continuous engagements across the travel and leisure industry are necessary, as stakeholders in the industry emphasise the importance of changing the perception of domestic tourism in Africa (Bama *et al.*, 2022:562). Therefore, in order to address marketing and other firm goals as well as ensure success, firms need to understand the engagement and interactions with and of pertinent stakeholders in the tourism sector (Todd *et al.*, 2017).

### **2.8 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

In this chapter a literature review was provided on marketing and stakeholder engagement. The chapter explained how marketing can be a beneficial tool for firms to effectively engage with their stakeholders. The chapter concluded with a brief overview of the travel and leisure industry. The following chapter describes the research design and methodology was used in the study to achieve the study objectives.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

#### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter two provided definitions and detailed overviews of marketing, the evolution of marketing, marketing strategies, stakeholder theory, stakeholder management and engagement. The previous chapter also briefly discussed the role of the travel and leisure industry in the South African economy and how marketing and stakeholder engagement impacts the industry. Chapter three carries out the third methodological objective of this study by determining the research methodology and design that best suits the study by addressing the research problem and objectives. This chapter will describe the study's research methodology and design that were used.

The study will make use of the research onion, a framework for research methodology and design created by Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2016), to effectively address the design and methodology decisions. The stages or layers of the onion are: (a) research philosophies, (b) approaches to theory development, (c) research strategies, (d) method choices (e) time horizons, and (f) data collection and techniques and procedures (Saunders *et.al.*, 2016).

Chapter three will therefore discuss the following, as applicable to this study: the research philosophy, approach to theory, research strategies, methodological choices, techniques for data collection, and techniques for data analysis. Trustworthiness of the research will also be discussed. The chapter will conclude with a discussion on ethical considerations and a chapter summary.

#### 3.2 RESEARCH PHILOSOPHY

Research philosophy functions as the theoretical lens through which the researcher looks at methodological components of their research, to determine which research methods and data analysis approach to use (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017:26). The five primary research philosophies are realism, interpretivism, critical realism, pragmatism and, postmodernism (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:144). Interpretivism entails defining the

social world in connection with subjective meanings that individuals attach to their actions and interactions (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:135). Interpretivism lays out a development and understanding of particular situations like cross-cultural research, elements affecting particular development, and it can result in new perspectives and findings (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). Thus, interpretivism is appropriate since this study will conduct an empirical investigation to explore stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the travel and leisure industry.

### **3.3 APPROACH TO THEORY DEVELOPMENT**

There are three alternative methods for building theories namely: deductive, abductive, and inductive (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:124). The deductive approach is a logical method in which the existence of multiple premises that are taken to be true, form the basis for the conclusion (Dudovskiy, 2018). The deductive approach is primarily used in natural science research, where theories serve as the explanatory framework (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:126).

Through the development of better understanding and insight into the workings of the world, research using the deductive approach advances knowledge (Varpio *et al.*, 2020:990). The current study uses the deductive approach to theory, drawing on an empirical investigation to compare stakeholder engagement strategies in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa. A fundamental assumption of this approach is that the theory contributes to the goal of the study (Varpio *et al.*, 2020:990). The deductive approach is best suited for this study as the study is built on the stakeholder theory and field of marketing, and it also integrates various findings to advance knowledge on how firms engage with their stakeholders.

### **3.4 RESEARCH STRATEGY**

A plan that is broad and guides researchers in selecting the main data collection methods to address the research question and achieve the study's objectives is known as research strategy (Melnikovas, 2018:39-41). A research strategy is a plan to accomplish aims or goals, it outlines the strategic research goals of a study and the

necessary steps to achieve them (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:177). Case study, grounded theory, surveys, action research, archival, narrative inquiry, ethnography and, experiment, and narrative inquiry are eight types of research strategy (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:178).

According to Fleming and Zegwaard (2018:206), in order to comprehend a specific case, case study research may concentrate on a certain situation, an individual or group and offer an in-depth analysis and interpretation. The research strategy used in the study is a case study to explore the stakeholder engagement strategies used by firms. This strategy is best suited for the research as the researcher will focus on four firms and analyse how these firms engage with their stakeholders.

### 3.5 METHODOLOGICAL CHOICES

According to Saunders *et al.* (2016), research methodological choices are determined by the application of both quantitative and qualitative research methods or by using only one type of method. A study that focuses on collecting data either qualitatively or quantitatively, is referred to as mono method; studies that use multiple methods to achieve different goals and mitigate limitations are referred to as mixed methods (Melnikovas, 2018: 39).

Qualitative focuses on using non-quantifiable data collection techniques like interviews and videos, which produces non-numerical results from data analysis processes like content analysis (Alturki, 2021:4). The objective of qualitative research is to obtain a comprehensive understanding of an occurrence as well as a particular case through in depth exploratory studies (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020). A qualitative research method was used to gather comprehensive information of stakeholder engagement strategies that the selected firms used. This method was best suited for the study because the study focused on non-quantifiable data collection in order to explore the firms' strategies.

### 3.6 TIME HORIZON

Time horizon refers to the length of the study, the duration a study examines the research, including the period in which data were collected and the relevant analysis was completed (Alturki, 2021:4). Long-term, mid-term, short-term, and retrospective points of time can all be chosen as a research time horizon, based on a study's objective (Melnikovas, 2018:41). A study can be conducted using a longitudinal time horizon, which is more similar to maintaining a journal over an extended duration, or a cross-sectional time horizon, which is like a picture obtained at a single moment in time (Saunders *et al.*, 2019:148)

This study makes use of a cross-sectional research design which, according to Zuleika (2022:256), data variables are observed and measured at a specific point in time by the researcher. The study will make use of a cross-sectional time horizon in order to accurately compare stakeholder engagement strategies at a given point in time by firms in a particular industry.

### 3.7 TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION

The last layer of the research onion consists of the techniques and procedures the study will use for data collection and data analysis (Saunders *et al.* 2016:164). Data collection is the methodological process of gathering and evaluating information to answer research questions and provide suggestions and viable solutions based on the findings once analysed (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016:158).

#### 3.7.1 SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data is gathered by a third party or utilised for a different purpose from the primary one and can be gathered from a variety of sources such as organisational records, census data, publicly available data and data that was initially gathered for different types of research (Pederson *et al.*, 2020:58). This study obtained secondary data by means of desk research to conduct a literature review. The study's secondary data is derived from the body of literature on firms' stakeholder engagement. As part

of the data collection, it was ensured that the information was pertinent to this research study. Topics covered will be marketing, marketing strategies, stakeholder theory, stakeholder management and stakeholder engagement and an overview of the travel and leisure industry.

### 3.7.2 PRIMARY DATA

Primary data is collected directly from the source as opposed to secondary sources like books or articles (Davis & Pimenta, 2021). In an empirical study, phenomena are examined using data (Li *et al.*, 2022) collected for the first time. This study will use an empirical investigation to obtain data from firms. For this study, desk research was conducted in order to gain access to data on the 2023 Facebook pages, integrated annual reports and websites selected firms in the travel and leisure industry. The empirical investigation will further be discussed in the following subsections, providing explanations of the population selected, the sampling techniques used, and further details about the desk study through which primary data was collected.

#### 3.7.2.1 Population

A population is a set of individuals or firms that the study aims to investigate (Majid, 2018:2). This study's population were firms in the travel and leisure industry that are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). The population consisted of eight firms that were listed in the JSE travel and leisure industry. To include the whole population is not practical, rather to include in their study, researchers select a sample from the population (Majid, 2018:2).

#### 3.7.2.2 Sampling techniques

A researcher uses sampling as a technique to carefully select a limited number of representations from a predefined group or population to act as research subjects (Sharma, 2017:749). Methods of sampling can be classified as probability or non-probability sampling (Berndt, 2020). Nonprobability sampling selects sample

participants according to accessibility rather than randomly, as in probability sampling (Etikan *et al.*, 2016:1).

