

**An evaluation of marketing strategies in 5-star
boutique hotels: A case study, Dylan hotel**

Dissertation submitted in part fulfilment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Business Administration
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Declaration

I, Eduardo Gonçalves Pereira, declare that this research is my original work and that it has never been presented to any institution or university for the award of Degree or Diploma. In addition, I have referenced correctly all literature and sources used in this work and this work is fully compliant with the Dublin Business School's academic honesty policy.

Signed: _____

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Eduardo Gonçalves Pereira', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Date: 22nd May 2017.

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Abstract

The hospitality industry in Ireland is growing, and boutique hotels are becoming increasingly popular. Boutique hotels are characteristically different to mainstream hotels, and therefore research specifically about boutique hotel marketing is essential. Marketing strategy is one of the most influential concepts in the hospitality industry, declaring its relevance as a topic of research. This research study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of Dylan, a 5-star boutique hotel in Dublin, Ireland. This was a single-case study designed to gain qualitative information regarding marketing strategies in Dylan hotel by carrying out semi-structured interviews with the marketing manager. Data collected was analysed, categorised, and discussed in relation to the published literature.

The findings of this study were that Dylan has a well-developed marketing strategy focused on personalised promotional methods. The aim of their marketing strategies is to achieve revenue-based goals. The measures of effectiveness of marketing strategies used by Dylan are exclusively financially based, and this is in contradiction with the recommended customer-focused metrics published in hospitality marketing literature. Overall, the marketing strategies of Dylan are effective according to the interviewee, but the researcher concluded that the current strategic plan lacks suitable measures of strategic effectiveness, and therefore has the potential to result in inefficient marketing budget, ineffective marketing strategies, and delayed recognition of deteriorating brand identity in the future. In summary, Dylan has a well-structured marketing strategy based on the elements of the marketing mix, but they do not measure the effectiveness of these strategies in a systematic, customer-orientated way.

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List of abbreviations

B2B - Business to Business
MBA - Master of Business Administration
OTA - Online Travel Agent
PESTEL - Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Environmental and Legal
PR - Public Relations
SEO - Search Engine Optimisation
SWOT - Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats

1. Introduction

Marketing strategy is one of the dominant concepts in the hospitality industry (Moraru, 2016, p.337). It directs business strategy and affects organisational and marketing success (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p. 69; Mircevska and Cuculeski, 2015, pp.26-27; Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). There is an abundance of research in the literature describing the tools used to develop marketing strategies and discussing their relative importance and benefits. However, the hospitality industry is continuously changing, in part due to globalisation and digitalisation of the industry and the consumer (Khunong and Giang, 2014, p.508). These factors contributed to the emergence of the boutique hotel industry and many other changes. As the industry evolves, the canvas upon which marketing strategies are developed, implemented, and evaluated changes, and ongoing research regarding current practices remains vital (Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, pp.275-277). This dissertation will add a small amount of knowledge to the published literature regarding marketing strategies in the boutique hotel industry in Ireland by evaluating the marketing strategies of Dylan hotel, Dublin, based on the structure of the marketing mix and its measures of effectiveness. It aims to add to the body of knowledge already published rather than compete with it, and to assist other researchers and boutique hotels in the development of marketing strategy.

1.1. Background to the research

The essence of marketing is to define and create value to meet customer needs profitably (Kotler, 2016). It involves understanding the customer intimately and being able to use that knowledge to build a relationship to create value and make a profit for

the organisation. One of the factors that makes marketing complex and cumbersome to study is that it is centred around consumer interaction and human behaviour. It is this human factor that makes marketing such a dynamic and variable process, and that complicates its implementation in organisations. Marketing strategies are tools used to achieve marketing goals. Many authors have discussed the importance of marketing strategy in the service industry; however, some organisations continue to avoid practical implementation of marketing theory (Andreu and Rosanas, 2012, p.147).

The tourism industry in Ireland is in a strong position at present. Expenditure by tourists has increased year on year and the number of tourists coming to Ireland for business and leisure is on the rise (CSO, 2017, p.1). Tourism is one of the largest industries in Ireland, accounting for approximately 11% of total employment (IHF, 2015). Ireland is a world-renowned centre of technological excellence, attracting business and leisure tourists alike. Room occupancy in Dublin is the highest in Europe and it is considered an attractive holiday and business destination because of the friendly atmosphere, natural sights and prosperous economy (Fáilte Ireland, 2016a).

Boutique hotels have increased in number and popularity over the last few years and are now an important category in the hospitality industry. They appeal to the consumer desire for luxury, attentive service and a different experience. They market uniquely because their target market is categorically distinct from the general hotel guest population (Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, pp.274-275). The growth of the boutique hotel industry in Dublin is likely to continue to rise as demand for hotel rooms is increasing, tourist spending is rising, and the consumer need for opulence and uniqueness

endures (CSO, 2017, p. 4). This study will evaluate the marketing strategies of Dylan hotel based on the structure of the marketing mix, and analyse how Dylan measures the effectiveness of these strategies by comparing the findings with the published literature on the topic.

1.2. The importance of the research

This research is important to the hospitality industry because it will provide an in-depth analysis of the marketing strategies utilised by a boutique 5-star hotel. This information can subsequently be used to guide marketers towards more effective marketing strategies in the future. This study is important to the researcher as it will broaden his knowledge concerning boutique 5-star hotel marketing strategies. The researcher chose to conduct this study in the hospitality industry because he is pursuing a career in this industry, and gaining a deeper knowledge on this subject will help him as a future marketing manager.

1.3. Topic choice

This topic was chosen because of its relevance to the researcher, the Irish economy and the hospitality industry in Ireland today. The boutique 5-star hotel industry is growing in popularity, but there is a discrepancy between its apparent importance and the available research regarding specific marketing strategies (Rogerson, 2010, p.437). In 2015, 5-star hotels made up 7.2% of hotel rooms in Ireland, their annual sales per room was almost double that of other hotels, and sales had increased year-on-year since 2010 (Murphy, 2016, pp.5-18). This highlights the potential for growth and profit, and supports the importance of the industry in the coming years. This

research aims to contribute to this inadequately researched field with the aim of guiding boutique 5-star hotel marketing strategy.

1.4. Aims and research questions

The aim of this research is to explore the field of marketing strategy in 5-star boutique hotels in Dublin, specifically in Dylan hotel. This will be done by evaluating the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of Dylan based on the 7 elements of the marketing mix. The first objective of the study is to ascertain how product, price, place, promotion, process, physical evidence, and people affect the marketing strategies of Dylan. This will be done by conducting a literature review, and primary research will be conducted via semi-structured interviews with the marketing manager of the hotel. The second objective of this research is to compare the marketing strategies of Dylan with published literature in this field. The third and final objective of this study is to analyse how Dylan measures the effectiveness of their marketing strategies and to discuss this in relation to the literature review conducted.

1.5. Research question

The research question is centred around the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of Dylan based on the framework of the 7 elements of the marketing mix, as this is the strategic foundation for service marketing (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). To achieve the objective of this study, the researcher formulated the following research question:

How effective is the marketing strategy of Dylan?

The effectiveness of the marketing strategies of Dylan will be evaluated based on product, price, place, promotion, process, physical evidence, and people. The

researcher will analyse the marketing strategy of Dylan in relation to each of these elements, and will then compare its marketing strategy with the literature. The complexity of the service industry requires each of the elements of the marketing mix to be analysed in detail. To assist with answering this question the researcher formulated the following sub-research questions:

**How do the elements of the marketing mix affect the
marketing strategy of Dylan?**

The elements of the marketing mix, known as the 7Ps, are the “ingredients needed to create viable strategies for meeting customer needs profitably in a competitive market place” (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.44). Each one is important in the development of hospitality marketing strategy. The product plays an important role in marketing strategy of hotels as the level of service the hotel provides and the amenities available distinguish it from competitors (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.44). Many factors affect the price a consumer deems acceptable such as ease of booking, perceived quality of facilities, and effectiveness of other marketing strategies. Place is an imperative strategic tool in the hospitality industry. The location of the hotel is important as it must be in an area to which the target market is attracted. Strategic choice of hotel location leads to increased short term and long term revenue (Yang, Wong and Wang, 2012, p.675). In the hospitality industry, promotional campaigns, use of third party online travel agents, website quality and design, social media campaigns, interaction with reservations personnel, merchandise, and PR strategies are all means to communicate with the guest to promote the hotel. Slow bureaucratic processes lead to loss of time and increase in staff frustration, decrease in consumer satisfaction, decrease in productivity and increase in hotel costs. Therefore, streamlined processes that are well integrated with hotel operations lead to increased productivity,

satisfaction and success. The physical evidence of a hotel includes the building, interior decoration, exterior landscaping, and all other tangible marketing queues. People remain at the heart of marketing, as marketing is an emotional field that appeals to human thoughts and desires (). As it is a service industry, the staff, not the product, are the main providers of the guest experience (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.16; Soler, 2012; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, pp.47-48). Knowing how Dylan hires, maintains, trains, and motivates staff is important to marketing strategy success. This sub-question aims to ascertain, in a well-structured manner, how Dylan builds its marketing strategy.

How does Dylan measure the effectiveness of its marketing strategy?

Measuring the effectiveness of marketing strategies is essential in hospitality, as the organisation must know how to allocate budget and when to modify poorly-performing strategies (Milichovsky, 2017, p.46; Högl and Hupp, 2007, p.367). Therefore, the measurement of effectiveness of strategies is an integral part of the evaluation of the marketing strategies of Dylan. To answer the main research question, the measures of success Dylan uses must be analysed.

1.6. Research approach

The methodology of this study is designed to maximise the information gained to answer the research question. The study aims to evaluate marketing strategies of Dylan and compare them with the literature. The methodology of this study involves six pillars: Qualitative design, interpretivist philosophy, inductive approach, single-case-study strategy, non-probability convenience sampling, and multi-method research choice. The research involved completing a review of the literature, holding semi-structured interviews with the marketing manager of Dylan, analysing the

qualitative data collected, and discussing the findings to conclude how effective the marketing strategy of Dylan is.

1.7. Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study can be divided into the limitations of the subject and the limitations of the methodology. The limitations of this subject are that the evaluation of marketing strategy is intrinsically difficult, as marketing strategy is interlinked with every department of a hotel. It is therefore difficult to separate marketing strategy from the managerial operation. The study of marketing strategy is also subjective. There is a wealth of published literature on the topic, but authors have different views on how marketing strategy is best defined, designed, implemented and measured in the hotel industry. In terms of methodological limitations, the use of a single case-study strategy is an innate limitation. Case studies have limited generalisability, and the use of convenience sampling to choose the case may have inadvertently introduced sample bias (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp.400; 304-305). Time constraints and lack of resources were also potential limitations in this study.

1.8. Organisation of the dissertation

This dissertation is divided into seven chapters. Chapter one is the introduction to the dissertation; it describes the setting for this research case including the background to the hospitality industry in Ireland, the importance of this, the aims and objectives of the study, and the research questions. The overall approach to the study and its limitations are briefly described. Chapter two is the literature review of this research. It is divided into eight sections; the definition of marketing and its importance, the implications of marketing strategy, the framework of the marketing mix, an overview

of the hospitality industry in Ireland and of 5-star and boutique hotels are all discussed to provide background to the topic. Marketing strategies and measures of effectiveness used by the hospitality industry are then explored to provide a basis against which to compare the marketing strategies of Dylan. Chapter three provides a comprehensive description of, justification for, and philosophy behind the methodology of this research. Chapter four provides an overview of Dylan, the hotel at the centre of this case-study; its strengths, weaknesses, and position in the competitor market competitors are described. Chapter five includes the findings of this study and discusses them in the context of the academic literature. Chapter six concludes this dissertation by discussing the implications of the strategies used by Dylan. The researcher also offers recommendations for future research in this field.

2. Literature review

2.1. Introduction

This chapter will discuss the content of relevant literature published to date. It aims to build upon the works already published and to be up-to-date, relevant, and informative to the reader. It also acts as a basis upon which this research study will be performed, and will be used as a standard against which to compare the marketing strategies of Dylan. This review will begin with a global approach to the field of marketing and marketing strategy before focusing on the hospitality industry specifically.

To fully understand the intricacies of marketing strategies in the hospitality industry, it is essential to study the background to the topic. In section two, the history and definition of marketing will be described and their relevance to this study discussed. Marketing as a general concept is considered relevant to this study as its defining features are the basis for marketing strategy. In section three, the concepts of business strategy and marketing strategy will be discussed. The role of this section is to inform the researcher and the reader regarding the academic theory supporting marketing strategies and their function in the overall objectives of a company. Section four examines the marketing mix, one of the tools used in the development of marketing strategies. This section will act as a framework against which the researcher will evaluate the marketing strategies of this case study. Section five will provide a background to the tourism and hospitality industries in Ireland, emphasising boutique hotels, and provide environmental information regarding the industry in which this case study is set. Section six will evaluate the marketing strategies used by the hospitality

industry using the approach of the 7Ps of the marketing mix. Section seven will analyse the measurement of marketing strategy effectiveness.

2.2. Marketing

Defining marketing is a subject of much debate, publication, and importance. Baker stated, “there are as many definitions of marketing as there are people willing to make one” (Baker and Hart, 2016, p.8). The role of defining marketing is to focus on critical questions, improve research, assist in discussion of issues, and promote the legitimacy of marketing as an organisational and academic field (Gundlach, 2007, p.243; Huh, 2016, pp.356-358). The importance of marketing to the financial success of businesses has been widely published. The hospitality industry marketing expenditure is high. To justify this spending, it is necessary to discuss the potential benefits of well-developed marketing strategy, the challenges that this poses to a business in the hospitality industry, and how the history and academia of marketing are important to the development of the strategy in a modern hotel (Sheth and Sisodia, 2002, p.350).

McCarthy introduced the concept of the marketing mix, commonly known as the 4Ps of marketing – price, product, place, and promotion, in 1964. However, the concept of the 4Ps did not become part of the American Marketing Association’s formal definition of marketing until 1985. This became the foundation of marketing for decades to come and has impacted the way in which marketing strategy is developed (McCarthy, 1981, p.261; Wilkie and Moore, 2007, p.269). In 1984, Levinson and Levinson (2011, p.17) introduced the concept of business-to-business (B2B) and consumer relationships in marketing, broadening the remit of marketing strategy in business to involve use of

marketing theory in every department of a company. Nowadays, marketing is described as “the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit (...) It pinpoints which segments the company is capable of serving best and it designs and promotes the appropriate products and services” (Kotler, 2016). It is “meeting needs profitably”. Its success creates demand and need for a product, allowing the organisation to direct product development (Kotler and Keller, 2016, pp.25-27). The evolution of the definition of marketing over time has changed how marketing strategy is viewed, executed, and its success. These definitions of marketing have modernised to include the role of the consumer, the relationship between consumer and business, the effect of marketing on each part of a company, and the impact of marketing on society (Tresidder, 2015, p.721; Moorman and Day, 2016, p.18; Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p.69). Marketing has earned the attention of business executives because its importance to organisational strategy and success has been repeatedly proven.

“Like its language itself, marketing shape shifts with time”; Keefe (2008, p.29) reminds us that not only is the definition of marketing changing, so too is marketing itself. Digitalisation, the availability of new technology, the increased focus on transparency, and the evolution of statistical analysis and marketing feedback are key concepts that distinguish modern from traditional marketing (Moorman and Day, 2016, p.6; Dahlen and Rosengren, 2016, p 363). The Marketing Institute states “In a rapidly changing world virtually all marketers are re-evaluating how they should do marketing. Different structures, new processes—everything is on the table” (Moorman and Day, 2016, p.6). These changes have made marketing integration into organisational framework

necessary to achieve company goals and have increased consumer participation and power (Kumar, 2015, p.4; Strauss and Frost, 2016, p.5).

2.3. Marketing strategy

To understand the intricacies and importance of marketing strategy in business, the overall business strategy must be considered. It has been shown that effective marketing strategy is intertwined with the business strategy of an organisation (Hunt, 2002, p.268). The common theme for most definitions of business strategy is the focus on long term goals, programmes to achieve goals, linking company to environment, and a strategic plan for implementation (Ronda-Pupo and Guerras-Martin, 2012, p.165). Marketers must be cognisant of the long-term business objectives and strategy of an organisation to design an appropriate marketing strategy. Continuous feedback and review is required for a strategy to be successful and remain current (Mircevska and Cuculeski, 2015, pp.27-28).