In this study, non-probability sampling was used. The sample was selected based on the criteria that the firms had large market shares in the travel and leisure industry. This resulted in the selection of four firms namely, Tsogo Sun, Southern Sun, City Lodges, and Sun International. Tsogo Sun is one of Africa's biggest hotel and casino firms' that includes more than 200 restaurants, 14 casinos, 6 movie theatres and 96 hotels (Sevel, Abratt & Kleyn, 2018:21). Southern Sun is a top hospitality group in southern Africa with a variety of hotels and resorts, bars, and restaurants as well as conference centres and banqueting spaces (Southern Sun, 2024). City Lodges is one of the hotels included in the largest 250 hotel chains worldwide with 7 540 rooms and hotels across some of the African countries (City Lodges, n.d.). Sun International is in the gaming, hospitality, and entertainment firm with a variety of assets including five-star hotels, casinos, and resorts (Sun International, 2024).

### 3.7.2.3 Desk study

To get a deeper understanding of a field, a desk study reviews results of earlier studies, and it works with already existing data and information (Wahid, Amin, Khan, Siddique & Warraich, 2023). As a requirement, firms on the JSE annually release integrated reports that explains to stakeholders how they generate value overtime, thereby encouraging transparency (Stinglingh *et al.*, 2017). In the current study data, will be collected using a desktop study data collection technique, through considering the texts of the selected firms on social media platforms, in annual reports, and on the websites of the four firms in the travel and leisure industry. The data collected will be key messages, common words that the firms use on their websites, annual reports, or social media pages when they refer to or describe relevant stakeholder information and/or relationships. Since this study is a desk study, no human interviews or questionnaires will be used to gather data and information.

### 3.8 TECHNIQUES AND PROCEDURES FOR DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from this study was analysed employing thematic content analysis. A research methodology used to interpret messages, typically unstructured content, in terms of texts, photos, symbols, and audio data is known as thematic content analysis (Gheyle & Jacobs, 2017).

The purpose of content analysis is to methodically transform a large amount of data into a concise, organised summary of important findings (Erlingsson & Brydiewicz, 2017:94). The process involves segmenting original texts into meaning and then coding and condensing those units as well as breaking data into smaller pieces (Graneheim *et al.*, 2017). Content analysis is a reflective process, the processes of coding, categorising, and determining and distilling meaning units are an ongoing process (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017:95). There are several approaches to perform content analysis, leading to themes/categories, depending on goal of a study (Lindgren *et al.*, 2020). A theme is defined as a “red thread” that unites several categories and gives significance to the phenomenon being studied and all of its manifestations (Graneheim *et al.*, 2017).

Data collected from the firms was analysed based on the words, images and texts that were commonly used to engage with their different stakeholders. The analysed data which were the findings, was then categorised in themes. The themes were then used to better understand how that firm engages with their stakeholders. Then the themes, with specific consideration of the strategies the firms are implementing, were compared across the firms to compare how they engage with their stakeholders in order to find similarities and differences.

### 3.9 TRUSTWORTHINESS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Trustworthiness is the degree to which readers find the findings of a study to be credible or trustworthy (Cypress, 2017:254). Trustworthiness considers transferability, credibility, confirmability, and dependability when being assessed, similar to reliability and validity (Alder, 2022) in quantitative studies. Credibility is the actual values that determines if the researcher has articulated and demonstrated a particular level of

confidence in the conclusions based on the phenomenon being studied (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). The researcher prepared, gathered, and analysed data for this study in certain ways to ensure its credibility. In order to establish credibility, the study triangulated data from multiple online platforms, including Facebook pages, websites, and annual reports of the firms in the travel and leisure industry. The purpose of the data analysis was to explore the stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms. Data collected was appropriately recorded.

Transferability means that the research will apply in the future and that current research findings will hold true in similar circumstances (Ghafouri & Ofoghi, 2016:1917). Transferability was ensured by providing a thorough explanation of the methodology and by taking the necessary steps to analyse and compare the firms' stakeholder engagement strategies, thereby ensuring transferability. Dependability states that the findings are unique, and expectations are consistent throughout data (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). Trusted sources were used in the current study in order to ensure dependability. Confirmability assesses if the interpretations and conclusions are derived exclusively from the lived experiences of the participants, without considering the potential biases of the researchers (Lemon & Hayes, 2020). In order to demonstrate that the findings and conclusions were drawn impartially from the data collected, the data collected was publicly available on the firms Facebook pages, websites and annual reports and the researcher included a research methodology and design chapter that detailed the procedures followed during the phases of data collection and analysis.

### **3.10 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The term ethics in research refers to the established standards of behaviour that guide a researcher's actions with regard to both study subjects and those who are impacted by the investigations (Saunders *et al.*, 2016:239). Nonetheless, choosing the right research methodology and techniques is only as important as considering the ethical issues surrounding the researcher's conduct (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018:209).

Research that uses human participants requires approval from the ethics committee prior data collection from the participants (Fleming & Zegwaard, 2018:210). There were no human participants used in this study, hence no ethical approval with regard to people was needed by following the ethical policies of Nelson Mandela University, the study made sure that the ethical standards were met. To ensure compliance, Ethical Clearance Form E was properly completed and submitted to the university (see Annexure A).

### **3.11 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

This chapter described how the study achieved the first secondary objective and second methodological objective in order to achieve the primary objective of this study. The chapter used the research onion of Saunders *et al* (2016) and described the research methodology and design used in detail. The next chapter will discuss the study's findings and interpretations.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the research design and methodology of this study, including the techniques that were used to collect and analyse data. This chapter carries out the third methodological objective which is to collect and analyse data from integrated annual reports, websites, and social media pages of selected firms to understand the strategies used to engage with stakeholders. Chapter four will therefore help in the attainment of the first and second secondary objectives which are about identifying and comparing stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the travel and leisure industry. This chapter will present and interpret the findings of data collected from four firms. The selected firms were public companies namely Tsogo Sun, Southern Sun, City Lodges and Sun International, and the data were collected from publicly available sources. The chapter will be structured in sections covering the themes and subthemes derived from the data, as stakeholder engagement strategies, followed by the summary and comparison of themes, as relevant among the selected firms. Finally, the chapter will present the summary of the chapter.

#### 4.2 THEMES

The data was collected from the firms' 2023 Facebook pages, integrated annual reports and websites. The data was analysed through a thematic content analysis. The data was coded using colour coding to develop themes. Four primary themes were found and these related to the types of stakeholders that firms in this industry engage with. The themes were named customers, employees, communities and stakeholders. Four colours were used to differentiate the four themes that were found. Green was used to colour code data fitting the theme customers, blue was used to colour code data relating to the theme employees, red was used to colour code data that links with the theme communities and purple was used to colour code data that fits with the theme shareholders. If it was deemed relevant, subthemes were found as

the stakeholder engagement strategies where further explored within each main theme. Each theme and related subtheme will be explained in the following sections.

### 4.3 THEME 1: CUSTOMERS

The customer theme represents the strategies that the firms used to engage with their customers. The customer theme relates to stakeholder engagement strategies like loyalty programmes, promotions, and competitions to engage with their customers, and therefore these were used to label the subthemes. All the firms used different engagement strategies which were visible on their Facebook pages, integrated annual reports and websites.

#### 4.3.1 LOYALTY PROGRAMMES

In terms of loyalty programmes, it was clear that firms in this industry uses it for customer engagement. Tsogo Sun uses a customer loyalty programme to reward customers with benefits and recognition. The firm's loyalty programme is known as Tsogo rewards and it is used across their casinos, hotels and all services that the firm provides. The rewards programme has four different levels, namely 10-tier benefits, J-tier benefits, Q-tier benefits, and K-tier benefits that rank customers from the lowest level to the highest level in terms of loyalty (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023). The firm uses the loyalty programme to understand the needs, attitudes and behaviours of their customers. This helps Tsogo Sun provide experiences that are relevant to the customers, thereby building their brand and increasing sales.