Successful strategy is dependent on extensive knowledge of and research into the environment in which the organisation exists to enable preparation for environmental change that may affect the business (Johnson *et al.*, 2014, p.33; Ramaseshan, Ishak and Kingshott, 2013, p.1227). A PESTEL analysis of the external environment (political, economic, social, technological, environmental and legal) is key to successful marketing strategy because it involves an analysis of the environment that the consumer and the business share, and this is essential to learning about factors that affect consumer behaviour and attitude. A SWOT (Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) of the company must also be completed to inform of the resources available and the areas of weakness within the company, at present and in

the future. This influences marketing strategy because this information is essential in designing a strategy that optimises businesses strengths and has a keen understanding of the consumer (Chiau-Ching *et al.*, 2012, pp.2552-2553; Kotler and Armstrong, 2012, pp.91-94; Blythe and Martin, 2016, pp.24-25; 32).

Strategic marketing has expanded to involve every area of the organisation (Băcanu, 2015, p.16). McKenna stated, "Marketing is and everything is marketing" (1991, p.79). However, it must be remembered that whilst marketing strategy involves consumer relationship, company reputation, society and many other parties, the aim of long term marketing is to sell a product or a service; all other focuses are a means to that end (Băcanu, 2015, p.17; Palmer, Simmons and Mason, 2014, p.383). Marketing strategy directs organisational mission and provides lasting competitive advantage (Mircevska and Cuculeski, 2015, pp.26-27; Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). It is the medium through which marketing and organisational goals can be achieved in a structured and continuous way (Constantin, 2016, p.3). Marketers must be aware of the need for constant re-evaluation and adaptation of the strategy. Alhakimi and Qasem highlight the role of the customer in marketing strategy, stating that the aim of marketing strategy is to satisfy customer needs as well as to meet other company objectives (2014, pp.26-27).

To implement marketing strategy, a strategic market plan is used; this is a structured, organised management process that guides a business through the marketing strategy by connecting company objectives and resources to the market (Kotler, 2004, p.134; Ranchhod and Gurău, 2007, p.12). Alhakimi and Qasem state that a well-designed marketing strategy involves 3 stages; analysis of the goals that are to be

achieved, analysis of the environment, and creation of the strategic processes (2014, pp.26-27). After implementation, the strategy must be audited, evaluated, adjusted, and re-evaluated frequently with updated market knowledge to support any changes (Ranchhod and Gurău, 2007, p.12; Ramaseshan Ishak and Kingshott, 2013, pp.1225). Clear objectives provide a concrete benchmark against which to compare the results and therefore the effectiveness of marketing strategy (Kitchen, 2006, p.465). Measuring the effectiveness of a marketing strategy is essential to the strategic planning process.

One of the major changing factors in marketing strategy development in recent years has been the introduction and advancement of digital technology. Digital customers are more likely to participate and are more loyal than traditional consumers (Palmer, Simmons and Mason, 2014, pp.383-385). Effective marketing strategy cannot control consumer opinion, but it can direct it and foster positive attitudes towards the organisation (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p.69). Therefore, digital marketing strategy is important as it can change the way a consumer thinks, change the environment in which we live, and change societal attitudes and beliefs. After all, the aim of marketing strategy is to make a company competitive, achieve its goals, and satisfy the customer; changing customer perception of the company can achieve this.

2.4. The marketing mix

The marketing mix was developed over several years with contributions from McCarthy in 1964, Borden in 1965, and Booms and Bitner in 1980. Booms and Bitner stated that the 4 Ps were not sufficiently comprehensive to use in the service industry, and added the 3 process, people, and physical evidence to the marketing mix (Ramo

et al., 2015; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.44; Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). Nowadays the marketing mix is considered the heart of marketing strategy, and consists of the 7Ps—product/service, price, place, promotion, process, physical evidence, and people (Grönroos, 1989, pp.52-53; Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, pp.42-43).

The role of an organisation is to use the elements of the marketing mix in an effective and updated manner to achieve the company's goals through marketing (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). To be effective, the 7Ps must provide a consistent marketing strategy, work well together, and build on the strengths of the business (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.68). Although the implementation of a marketing plan is highly dependent on the support of marketing managers and other departments, it has been shown that managers often have little marketing training development, and this can lead to poor implementation and less success (Alhakimi and Qasem, 2014, p.27; Constantin, 2016, p.4). This multi-departmental input is a challenge for marketers, who may have developed the strategy but have little control over its implementation and success (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.43). Involvement of non-marketing staff in the development and implementation of marketing strategy from an early stage is a key success factors in marketing strategy (Ramaseshan Ishak and Kingshott, 2013, pp.1238-1239).

Product

A product is any tangible item that ends up as the final selling product; it is “a bundle of benefits” (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.122). A broader definition of products in the context of the marketing mix can include services, people, places, or organisations,

and this is more applicable to the service industry. A service is something that is experienced, and includes both the physical and experiential aspects (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, pp.105-106). Brand name on items affects guest perception (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.62; Kushwaha and Agrawal, 2015, p.87). Brand imaging and packaging are secondary characteristics of the product element of the marketing mix (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.122).

Price

Price is the value of a service, and is non-financial as well as financial (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.62). Kotler and Armstrong (2016, p.324) describe price as the monetary cost of a product or a service. More generally, price can be defined as the combined value needed to use the benefits of a product or service. The aim of the pricing element of marketing mix is to decide on a price that will create profit, reduce losses, and boost market share (Sangkaworn and Mujtaba, 2010, p.3). Value is rated by consumers using price, product quality, and product suitability. In discussing pricing, Blythe and Martin stated, "customers are usually prepared to pay a little more for something that really works well for them" (2016, pp.11-12). As well as cost and consumer factors, competitor factors play a significant role in pricing strategy (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.181).

There are non-financial elements that affect price include time, perceived quality, and attitude (Blythe and Martin, 2016, pp.11-12). Satellite costs are costs that are not included in the written price of a product or service, but that the customer is likely to incur in its use or acquisition. Although satellite costs are perceived differently by consumers, they usually do not go unnoticed and so organisations must be mindful of

their effect (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.62). Sales promotion tools sometimes involve price reduction. Temporary reductions in price reduce the perceived quality of services, but it is sometimes a useful tool to promote brand awareness and entice new guests (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). Location affects price because the environment influences marketing strategy design (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.62).

Place

The place element of the marketing mix refers to the distribution channels used by guests and by the organisation to deliver the product or service to the consumer (Kiatsongchai and Choibamroong, 2014, p.179; Pour, Nazari and Emami, 2013, p.3275). It focuses on how a company can place itself to maximise convenience for consumers, so that the product or service is sold effectively and efficiently (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.174). Distribution channels are connections between people and places where marketing strategy can be designed to maximise organisational goals (Blythe and Martin, 2016, pp.174-175). Examples in the service industry include travel agents, company websites, and mobile applications providing information and booking facilities. The final element of these distribution channels is the selling place. In relation to the service industry, this refers to the place where the service is consumed (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.63). Target market, volume of that potential market, and practicality for suppliers are factors that affect place strategy. Some factors to consider in the service industry include traffic, wealth and amenities of the area, and the characteristics of the people (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.63; Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.11). Consumer satisfaction increases with ease of availability, and place strategy has substantial control over the availability of a product or service. Increased variety of distribution

channels is usually beneficial in terms of accessibility (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.43).

Promotion

Promotion is the combination of methods an organisation uses to engage, communicate with, and build rapport with customers to create profitable relationships (Kotler and Armstrong, 2016, p.447). It is how an organisation shares a message with customers. The promotional mix are tools that can be used to create and implement an effective promotional strategy. Elements include advertising, personal selling, public relations (PR), direct marketing and sales promotion (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.69; Pour, Nazari and Emami, 2013, p.3275; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.46).

PR encompass all attempts to create interest in an organisation through events, media coverage, sponsorship and publicity (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.197). Word-of-mouth is a low-cost, highly effective PR tool. It is “probably the most powerful communication medium in existence”. It is effective because it is interactive, provides feedback and is considered credible by potential customers (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.223). Social media is often used as a tool to encourage word-of-mouth as it allows an organisation to connect with each customer individually, and allows customers to connect with one another. It has revolutionised communicating with the consumer, as it is measurable and bidirectional (Baxi, Panda and Karani, 2016, p.2). This is advantageous for the organisation as it nurtures a relationship with the consumer and allows the consumer to feel involved, strengthening the brand connections (Palmer, Simmons and Mason, 2014, p.385).

Advertising has the same aim as PR, but involves a paid message conveyed through a medium (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.200). It is a means through which brand image can be built, and increases service value. Ample financing increases advertising effectiveness, thereby increasing brand awareness and perceived quality (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.43).

Sales promotion is a short-term action to encourage a customer to buy a product, and personal selling is an action that creates a new customer relationship under instruction of the company to encourage customers to buy products. Hotels must promote nationally and sometimes internationally, a strategy that can be more expensive and complex than local marketing. It is important because guests to hotels are often from a wide area. The internet and social media are cheaper means through which to perform large scale promotion. Conference facilities can be marketed by direct selling to organisers or to executives, whereas normal hotel room packages can be promoted via sales promotion and advertising (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.64).

Promotion can be optimised by clear setting of goals and analysis of the current promotion situation, choosing promotional tools to suit these objectives, implementing the tools, evaluating the success, and creating a long-term strategy involving these promotional tools (Sangkaworn and Mujtaba, 2010, pp.3-4).

Process

Processes are the structure of services (Kushwaha and Agrawal, 2015, p.89). They are the series of choices and steps taken to maximise the value of the raw materials used to create a product or service (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.281). The process

aspect of the marketing mix can be thought of as the structure upon which the entire service industry depends (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.220). A well-designed process is structured based on the consumer perspective. This leads to consumer satisfaction, but also has been shown to increase employee satisfaction. Inefficient service arises when processes are slow, designed poorly, and involve unnecessary steps or skip important ones, resulting in customer dissatisfaction. They lead to decreased organisational productivity and therefore loss of profit. An important concept of the process element of the marketing mix is to ensure that processes are replicable, consistent, and do not vary, as consistency increases perceived value (Lovelock, Wirtz, 2016, p.41;220; Vrana and Zafiroopoulos, 2011, p.785). The process element of the marketing mix is perhaps the area that is most improved using digital technology (Kushwaha and Agrawal, 2015, p.89). Food ordering, supplier relationships, and reservations have all been changed for the better (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.65).

Physical evidence

Physical evidence is any tangible item that customers use as representative examples of the service a company provides. Loyalty and brand image are increased through marketing strategy based on physical evidence and it has a positive effect on competitive advantage. It is particularly important in the service industry as it is easier to assess the quality of a tangible item rather than that of a service (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.284; Prapannetivuth, 2015, p.3904; Kushwaha and Agrawal, 2015, pp.85-87). A well marketed service will have tangible evidence at each step of the consumer interaction process to improve perceived quality and to improve customer attitude and experience (Grădinaru, Toma and Marinescu, 2016, p.313). Physical evidence provided to customers to take home with them can act as positive reminders of the

service characteristics and quality, as a catalyst for repurchasing, or as an incentive for friends and family to trial the service (Blythe and Martin, 2016, pp.283-284).

Some authors describe the sixth P of the marketing mix as the physical environment rather than the physical evidence. Although the general concept is the same the specific definition of physical environment in the context of the marketing mix differs. Physical environment describes the setting in which a service takes place, including the physical surroundings and all tangible items that a customer experiences during the delivery of the service. Smaller organisations can have limited competitiveness when it comes to physical environment as facilities and finances may be more scarce. Physical environment affects the customer's experience because it portrays the organisation's quality. It sets an organisation apart from its competitors by product or service positioning and differentiation (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, pp.276-280).

People

People are key to the marketing strategy of any organisation, and play a particularly important role in the success of the service industry (Prapannetivuth, 2015, p.3905). The people element of the marketing mix describes all people involved in service or product supply. Employees in the service industry influence brand position, sales and organisational productivity and efficiency. Personal characteristics and attributes, training, and actions of employees affect the consumer attitude to a service. They are key stakeholders in determining quality and are often the competitive differentiator between organisations. Employees must be recruited, trained, motivated, and assessed to ensure they are beneficial to an organisation, highlighting the importance of human resource management (Grădinaru, Toma and Marinescu, 2016, pp.312-313;

Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, pp.302-303). Keeping morale high by maintaining a positive, supportive, and pleasant work environment creates a feeling of shared values and improves brand image and customer perception (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.277).

Customers are another important subset in the people element of the marketing mix. Goldsmith and others suggested that the customer should form the eighth element of the marketing mix due to their influence on marketing strategy (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). Customers are the target market of marketing strategy, but they also shape its development, implementation, and success (Grădinaru, Toma and Marinescu, 2016, p.313).

2.5. The hospitality industry

2.5.1. Tourism in Ireland

Tourism is a significant contributor to the GDP (Gross Domestic Product) and employment of most countries, and forms 10% of global GDP (WTTC, 2017a, p.1). This establishes its importance as a topic of research (Mircevska and Cuculeski, 2015, p.26). Tourism results in increased domestic industry, upgraded infrastructure, and attraction of foreign investment. Although there are many elements that make a destination attractive for tourists, marketing and advertising of the destination remains vital (Seetanah and Sannassee, 2015, pp.202-203).

The tourism industry in Ireland is important to the economy and is growing. In 2016, tourism accounted for 5.8% of Ireland's GDP (WTTC, 2017b, p.3). More than €6 billion was generated from tourists, with €1.75 billion of that coming from domestic tourists. This was an increase of 9.5% on 2015 figures (CSO, 2017, p.4). Foreign tourists

increased by 13.1% in 2015, with Britain being the largest overseas market with 41.6% of tourists. The influence of digital technology and digital marketing is also becoming increasingly evident in the tourism industry in Ireland. In 2015, 83% of tourists to Ireland used the internet to plan their trip (Fáilte Ireland, 2016a).

An analysis of the tourism industry in Ireland shows that it is a promising environment for business. Politically and socially, Ireland is an attractive destination for national and international tourism. In the present situation of worldwide political instability, Ireland is a relatively safe and stable nation with an open immigration culture and a welcoming attitude (WTTC, 2017a, p.13). From an economic point of view, Ireland is a developed country with a diverse economy. Although affected by the international economic downturn in 2009, Ireland's economy has improved steadily since 2013 (Trading Economics, 2017). Information technology is one of the leading industries in the country. Ireland's reputation as a centre of technological innovation makes it an attractive destination for business and leisure travellers from all over the world, and means that tourism businesses can benefit from advanced digital systems that can increase their productivity. Environmentally, Ireland is known worldwide as a "green" nation with an abundance of attractions for tourists to visit (Reilly, 2013).

Overall, the tourism industry in Ireland is thriving, and there is further growth anticipated in the coming years. The above analysis confirms its attractiveness as a tourist destination and as an appealing industry in which to work. The hospitality industry is affected greatly by tourism, and its promising outlook means that the hospitality industry must be ready to extract maximum benefit in the coming years.

2.5.2. Hospitality industry in Ireland

The hotel industry in Ireland has done well over the last number of years. In 2015, there were 798 hotels in Ireland (56,240 rooms). Occupancy in Ireland was high at 70% (Fáilte Ireland, 2016a), and occupancy in Dublin was the highest in Europe at 82.5% (PWC, 2017, p. 22). In terms of holiday-makers, hotels were the most popular choice of accommodation with 19% of tourists staying there. Seasonality continues to be prominent in the industry, with 33% of tourists visiting in between June and August and only 18% visiting between January and March (Fáilte Ireland, 2016a).

Challenges to hotel industry in Ireland over the last few years include the global economic climate, lack of accommodation, poor awareness of tourism sites and attractions, terrorism threats, global civic and political unrest, Brexit and skills shortages (Fáilte Ireland, 2016a; ITIC, 2016). The Irish Tourist Industry Federation estimates that 50 new hotels will be needed in 2017 to cope with the current demands of the tourism industry and the anticipated increase in tourism this year (Clarke, 2016). To maximise growth potential, it is necessary for marketers to focus on the positive aspects of the industry whilst political bodies help to rectify these problems. It is important that the hospitality industry recognise its strengths and growth potential, without ignoring its volatility. Tourism and hospitality groups need to work together to build a strong foundation that would withstand an adverse economic situation.