Southern Sun uses its frequent guest reward programme for customers to receive information and early options of the firm's hotel deals, and affordable meals when their customers visit the firm's restaurants. The frequent guest programme accrues SunRands which customers can use to reserve lodging, spa services or meals at any of the group's hotels (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023). The programme gives the firm access to customer intelligence that helps Southern Sun serve their customers better and meet their needs and expectations.

City Lodges plans to improve their customer engagement by redesigning their loyalty programme. The firm plans on developing and implementing a new loyalty programme that they believe will help increase customers loyalty and trust (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International uses their loyalty programmes known as Most Valued Guest (MVG) to draw and keep customers. The programmes are used to engage with the firm's urban casino customers. The loyalty programmes help Sun International create behavioural profiles that the firm uses to offer customised products and promotions (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

It is evident that firms in the travel and leisure industry use loyalty programmes to foster customer engagement. These programmes offer customers various benefits such as discounts and exclusive offers. Through loyalty programmes, firms are able to understand their customers' needs and wants and serve them accordingly. Customer attainment and retention is aided through the loyalty programmes. Except for City Lodges, which is redesigning their loyalty programmes, three firms use loyalty programmes to engage with their customers.

#### 4.3.2 PROMOTIONS

Customer engagement was also evident through the promotions run by firms in the travel leisure industry in South Africa. Tsogo Sun offers seasonal getaways depending on the season of the year with affordable rates for their customers to explore their destinations. For 2023's summer, Tsogo Sun offered their summer getaways promotion for their customers to consider locations and book their vacations (Tsogo Sun Facebook, 2023). Tsogo Sun's summer getaways offer affordable rates, encouraging exploration of diverse destinations, which aligns with the industry's need for effective marketing strategies to attract customers (Razeeth *et al.*, 2023). The firm also promotes the firm's app known as the Tsogo Sun app for their customers to register. The app provides access to a wide variety of promotions (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

Southern Sun uses their spring break promotions to engage with its customers by offering seasonal promotions throughout the year. The promotions are offered during different seasons such as summer, winter, autumn, and spring holidays (Southern Sun Facebook, 2023). The firm offers different promotions on their website. One of the firm's common promotions is the offer of 50% discount on accommodation which they offer to their elderly customers (Southern Sun website, 2023).

City Lodges has a weekly promotion on Fridays using the Woza promo code to book for rooms at discounted rates. The firm also has a promotion that lets customers book for 3 nights at any of their hotels and pay at a discounted rate. The firm has a partnership with Avis's car rentals and customers that book with the hotel get to use the car rentals at a 10% discount rate. On Valentines Day in 2023, the firm offered a Valentines Day accommodation package for couples (City Lodges Facebook, 2023).

Sun International offers a promotion to their entertainment customer group weekly on Thursdays. The customers get an extra R1 000 in bonus on vouchers to use at the firms' casinos. Once promotional offers are taken up by customers, it helps the firm to create a behavioural profile for every customer. The firm can use the customer information to offer customised products and promotions in the future (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

From the findings, promotions were used by all the firms to engage with their customers. Promotions offer discounted prices that enable customers to save. Promotions help firms understand what their customers want by creating behavioural profiles to improve future customised offers, thereby offering services and products at discounted prices which increase the firm's sales by drawing and keeping customers. City Lodges engaged with their customers by offering a wider variety of promotions on their social media pages and websites, compared to the other firms.

#### 4.3.3 COMPETITIONS

The third subtheme relevant to the main theme of customers, for travel and leisure firms' stakeholder engagement, was competitions. Tsogo Sun uses different

competitions to engage with their customers on their Facebook page. The firm held a competition for their customers with the chance of 60 winners to get two tickets to the Investec SA open championship, a golf competition (Tsogo Sun Facebook, 2023). The firm also conducted a competition for their customers by challenging them to take a selfie with their partners at any of their locations with a chance of winning a weekend getaway (Tsogo Sun Facebook, 2023).

Sun International also uses competitions to engage with their customers on their Facebook platform. The firm asked their customers to take pictures at any off the Sun International properties to capture the essence of summer and stand a chance to win one of their four Instax cameras (Sun International Facebook, 2023).

According to the findings under this subtheme, Tsogo Sun and Sun International were the only firms that used competitions to engage with their customers in 2023. By encouraging reservations to visit the locations, the competitions served as a means of customer engagement, helping the firms boost their brand recognition while simultaneously rewarding their customers. The firms used their Facebook platform to conduct the competitions.

#### **4.4 THEME 2: EMPLOYEES**

The employees theme represents the strategies that the firms used to engage with their employees. The strategies the firms used were reward programs, communication, training and development programs as well as employee volunteering. Each of these will be further explained as employee subthemes.

##### **4.4.1 REWARD PROGRAMMES**

In terms of reward programmes, it was clear that firms in this industry uses it for employee engagement. City Lodges uses a reward programme known as WOW to celebrate its employees. The firm uses the programme to encourage employees to think outside the box and come up with ideas that delight customers while also finding ways to improve productivity and quality of work. Employees that are successful in the

initiative are celebrated on all of the firm's platforms including its Facebook page and website (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International uses its SunStar's programme for employee recognition and rewards (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023). Employees that perform well are rewarded for their contributions to the firm. Three employees from each unit are honoured each month for their overall contribution to the firm with the winner getting a cash reward. Monthly winners go up against each other at the year-end events and the final winner receives the Sun Star award, and he/she is then named the Sun Star of the Year. In 2023, 64 employees were recognised and rewarded for their sustainable behaviour (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

It is evident that the firms in the travel and leisure industry engage with their employees using internal reward programmes. They promote creativity, productivity and sustainable behaviour which causes engagement between the firm's brand, management and employees. Employee engagement is demonstrated by recognising and rewarding employees with employee of the year's awards and prizes. City Lodges and Southern Sun engaged with their employees using this strategy. Sun International and Tsogo Sun also showed that they engage with their employees through rewards, but the firms' integrated annual reports did not give further details.

#### 4.4.2 COMMUNICATION METHODS

Employee engagement was also evident through different communication methods utilised by firms in the travel leisure industry in South Africa. Tsogo Sun engages with their employees through open communication, where the employees and employers are open to giving and receiving feedback, in order to foster positive work environments, and the firm treats this as a priority (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023). Southern Sun engages with their employees through internal communications and posters (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

City Lodges launched a brand-new intranet that acts as a centralised hub, bringing employees from different locations together. It has encouraged cooperation, improved

communication and bolstering a single organisational culture. The intranet has promoted a more engaged workforce (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International engages with their employees through the use of emails, WhatsApp, video messages and the Sun Talk communication platform. The firm mostly uses the Sun Talk platform to interact with their employees in a transparent, honest and open manner. The platform raises awareness of the firm's projects and campaigns (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

The difference is evident from the findings under this subtheme, that City Lodges and Sun International demonstrate more strategies of communicating with their employees compared to Tsogo Sun and Southern Sun as they provide diverse platforms and approaches to their communication practices. The use of their Facebook pages by Sun International and City Lodges has shown to enhance internal communication, allowing for real time feedback and engagement among employees and the firms.

#### 4.4.3 TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES

Employee engagement was evident through the training and development programmes offered by firms in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa. The Tsogo Sun Academy offers training and development programmes to Tsogo Sun employees, offering a wide range of training from transferable skills such as communication and problem-solving skills to functional skills that are required on the job (Tsogo Sun integrated report, 2023).

Southern Sun creates and offers new and up-to-date development programmes that enhance their employees' skills. The firm offers training programmes themselves to their employees. Southern Sun offered 571 certified training programmes to their employees in 2023 (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

City Lodges spent an average of R4 840 on employee, which gave the employees access to year-round training opportunities. The majority of the year's training and

development was directed toward the kitchen staff employees since this is in line with the firm's strategic focus (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International offers continuing professional and personal development through integrated job training, internships, bursaries, and apprenticeships in order to empower, retain, and inspire their employees (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

Firms engage with their employees using training and development programmes as from the findings under this subtheme. The firms' focus areas in this regard differ depending on each firm's strategies to develop the skills of its employees. As a result of the engagement, employees could possibly be more committed and inspired to do their jobs and could have higher levels of job satisfaction.

#### 4.4.4 EMPLOYEE WELLNESS PROGRAMMES

Employee engagement was also evident through employee wellness programmes that were offered by the firms in the travel and leisure industry. Tsogo Sun offers clinic facilities at some of their locations as a way of supporting the wellness of their employees. The firm also offers the Tsogo Sun medical scheme that has 3 700 employees and 213 pensioners as members (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

Southern Sun offers HIV counselling as one of their ways of engaging with their employees. The firm also looks for methods to support their workers in taking care of their health and provide employee support programmes as part of their employee wellness programme (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

City Lodges engages with its employees through their employee wellness programmes. The wellness programs provide mental health and trauma counselling, debt counselling and safeguarding concerns as well as advice on retirement preparation (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International engages with its employees through the One Sun wellness program that has various programs incorporated in it. The program contains psychosocial support, workplace absenteeism management, health and lifestyle risk assessments and HIV counselling and testing, as well as aspects to manage gender-based violence (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023). Sun International's wellness program provides a free yearly health and risk assessment to all of their employees. This assessment helps identify health risks that are unrelated to work as well as counselling and testing (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

The findings under this subtheme show that employee wellness programmes are used by all the firms to engage with their employees. These programmes ensure the firms and employees are engaging since they are taking part in wellness programs offered by their employers, which also assist in ensuring employees are healthy. This could aid positive working environments for the employees and possibly increase their job satisfaction levels.

#### 4.4.5 EMPLOYEE VOLUNTEERING

Lastly, employee engagement was evident through employee volunteering programmes offered by firms in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa. Employee volunteering programmes are initiatives that the firms organise to give opportunities to their employees to volunteer in the communities they operate in which are mostly related to the firm's corporate social responsibility objectives. Tsogo Sun's volunteers programme offers their employees a chance to improve and positively impact their communities and lend a hand to those who are less fortunate. Among the firm's 2023 initiatives were World Blood Donor Day and charitable funding campaigns in which employees participated by volunteering (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

Southern Sun's volunteer programme lets employees take part in a variety of community service initiatives such as helping at welfare shelters and cleaning up beaches (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023). City Lodges employees engage in community service as part of their active citizenship (City Lodges integrated

annual report, 2023). Sun International's employees actively volunteer their free time to engage with communities (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

The firms use volunteer programmes to engage with their employees and give them an opportunity to make a difference in the communities in which the firms operate, which is linked to the firms' objectives and values. Employees may acquire new skills and competencies through these programmes since they offer a range of learning opportunities that are outside of their regular work which may also improve their contributions to the firm. This may possibly increase the engagement between the firms, their employees as well as the communities they operate in. Slightly different is community volunteering which is one of the subthemes within the next theme. Employee volunteering is internal and focuses on their employees and aligning them with the corporate social responsibility of the firm while community volunteering is external where the firm engages with the community.

#### **4.5 THEME 3: COMMUNITIES**

The communities theme represents the strategies the firms use to engage with their communities. The strategies included community volunteering and community upliftment programs, and therefore these were regarded as the subthemes within the main theme relating to communities as a stakeholder group.

##### **4.5.1 COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERING**

The first subtheme relevant to the main theme of communities, for travel and leisure firms' stakeholder engagement, was community volunteering. Firms conduct volunteer programmes as short-term goals to address issues that the communities they are operating in face such as education challenges, natural disasters and reducing poverty. Tsogo Sun's volunteer programmes helps impact the communities they operate in. Throughout the 2023 year, a wide range of volunteer initiatives were employed including flood relief efforts in KwaZulu-Natal (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

Southern Sun engages with their communities through volunteer programmes. On Nelson Mandela Day in 2023, a total of 565 Southern Sun employees volunteered at over 50 different causes in almost every province of South Africa, demonstrating support for their local communities. Ahead of Mandela Day in 2023, Southern Sun volunteers prepared 1 700 meals in support of rise against hunger at Sandton convention centre. The meals were distributed to under resourced school children (Southern Sun Facebook, 2023).

City Lodges participate in active citizenship by having volunteer days in their communities. City Lodges together with Save the World Foundation volunteered by visiting schools to offer messages of hope and transformation, mentored students facing various challenges, and concentrated on developing leaders with the help of community leaders in the communities they operate in (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International engages with their communities through volunteer programmes. In an effort to reach girls under the age of 13 in communities with high rates of crime and poverty, the firm sponsored a street netball programme with the aim of creating an environment for the girls to interact with one another in a positive and constructive manner. The programme involved eight communities, and the firm was able to provide important life lessons and steered the girls towards future opportunities (Sun International integrated annual report 2023).

It is evident that the firms engage with their communities using volunteer programmes. The firms used various volunteer programmes such as flood relief efforts, meal preparation and distribution, support programmes and a netball programme to engage with their communities. The programmes ensure that the firms are engaging with the communities the firms operate in. This possibly improves the firms' reputations and corporate social responsibility actions by forming relationships with community members in the areas where the firms operate.

#### 4.5.2 COMMUNITY UPLIFTMENT PROGRAMMES

The second subtheme relevant to the main theme for communities was community upliftment programmes. This subtheme is notably different from community volunteering as community upliftment programmes are usually long-term goals that are placed to address and solve issues in the communities the firms are operating in. Tsogo Sun has community upliftment programmes with the aim of positively and significantly impacting the communities in which the firm operates, with two main initiatives focusing on donations and enterprise development (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023). The enterprise development program helps small firms all over South Africa that have the potential to be part of the firm's supply chain in future. The firm spent R5 million towards enterprise development beneficiaries (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

Southern Sun is dedicated to helping disadvantaged communities by donating a portion of their annual profits to nonprofit firms, firm development and environmental preservation. Southern Sun gave work-based learning opportunities to 484 jobless students, allowing them to finish their education and obtain a degree; 17 of them found employment (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

City Lodges has the YES programme that develops youth in communities. The firm is committed to societal change by their participation in youth employment initiatives. The YES programme serves as an investment in youth by providing employment opportunities and acts as an investment in the workforce of the future (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023). The firm also runs a corporate social responsibility program with the goal of benefiting the communities and environment. Part of the programme is conducted at a national level, while other parts are taking place regionally and these are overseen by the general manager of each hotel with the aim of helping the communities (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International has community upliftment programmes at all the locations the firm operates. The firm uses a social economic development programme to uplift their communities with the majority of their programmes allocated to educational projects (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023). The Table Bay Hotel which is part

of Sun International has shown its dedication to community involvement by contributing to various education related causes which has improved the resources available to students from underprivileged backgrounds. The Table Bay Hotel renovated four community schools and distributed 500 pairs of socks and shoes to students in elementary schools (Sun International integrated report, 2023).

The findings under this subtheme show that the firms in the travel and leisure industry engage with their communities using community upliftment programmes, such as donations and enterprise development, firm development, youth development and social economic development programmes. Through these programmes, firms engage with their communities by developing community members and they make a lasting positive impact on these communities. In return, the firms' reputations are possibly enhanced due to stakeholders noticing the firms' impact. Sun International used more strategies to engage with their communities compared to the other three firms.