2.5.3. Boutique hotels

The concept of a boutique hotels emerged in the 1980s as a rebellion against the conformity and sameness of large hotel chains (Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, pp.275-277). Schragger and Rubell coined the phrase “boutique hotel” to describe Morgans in

New York. The aim was to create a unique hotel that appealed to the five senses, and that appealed to a niche group of people rather than to the entire population of potential tourists. “We treated a hotel as more than just a place to sleep—a place for somebody to have fun, a visual feast” (Rogerson, 2010, pp.427-428). Attention to detail and personalisation of service distinguish boutique hotels from large hotel chains. They are usually characterised by less than 100 rooms and a small area of meeting space and have unique interior design styling, ample amenities, an atmosphere of comfort and luxury, and use of refurbished buildings. Innovative use of modern technology is important (Alves, 2013, pp.50-51; Khosravi, Malek and Ekiz, 2014, p.29; Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, p.275). Some authors state that boutique hotels must be of five-star standard and have high quality food and beverage facilities (Firat, Turker, and Metin, 2014, p.282), whilst other authors emphasise the importance of atmosphere rather than amenities.

A boutique hotel can be described as a customer experience, that is set up in a way to best meet customer needs (Alves, 2013, p.51; Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, pp.274-275). Unique design, personalised service, comfort, quality, location, and culture differentiate boutique from traditional hotels (Kiatsongchai and Choibamroong, 2014, p.175; Van Hartesvelt, 2006, p. 32). Some large hotels identify themselves as boutique, but many authors dispute the practicality of a large chain boutique hotel, because standardisation and generic service are often inherent in that type of establishment (Henderson, 2011, p.218; Nankervis, 2005, p.235; Brant, 2016; Gyurácz-Németh, 2015, pp. 87-88)

The aim of a boutique hotel is to be profitable whilst diverging from the usual hospitality business plan of standardisation and cost reduction strategies (Alves, 2013, p.51). The uniqueness provided by a boutique hotel adds value that can supersede the additional running costs. Sensorial interactions such as positive sounds, surfaces, visual triggers and smells, and psychological benefits such as feelings of relaxation and comfort all influence the customer hotel experience. Boutique hotels appeal to the consumers need for fashionable and designer items, where items are valued based on reputation as well as quality (Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, p.274; Rogerson, 2010, pp.427-428).

Luxury hotels often compete with boutique hotels. A luxury hotel is characterised by high quality premises, ample amenities, and attentive service (Fáilte Ireland, 2016b; (Chen and Chen, 2014, p.79). In 2015, five-star hotel sales accounted for 41% of the total sales in the industry (Euromonitor, 2016). Brand loyalty, brand awareness, service experience and perceived quality affect success of 5-star hotels (Narteh *et al.*, 2013, p.412). In conclusion, boutique hotels are a core element of the hospitality industry, are becoming increasingly popular, and are considered “one of the most interesting developments in the hospitality sector of the leisure industry” (Horner and Swarbrooke 2005, p.369). They differ from mainstream hotels in many ways, including design, business model, target market, and pricing. The marketing strategy developed and used by boutique hotels must reflect the uniqueness of the product and maximise profitability by targeting the right customers and using the right methods. Therefore, the study of boutique hotel market strategy is necessary because it differs from other hotel strategy, and it is important because of the success of the boutique hotel industry (Rogerson, 2010, p.437).

2.6. Marketing strategies in the hospitality industry

In developing marketing strategies in the hospitality industry, marketers must understand the principles of tourism marketing. Designing a tourism marketing strategy involves an in-depth knowledge of marketing definitions and concepts, and a clear understanding of the tourism market and the customer (Mircevska and Cuculeski, 2015, p.26; Tresidder, 2015, p.711). National organisations must be incorporated into an organisation's individual tourism marketing strategy; marketers should understand and implement a strategy supporting the national touristic programme to ensure a consistent and cohesive message is delivered to the customer (Mircevska and Cuculeski, 2015, p.35; Vrana and Zafiropoulos, 2011, p.785).

To be successful, hospitality marketing strategy must be unique, proactive, and focus on brand reputation (Tresidder, 2015, p.711). The hospitality industry is an emotional one, and marketers must train to be aware of and react to the cultural sensitivities and differences of potential guests (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.16). Using communication and confidence in marketing strategy design improves the customer relationship, and this leads to re-patronage (Narteh *et al.*, 2013, p.413). Hotel marketing strategies should aim to send a clear message to potential guests regarding a unique product (Cai *et al.*, 2000, pp.41-42).

Hospitality businesses are unique in that they offer a service composed of multiple products and services to create a consumer experience, and they must be personalised to improve customer satisfaction. Boutique hotels create diversity in the tourism industry by offering an alternative hospitality experience. Customer loyalty is higher in boutique hotels, and one study of guest experiences suggested that this was

almost entirely due to customised quality service and reliability of good service (Herjanto, Erickson and Calleja, 2017, p.262; Firat, Turkur and Metin, 2014, pp.82-86). Marketing strategy in the hospitality industry is often based on the 7Ps of the marketing mix. When used well, it helps to design effective branding strategies, create happy customers, and earn sustainable competitive advantage (Sangkaworn and Mujtaba, 2010, p.2; Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). Below, the marketing strategies used by the hospitality industry will be discussed under the structure of the 7Ps of the marketing mix.

Product

Marketing a service differs from marketing a tangible product in that emotional appeals are more successful than practical ones. People have an increased emotional response to services, so emotional marketing strategies improve perception of hotel product and quality. This then leads to increased consumer loyalty and positive feedback (Lemon and Verhoef, 2016, p.72; Chen and Chen, 2014, p.91). Leavitt described the importance of emotional appeals in service marketing, stating “People don’t ask for facts in making up their minds. They would rather have one good, soul-satisfying emotion than a dozen facts” (McPherson and Fuller, 1997, p.82). An example of effective emotional appeals in hospitality include using full-screen photographs on a hotel website to make the guests feel they are part of the moment (Soler, 2012). Packages are tools used to increase guest perception of product, such as offering holiday packages with transportation, food, or leisure facilities value (Oh and Pizam, 2008, pp.63-69). In boutique hotels, product differentiation and marketing based on high service quality are key strategic tools (Kiatsongchai and Choibamroong, 2014, p.171). Product is a central element in the marketing mix. In the hospitality

industry, this element represents the service provided to a consumer. Marketing strategies based on services are complex, intricate, and must incorporate emotional as well as practical appeals. To market effectively using the product element of the marketing mix, marketers must understand the service, the consumer, and the potential relationship that could be developed between the two.

Price

Pricing is a strategic determinant in the hospitality industry. Factors that affect financial pricing determination in the hospitality industry are service standards, perceived value, and guest return intention (Khuong and Giang, 2014, p.509). Four structures for pricing used in the industry are economy, skimming, penetration, and premium. Economy pricing involves using a low price to market a low-quality product. Skimming involves using higher pricing to sell a lower quality product; this strategy can generate an appearance of service superiority and lead to increase in revenue. Penetration involves using a low price to market a high-quality service; this strategy has the benefit increasing the market share of an organisation. A premium pricing strategy uses high prices to market a high-quality service (Dudovskiy, 2016).

Pricing strategy is particularly important in luxury and boutique hotels. They use prices above the industry average and must maintain high standards and use innovation and attention to detail to ensure the customer perceives value for money (Khuong and Giang, 2014, p.503; Firat, Turker, and Metin, 2014, p.282; Narteh *et al.*, 2013, p.412). In the boutique hotel industry, pricing is usually premium; however, sales promotion strategies can be used to increase penetration and customer exposure at times. Discounts on premium pricing are attractive to customers but can reduce the perceived

service quality (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). Non-financial costs to the consumer include a hotel offering chauffeured transport at an additional cost; this increases financial cost for the guest, but decreases stress and time (Blythe and Martin, 2016, pp.11-12). To effectively design a marketing strategy based on pricing, the marketer must understand the service, the mind-set of the customer and how they perceive it.

Place

Place strategy in the hospitality industry involves the location and distribution channels of the hotel. Making the product or service available in multiple locations is usually beneficial in terms of accessibility. In the hotel industry, large chain hotels use place strategy effectively by having multiple similar hotels in various locations. However, in the case of boutique hotels, the opposite is often true (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.43). The boutique hotel offers a unique and rare experience that cannot be readily enjoyed in multiple locations; instead, exclusivity rather than accessibility is the attraction (Rogerson, 2010, p.427). The internet, especially the hotel website, is the major distribution channel of a hotel (Rao, Srivatsala and Suneetha, 2016, p.692). Reservations, guest requests, and research about the hotel can all be performed online with ease, making it the preferred choice for customers (Vrana and Zafiroopoulos, 2011, p.767; Xu, Youcheng, and Yixiu, 2015, p.131; Gilbert and Powell-Perry, 2001, p.143). The popularity of hospitality websites is increasing, making the use of a website less of a competitive differentiator and more of a marketing necessity (Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2011, p.695). The distribution channels that exist to entice guests to use the hotel service are numerous, but online travel agents (OTAs) and the hotel website are perhaps the most important and preferable tools for booking and

accessing information about the hotel (Morosan and Jeong, 2008, p.284). Forming relationships with businesses involved in the distribution channels of a service is important. However, Dontigney (2017) found that hotels should carefully select the businesses with whom they choose to form relationships, as restricting B2B relationships to a small number of companies can limit purchasing power. Marketers must have a keen understanding of hotel location and other distribution channels before constructing the marketing strategy of a hotel.

Promotion

The promotion element is important in designing a hotel's marketing strategy (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.69; Pour, Nazari and Emami, 2013, p.3275). Investment in advertising as a tool of hotel marketing strategy has been shown to positively affect brand loyalty, room booking and word-of-mouth (Leung, Bai and Stahura, 2012, p.153;162). Digital methods are important in the use of advertising and direct marketing in the hospitality industry although Chen and Lin (2012, p.492) described that most online advertising campaigns affect room price, not room occupancy (Rao, Srivatsala, and Suneetha, 2016, p.692). An organisation's website is a key tool and platform used to communicate with consumers, and online review sites and social media provide the opportunity for organisation-consumer dialogue (Panagopoulos *et al.*, 2011, p.695; Clarke, 2015; Crace, 2013). A successful hotel website describes their differentiating characteristics, provides detailed information and photographs, is secure, is easy to navigate and is interesting to consumers. The site must also have an emotional appeal that will attract consumers (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.16). A well-designed hotel website increases customer satisfaction and brand loyalty (Vrana and Zafiroopoulos, 2011, p.785;771).

Personal selling in hotels describes any interaction a customer has with staff where information is given to generate consumer preference for that hotel. Hotels spend more on personal selling than on any other tool in the promotional mix; this is because it focuses on one-to-one relationships, is very effective and is amongst the most expensive promotional tools. Personal selling is well suited to the hospitality industry as it is adaptable, feedback can be obtained immediately, and its effectiveness is easily measured (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2016, p.199; Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.210; Siguaw and Bojanic, 2004, pp.2-6). The sales force involved in personal selling should have a keen understanding of the service and the needs of the customer, targeting their strategy based on this information (Blythe and Martin, 2016, pp.211-212). Front of house staff such as waiters, concierge and receptionists liaise with existing guests to build a relationship and increase expenditure, whereas sales executives deal with prospective customers to build relationships with them and encourage them to choose the service (Knowles, Diamantes and El-Mourhabi, 2004, p.46).

Sales promotion is a useful tool for hotels to communicate with consumers and to increase purchasing volume. It positively affects perception of cost, but negatively affects brand perception in loyal customers, especially in the hospitality industry (Christou, 2011, pp.815-818). Sales promotion is often used in hotels to reduce the impact of seasonality (Knowles, Diamantis, El-Mourhabi, 2004, p.4). PR can involve speeches, charity events, celebrity appearances, press releases, sponsorship, word-of-mouth and use of hotels in television shows or movies (Kulcsár, 2014, p.81; Knowles, Diamantis and El-Mourhabi, 2004, p.46). Although many PR events are opportunistic, there are several ways in which a hotel can maximise their PR potential;

nurturing positive relationships with local media outlets, training senior staff to improve interview skills, and publicising the presence of well-known guests are feasible steps a hotel can take to utilise PR (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.216).

The promotion element of the marketing mix is important, multi-faceted, and effective. In boutique hotels, promotion differs in many ways. The target market is specific and younger than the general population, usually under 55-years-old. Product emphasis is on lifestyle and experience rather than facilities, and price is above average (Henderson, 2011, p.219). The website is a primary marketing tool for boutique hotels. Consumer lifestyle and culture affect the popularity and focus of boutique hotels; these are things that the hotel industry has little control over, and to which it must adapt (Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, p.275). The promotion mix provides a hotel with tools to improve guest perception and increase sales over short and long periods. Each element must be focused on separately to create a unique, targeted, informed and unified communication strategy that will benefit the hotel.

Process

The process element of the marketing mix is important in the hospitality industry as it represents the structure of the daily running of the hotel and how that structure affects the marketing strategy (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2016, p.41). This is particularly challenging in the boutique hotel industry as the uniqueness and personalisation of boutique hotel customer service contends with the efficiency and standardisation of traditionally effective processes. Boutique hotels must reach a balance between standardisation and customisation in a way that maintains high standards but also nurtures a feeling of personalised and caring service. Streamlined reservations and

food ordering processes improve guest satisfaction in the hotel and increase productivity (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.220). Ensuring processes are updated and include no unnecessary steps is a multi-departmental challenge, and truly helps to portray a positive brand image to customers in hotels.

Physical evidence

The physical evidence in the hospitality industry is often the means through which customers assess the quality of the hotel service (Prapannetivuth, 2015, p.3904; (Kushwaha and Agrawal, 2015, p.87). Accessibility of facilities, aesthetics and cleanliness affect guest perception of the hotel environment (Chua *et al.*, 2015, pp.384-386). Small hotels often have limited competitiveness when it comes to physical evidence as facilities and finances are scarcer. In contrast, boutique hotels are small so provide personalised service, but also offer the facilities and have access to the finances of a larger hotel, providing a dual advantage (Prapannetivuth, 2015, p.3905). Physical evidence involves making a service seem tangible to create an emotional response in the guest. It has been shown that aesthetics and ambience increase guest pleasure in hotels and that a positive physical environment decreases guests' negative emotional responses and improves the service encounter. Effective use of physical evidence in hotel marketing strategy increases perceived quality, length of stay and re-patronage (Chua *et al.*, 2015, pp.381-382). The use of token items such as pens, business cards, chocolates, and toiletries have a positive impact on guest perception of hotel quality (Blythe and Martin, 2016, pp.283-284; Wahid, Mohamad, and Zahari, 2012, p.10255). Luxury hotels need to convince guests that their higher prices are justified; they must convey this message by convincing guests that their service is of a higher quality than competitors. The primary objective of

physical evidence is to demonstrate to guests the quality of the service of a hotel, thereby justifying premium pricing.

People

People are a critical success factor in hotel marketing strategy. It has been shown that staff in smaller hotels, such as boutique hotels, deal better with consumers and respond better to change. Small hotels have a better working relationships and employees feel more personally responsible for providing quality service (Prapannetivuth, 2015, pp.3903-3905). Employee performance directly affects customer experience. In hotels, HR plays an important role in the people element of the marketing mix because they oversee recruitment and training. This is essential to ensure suitable people are involved in the provision of hotel service (Nadda *et al.*, 2014, pp.89-92). Front of house managers also have a significant impact on the attitudes, skill and morale of employees. It is the responsibility of managers to maintain a positive work atmosphere, keep morale high, ensure teams are working well together and empower their staff. This leads to an increased desire to work for the hotel and improves customer perception of the hotel and its employees (Blythe and Marin, 2016, p.277; Nadda *et al.*, 2014, p.91). The people element of the marketing mix is important because people are imperative to the success of a boutique hotel, its marketing strategy, and its organisational goals. The ongoing challenges for the hotel after hiring staff include maintaining morale, ongoing training, and ensuring staff continue to provide personalised customer service at the high level that a luxury boutique hotel demands.