#### **4.6 THEME 4: SHAREHOLDERS**

The shareholders theme represents the stakeholder engagement strategies the firms use to engage with their shareholders or investors. The strategies will be explained in the following sections, which link to the two subthemes in this main theme namely annual general meetings as well as remuneration policies and implementation reports.

##### **4.6.1 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETINGS**

Shareholder or investor engagement was evident through the annual general meetings the firms conducted to engage with their shareholders or investors. Annual general meetings are compulsory for firms as they are means by which shareholders can influence management, take part in decision making and guarantee efficient communication (Wonjun, 2022). Tsogo Sun engages with their shareholders through their annual general meetings. The board presents the firm's approved annual financial statements to shareholders at each of the firm's annual general meetings,

per the audit and risk committee's recommendation (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

One of the major agendas of the Southern Sun's annual meeting in 2023 was to present to the firm's stakeholders their audited financial statements for the annual year together with reports from the directors, audit, risk committee, social and ethics committee (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

City Lodges engages with their shareholders through annual meetings as well. For the 2023 annual year, the firm requested their shareholders to send emails regarding proposed resolutions or questions that were going to be addressed at their annual general meeting. The firm also encouraged the resolutions or questions the shareholders have brought forth in person during the meeting (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International's board and shareholders engage at their annual general meetings. The board at Sun International is kept informed of all the firm's development and progress toward its strategic goals. At every annual general meeting the chairman of the social and ethics committee provides an update of what is happening in the firm to the shareholders (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

The firms all engage with their shareholders once a year at their annual general meetings as it is mandatory. These annual general meetings are used for stakeholder engagement since information is provided to shareholders, on how the firms are operating, and it is used to get feedback and information from shareholders.

#### 4.6.2 REMUNERATION POLICIES AND IMPLEMENTATION REPORTS

Shareholder engagement was also evident through the remuneration policies and implementation reports provided by the firms in the travel and leisure industry. Tsogo Sun engaged with their shareholders through cast voting rights concerning the remuneration policies. In 2023, 94% of the voting rights were obtained and were used in the advisory vote on the firm's compensation implementation report. The votes were

cast in favour of the policies and the policies was implemented (Tsogo Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

Southern Sun engaged with their shareholders through the approval of its remuneration policies and implementation report. The firm engaged with their shareholders by casting votes on whether the remuneration policies and implemented report should be approved of or not. The number of votes generated in 2023 were higher compared to those casted in the previous year (Southern Sun integrated annual report, 2023).

City Lodges' remuneration report provided a useful forum for communicating and engaging with their shareholders and addressing the concerns this stakeholder group brought up during the year. The votes casted for the approval of the implementation report and remuneration policies were 88.59% and 87.08% respectively (City Lodges integrated annual report, 2023).

Sun International engaged with their shareholders through its remuneration policies. The firm kept in contact with shareholders to hear their opinions and concerns about Sun International's compensation practices and policies and the firm received feedback concerning the practices and policies (Sun International integrated annual report, 2023).

It is evident from the findings under this subtheme that the firms engage with their shareholders or investors through remuneration policies and implementation reports. This engagement strategy, by involving shareholders, helps the firms carry out policies and implement reports that the firms and shareholders have mutually agreed on, strengthening the relationship between these two parties.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY AND COMPARISON OF THEMES AND STRATEGIES AMONG THE SELECTED FIRMS**

This section shows a table that summarises the stakeholder engagement strategies that are employed by firms in the travel and leisure industry, presented as Table 4.1.

**TABLE 4.1: SUMMARY OF STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES BASED ON THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

FIRMS	CUSTOMERS	EMPLOYEES	COMMUNITIES	SHAREHOLDERS
Tsogo Sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Customer loyalty programme</li> <li>Seasonal getaways</li> <li>Facebook competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Open communication</li> <li>Tsogo Sun Academy</li> <li>Tsogo Sun medical scheme</li> <li>Volunteer programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteers programme</li> <li>Donations and enterprise development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual general meetings</li> <li>Remuneration policies and implementation reports</li> </ul>
Southern Sun	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Frequent guest reward programme</li> <li>Seasonal promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>HIV counselling</li> <li>Methods for supporting employee health and wellness</li> <li>Volunteer programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteers programme</li> <li>Donations</li> <li>Firm development</li> <li>Work based learning opportunities</li> <li>Environmental preservation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual general meetings</li> <li>Remuneration policies and implementation reports</li> </ul>
City Lodges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly Woza promotion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>WOW reward programme</li> <li>Intranet hub</li> <li>Mental health and trauma counselling</li> <li>Debt counselling</li> <li>Volunteer programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteer programme</li> <li>YES programme for youth</li> <li>Corporate social responsibility programme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual general meetings</li> <li>Remuneration policies and implementation reports</li> </ul>
Sun International	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most valued guest</li> <li>Weekly bonuses</li> <li>Facebook competition</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>SunStar's programme</li> <li>Volunteer programmes</li> <li>Emails</li> <li>WhatsApp</li> <li>Video messages</li> <li>Sun talk communication platform</li> <li>Psychosocial support</li> <li>HIV counselling and testing</li> <li>Health and lifestyle risk assessments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Festival of giving initiative</li> <li>Social economic development programmes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual general meetings</li> <li>Remuneration policies and implementation reports</li> </ul>

From Table 4.1 it is evident that every firm uses a combination of different strategies for stakeholder engagement. When comparing the strategies used by all the firms to engage with their customers, Tsogo Sun and Sun International have more strategies in which they use to engage with their customers.

It is also evident from Table 4.1 that all the firms used different strategies to engage with their employees. According to the findings regarding employee engagement strategies, Tsogo Sun offers a medical scheme for their employees, Southern Sun and

Sun International offer HIV counselling, while City Lodges offers mental health and trauma counselling as well as debt counselling. Overall, Sun International has more employee engagement strategies compared to the other firms. All the firms engage with their communities using different strategies. Based on the findings on community engagement strategies, Tsogo Sun focuses on enterprise development, Southern Sun focuses on firm development and learning based opportunities, City Lodges focuses on empowering the youth and corporate social responsibility programmes, while Sun International focuses on social economic development programmes.

Additionally, some of the strategies used by the firms to interact with their stakeholders are similar, according to the findings. All the firms use volunteer programmes to engage with their employees and communities, and loyalty programmes to engage with their customers. Concerning the engagement strategies for shareholders or investors, all the firms use annual general meetings as well as the firms' remuneration policies and implementation reports.

#### **4.8 SUMMARY OF THE CHAPTER**

The study's findings were presented in this chapter. Based on the empirical investigation that was done, firms in the travel and leisure industry engaged with their customers, employees, communities and shareholders using various stakeholder engagement strategies. Specific subthemes, showing the stakeholder engagement focus areas of the firms, were also identified and discussed. The next chapter will provide the summary of the study as well as the recommendations to various role players in the travel and leisure industry.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter four gave an analysis of the data collected from firms in the travel and leisure industry regarding their stakeholder engagement strategies. This final chapter will achieve the last secondary objective which is to provide conclusions and recommendations to improve stakeholder engagement in the travel and leisure industry. This chapter will also achieve the last methodological objective, which is to build a framework, based on the findings of this study to inform firms how they can improve their stakeholder engagement strategies. However, firstly, Chapter five will provide a summary of this study.

#### 5.2 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The primary objective of this study was to explore stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the industry of travel and leisure in South Africa. The following secondary objectives were formulated to achieve the primary objective:

SO<sup>1</sup>: To identify the stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the industry of travel and leisure.

SO<sup>2</sup>: To compare the stakeholder engagement strategies of different firms in the industry of travel and leisure.

SO<sup>3</sup>: To provide conclusions and recommendations to improve stakeholder engagement in the industry of travel and leisure.

The following methodological objectives have been identified to fulfil the primary and secondary research objectives:

MO<sup>1</sup>: To conduct a literature review on stakeholder engagement strategies in South Africa's travel and leisure industry including previous research findings and appropriate theories.