2.7. Measuring effectiveness of marketing strategy

Milichovsky and Simberova (2015, pp.212-213) discuss the importance of measuring long- and short-term of marketing strategy effectiveness. It has been shown to lead to positive long-term organisational outcomes, lead to earlier identification of discrepancies between actual and target performance, and assist in the allocation of budget (Milichovsky, 2017, p.46; Högl and Hupp, 2007, p.367). Farris *et al.* (2015, p.2) highlighted that marketing managers must be adept at measuring marketing effectiveness; “if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it”.

The optimal method to measure marketing effectiveness is disputed in the literature. (da Gama, 2011, p.4; Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, p.214). Appiah-Adu *et al.* (2001) suggested that each marketing plan should define what effectiveness is to that company, as the definition of marketing effectiveness is strongly linked to corporate objectives (Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, pp.212-213).

Definitions of marketing effectiveness vary widely; It is defined as the return a of funds invested in marketing activities (Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, p. 213); the extent to which an organization acquires market share over competitors (Nwokah and Ahiauzu, 2008); and the process where value is created using organization’s resources for marketing activities and creation of competitive advantage (Žostautienė and Vaičiulėnait, 2010; Daukševičiūtė, Valainis and Vilkaitė, 2011, p.201-202). It is not surprising that there is no consensus over strategies to measure effectiveness, as there is no consensus over the definition of effectiveness.

Because the effectiveness of marketing involves many processes and departments, it is difficult to quantify. Overall, measurement has moved from financial to non-financial measures. Checklists are a common way to measure effectiveness, but this technique can sometimes lack the depth of focus on services and their characteristics (Wilson, 2002; da Gama, 2011, pp.4-5). Högl and Hupp (2007, p.369) proposed a check list tool to evaluate the effectiveness of marketing strategies based on the elements of marketing mix that was customer-focused. However, it was unsuitable for use in the hospitality industry as it didn't involve the customer view of marketing strategy. Marketing strategies have been found to be more effective when they use a customer-centred approach, are integrated, use up-to-date data, and are efficiently executed. Business performance, marketing campaigns and customer feedback are useful information sources (Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, pp.212-213).

Using the right metric to measure effectiveness is important (Milichovsky, 2017, p.47). Farris *et al.* defines metric as "a measuring system that quantifies a trend, dynamic or characteristic" (2015, p.1). Financial targets, marketing mix elements, and other metrics can be used to measure effectiveness (Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, pp.213-214). Analysis of the competitor and the target market and clear definition of that group is essential in measuring effectiveness of marketing strategies. This enables an organization to accurately measure market share, customer perceptions and competitor analysis.

Financial metrics, although a limited tool, can be useful in the measurement of effectiveness. This data is easily calculated and can provide valuable information about the current status of an organization. However, they do not reflect individual

marketing strategies and one can only draw an association, not causation, between the two (Farris *et al.*, 2015, p.34;66-67). Pavlou and Stewart (2000, p.63) found that traditional advertising tools such as TV and radio advertising were as effective at influencing brand choice as digital media. Some authors categorize metrics according to the marketing mix (Lovell and Wirtz, 2011, p.381-382; Healy, Ledwith and O'Dwyer, 2014, pp.49-68). Yet, this disagrees with Ewing (2009, p.103) and Farris *et al.* (2015, p.369) who discourage the measurement of effectiveness under the structure of marketing mix. These authors argue that although marketing strategies are implemented separately, their effectiveness must be measured together due to the synergistic effects.

2.7.1. Measuring effectiveness of marketing strategy in the hospitality industry

Although most published research on the measurement on the effectiveness of marketing strategy is not focused specifically on boutique hotel marketing, many of the same concepts, tools and metrics apply. What is known is that measurement of the effectiveness of marketing strategy is essential to hotel success, it must be customer-focused, and there must be financial and non-financial factors involved (Kontis and Lagos, 2014, pp.410-413). O'Malley and Mitussis (2002, pp.230-231) suggested the integration of advanced online applications to collect and react to feedback. Social media affects how hotels measure marketing strategy effectiveness as it affects marketing plan structure, statistical analysis and feedback of consumer usage and guides digital media budget allocation (Kumar, 2015, pp.4-5). Billoš, Turkalj and Kelić (2016, p.105) found that understanding guest expectations in email marketing is essential to measuring effectiveness. Search engine optimisation (SEO) and feedback software are most successful when the hotels correctly estimate the

amount of information a guest will want and can estimate the perceived relevance of their online advertising (Klapdor, 2013, pp.76-77; Milović, 2012, p.30).

Although the optimal method of measuring marketing effectiveness is disputed in the literature, most authors agree that effectiveness must be clearly defined, marketing strategies must be regularly reviewed, organisational goals must be interlinked with marketing goals and a combination of financial- and customer-based data must be collected. Marketing strategy is central to the luxury hospitality industry, so hotel marketers must define effectiveness, set performance targets, carefully select suitable metrics and regularly evaluate marketing strategy effectiveness to improve their organisation.

2.8. Literature review conclusion

This literature review has discussed the concepts of marketing, marketing strategies, the marketing mix, and their applicability to and importance in the hospitality industry. It has revealed interesting insights about how marketing strategies can be developed to improve hotel competitiveness and profitability. It has been identified in this review that although there is ample academic research pertaining to hospitality marketing strategy and its effectiveness, this does not always translate to practical application. This study will be a practical examination of the application of marketing strategies based on the 7Ps in a boutique hotel in Ireland. The marketing strategies of Dylan hotel will be evaluated to extrapolate how a boutique hotel applies the theory available to them.

3. Methodology

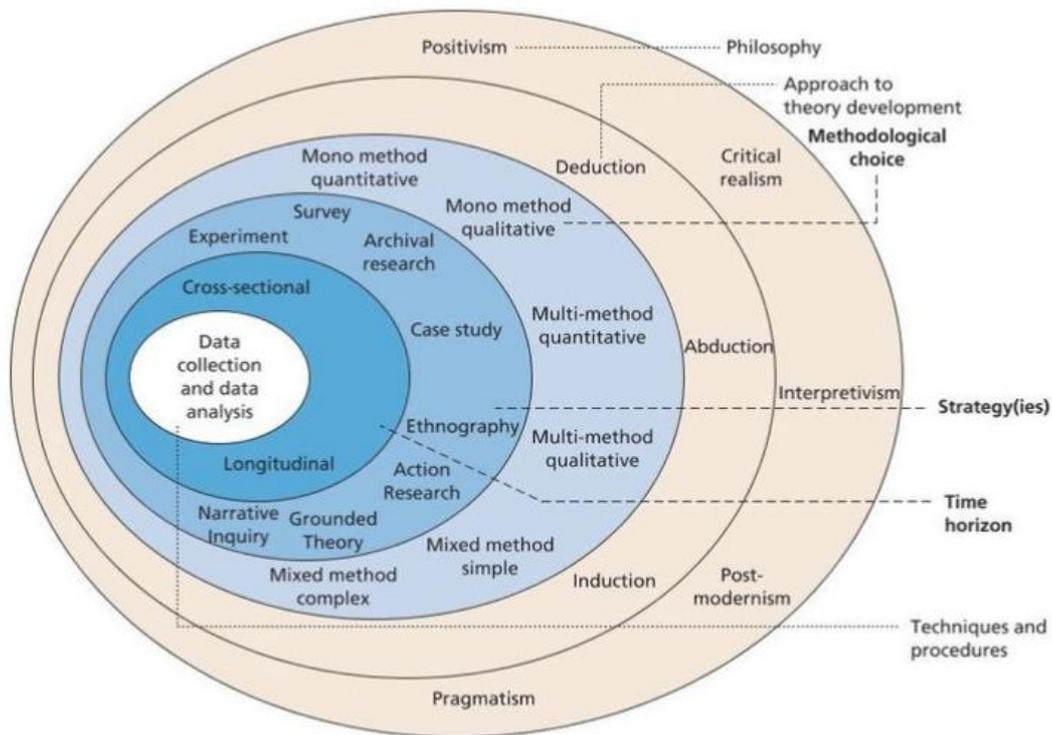


Figure 1: The "research onion" (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p.164).

3.1. Introduction

This section will describe the methodological structure that was used in the design of this study and justify its supporting rationale. The “research onion” (figure 1) was used as a structure (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p.164). The methodology chosen to complete this research allowed the researcher to achieve the aims of the study. It involves six pillars: Qualitative design, interpretivist philosophy, inductive approach, single-case study strategy, non-probability convenience sampling, and multi-method research choice. Semi-structured interviews and a review of the literature were used to collect data, and categorisation was used to analyse data. The ethical implications and limitations are also discussed.

The goal of this study was to evaluate the marketing strategies of boutique hotels, specifically Dylan hotel, and to compare this with the published literature. The selected research design aimed not to disprove or invalidate the current body of knowledge, but to provide additional knowledge to the field.

3.2. Research design

Kumar (2011, p.94) describes research design as the framework in which a study is conducted. It is the all-encompassing plan of how the research questions will be answered (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp.163-165). A qualitative method of data collection was used in this study. This method is often used in marketing, and is well suited to the exploration of complex concepts and subjective ideas. A quantitative was not chosen, as it could not provide the structure needed to analyse this non-numeric data (Hague *et al.*, 2016, p.128).

During the study, the marketing strategies used by a boutique 5-star hotel were evaluated using a single-case study strategy. An inductive approach and interpretivist philosophy were employed to explore the topic. A multi-method research choice of semi-structured interviews and a literature review was utilised. The sample was selected by non-probability convenience sampling. The data collected provided an opportunity for in-depth investigation of the research questions and for it to be related to current research. The advantage of this design is that it explored the individuality of this case (Hannah and Lautsch, 2011, p.17; Polit and Beck, 2010, p.1452; Hague *et al.*, 2016, p.128).

3.2.1. Research philosophy

An interpretivist philosophy was used in this study. This approach focuses on the way people understand the world and the role that individuals play in society (Gill and Johnson, 2002, p.168). The principles of interpretivism are subjectivity, researcher interest, and the participant effect on the process (Blumberg, Cooper, and Schindler, 2011, p.17). It uses knowledge based on perceptions and interpretations rather than irrefutable facts, so is well-suited to marketing studies and situations dealing with human interaction.

An interpretivist philosophy was selected for this study as the interviews related to opinion and understanding of the topic of marketing strategy rather than incontestable facts. The researcher's expertise and interest in the field of boutique hotel marketing, as well as career aspirations for the field, drove the study. Alternative philosophies, if chosen for this study, would not have provided the researcher with the same appreciation for differing expert opinion and understanding of the subjectivity and complexity of marketing strategy (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill, 2016, p.136).

3.2.2. Research approach

An inductive approach was used in this study, allowing the researcher to progresses "from specific observations to broader generalisations" (Saleem, 2008, p.5) and elaborate on the concept (O'Reilly and Parker, 2012, p.194). This approach enabled the researcher to collect and analyse the ideas provided by the interviewee without having to pre-define the direction of the study (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p.145).

3.2.3. Research strategy

A multi-method qualitative research choice was used in this study. This involved a combination of qualitative methods: literature review, online searches, and semi-structured interviews. This research strategy was vital in determining what questions the study will be able to answer (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, p.177). A case study research strategy was adopted. A case study is “an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring, 2004, p.343). This design allowed the detailed and subjective nature of the data the researcher wished to collect to be kept in its original context (Christie et. Al., 2000, p.12; Gerring, 2004, pp.341-343).

Yin (2009, p.47) states that a single-case study is justified if it is critical, unique, representative, revelatory case, or longitudinal. This case study is a single, unique, exploratory case. Dylan is unique as each 5-star boutique hotel has an exclusive marketing plan and traits, and therefore must be examined as such. The category of case study most suited to the research questions was an exploratory study, which is used to explore situations with no clear or single set of outcomes (Baxter and Jack, 2008, p. 548). This was chosen as the researcher entered the interview without a hypothesis, aiming to explore the interviewee’s perceptions and ideas, and allowed the interviewee guide the interview.

A disadvantage of a case study is that the data is not always generalisable, so the results can be of indeterminate significance. A multi-case study can be useful in performing inductive marketing research as the information can be maintained in context whilst also being partly generalisable. However, time restrictions dissuaded

the researcher from a multi-case strategy. Instead, a single-case study research strategy was used, but its limitations in drawing conclusions were recognised.

This study used a cross-sectional time horizon. This provided the researcher with the opportunity to obtain a snapshot view of the interviewee's perspective of Dylan's marketing strategies. Although a longitudinal study would have allowed the researcher to explore the changes in interviewee perspective over time, the time restrictions associated with the completion of this study as part of a Master's Degree meant that the researcher would not have been able to complete a longitudinal study to the highest standard.

3.2.4. Sampling

To select a research sample, the researcher identifies the research population, a sampling strategy, and then the sample population. The population in this study was the marketing managers of 5-star boutique hotels in Ireland. This population was chosen as it is the researcher's area of interest and study. The sampling strategy used was non-probability sampling, as the study used just one participant as part of a single-case study approach. Convenience sampling was used to select the site of study, as the researcher worked at Dylan hotel. The convenience associated with working in the hotel enabled the researcher to readily access the marketing department. Non-probability sampling limits the ability of the researcher to extrapolate the extent of the problem but can lead to detailed qualitative results (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp.295-297). Probability sampling would have been inappropriate in this study due to the emphasis on statistical significance rather than creative and qualitative techniques (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013, pp.392-395). The sample population selected for

this study was the marketing department of Dylan hotel, Dublin, Ireland. In selecting criteria to choose a hotel for this case study, several factors were considered. The hotel must be characterised as boutique, 5-star, have a formal marketing strategy, be willing to participate in the study, and be in a location that is practical for the researcher. Dylan was chosen as it met the selection criteria explained above and was practical for the researcher.

3.3. Data collection instruments

Data collection was completed using multiple methods. Primary data was obtained via interviews, and secondary data obtained via literature review. Secondary data collection involved books, peer-reviewed articles, magazines, newspapers and census data. After an evaluation of the secondary data, the researcher had an in-depth knowledge about the subject, and then the primary research was gathered to satisfy the research objectives and explore the topic further.

The primary data collection in this study commenced with an online search to view some of Dylan's online activities. This involved reviewing the hotel website and online articles regarding marketing campaigns. The researcher then obtained the official marketing plan of Dylan. An email was used to make contact and invite the participant to the study. Collection of primary data involved 2 semi-structured interviews with the marketing manager of Dylan. The interview process was a face-to-face interview lasting approximately 80minutes. It was preceded by the participant signing the consent form and asking any clarifying questions (See appendix 4 for consent form and information sheet). During the interview, the participant answered open-ended questions about Dylan's marketing strategies (Hague *et al.*, 2016, pp.81-82). Semi-

structured questions, designed by the researcher for this study, were selected based on the literature review and the researcher's experience. Voice recording was completed during the interview process using the researcher's personal Dictaphone. No other equipment was required. Other data collection instruments, such as survey or observation, were not used in this study, as they do not allow the researcher to explore perceptions and opinions, and are less suited to an inductive interpretivist philosophy.

3.4. Data analysis procedures

Data analysis was completed throughout the data collection, preparation, and formal data analysis stages. During the audio recorded interviews, data analysis took place in the form of the researcher identifying thematic comparisons and clarifying and expanding upon salient points. The entire audio recording of the interviews was typed to reduce memory bias and selective bias. The researcher analysed relationships between the data collected and consequently, theories were developed from this process (Thorne, 2000, pp.68-69). This inductive approach allowed the interviews to be guided by the experience and knowledge of the participant rather than by a pre-set theory or researcher opinion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp.570-571). After interview completion, categorisation was used to identify important themes from the interview and these themes were used to direct the data collection and analysis processes (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp.566-570)

3.5. Research ethics

Formal ethical approval was not required as the research did not impede on participants' rights or privacy. Informed written consent was obtained prior to

commencement of the interview, and the interviewee granted the researcher permission to record, store, and publish the information (Hanson, Balmer and Giardino, 2011, p.381). The data collection methods and confidentiality were explained during the consent process, and the interviewee was supplied with an information leaflet.

Although there were no physical risks related to this research, there were potential psychological risks associated to participation, included stress and worry due to time pressure. These were minimised as much as possible by allowing the participant to pick the time and location of the interviews (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp.243-245), and by reassuring the participant that they could withdraw consent, reschedule interviews, or end an interview at any time. The voice recording was transcribed without interviewee identifiers, and the recording was deleted.

3.6. Limitations of methodology

Although every effort was made to design and complete this research project to the highest standard, several limitations remain. The use of a case study research strategy impedes the generalisability of the research results, and reduces the amount of useful, relevant knowledge obtained, and convenience sampling may have inadvertently introduced sample bias (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016, pp.304-305; 400). Time constraints limited this study, as it formed a mandatory requirement for the completion of the degree of Master of Business Administration (MBA) and had to be completed and published within approximately four months (Zikmund *et al.*, 2013, pp.80-81). To limit this, the researcher aimed to be efficient in completing the interview process and

to give the participant cohort as much notice as possible, so that there was ample time to complete the interviews.

3.7. Conclusion

This chapter described the research methodology utilised to conduct this study. This design enabled the researcher to complete a qualitative study and answer the chosen research question to the highest standard. This analysis of the marketing strategies of Dylan aims to provide interesting, reasonable data regarding the marketing strategies of this hotel, as well as providing a limited amount of case-level evidence that may be partly generalisable to the larger field of marketing strategies in 5-star boutique hotels (Yin, 2009, p.15). The researcher hopes that this research may also be used as a structural foundation for larger multi-case studies on marketing strategies in boutique 5-star hotels. The next chapter will explore Dylan hotel, the subject of this case study.

4. Dylan

4.1. Hotel overview

Dylan is a boutique 5-star hotel in Dublin, Ireland. It was opened in 2007 and employs approximately 50 people. The building is a renovated Victorian era *facade* with modern interior design and post-modern furniture. It is in a quiet, affluent, residential area on the southern edge of Dublin's city centre. It was voted best boutique hotel in 2008 by Hospitality Ireland. It has 44 bedrooms, and is expanding to 70 rooms next month (June 2017). The commercial and financial Grand Canal district nearby provides custom for meeting and conference facilities, and its restaurant (Tavern), bar, and outdoor terrace cater to business and leisure guests. Financial difficulties and debt threatened the existence of the hotel in 2010, but recovered in the following years due the upturn of Irish economy (Dublin.info, 2013; McCaughren, 2015; Deegan, 2012; McLaughlin and Mathews, 2010; O'Hora, 2014).

Dylan is a prime example of an Irish boutique luxury hotel and operates according to the principles of personalisation, uniqueness, modern technology, and high quality. Dylan's mission statement is "together we are creating a memorable guest experience at Dylan"; and its core values are teamwork, fun, commercial ethos, enthusiasm, and respect. It strives for strong leadership, positive working conditions and a safe environment to achieve employee satisfaction (Dylan, 2016). "Contemporary comfort", "unique" and "award winning" are terms used to describe the hotel on their website (Dylan, 2017). Each room is individually designed (Dublin.info, 2013; Cochrane, 2012, pp.51-52). The design of Dylan hotel is focused on visual impact and unique physical environment. A key design item in each room is used to modernise the atmosphere

(Gore-Grimes, 2014, pp.8-9). Dylan uses Irish artwork throughout the hotel such as Irish photography and Belleek pottery to appeal to local pride and originality (Hegarty, 2017). The menu in the restaurant features local foods and suppliers with a focus on traditional cooking methods (Cochrane, 2012, pp.20-21; Gore-Grimes, 2013a, p.18). iPod docks in each room show awareness of the modern attitudes of their guests, and Mark Buxton toiletries appeal to the luxurious needs of the target market (Hegarty, 2017; Gore-Grimes, 2013b, p.12). The marketing strategies of the Dylan hotel should optimise these principles to achieve marketing effectiveness.

4.2. SWOT analysis

Below is a SWOT analysis of Dylan based upon its marketing department's own analysis and the researcher's adaptation of this based on secondary research.

Table 1: SWOT analysis for Dylan hotel.

Strengths	Privacy	• Privacy of meeting facilities
	Staff	• Friendly staff
	Bedroom	• Bedroom design • Guests can choose their bedroom
	Product	• Product uniqueness (boutique hotel)
	Small size	• Exclusive buy-out and private dining • Occasion packages available • Individual entertainment areas
	Terrace	• Two outdoor terraces for events and individuals
Weaknesses	Communication	• Corporate groups not always have the information in terms of availability
	Location	• Further from city centre • Located in a side street, away of main road • No footfall
	Brand awareness	• Competition with historic hotels
	Leisure facilities	• Lack of leisure facilities: spa, gym and pool
	Food and Beverage	• Lack of standalone dining popularity: no award winning
	Bedroom	• No suite design rooms available
	Meeting room	• Little options of meeting space: weddings and corporate events

Table 1: SWOT analysis for Dylan hotel (cont.)

Opportunities	Expansion	• Undergoing hotel expansion adding 28 rooms
	High occupancy rate	• Lack of room availability in Dublin
	Emerging markets	• Investment in communications with Africa, India, China and Eastern Europe embasys
	Boutique concept recognition	• Emerging popularity of boutique and design hotels
	Safe	• Ireland is known as a safe destination
	Comercial development	• Significant commercial construction on the way in the area
Threats	Political situation	• The Brexit situation and Donald Trump decisions may interfere in Ireland tourism industry
	Number of accounts	• Over reliance on small number of corporate accounts
	New entrants	• Specially a new boutique hotel in Ranelagh under construction
	Dublin image	• Dublin is perceived as an expensive destination
	Dependency of external events	• Lack of Convention Centre Dublin events in 2017

4.3. Competitors

Dylan's primary competitors are other 5-star hotels in Dublin city centre. Each utilise social media, have a strong web presence, and use third party OTAs. There are no boutique hotels amongst the competitors, so intrinsic differences between Dylan and its competitors exist.

Fitzwilliam hotel

The Fitzwilliam Hotel Dublin opened in 1998. It is a 5-star hotel in the popular St. Stephen's Green area. It focuses on hospitality, comfort, and service. It has 138 rooms, 3 meeting suites, 3 restaurants, onsite parking, a fitness centre, a spa, and a nail salon. It's restaurant Thornton's won multiple awards and had a Michelin star for many years, but lost this title in 2015 and is currently closed for renovation. Personalisation of service and attentive concierge are the main competitive

differentiators in the Fitzwilliam (Fitzwilliam Hotel, 2017; Five Star, 2017). Strengths include its optimal location for both leisure and business guests, well-known status, partnership with the Preferred Hotels group and views of St. Stephen's Green. Weaknesses include noise pollution and the high room rate.

InterContinental hotel

The InterContinental hotel Dublin is a 5-star hotel in Ballsbridge, a residential area near Dublin city centre. It has 197 rooms and suites, a spa, sauna and heated swimming pool. It also offers large ballrooms and meeting spaces and is a popular conference and banquet venue. The hotel is set on a two-acre campus offering guests ample outdoor space (Five Star, 2017; IHG, 2017). Strengths include its size, reputation, links with InterContinental Hotel Group, spa, function rooms and large grounds. Weaknesses include its distance from Dublin city centre, and its reputation for large functions rather than personalised service.

The Marker hotel

The Marker Hotel is a 5-star design hotel located in the Grand Canal Square area. It opened in 2013, employs over 200 staff, and is part of the "Leading Hotels of the World". The architecture is based upon a geometric style and the Irish landscape. It has 187 bedrooms, a ground floor bar, rooftop bar and terrace with panoramic views. It has a spa and swimming pool. The bedroom size is above average. Modern technology is well incorporated into the workings of the hotel, such as the provision of smartphone docks (Deegan, 2015; Irish Building, 2013; The Marker, 2017). Strengths of the Marker include its proximity to the Grand Canal financial district, rooftop terrace,

its leisure centre, and the suite design. Weaknesses are that the location is sub-optimal for leisure guests and that the rates are higher than those of Dylan.

Merrion hotel

The Merrion is one of Dublin's leading 5-star hotels. It is set in a renovated Georgian era building opposite government buildings. It has 142 bedrooms, all of which face onto 18th century gardens. It offers a 2-star Michelin restaurant, The Cellar Bar and Restaurant, a cocktail bar, and 6 private dining rooms. It aims to provide guests with comfort and elegance. It has a well-equipped leisure centre with a pool, spa and gym, and private parking is provided. Art is central to the décor and atmosphere of the Merrion, and it contains one of the largest private art collections in Ireland (Five Star, 2017; Blue Book, 2017). Strengths include its current 1st place status on Trip Advisor, 2-star Michelin restaurant, spa, and suite design. Weaknesses include high room rates, and potential for protests in the area (Trip Advisor, 2017).

Shelbourne hotel

The Shelbourne Dublin is set in a 200-year-old building on Dublin's popular St. Stephen's Green. It is Dublin's largest 5-star hotel, with 265 bedrooms. It also has 19 suites, a spa, fitness centre, swimming pool, 2 restaurants and a large ballroom. The Shelbourne Dublin was central to many historical and political events in Irish history and is considered a Dublin landmark. The hotel was renovated in 2016, modernising and improving the historic building (Shelbourne, 2017). Strengths of the Shelbourne include its landmark status, views of St. Stephen's Green, historic status, membership of international chain Marriott, its suite design and popularity, and its leisure facilities.

Its weaknesses include that it can be crowded, room rates are amongst the highest in Dublin, and the small rooms size.

Westbury hotel

The Westbury is a 5-star hotel in Dublin city centre and is a member of the Doyle family group. Irish artwork and design feature prominently, and it has one of the largest private art collections in Ireland. It has 201 rooms, 4 suites, and is a member of Leading Hotels of the World. Its location off Grafton street is desirable to business and leisure guests, and it was awarded "Best Business Hotel Ireland" in 2013 (Five Star, 2017). Strengths include its central location, and its membership of Leading hotels of the World and the Doyle Collection. Weaknesses include lack of spa and swimming pool, noise pollution, and its high room rates.

Westin hotel

The Westin is 5-star hotel with a prime location between Grafton street, Temple bar, and O'Connell street. It is set in a 19th century building. Interior design focuses on Irish artwork and design. The hotel has 163 bedrooms, a glass-roofed Atrium lounge, and the Exchange restaurant (Five Star, 2017; The Westin, 2017). Strengths include its prime location, its membership with the Marriott chain and the and conference and banqueting facilities. Weaknesses are that it lacks spa and leisure facilities and the area can be noisy, especially at night. The ongoing Luas construction works run directly outside the main entrance of the Westin, obstructing the view of the hotel, and creating noise and dust pollution.

5. Data analysis and discussion

5.1. Introduction

To collect the data, semi-structured interviews were conducted. The qualitative data accumulated was analysed using categorisation to extract themes of relevance to the evaluation of marketing strategies in Dylan. The data analysis and discussion chapter is structured per these themes. To effectively answer the research questions of this study, the results must be analysed in the context of the published literature. To do this, the researcher will use excerpts of the results and compare them with the opinions and findings and other authors to assist in answering the research questions of the study. The interviewee was the Director of Sales in Dylan. Her role was to manage the sales and marketing departments and professional experience involved sales and marketing management roles in multiple 4- and 5-star hotels in Dublin over 8.5 years.

5.2. Perception of marketing in Dylan

When asked about her definition of marketing, the interviewee explained, *“Marketing for us is everything that doesn’t result in a direct sale... It is all about building brand awareness”*. Brand awareness and brand identity are key issues in Dylan, and the aim is to ensure consumers are remembering Dylan in a positive light. The interviewee recognises the importance of B2B relationships in improving consumer perception. Speaking of the relationship between “Teeling Whiskey” and Dylan as an example, she said *“there is synergy between our brand and theirs”*. She also stated it was the role of the sales department to achieve brand awareness and room occupancy, ensuring *“people are coming in the door”*. The interviewee explained that marketing is

important to the hotel because of the reduced passing trade and “shop window” marketing. The location is central but isolated. She states that consumers often say, “I never knew this place was here”, and that it is the aim of the sales and marketing department to repair this weakness.

In terms of the definition of marketing the interviewee appears to have a narrow impression, with emphasis placed only onto the communication aspect of marketing theory. The focus of the interviewee on brand awareness and promotion in her definition of marketing, although not an all-encompassing definition, is relevant to her role as a Sales director. Oh and Pizam (2008, p.69) stated that the aim of promotion is to attain brand awareness, thereby supporting the interviewees view. Narteh *et al.* (2013, p.412) found that brand awareness was one of the critical success factors in the luxury hospitality industry. The interviewee’s focus on B2B relationships is supported by Levinson and Levinson’s definition of marketing, who enforced the importance of long term consumer relationship development in the success of marketing and business (2011, p.17). This theme is also in keeping with Kotler and Armstrong’s interpretation of the promotion mix (2016, p.447) and with Palmer, Simmons and Mason’s interpretation of PR (2014, p.385). These authors agree that the role of consumer relationship management is essential to marketing and its tools, especially in the boutique hotel industry, where personalisation of service and developing consumer loyalty and relationships is integral to the hotel philosophy.

5.3. Impact of the tourism and hospitality industries on Dylan

The perception of Dublin as a safe place amid global terrorist attacks and political instability is advantageous. Conversely, she explains that Brexit poses a threat in

terms of ease of access to Ireland, Irish economic dependence on Britain, and the Euro exchange rate. From an internal political view, a change in Irish government could mean a change in the 9% VAT rate, and this could negatively impact the hospitality industry.

The interviewee believes that Dublin's perception as a safe city makes it an attractive destination, but does not feel its marketing strategies require altering to benefit from these opportunities. The interviewee explains that Brexit poses a potential threat to Dylan, something that is echoed in the literature, and that the hotel has altered its marketing strategies to adapt to this by focusing less on the UK market and more on emerging markets, reducing Dylan's economic dependence on Britain (ITIC, 2016).

When asked about the role of tourism agencies in the marketing strategy of Dylan, the interviewee stated that Fáilte Ireland and other tourism boards do not play a significant role. The 'Dublin: a breath of fresh air' campaign would include hotels such as Dylan, but as Dylan focuses more on individual guests, niche markets, and commercial guests, their campaigns are less relevant to the success of Dylan. However, the hotel does liaise with tourism organisations in terms of keeping connected, hosting key employees of those organisations, and using them to create publicity.

The interviewee describes that the tourism industry and tourism boards affect Dylan sales and revenue, but that they do not greatly affect their marketing strategies. She explained that this is because the target market of Dylan is specific, whereas the marketing campaigns of tourism boards are targeted at the masses. This is in contrast with the literature, that recommends hotels design their marketing strategy in

conjunction with national tourism strategies (Mircevska and Cuculeski, 2015, p.35; Vrana and Zafiroopoulos, 2011, p.785), although no data was found in the literature regarding the relevance of tourism boards to boutique hotels specifically.

5.4. Characteristics of Dylan and boutique hotels

The interviewee described Dylan as a 5-star boutique property with individually designed bedrooms and a unique position in the market place. She considered design, location, atmosphere, personalised service, food and beverage quality, and the outdoor terraces to be most the important features to describe the essence of Dylan.

In speaking about the service offered in Dylan, the interviewee defined it as personalised, relaxed, and aiming to satisfy each guest – *“It is a very personalised service, it is not conformed in any way”*. She explained that the small hotel size is key to service quality and the philosophy of Dylan. However, she feels that the hotel expansion will not impact this, as the 72 rooms will remain small enough to be *“manageable”*. The location’s hidden nature is a challenge in attracting potential guests but its centrality is a strength for regular guests who are already aware of its location. Transport, ease of access, and parking are all positive attributes. The decoration and high quality furniture and linen are also a strength. Dylan optimise the individuality of its rooms by utilising it as a marketing tool to involve the guest in room selection. The modern design of the suites appears to be a relative weakness that may impede revenue and suite occupancy. Design is classified as the unique point of sale in Dylan from the perspective of the sales manager. This highlights the importance of the physical environment in the marketing strategy of Dylan.