MO<sup>2</sup>: To determine the research methodology that best suits this study in addressing the research problem and objectives.

MO<sup>3</sup>: To collect and analyse data from integrated annual reports, websites, and social media pages of selected firms to understand the strategies used to engage with stakeholders.

MO<sup>4</sup>: To build a framework, based on the findings of this study, to inform firms on how they can improve their stakeholder engagement strategies.

The following summary describes each chapter's contribution to the study in order to meet the research objectives. Chapter one gave an overview of the introduction and background of the study. This was followed by the problem statement clearly formulated in the chapter. The primary, secondary and methodological objectives of the study were outlined.

Chapter two provided definitions of the key concepts of the study such as marketing, marketing strategies, stakeholder theory, stakeholder management and stakeholder engagement. In the marketing-related sections, the chapter gave a background on marketing and how it evolved over the years. Thereafter, stakeholder engagement was explained in more detail, describing how both firms and stakeholders benefit from engagement strategies. This was followed with a discussion of the travel and leisure industry.

Chapter three outlined the research methodology and design that was used for the study. The study used an interpretivism philosophy to understand stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the industry of travel and leisure. The study used a deductive approach, and a case study strategy was employed. The methodology was qualitative in nature and the study used the cross-sectional time horizon to conduct the empirical investigation. The selected public firms were Tsogo Sun, Southern Sun, City Lodges and Sun International. Primary and secondary data was collected using desk research. This chapter further specified that thematic content analysis was selected to analyse the collected data.

Chapter four presented the empirical findings of the study. Based on the thematic data analysis that was conducted, the findings were categorised into themes and subthemes. The findings were presented according to the four themes namely customers, employees, communities and shareholders. The themes were further

expanded to subthemes to explore and showcase the strategies that the firms implement to engage with stakeholders. The following table, Table 5.1, provides an illustration of how the study’s objectives were achieved in each of the study’s chapters.

**TABLE 5.1: ATTAINMENT OF THE STUDY’S OBJECTIVES**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Chapter(s) achieved</b>
<b>Primary objective:</b>	
To explore stakeholder engagement strategies in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa.	Chapter 2, Chapter 4 and Chapter 5
<b>Secondary objectives:</b>	
SO <sup>1</sup> : To identify the stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the industry of travel and leisure.	Chapter 2, Chapter 3 and Chapter 4
SO <sup>2</sup> : To compare the stakeholder engagement strategies of different firms in the industry of travel and leisure.	Chapter 4
SO <sup>3</sup> : To provide conclusions and recommendations to improve stakeholder engagement in the industry of travel and leisure.	Chapter 5
<b>Methodological objectives:</b>	
MO <sup>1</sup> : To conduct a literature review on stakeholder engagement strategies in South Africa’s travel and leisure industry including previous research findings and appropriate theories.	Chapter 2
MO <sup>2</sup> : To determine the research methodology that best suits this study in addressing the research problem and objectives	Chapter 3
MO <sup>3</sup> : To collect and analyse data from integrated annual reports, websites, and social media pages of selected firms to understand the strategies used to engage with stakeholders.	Chapter 4
MO <sup>4</sup> : To build a framework, based on the findings of this study, to inform firms on how they can improve their stakeholder engagement strategies	Chapter 5

It is evident from the summary of the study and in Table 5.1 that the primary, secondary, and methodological objectives of the study were achieved.

**5.3 AN OVERVIEW OF THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

According to the desk research conducted on the firms in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa, stakeholder engagement strategies were categorised into four themes based on the empirical findings. Stakeholder engagement strategies that were visible on the firms’ Facebook pages, integrated annual reports and websites, will be

summarised in the next sections, according to each theme, and relevant recommendations will be provided.

### 5.3.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THEME 1: CUSTOMERS

Based on the firms' Facebook pages, integrated annual reports and websites, it was evident that the firms in the travel and leisure industry employ stakeholder engagement strategies with their customers to enhance their offerings, as well as to attract and retain customers in order to increase sales. Specifically, the subthemes that resulted under this theme were, loyalty programmes, promotions, and competitions. From their integrated annual reports (available on the firms' websites), as well as Facebook pages, the firms engaged with their customers through loyalty programmes and promotions. These stakeholder engagement strategies encouraged the customers to make use of their services, encouraged customers to visit their sites, and the firms' benefited through increases in sales.

The following recommendations are linked to customer engagement strategies:

- It is suggested that firms' update their loyalty programmes on a regular basis to adapt to the shifting needs of customers. For instance, making the loyalty programmes technologically flexible to make them user friendly, allowing customers to track their rewards and personalised offerings digitally.
- It is recommended that firm's incorporate artificial intelligence (AI) in their booking systems so that they can assist customers in finding suitable travel experiences and encourage them to try something different from, and extra to, what they usually book.
- It is suggested that the firms monitor social media trends and leverage them as marketing tools to create competitions that entice customers to participate. For instance, the firms could create a Tik Tok challenge where customers compete by sharing the firms' top destinations they would like to visit and the reason why they chose those destinations.

### 5.3.2 AN OVERVIEW OF THEME 2: EMPLOYEES

The theme employees represented the stakeholder engagement strategies that the firms used to engage with their employees. The subthemes that were found were reward programmes, communication methods, training and development programmes, employee wellness programmes as well as employee volunteering. From the firms' annual reports (available on their websites), it was evident that the firms engage with their employees to improve the working environment of their employees in order for the employees to contribute to the success of the firms. Employees that performed well were celebrated through reward programmes at City Lodges and Sun International. The firms used different communication methods such as communication platforms, emails, and intranets to engage with their employees'. The firms also engaged with their employees through training and development programmes, employee wellness programmes as well as volunteer programmes. The following recommendations are provided regarding employee engagement strategies:

- It is suggested that firms host special events to celebrate their employees such as quarter birthday celebrations, which take place every four months to celebrate employees whose birthdays fall within that quarter of the year.
- As the firms operate in different locations in South Africa, it is recommended that they hold employee competitions between teams in different locations, encouraging teams to improve performance and be rewarded accordingly.
- It is suggested that firms implement strategies that encourage employees to get to know each other and foster positive working environments, such as holding cultural days which employees share meals and learn about each other's cultures.

### 5.3.3 AN OVERVIEW OF THEME 3: COMMUNITIES

For this theme, the firms' stakeholder engagement strategies were aimed at engaging with communities. The subthemes that were found under this theme were community volunteering and community upliftment programmes. It was evident from the firms' annual reports that the firms used different community volunteering initiatives and community upliftment programmes to engage with their communities. The firms

uplifted their communities through donations and enterprise development (Tsogo Sun), work-based learning opportunities (Southern Sun), youth development (City Lodges), and socio-economic development programmes (Sun International).

The following recommendations are suggested to further increase community engagement strategies:

- It is recommended that firms have suggestion boxes available when engaging with communities (for communities to supply ideas) in order to be able to tailor their community upliftment programmes to fit both the firms and communities.
- As a way of engaging with their communities, the firms can collaborate with the locals such as the farmers, artists and entertainers in order to promote their goods and services.
- It is suggested that the firms also engage with their communities by conducting programmes and practices that encourage sustainable behaviours such as planting of trees and running community cleaning projects.
- It is recommended that firms use fundraising initiatives to address certain local problems and use the funds raised to improve those problems. For instance, a firm can host an event at their accommodation properties where local artwork and handicrafts can be sold, with the funds raised going towards the artists as well as the problems the communities face.