Many authors define boutique hotels in a similar way to the interviewee's depiction of Dylan. Attention to detail, personalisation of service, small number of rooms, unique interior design styling, atmosphere of comfort and luxury, innovative use of modern technology and use of refurbished buildings are characteristics attributed to a boutique hotel (Alves, 2013, pp.50-51; Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, p.275). Ample amenities are said to be important for boutique hotels in the literature and although Dylan has multiple dining and lounge areas, it lacks a leisure centre, pool, or spa that other hotels sometimes offer (Khosravi, Malek and Ekiz, 2014, p.29). When asked about the facilities available, the interviewee described that Dylan aims to provide "*a warm welcoming service, a warm atmosphere, a comfortable home away from home*" for guests, and that atmosphere is more important than facilities in achieving this. This sentiment echoes the opinion of Alves (2013, p.51) who described that atmosphere is more important than star classification in the definition of a boutique hotel. The interviewee discusses the small size of Dylan as an advantage in terms of the level of service that can be offered to each guest. She states in the interview, and in Dylan's strategic marketing plan, that a larger hotel is fundamentally incapable of offering such service. This resonates with the published views of Henderson (2011, p.218) who stated that boutique hotels should have less than 100 rooms and not be part of a chain of hotels to ensure they can provide personalised service rather than generic encounters.

5.5. Competitors

Competitor strategy has a substantial influence on the marketing strategies of Dylan, according to the interviewee, and price is almost exclusively derived from competitors'

pricing strategy. The interviewee listed the InterContinental, The Marker, Fitzwilliam, Shelbourne, Merrion, Westbury and the Westin hotels. These are 5-star hotels in Dublin city, although they do not include every 5-star hotel in the city. None of the competitors listed are boutique hotels. When asked about boutique competitors, the interviewee explained that The Dean is a popular boutique hotel, but Dylan does not classify it as a main competitor due to the price and target market discrepancy. A major threat for Dylan is the impending opening of a 41-bedroom boutique hotel nearby.

When asked what distinguishes Dylan from its competitors, the interviewee stated that the personalisation of both decoration and service in Dylan are unique. The size of the hotel lends itself to personalisation. An example given is that groups can choose rooms to suit each guests' taste and style. Kiatsongchai and Choibamroong (2014, p.175) described these same characteristics as the differentiator of boutique and luxury hotels, implying that Dylan has a well-developed idea of the meaning of its boutique status. The relaxed atmosphere is also key to the aims of the hotel and is unique amongst 5-star hotels in Dublin. The interviewee relates: "*(the atmosphere) ... is not stiff upper lip and top hat and tails. It is a warm welcoming service, a warm atmosphere, a comfortable home away from home*". Băltescu and Boşcor (2016, p.274) reaffirm the importance of relaxed atmosphere in boutique hotels, highlighting the role they play in creating a positive customer experience, and Prapannetivuth (2015, p.3905) found that a homely atmosphere was a key differentiating characteristic of boutique hotel.

When asked about the marketing strategies of Dylan compared with those of competitors, the interviewee stated that the marketing strategies are less focused on

mass promotional activities and more focused on personalised customer-focused communication. This elucidates the differences between marketing strategies of boutique and luxury hotels. Rogerson (2010, p.437) highlighted the significance of using different marketing strategies in the boutique hotel industry because of the intrinsic differences in product, target market, and aims.

5.6. Current Marketing strategy

When asked about the development of strategic marketing plans, the interviewee described that she is predominantly involved in this, with input from other directors and managers. The plan is designed annually. The sales and marketing strategies are unified, in that there are no specific marketing objectives, but sales objectives that are achieved through marketing strategies. These sales objectives usually revolve around revenue targets. The strategy is revised monthly to focus on specific events and involves planning the marketing tools that will be used to improve brand identity and promote the hotel and its events. Personal selling forms a large part of the marketing strategy of Dylan, as the sales and marketing manager holds appointments with 16 clients each week to discuss engagement opportunities. Marketing strategy used by the companies who manage the PR, website, and social media are also analysed each month to evaluate effectiveness in terms of revenue.

The literature describes the importance of involving every department in the hotel in the designing and implementation of marketing strategy. This is wholeheartedly embraced by Dylan, as the marketing strategy development and execution is a multi-departmental process. Constantin found that not involving departmental managers in marketing strategy can lead to poor strategy implementation and ultimately lower

chance of success (2016, p.4). Dylan has recognised the role that non-marketing executives play in marketing, and this is likely to lead to increased marketing success. However, the lack of defined marketing objectives is in contradiction with the findings of many authors. Alhakimi and Qasem (2014, p.26-27) found that well defined objectives enabled accurate identification of ability and need, and having poorly defined objectives were more likely to lead to meeting customers value requirements. Kotler and Keller (2016, p.78) re-enforced the role of defining objectives prior to developing marketing strategies, and Milichovsky and Simberova (2015, p.213) found that effectiveness of marketing strategies was increased with well-defined corporate and marketing objectives. Although Dylan plans its strategies with multi-departmental input and revises them regularly, its lack of defined strategic marketing objectives is problematic.

To promote brand identity, the interviewee says, *"I really believe is about building relationships"*. She explains that spending time on listening to clients and nurturing relationships with them is very important. Dylan focuses on personal selling, which although costly and time consuming, adds personalization and assists in building B2B and consumer relationships. *"B2B is fading to become person to person now"*. Building this loyalty leads to customers utilizing Dylan for a variety of personal and professional events, and leads them to see Dylan as the *"be all and end all"*; She explains that new customers are difficult to attract, but that regular guests *"love Dylan"*. She describes that the PR and social media companies are other important tools used to improve brand identity. Social media tools allow Dylan to target specific markets. Targeting domestic markets outside Dublin will be important this year, she says, as focus groups have shown that brand identity is sub-optimal outside of Dublin. The interviewee feels

that improving brand identity will lead to business success, because some of the main obstacles are the location and therefore inherent lack of awareness. Increased awareness will lead to increased revenue, she says, as the product is exemplary.

The focus of the interviewee of generating customer loyalty to improve brand identity, among other objectives, is well-supported in the literature. Many authors have demonstrated that focusing on customer loyalty as a marketing strategy objective is beneficial. Firat, Turkur and Metin (2014, pp.82-86) found that customer loyalty was higher in boutique hotels to due personalised service and personalised marketing strategies; Blythe and Martin (2016, p.288) described that customer loyalty increases sales, sustainable competitive advantage, positive word-of-mouth and employee satisfaction. However, the interviewee describes that it is difficult to attract new customers; it has been shown that customer loyalty initiatives make it cheaper to retain regular guests, but that it does not help to attract new ones (Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.288). Dylan's restrictive focus on loyalty may limit its target market in this respect.

5.7. Influence of the elements of the marketing mix on marketing strategies in Dylan

Product

According to the interviewee, Dylan is very clear about the product element of the marketing mix. When asked about the influence that Dylan's service has on marketing strategy, the interviewee exclaimed *"The product and service is kind of everything"*. The uniqueness of the product is the selling point of Dylan, and that is focused upon in the development of marketing strategy. She says, *"People chose us because we*

have that unique feel". The interviewee again highlighted customised guest encounters as an influential factor in designing and implementing marketing strategies - *"It is a very personalised service; it is not conformed in any way"*. Ensuring that any publicity gained conveys the right message about Dylan – individuality, comfort and modernity – is important in the development of marketing strategy.

The uniqueness of Dylan allows the marketing manager to explore every aspect of the strategy and enhance its emotional aspects and value. Cai *et al.* (2000, pp.41-42) propose that every hotel marketing strategy should highlight the unique aspect of the product or service being offered. The interviewee describes the decoration and design as the unique selling point of Dylan, showing that she recognises its importance. The distinctiveness of the product design is key when developing a strategy for boutique hotels, per Kiatsongchai and Choibamroong (2014, p.171).

According to Alves (2013, p.50) the personalisation of service is the key feature of a boutique hotel. The interviewee supports this statement when asked to describe Dylan's service. Personalisation of service to suit the individual consumer has been repeatedly shown to be a critical success factor in the hospitality industry by many authors. It has also been shown that personalisation of service has an even greater positive impact on hotel success and customer loyalty in the boutique hotel industry (Herjanto, Erickson and Calleja, 2017, p.262; Firat, Turkur and Metin, 2014, pp.82-86). Overall, Dylan focuses a lot on the product element of the marketing mix in the development and implementation of its strategies in keeping with the recommendations of the academic literature.

Price

When asked about pricing in Dylan, the interviewee explained that the rates are above the industry average due to the hotel's boutique luxury status. She went on to explain that competitor pricing was a main contributor to the development of pricing strategy. Dynamic pricing is used based on demand and availability, but keeping prices competitive is the focus. Speaking of the relationship between price and location, the interviewee said, "*if we were that little bit closer in (city centre), we would be charging more*". She explains that corporate room rates are offered to specific corporate accounts, and that the desirability of this rate is based on how many room/nights they occupy per year. Group rates are higher than individual rates for a variety of factors not explored in this study. Although the pricing strategy used is predominantly premium pricing, sales promotion is sometimes used to employ penetration techniques to improve guest perception of value.

According to the interviewee, Dylan rates are above the city average for hotel rooms because of the high service quality and the boutique luxury status of the hotel. This is in keeping with many authors who found that luxury hotels can, and should, charge more for their service. This is not only because customers are willing to pay more; the higher room rate has been shown to increase consumer perception of quality in the luxury hotel industry, so charging more increases consumer value perception (Khuong and Giang, 2014, p.503; Firat, Turker, and Metin, 2014, p.282; Narteh et al, 2013, p.412; Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). However, other authors focus on the importance of provision of amenities in selecting higher prices in luxury hotels and found that hotels with more facilities have a higher perceived value (Firat, Turker, and

Metin, 2014, p.282; Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, p.275). The interviewee explains that facilities are not considered in the determination of pricing strategy as she feels Dylan's unique atmosphere, design and service are sufficient to determine price.

She explained that although she believes Dylan provides a higher quality and more unique product than competitors, she sets the room rate below that of competitors because she recognises the location as a weakness. Khuong and Giang (2014, p.509) support the consideration of non-financial consumer costs, such as time spent travelling to city centre, as influential factors in the development of pricing strategy. Blythe and Martin (2016, pp.11-12) reinforce the role of non-financial costs. However, they explain that hotels should consider all non-financial costs to the consumer and use these to modify pricing strategy – transport services to the hotel are an area upon which the luxury hotel industry often excels, but Dylan has not considered this in its pricing strategy.

Place

When asked about the influence that location and distribution channels have on the development of marketing strategy, the interviewee states that these channels are very important because it is the first time guests are seeing the hotel - "*First impressions are huge*". The methods a guest uses to contact the hotel could be phone, website, OTAs, or by walking through the door. The mannerisms and attitudes of the employees that guests meet at these stages, the design of the website, and ease of booking, are all taken into consideration when designing marketing strategy. In terms of the website design, the number of clicks needed to make a reservation and ease of booking are considered. This is achieved via use of a respected website company.

Place strategy also involves maximising the advantages of the location of the hotel. According to the interviewee, Dylan has built and works hard to maintain relationships with local suppliers and food and beverage establishments. She explains the rationale behind this is to ensure that there is mutual benefit from the relationship and that Dylan can be honest in its recommendations to guests.

The channels a guest uses to reach the hotel are important in the development of marketing strategy, according to the interviewee. This echoes the opinion of Blythe and Martin (2016, pp.174-175), who discussed the role of place strategy in the service industry. They described that each distribution channel is a potential opportunity to reach marketing and business objectives. Dylan appears to have embraced this opportunity. Website design is described by the interviewee as a factor that affects place-orientated marketing strategy. Multiple authors highlight the same aspects of website use, such as number of clicks, ease of navigation, and overall appeal of website content and design, and their role in affecting marketing strategy (Rao, Srivatsala and Suneetha, 2016, p.692; Vrana and Zafiroopoulos, 2011, p.767; Xu, Youcheng, and Yixiu, 2015, p.131). However, as Panagopoulos *et al.* (2011, p.695) stated, a well-designed website is now a necessity rather than a strategic advantage in the hospitality industry, as it is ubiquitously encountered. Local B2B relationships form a key element of the strategic marketing plan of Dylan, according to the interviewee. Most authors agree that maintaining positive relationships with local establishments is important in developing marketing strategy, such as Oh and Pizam (2008, p. 63) and Blythe and Martin (2016, p.11), but they are not clear as to the specific advantages of local B2B relationships to hotels. Cai et al (2000, p.42) found that nurturing local B2B relationships was advantageous to hotels in times of

competitive stress, as local guests could be attracted to utilise the hotel's food and beverage facilities. However, Dontigney (2017) argued that focusing exclusively on local B2B relationships limits the purchasing options of the organisation, especially if the practice is not common amongst competitors. Dylan nurtures relationships with local businesses, which is likely to be beneficial, but caution is required so that they do not restrict their distribution channels.

Promotion

When asked about the influence that promotion has on the development of marketing strategy, the interviewee stated that many promotion tools are utilised in the marketing strategies of Dylan. PR, advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, and direct marketing are all used to different extents. Sales promotion is noted on the website where the room rate is demonstrated as a fraction of what it should be. This gives the customer the perception of increased value. When asked about advertising, the interviewee stated, *"I don't know how relevant that is now"*. However, social media is used as a combination of advertising and direct marketing to promote events and the hotel to particular groups. The interviewee reports that Dylan uses direct marketing in the form of e-magazines sent to previous guests to maintain high brand awareness and promote the hotel. PR is done through a third-party company, and involves inviting influencers and tourism organisations to gain positive media coverage. Personal selling is the main promotional tool used in Dylan, according to the interviewee. She meets with 16 companies and groups each week. She also explained that a member of management also calls each guest after they have held an event in Dylan to gain feedback and enquire about future bookings. Also, every guest is individually contacted by phone or email to evaluate their stay and thank them for their custom.

The interviewee elucidates that another point at which personal selling is utilised is during the reservations process. She explains that this is when upselling mostly occurs, which aims to increase revenue through selling a more expensive room or adding on surplus items.

As per the interviewee, Dylan uses all major tools of promotion to varying degrees. Sales promotion was noted by the researcher on the hotel website, but the interviewee did not mention this in the interview. This is not in keeping with Christou (2011, pp.815-818) who found that hotels should consider sales promotion as it positively affects the consumer's perception of product cost. However, he also found that brand perception in regular customers was negatively impacted by sales promotion. Although the literature is unclear about the value of sales promotion, it is a tool that was not mentioned by the interviewee but that should be considered. Advertising is not often used in Dylan. The interviewee qualifies this as explaining their primary marketing aim is to create guest relationships, and that mass-marketing tools such as advertising are not personalised, and therefore not suited to the ethos of Dylan. However, this is not in keeping with the findings of many authors; Leung, Bai and Stahura (2012, p.153, 162) found that advertising improves brand loyalty and positive word-of-mouth, and Rao, Srivatsala, and Suneetha (2016, p.692) found that advertising is essential in hospitality marketing strategy. Social media is a combination of advertising, direct marketing and PR. It improves brand reputation and consumer impression (Clarke, 2015; Crace, 2013; Baxi, Panda and Karani, 2016, p.2). Social media forms an integral part of the hotel's marketing strategy, according to the interviewee. She describes that social media aims to improve brand identity, in keeping with the above authors. However, the use of separate PR and social media companies is a potential

weakness, as they may not work in an integrated fashion, and it has been shown that successful marketing strategies must be integrated (Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, pp.212-213). Dylan uses direct marketing to maintain brand awareness. This agrees with the findings of Oh and Pizam (2008, p.64), that direct marketing is the optimal promotional tool for hotels to marketing to corporate guests.

Personal selling is described by the interviewee as the most important, influential, and time-consuming marketing activity utilised by Dylan. The literature shows that personal selling is amongst the most important promotional tools in the hospitality industry. Its adaptability, ease of attaining feedback and ease of measuring effectiveness are desirable traits (Siguaw and Bojanic, 2004, pp.2-6; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2016, p.199; Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.210). According to the interviewee, it is primarily senior management, who have been trained in sales and marketing skills, that are involved with influential guest encounters in Dylan. This is important because Narteh *et al.*, (2013, p.413) found that confidence and experience in individual guest encounters leads to better customer relationships and to re-patronage. However, Knowles, Diamantes and El-Mourhabi (2004, p.46) differentiate personal selling strategy into that executed by front-of-house employees to current guests, and that executed by sales executives to prospective guests. The interviewee did not acknowledge the role of front of house staff in personal selling, and therefore may not be focusing on the 'big picture' of the strategy and its potential. Dylan's use of personal selling to target both leisure and business guests is an interesting approach. Conversely, Oh and Pizam (2008, p.64) described that personal selling is helpful in corporate marketing, but that sales promotion and advertising should be primarily employed to target individual leisure guests.

The interviewee describes that PR measures are incorporated into the marketing strategy of Dylan. Lovelock and Wirtz (2011, p.197) and Blythe and Martin (2016, p.223) highlight its importance due to its relatively low-cost. According to the interviewee Dylan do nurture relationships with organisations that can provide PR opportunities, such as tourism boards and local media. This echoes the findings of Blythe and Martin (2016, p.216) who stated that maintaining positive relationships with media outlets improves PR and media coverage.

Processes

The interviewee stated that *“The reservations processes are something we focus on”* and that personalisation is essential to these processes. However, food ordering and payment processes are not focused upon in marketing strategy development. She explained that the marketing activity process involves the sales and marketing department and other managers meeting weekly to discuss the marketing activities, and then communicating these activities with the social media, PR, and website companies. The companies then offer a plan to the sales and marketing director, who approves or modifies it as needed.

The interviewee’s narrow interpretation of which processes are relevant to marketing strategy is in conflict with Lovelock and Wirtz (2016, p.41), who highlight the importance of considering all process of hotel operations in marketing strategy development. Some authors suggest that operational processes are ignored by marketers because these areas are not led by marketing department, leading to miscommunication. However, the interviewee describes that Dylan’s departmental

managers meet on a weekly basis, which should minimize inter-departmental miscommunication (Moormam and Day, 2016, p.21; Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42). The interviewee explains that personalization is a key feature of the processes of Dylan and that standardization is not considered important. This is in keeping with Alves (2013, p.50) who highlights the importance of personalization but is in contrast with Lovelock and Wirtz (2016, p.41) who state that processes should be standardized and replicable to be successful. This dilemma has been researched and discussed extensively in the literature in relation to boutique hotels (Nankervis, 2005, p.235; Brant, 2016; Gyurácz-Németh, 2015, pp. 87-88; Henderson, 2011, p.218).

Physical evidence

When asked about the influence that the physical environment and physical evidence of Dylan have on the development of marketing strategy, the interviewee stated that it is one of the main differentiators of boutique versus luxury hotels. Guests appreciate the move from genericity and standardisation to individuality that a boutique hotel can offer. She described *“everyone walking through the door will notice something different”*. Individual items remind guests of their previous stays in Dylan and bring back positive memories, something that is harder to do if the environment is like all other hotels. The terrace on Dylan has been described by many guests as a reminder of previous good times, she says - *“everybody has good memories there”*.

According to the interviewee, physical evidence is very important in Dylan. This agrees with Prapannetivuth (2015, p.3904) and Kushwaha and Agrawal (2015, p.87) who found that physical evidence is the primary tool a customer uses to access hotel quality; and Blythe and Martin (2016, pp.283-284) who described it as a positive

reminder of service. However, although the interviewee acknowledges the role of unique design in marketing strategy development, she fails to emphasize the wider potential role the of physical evidence in Dylan. Grădinaru, Toma and Marinescu (2016, p.313) explained that marketers must use physical evidence at every stage of the customer journey for marketing strategy to be effective. Blythe and Martin (2016, pp.283-284) highlight the role of business cards, menus, pens and many other physical items in improving guest perception of quality. Physical evidence has been shown to be a useful tool in forming customer relationships and improving brand identity, something that is important to Dylan's as per the interviewee (Kushwaha and Agrawal, 2015, p.85). The interviewee states that emotional appeals are often used as part of Dylan marketing strategies, such as unique furniture reminding guests of positive experiences. Emotional appeals have been shown to be effective in luxury hotel marketing (Oh and Pizam, 2008, p.16). Leavitt (1939) re-enforced the role of emotion, exclaiming "People don't ask for facts in making up their minds. They would rather have one good, soul-satisfying emotion than a dozen facts" (McPherson-Shilling and Fuller, 1997, p.82). Dylan has incorporated emotional strategies well into its marketing strategy, but they fail to tangibilise these emotional appeals will frequent use of physical evidence.

People

When asked about the influence that people have on the development of marketing strategies, the interviewee stated that employees are an important hotel asset but that they are underutilised. As renovation work is currently underway, the marketing team is located off-site. The interviewee describes this as a disadvantage, as the department has become disconnected with the daily views and concerns of staff. As

the service industry relies on guest-employee interaction, she recognises that the under-use of employee views and suggestions requires improvement. She states *“(staff) ...probably know a lot more about individual guests and their needs than I do”*. The hotel does feature its staff in the e-magazines sent to previous guests, providing profiles and personal interviews with them. This improves brand image by showing that the hotel cares about staff and are a positive company for which to work. The entire managerial level is involved in the hiring and training of staff, and the interviewee says that personality and attitude are required more than experience to be a member of team. The interviewee also explains that customers are another group that influence marketing strategy, as the entire process is designed to influence them. As an example, she describes that the personalized phone calls to guests provide a valuable feedback opportunity that can be used to adapt marketing strategies.

The interviewee stated that employees are an essential asset to Dylan. This is supported by Prapannetivuth (2015, p.3903), were fundamental to creating a positive guests experience. However, the interviewee acknowledged that employees are underutilized in marketing strategy and has plans to improve this in the upcoming months. The interviewee recognizes the importance of employees in personalisation of service, and this is in keeping with the findings of many authors who state that personalized service is a key characteristic of a boutique hotel (Alves, 2013, p.50; Henderson, 2011, p.218; Băltescu and Boşcor, 2016, p.275; Van Hartesvelt, 2006, p. 32). The interviewee says that employees contribute to a relaxed atmosphere and a friendly customer relationship, and Blythe and Martin (2016, p.277) support this idea, highlighting the importance a positive work atmosphere and good morale in improving brand perception.

Many authors support the role of training in the development of a marketing strategy (Grădinaru, Toma and Marinescu, 2016, p.313; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011, p.303; Nadda *et al.*, 2014, pp.89-92; Blythe and Martin, 2016, p.277). The interviewee does not mention an employee training program based on customer interaction and marketing techniques, so it is unclear if the Dylan uses training as a marketing strategy tool. She focusses on the role of customers in the development of marketing strategies, explaining that the services and processes are customer-centred. Many authors echo this sentiment and support the involvement of customers in the development of marketing strategies (Subram, Khan and Srivastava, 2016, p.42; Grădinaru, Toma and Marinescu, 2016, p.313).

5.8. Measuring effectiveness of marketing strategy

When asked how Dylan measures the success of marketing strategies, the interviewee explained that effectiveness is a difficult concept to measure - *"From a marketing point of view, you don't know how it's working"*. She explained effectiveness is based primarily on revenue, that Dylan do not set specific marketing objectives, and that effectiveness of marketing strategies is not formally defined in the strategic marketing plan. Many authors focus on the significance of defining effectiveness before trying to measure it (Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, pp.212-214; da Gama, 2011, p.4). However, the interviewee states that Dylan does not do this, which is concerning. Farris *et al.* was definitive in their opinion of hotels who do not accurately measure marketing effectiveness, saying "if you can't measure it, you can't manage it" (2015, p.2).

To help measure effectiveness of marketing strategies, the interviewee explains that Dylan defines its competitors and target markets; this is important because different marketing strategies are directed towards each target group. *“We divide that as corporate direct, corporate group and GDS bookings... leisure group...that would consist of your golf groups, your weddings... leisure agent bookings... Then other segments are our own website, direct business... and OTAs”*. Other characteristics of target groups are noted, such as country of residence and gender. Farris *et al.* (2015, p.34; 66-67) support this clear definition of target markets and competitors, finding that it leads to more accurate metrics, data collection, and measurement of marketing strategy effectiveness.

A sales and marketing strategy plan is created each year and modified each month. Dylan sets revenue targets using a web-based hospitality forecasting tool. This tool utilises the predicted income for the month, and competitor and economic factors to calculate the monthly target revenue; marketing strategies are deemed successful if these targets are reached. The specific details of this forecasting tool were not provided to the researcher during this study. Room occupancy, total revenue and room rate are some of the metrics used. According to the interviewee revenue is the primary tool that Dylan uses to measure the effectiveness of marketing strategies. Daukševičiūtė, Valainis and Vilkaitė (2011, pp.201-202) found that financially-based metrics can be useful in measuring effectiveness. However, Farris *et al.* (2015, p.66-67) suggested that although financially-based metrics may be easy to measure, they are incapable of assessing individual strategies; they can only draw links of relation, not causation between finances and strategies. Da Gama (2011, pp.4-5), Ranchhod and Gurău (2007, p.5) and Kontis and Lagos (2014, pp.410-413) argue that revenue

alone is an insufficient metric with which to measure the effectiveness of strategies, as strategy is more intricate than short-term financial values. They found that measures should be more customer focused and that non-financial tools are essential, recommending a combination of data from business performance, marketing campaigns and customer feedback to accurately measure the effectiveness of strategies.

The interviewee explained that the senior management team meet weekly to analyse data collected from the forecasting tool and to measure the effectiveness of the marketing strategies based on their success at reaching the revenue-based targets; if strategies are found to be ineffective, they are replaced or modified. The regular multi-departmental review of marketing strategies is supported by many authors. Constantin (2016, p.4) found that marketing strategy is more effective when the managers from all departments are involved, and Ranchhod and Gurău (2007, p.12), Subram, Khan and Srivastava (2016, p.42) and Ramaseshan Ishak and Kingshott (2013, p.1225) found that regular auditing of effectiveness and modification were essential to marketing success.

Dylan does not hold market research activities, but the PR company employed by the hotel has completed one focus group, according to the interviewee. She felt that this was beneficial. The literature would suggest that liaising with customers in a formal, organised manner, such as focus groups, to gain guest response is necessary to decide if a marketing strategy is working, and that this should be done regularly (Milichovsky and Simberova, 2015, pp.212-213). The consumer perception of marketing strategies is a key concept in marketing, and communicating directly with

the target market is the clearest way of clarifying their attitude to new marketing strategies. Dylan has identified the advantages of market research activities but is not currently conducting them regularly.

Social media effectiveness is not directly measured by Dylan, as a separate company controls this. However, the interviewee states that potential effectiveness of a social media strategy is evaluated by assessing if it is in keeping with brand guidelines and has a clear message - "*(It must be) ... all very Dylan*". She also explains that when influencers stay at Dylan, their social media use is observed and the effectiveness of it measured by performing cost-benefit analysis. The form of measurement is not systematic, and no statistical analysis or integrated online applications are used to measure the effectiveness of social media strategy. This in conflict with the theory, as these tools have been suggested by several authors and have been shown to positively guide budget allocation and marketing plan (O'Malley and Mitussis, 2002, pp.230-231; Kumar, 2015, pp.4-5).

The interviewee explains that another company controls the hotel website, and that they use SEO and Pay-per-click; this is important to Dylan - "*(our) website is our shop window*". These web-based metrics used by Dylan are supported by Klappdor (2013, pp.76-77) and Milović (2012, p.30), amongst other authors, as they increase the perceived relevance of hotel websites to guests. The interviewee explains that website content is adapted based on these metrics, and this is in keeping with the published theory.

She describes another measure of effectiveness of marketing strategies is the rate of upselling and package purchasing. Upselling is compared across the reservation methods to assess which distribution channels are least profitable in that sense. The interviewee states that OTA bookings are less under control of Dylan and therefore less upselling takes place via that medium. The use of rate of upselling to measure the effectiveness of personal selling strategies may have merit, but Dylan is not statistically analysing these measures. The interviewee's impression that OTA bookings are weaker in terms of personal selling does not appear to be based on research, and has not been confirmed in the literature to the knowledge of the researcher. Morosan and Jeong (2008, p.284) found that customers prefer OTA websites, something that should be kept in mind in a customer-focused hotel marketing strategy.

According to the interviewee, the final method Dylan uses to measure the effectiveness of marketing strategies is customer feedback; this is obtained via reviews on websites such as TripAdvisor, phone calls to ask for guest feedback, and show-arounds. Customer feedback is essential to the marketing process, according to Lemon and Verhoef (2016, p.71), but it should be done in a structured way. Therefore, Dylan carries out activities that could be used to assess the effectiveness of strategies, but they are not designed in a systematic or thorough way that could lead to valuable information about marketing success.

5.9. Conclusion

This chapter summarised the findings of the primary data of this study and discussed the marketing strategies of Dylan hotel and the measures used to assess their

effectiveness by following the framework of the marketing mix. Analysis of the qualitative data was completed and the results presented with the aim of providing insight into the marketing strategies of Dylan hotel. The strategies and measurement metrics were analysed and compared with the literature. This discussion provided a strong foundation for the researcher to effectively answer the research questions of this study. In chapter six below, the findings will be used to answer the research question.

6. Conclusion

6.1. Introduction

This research study evaluates the effectiveness of the marketing strategies of Dylan, a 5-star boutique hotel in Dublin, Ireland. The tourism industry in Ireland is growing and it is a promising environment for hospitality businesses. Dublin has the highest hotel room occupancy rate in Europe and boutique hotels are becoming increasingly popular. This topic is of great importance due to the known complexity of creating, implementing, and measuring effectiveness of marketing strategies. Boutique hotels must be considered separately to mainstream hotels, as they are smaller, are unique by design, and offer a more personalised service.

6.2. Aims of the study

The aims of this study were to ascertain how the 7 elements of the marketing mix affect the marketing strategies of Dylan, to analyse how Dylan measures the effectiveness of marketing strategies, and to compare the marketing strategies and measures of effectiveness of Dylan with published literature in the field. The marketing strategies of Dylan were analysed and evaluated under the framework of the 7 Ps of the marketing mix. This was done to provide structure and organisation to the strategies, allowing for thorough analysis. The measurements of effectiveness of marketing strategies were then evaluated.

6.3. Research question

The primary research question of this study is 'How effective is the marketing strategy

of Dylan hotel?'. The sub-research questions were designed to assist in the answering of this question.

6.3.1. Sub-research question 1

How do the elements of the marketing mix affect the marketing strategy of Dylan?

The product element of the marketing strategy of Dylan is that it is well-characterised as a boutique hotel, that design is promoted as the unique point-of-sale, and that the personalised service is central to its marketing strategy. Its definition of itself is in keeping with literature on boutique hotels. It views product strategy as central to improving brand positioning. According to the interviewee, guests appreciate this product, reflected by positive feedback. Therefore, product is very influential in the development of marketing strategy.

The price strategy is based on competitor rates, and Dylan's position in relation to competitors is noted to be a concern. Price is not a significant effector of marketing strategy of Dylan, although it substantially affects revenue. Dylan might consider pricing hugely influential to strategic effectiveness, as it dramatically affects revenue, but pricing, is in reality, having minimal influence on the marketing strategies of Dylan. This highlights another issue with utilising financial metrics to measure the effectiveness of marketing strategies.

The place element of the marketing strategy in Dylan is focused on as the ways in which the consumer's first impression of the hotel could be improved. The location, although suitable for a boutique hotel, is recognised as a strategic weakness and the hotel has marketing strategies in place to minimise this weakness. Place is prioritised

highly in the development of marketing strategy, as it is commonly accepted that first impressions of a hotel are key in developing positive consumer relationships.

The promotion strategy in Dylan is one of the main focuses of the overall marketing strategy; this may be because of the narrow view and constricted definition of marketing within the business. Personal selling and direct marketing are the primary tools used in the marketing strategy; this is a suitable use of personalised promotional tools for a boutique hotel. However, there are areas in which Dylan promotional strategy is lacking; it is not unique, does not utilise advertising to a significant extent and fails to achieve the brand identity of competitors. The use of separate third party companies for website, social media and PR is an obstacle to the integration of communications to produce a clear message to the guest. Promotion is fundamental to Dylan's marketing strategy as the main tool to achieve revenue goals, and although not executed in a perfect manner, it is done in a way that upholds the Dylan ethos.

The process element of marketing strategy of Dylan is not well defined, as only the reservations and marketing activity processes are incorporated into marketing strategy. Therefore, processes have little direct impact on the marketing strategies of Dylan.

Physical evidence strategy is mainly centred around the interior design of Dylan. Additional tokens such as customer gifts and food quality are not fully integrated into the marketing strategy, despite the substantial cost and high quality of some of these items. Therefore, it is the researcher's opinion that physical evidence affects the strategy of Dylan, but its effect has not been maximised by the hotel.