#### 5.3.4 AN OVERVIEW OF THEME 4: SHAREHOLDERS

The theme shareholders represented the stakeholder engagement strategies that the firms used to engage with their shareholders or investors. The subthemes that were found under this theme were annual general meetings, as well as remuneration policies and implementation reports. It was evident from the firms' annual reports (available on the firms' websites) that these firms used annual general meetings as well as remuneration policies and implementation reports to engage with their shareholders. The annual general meetings were conducted to provide insights to the shareholders on how the firms are operating as well as to receive feedback and suggestions from shareholders. The remuneration policies and implementation reports were used to cast votes whether suggested policies must be implemented or not for the firms to continue operating.

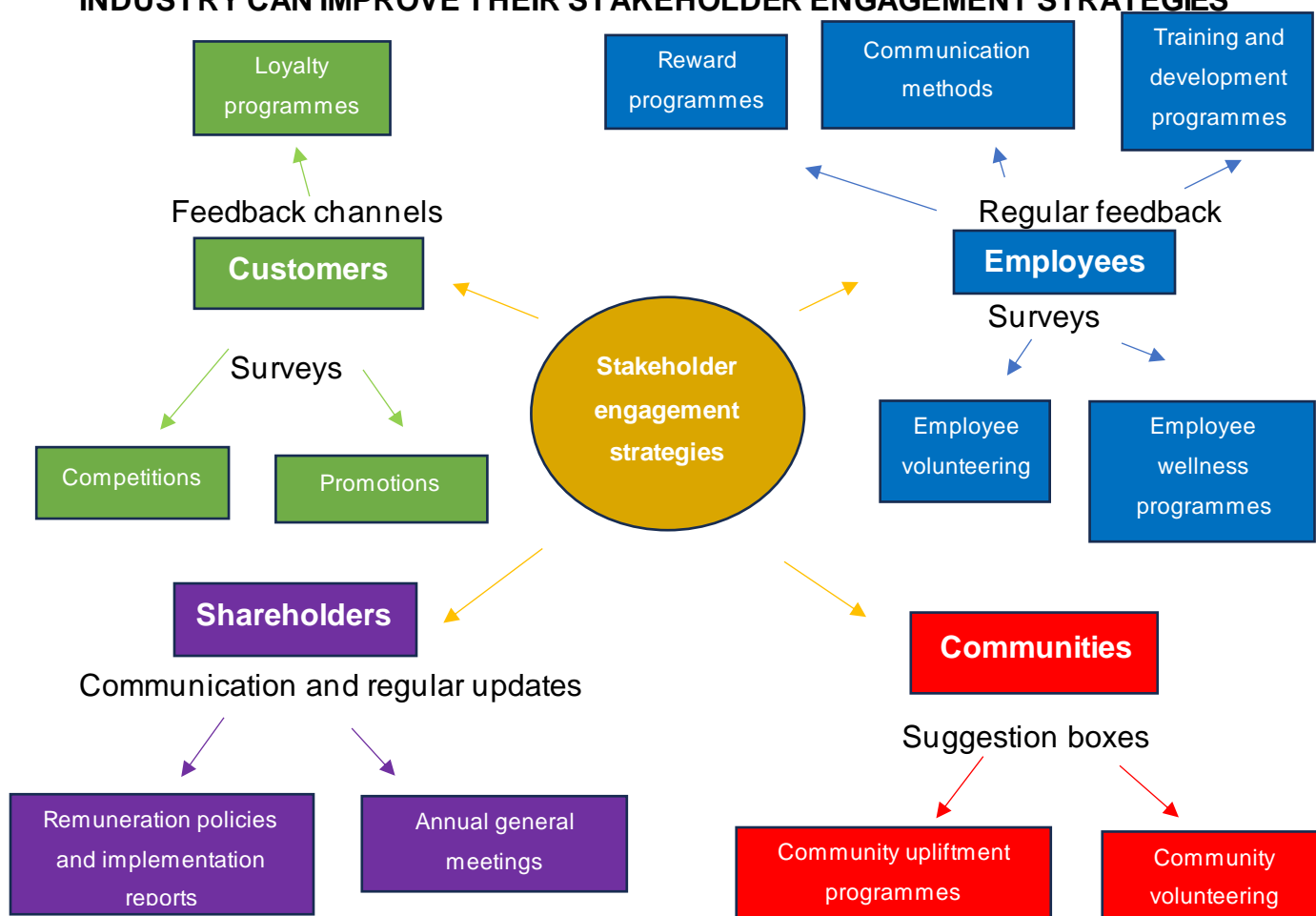
The following recommendations are provided by the researcher in terms of shareholder engagement strategies:

- It is recommended that the firms conduct several meetings whether online or physically to update and engage their shareholders on financial matter, in addition to the annual general meetings that occur once a year.
- It is suggested that firms create forums or mobile applications (apps) through which they can increase regular communication with their shareholders.

### 5.4 FRAMEWORK BASED ON THE STUDY’S FINDINGS

From the findings of this study, it is evident that all the firms use different strategies to engage with their customers, employees, communities and shareholders. Figure 5.1 illustrates how firms in the travel and leisure industry can improve their stakeholder engagement strategies.

**FIGURE 5.1: FRAMEWORK ON HOW FIRMS IN THE TRAVEL AND LEISURE INDUSTRY CAN IMPROVE THEIR STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT STRATEGIES**



To engage with their stakeholders, firms in the travel and leisure industry must continuously assess their stakeholders to meet their changing expectations and preferences. To achieve this, for instance, they can use surveys and feedback channels for their customers and employees, suggestion boxes for their communities and various communication methods to provide regular updates to, and receive feedback from, their shareholders.

Figure 5.1 illustrates that firms in the travel and leisure industry use different strategies to engage with their different stakeholder groups. In particular, customer strategies include loyalty programmes, promotions and competitions. The firms can use surveys and feedback channels as a way of communicating with their customers in order to improve the firms' engagement strategies. This can help their strategies become more technologically flexible and incorporated with Artificial Intelligence. It may also help the firms to be able to take advantage with social media trends as means of improving their engagement strategies. In addition, employee engagement strategies include reward programmes, communication methods, training and development programmes, employee wellness programmes and employee volunteering. Tools such as surveys and feedback channels can be used to engage with employees as means of gathering information which will improve the engagement strategies. The information may be used to host special events and days as means of improving their employee engagement strategies.

Furthermore, community engagement strategies refer to community volunteering and community upliftment programmes with tools such as suggestion boxes that can be used by firms to encourage communities to come up with ideas that can improve the firms' community engagement strategies. This may also increase benefits from local communities. Finally, shareholder engagement strategies are annual general meetings as well as remuneration and implementation policies. Tools such as various communication methods and regular updates could be used to improve firms' stakeholder engagement strategies. These are examples that firms can utilise to identify the expectations and preferences of their stakeholder groups and match those needs with their stakeholder engagement strategies.

## 5.5 THE STUDY'S LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Each study has limitations that pertain to potential weaknesses that the researcher may encounter, which are beyond the control of the researcher, and are closely linked to the research design chosen, constraints related to data analysis, funding and other aspects related to a study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2028:163).

This study only analysed the stakeholder engagement strategies of four firms in the travel and leisure industry, therefore the findings cannot be generalised and applied to other industries. This research study had a short time frame for it to be completed and the researcher was restricted to analyse only some sources of the selected firms. The study was conducted through desk research and used publicly available resources of the firms such as their websites, annual reports and Facebook pages, thus secondary data. There was no primary data that was collected from the firms which could have enhanced the findings with current information.

A recommendation for future research related to this study would be to investigate and compare the stakeholder engagement strategies employed by firms in the industry of travel and leisure in other countries besides those in South Africa and Africa. Another recommendation for future research would be to have an in-depth analysis on how firms engage with all their stakeholders in the industry of travel and leisure and to use a longitudinal time frame to identify trends and changes in stakeholder engagement strategies in the industry.

## 5.6 FINAL CONCLUSION

The study's primary objective, to explore stakeholder engagement strategies in the travel and leisure industry in South Africa, was accomplished in spite of the limitations that were discussed. Four main stakeholder groups with whom firms in the industry engage have been identified. In addition, specific engagement strategies linked to each stakeholder group were revealed in the empirical investigation. Thus, the study's findings and conclusions provide insight on the stakeholder engagement strategies employed in the South African travel and leisure industry. Based on the study's

findings, recommendations were given on how firms can improve their stakeholder engagement strategies. If implemented, these recommended strategies could enhance stakeholder engagement in the industry, which may lead to benefits for both firms and stakeholders.

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# ANNEXURE A: ETHICS CLEARANCE FORM E

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## ANNEXURE A: ETHICS CLEARANCE FORM E



### FACULTY OF BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC SCIENCES DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

#### ETHICAL CONSIDERATION FOR HONOURS TREATISE

##### INSTRUCTIONS

- Should be completed by study leader and student.
- Must be signed off by the student, study leader and HoD.
- Submit completed form to Ms Kim Alexander.
- Please ensure that a summary of the research methodology section of the treatise is attached to this form (*Complete Annexure A*).
- **Please note that by following this ethics route, the study will NOT be allocated an ethics clearance number.**

##### SECTION A – STUDENT ACKNOWLEDGMENT

- The student acknowledges that their research project is for academic qualification purposes only. As such, the research report or any sections thereof **may not be published**.
- The student also acknowledges that their research project **will be a desktop study** and will **make use of publicly available documents or secondary data**. No human subjects will be involved in the study as primary sources of data.

Secondary data, in this instance, refers to data that was collected and processed by someone else for some other purpose but is now being used by the researcher for another reason (Tripathy, 2013). Research utilising secondary data that both exists and has been collected in a public, academic database, for example Google Scholar, is considered desktop research, and generally does not require full ethical approval (Creswell & Poth 2017).

##### SECTION B – STUDENT AND RESEARCH PROJECT DETAILS

Student name & surname	Alinafe Tina Sosola
Student number	221365362
Title of treatise	Stakeholder engagement in the travel and leisure industry: A South African comparison
Qualification	Bachelor of Commerce Honours in Business Management
Department	Business and Economic sciences
Study leader	Prof Chantal Rootman

## ANNEXURE A: ETHICS CLEARANCE FORM E

### SECTION C – ETHICS CRITERIA

<i>(Please tick the appropriate block)</i>		YES	NO
1.	Is there any risk of harm, embarrassment of offence, however slight or temporary, to the participant, third parties or to the communities at large?		x
2.	Is the study based on a research population defined as 'vulnerable' in terms of age, physical characteristics and/or disease status?		x
2.1	Are subjects/participants/respondents of your study:		
2.1.1	Children under the age of 18?		x
2.1.2	NMU staff?		x
2.1.3	NMU students?		x
2.1.4	The elderly/persons over the age of 60?		X
2.1.5	A sample from an institution (e.g. hospital/school)?		X
2.1.6	Handicapped (e.g. mentally or physically)?		X
3.	Does the data that will be collected require consent of an institutional authority for this study? (An institutional authority refers to an organisation that is established by government to protect vulnerable people)		X
3.1	Are you intending to access participant data from an existing, stored repository (e.g. school, institutional or university records)?		X
4.	Will the participant's privacy, anonymity or confidentiality be compromised?		X
4.1	Are you administering a questionnaire/survey that:		
4.1.1	Collects sensitive/identifiable data from participants?		X
4.1.2	Does not guarantee the anonymity of the participant?		X
4.1.3	Does not guarantee the confidentiality of the participant and the data?		X
4.1.4	Will offer an incentive to respondents to participate, i.e. a lucky draw or any other prize?		X
4.1.5	Will create doubt whether sample control measures are in place?		X
5.	Do you wish to publish any research output (i.e. article) from this study?		X

*Please note that if ANY of the questions above have been answered in the affirmative (YES) the student will need to complete the full ethics clearance form (MEOS REC-H application) and submit it with the relevant documentation to the Faculty RECH (Ethics) committee.*

The student hereby certifies that he/she has given his/her research careful ethical consideration and full ethics approval is not required.

### SECTION D – INFORMATION TO BE INCLUDED INTO THE RESEARCH REPORT

*(The section below should be edited and aligned to the specifics of the study)*

#### 1. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

This study will follow the ethical research considerations that apply to all research in the social sciences, which are defined as moral rules and professional codes of conduct to the collection, analysis, reporting, and publication of information about research subjects (Pietilä, Nurmi, Halkoaho & Kyngäs, 2020:49). The research will, at all times, adhere to the following ethical considerations:

##### 1.1 Informed Consent

Where data is freely available on the Internet, books or other public forum, permission for further use and analysis is implied, however, the ownership of the original data must be acknowledged (Tripathy, 2013).

##### 1.2 Anonymity and Confidentiality

To ensure privacy and to protect individuals or institutions within the secondary data, a privacy plan or protocol will be in place to protect the confidentiality of the users. This may include removing identifiable information, securely storing the data and removing any sensitive information prior to distribution of the outcome of the study (where needed).

##### 1.3 Action and Competence of Researchers

The study will be undertaken in an ethically correct manner. Under no circumstances would the researcher in this study make judgments about data, falsify data or plagiarise.

##### 1.4 Respect of Intellectual Property

Intellectual property is the creation arising from intellectual activity, and this study will acknowledge and reference all ideas and sources used in the study.

##### 1.5 Beneficence

The study topic being researched is for degree purposes only and will not be published.

##### 1.6 Non-Maleficence

Non-maleficence makes sure that what is being done is not harmful and that harm is not done by omitting care or treatment. This study will make sure that no harm will come to anyone connected to the study. This body of work and the documents consulted will also adhere to the Protection of Personal Information Act (PoPIA). POPIA governs the collection, processing and sharing of personally identifiable information (PII).

##### 1.7 Applying for ethical consideration

The researcher will apply for ethical consideration from the **Department of Business Management** (Nelson Mandela University) to have the right to research within the intended domain. The research process, in particular data collection, may only be conducted once ethical clearance has been granted, i.e., the ethics form has been signed by the student, the study leader and the Head of Department.

# ANNEXURE A: ETHICS CLEARANCE FORM E

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## SECTION E – SIGNATURES AND DATES



STUDENT

21 APRIL 2024

DATE



STUDY LEADER

25 April 2024

DATE



HEAD OF DEPARTMENT

01/05/2024

DATE

## ANNEXURE B: TURNITIN SUMMARY

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### ANNEXURE B: TURNITIN SUMMARY

221365362 SOSOLA AT

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#### ORIGINALITY REPORT

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<b>5</b> %	<b>3</b> %	<b>1</b> %	<b>3</b> %
SIMILARITY INDEX	INTERNET SOURCES	PUBLICATIONS	STUDENT PAPERS

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#### PRIMARY SOURCES

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<b>1</b>	<b>Submitted to Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University</b> Student Paper	<b>2</b> %
<b>2</b>	<b>busman.mandela.ac.za</b> Internet Source	<b>1</b> %
<b>3</b>	<b>hdl.handle.net</b> Internet Source	<b>&lt;1</b> %
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## ANNEXURE B: TURNITIN SUMMARY

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**ANNEXURE C: GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN WRITING PROCESS – USAGE DECLARATION**

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**ANNEXURE C: GENERATIVE AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES IN WRITING PROCESS – USAGE DECLARATION**

**Student declaration:**

During the undertaking of preparing and writing this mini treatise,

I Alinafe Tina Sosola, 221365362, declare that I have not used AI in an unacceptable manner as described by Nelson Mandela University's Institutional Position Statement on the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence.

I further declare that I have used paraphrasing tools in order to paraphrase information that I gathered to clarify concepts.

I also acknowledge that I am ultimately responsible and accountable for the contents of this mini treatise.

SIGNATURE STUDENT:



DATE:

14 OCTOBER 2024