The people element of marketing strategy of Dylan is poorly developed and not well-planned, and does not affect the overall marketing strategy. Although the interviewee recognised the importance of employees in marketing, they are not currently directly involved in it. The marketing department focus on personal selling, but employees are not formally trained in these skills despite the opportunities they have with consumers.

In summary, the elements of the marketing mix greatly influence the marketing strategy of Dylan. Each of these elements is considered in the development of marketing strategies, but some are better implemented and more influential than others. Product, place, promotion and physical evidence are considered most important by Dylan in the development of their marketing strategy.

6.3.2. Sub-research question 2

How does Dylan measure the effectiveness of its marketing strategy?

To be successful, marketing effectiveness must be clearly defined, marketing strategies regularly reviewed, organisational goals interlinked with marketing goals and data collected in the correct way. The measurement of the effectiveness of marketing strategies in Dylan is not systematically or continuously completed. Revenue is the only formal metric used by the hotel to measure the effectiveness of marketing strategies. This is problematic due to the inexact relationship between short-term revenue and current marketing strategies. Also, the complexity of marketing strategy effectiveness demands that multiple metrics are used, with at least some of these being customer orientated. The lack of market research activities and lack of data collection seem to signify the inadequacy of the measurement of

effectiveness of the marketing strategies in Dylan. Having said that, managers regularly contact guests to solicit feedback, and informal one-to-one meetings are carried out with corporate guests and during show-arounds. According to the interviewee, Dylan is achieving its revenue based targets by implementing effective marketing strategies, and customer perception of Dylan is positive. In summary, Dylan measures the effectiveness of marketing strategies by measuring revenue, and this method is insufficient and potentially inaccurate according to the literature.

6.3.3. Research question

How effective is the marketing strategy of Dylan hotel?

The overall marketing strategy of Dylan is effective, according to the interviewee, as the revenue targets are being met. The researcher finds it difficult to assess the effectiveness of the marketing strategies from the interviews conducted in this study as the hotel does not use ample metrics or have customer-derived data to support its claims. What the researcher can deduct from these results in the context of the current literature is that Dylan's strategic plan, with its lack of measures of strategic effectiveness, has the potential to result in wasteful marketing expenditure, ineffective marketing strategies, and delayed recognition of the deteriorating market position and brand identity of the hotel. In summary, Dylan has a well-structured marketing strategy based on the elements of the marketing mix, but they do not measure the effectiveness of these strategies in a systematic, customer-orientated way.

6.4. Recommendations for further research

Future research on the measurement of the effectiveness of marketing strategies in other luxury and boutique hotels in Ireland could provide valuable information. A

quantitative study on this topic could allow researcher to collect data from larger groups more efficiently, and a survey-based study involving what metrics used to measure effectiveness in luxury or boutique hotels could potentially lead to valuable data for the hotel industry. Customer perspective of marketing strategy is another viewpoint that could be investigated. Furthermore, a larger qualitative study could be completed by expanding the methodological structure of this research to cover all luxury hotels in Dublin, thereby enabling comparison between hotels and possibly the generation of generalizable conclusions.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Self-reflection

Introduction

This purpose of this section is to describe and critically analyse the researcher's personal learning experience during this dissertation work. The researcher will report his own reflection on learning, identifying his improvements and accomplishments, and acknowledging the areas on which he requires improvement. The aim of the self-reflection report to complete an evaluation of the MBA course, particularly the dissertation, from a learning perspective and understand the importance for the researcher and the case study organization. The style of teaching in DBS, the structure of the course, and the interactive nature of classes nurtures a positive and symbiotic teacher-student relationship, and made the entire experience of completing this Master's degree gratifying and worthwhile. Although the researcher had a clear idea of his educational objectives on commencement of this dissertation, he realises now that evolution of his learning style, and recognition of his learning strengths and weaknesses have formed a large part of what he has achieved from this dissertation, and that these things will continue to help him in the completion of personal and professional challenges in the future.

Expectations

My expectations for this course included learning the study material, needing to improve my class participation and confidence, putting long periods of time into the dissertation writing, improving my professional skills and learning how to deal

effectively with professional challenges in Ireland. I found that the course did meet these expectations, but there were some challenges that I had not expected. The workload and the study expectations from the lecturers surprised me at first. I had not studied for many years, and although I was interested in the course material, I found it difficult to focus and to study as much as I needed to. However, I overcame these issues with time, support from lecturers and colleagues, and self-reflection.

Learning styles

Identifying a style that best portrays the researcher's approach to learning is an important element in assessing one's own learning. Felder and Henriques define a learning style as 'the way, in which an individual characteristically acquires, retains, and retrieves information' (1995, p.21). Kolb provides another definition, "learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984, p.38). According to Kolb's theory, the experience of learning is a circular process. He states that learning is an active process which involves thinking. This theory focuses on the connection between the learning experience, the post experiential reflection phase, the stage of conceptualisation and theorisation, and the final stage of acting upon the new theory to create a new learning experience; this leads back in to the experiential phase, and the cycle continues (Cameron, 2008, pp.119-120).

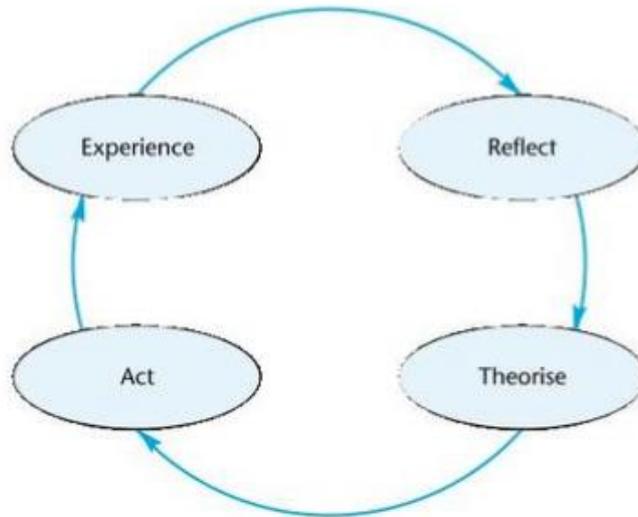


Figure 2: The Kolb learning cycle (Cameron, 2008, p.120).

Broadly related to Kolb's cycle, Honey and Mumford (2000) suggest that individuals prefer to learn in different ways. They developed a questionnaire to help people to identify their preferred learning style (Cameron, 2008, p.122). The purpose this is for a learner to recognise their learning style, but also to enlighten the learner as to their strengths and weaknesses with respect to learning experiences. Learners can use Kolb's model to combine learning styles and truly embrace the experiential learning cycle. They identified four learning styles: Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists (Cameron, 2008, pp.122-124; Groat and Musson, 2016, p.55).

The researcher completed Honey and Mumford's Learning Styles questionnaire (table 2) to enable him to recognise his learning style, to learn about this style, to formulate a learning plan and to enrol learning strategies that would best meet his learning needs. The researcher scored highest in the Reflector category. This learning style describes an attentive learner who acts as a good observer in group situations, and are efficient at information assimilation. This is advantageous in the completion of a

dissertation as the researcher can be focused, act in a careful manner, and reflect upon the learning opportunities and experiences with which he is faced. However, he recognises that a Reflector learning style is also linked with lack of group participation and leadership, and lack of risk-taking. He scored lowest in the Activist category, which describes a person who may lack openness and passion about a learning experience; although this learning style can be useful in the early stages of a dissertation, the lengthy nature of the activity may prove challenging for an activist and therefore the researcher feels that this low score may have been beneficial to him during this study. However, the researcher identifies the relative lack of Activist characteristics as a potential weakness in future research, but feels that prior awareness of this will improve his overall learning style.

Although the researcher did score highest as a reflector and lowest as an activist, it is notable that his scores were similar throughout the categories. This shows that he is less likely to have extreme learning styles and is more likely to be able to adapt to a diverse range of learning situations. At times when the researcher was struggling to progress with the study, reviewing the learning style questionnaire allowed him to identify how his weaknesses were challenging him at those times. Throughout the course of this dissertation, the researcher felt that the learning style questionnaire guided his learning and modified his learning style.

Table 2: Researcher's learning styles questionnaire and results.

Style	General characteristics	Researcher score
Activists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Open-minded, sociable, passionate and excited about new experiences • Weak on implementation or providing sustained effort 	11
Reflectors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attentive and cautious, adopt a low profile in discussions and are good observers • Tendency to be too cautious and not take enough risks 	16
Theorists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Logical, adapt their observations into coherent theories, are rational and analytical • Dislike subjectivity 	13
Pragmatists	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confident to act on new ideas and solve problems; sure that have a better way to do things • Find open-ended discussions frustrating 	13

(adapted from Groat and Musson, 2016, p.55)

Stages of learning

Noel Burch's 'Four Stages of Learning any New Skill' describes the process a learner moves through as they become skilled in a field. The researcher commenced this study at the second level of 'Conscious incompetence', meaning he was aware of the gaps in his knowledge. The researcher had progressed from the first level of 'Unconscious incompetence' during the initial stages of this Master's course with the help of his teachers. The researcher, in his own opinion, has now reached a stage of 'Conscious competence', where he has acquired a great deal of knowledge and understanding in the area of this study, yet continues to acknowledge his junior position and minimal real-world application of this knowledge. The researcher hope to reach a level of 'Conscious competence' in the coming years, with the undertaking of further study and regular use of this theory in his daily career (Adams, 2016).

Self-assessment from the MBA course and thesis

Personal

In the evaluation of his personal input and development during this study, the researcher feels he was an enthusiastic learner for the duration of the course and dissertation writing. He participated in class discussions, achieved excellent grades in coursework, and feels that the positive atmosphere during team meetings and high grades in group assignments is reflective of good team-working and leadership skills. The researcher was a consistency learner, despite personal struggles and being in a foreign country for this course.

Added value

Professionally, the researcher feels he has become a more desirable employee and has earned the respect of his colleagues. This course has also stimulated his interest in further education, and he is considering enrolling in further post-graduate studies. Personally, the researcher improved his self-discipline skills and interest in research and the field of hospitality marketing. He also gained a significant sense of achievement, as he had not considered earlier in his career that he would be eligible for or achieve a postgraduate qualification.

Time management

Planning and organisation are a skill of this researcher. The researcher found it difficult to complete this dissertation as he was reliant on other people, such as the interviewee. The researcher had to learn to deal with changes in plans, alterations to

time-line, and delays in completing stages of the dissertation. The researcher feels this was a key learning point for him in this study that will help him indefinitely.

Acquisition of skills

The entire MBA course demanded a high level of effective and productive communication also, a skill that the researcher felt he had improved through years of working in the hospitality industry, but that he has once again improved during this course. The researcher's English language skills also improved; although English is his third language, the researcher has lived in English speaking countries for many years. However, the writing of a dissertation presented challenges to him of which he was previously unaware. His professional language skills have improved during this course and this study, something for which he is grateful.

The process of writing this dissertation involved 4 core elements, in the opinion of this researcher; Secondary data collection, Conduction of interviews, critical analysis of research findings, and collection of data into a concise, structured, informative written piece. These skills will help the researcher throughout his career. Secondary data collection and critical analysis are necessities, both to complete further research projects, but also to remain up-to-date with evolving knowledge in the fast-growing area of hospitality marketing. Interview skills were greatly improved by the researcher during this study, and he now feels more comfortable in dealing with managers, and well-equipped to conduct meetings and interviews in his workplace in the future.

Problems encountered

The researcher's main issues at the beginning of the dissertation were content related. The nature of this topic is that it is complex, and many authors dispute the facts. It was also noted early in this study by the researcher that there is a lack of published research relating to boutique hotel marketing, and this was problematic in trying to complete a useful literature review. This was recognised early by the researcher, enabling him to limit the effect of this problem by widening the subject of the literature review. Later in the dissertation, time management became a concern for the researcher, in part due to the time-line he developed being too restrictive, and in part due to unexpected delays in dissertation completion due to personal circumstances and research subject scheduling. This problem was also recognised early, and was rectified by developing a new dissertation timeline that would be more practical, in keeping with the researcher's work and personal schedules, and in keeping with the scheduling of the interviews.

Conclusion and future directions

The researcher has learned about his learning styles, strength and weaknesses, and has gained insight into how he approaches challenges and how he attempts to overcome them. The opportunities in the hospitality industry in Ireland today are improving, but there remain challenges. This MBA qualification is something that is held to high esteem in the industry, and the researcher believes it will be looked upon favourably when in the search of new roles. The researcher also feels that he could be successful in achieving another Masters or PhD qualification in this field as he has found new interest in study. The MBA program has made the researcher aware of the importance of collaborative work and the distinct challenges that come with working in

groups, especially when there are personality clashes, ideological differences, and disparities in ability. Overall, this MBA process has made the researcher a better learner, a more insightful person, and a more valuable employee in the hospitality industry.

Appendix 2: Gantt chart

This Gantt chart depicts the timeline of the dissertation.

Table 3: Gantt chart of dissertation timeline.

Plan for completion												
Month	March				April				May			
Week Beginning	6	13	20	27	3	10	17	24	1	8	15	22
Activities undertaken / Weeks	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Meeting with research supervisor												
Research and finalise focus and research question												
Conduct literature research												
Write literature chapter												
Meeting with research supervisor												
Research and decide on methodology strategy												
Write method chapter												
Contact suitable respondents for research												
Conduct primary data collection												
Meeting with research supervisor												
Conduct data analysis phase												
Write results chapter												
Write discussion, conclusion and abstract												
Compile first overall draft												
Meeting with research supervisor												
Editing												
Final proofing												
Submission												

Appendix 3: Semi-structured interview guiding questions

Guiding questions for the semi-structured interview

Opening questions

What is your professional background?

What is your position in Dylan hotel?

How would you describe the Dylan hotel?

Who are the Dylan hotel guests?

What is the organisational structure of the Dylan hotel?

Tell me about your idea of what marketing is and how it affects Dylan hotel?

What are the strengths and weakness of the Dylan Hotel?

Industry questions

Tell me about Dublin as a tourist destination?

What are the opportunities and threats from the current market?

Does the marketing plan of tourism boards affect the Dylan hotel?

Who are your competitors and how do they affect Dylan's strategy?

What do you think separates the Dylan from competitors?

Marketing strategy development

Tell me about marketing in Dylan

Does the Dylan Hotel have a strategic marketing plan?

What are the current marketing objectives?

What strategies do you use to achieve marketing objectives?

What is the most effective marketing strategy of Dylan?

How do employees affect the marketing strategies?

In your opinion, what is the Dylan hotel's unique point of sale?

How do you measure the success or the failure of the marketing strategies?

How has the marketing strategy improved since you started in Dylan?

Appendix 4: Consent form and Information sheet

INFORMATION SHEET FOR PARTICIPANTS

Project title: Marketing strategies in 5-star boutique hotels: A case study, the Dylan hotel

OVERVIEW

You are being asked to take part in a research study on the marketing strategies used by 5-star boutique hotels. This research involves a qualitative case study of the Dylan hotel marketing strategies. Information will be gathered via a literature review, and via a semi-structured interview. The study will be carried out by the researcher, Mr. Eduardo Pereira, and will be supervised by Mr. John Staunton. The study is affiliated with Dublin Business School and is being completed in partial fulfilment of the researcher's Master of Business Administration degree.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN

If you choose to participate in this study, your assistance will be required in the form of a semi-structured interview. This will be held face-to-face with the researcher, Mr. Eduardo Pereira, and will be audio recorded. The interview will involve the researcher asking you questions about the marketing practices of the Dylan hotel and the rationale behind these choices. The questions will be open-ended and designed to allow you to elaborate where you deem suitable. The questions will aim to gather information about the focus of the marketing strategies of the Dylan hotel. They will be intentionally subjective. The interview will be transcribed from the audio recording afterwards without identifying features. The audio recording will be destroyed once the transcription has been completed.

TIME COMMITMENT

The interview should last approximately 60minutes. It can be completed in shorter aliquots if this is preferable to you.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHTS

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation required from you. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn / destroyed. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome. A full de-briefing will be given after the study). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

CONFIDENTIALITY/ANONYMITY

The data I collect does not contain any personal information about you except identifies you as a Marketing Manager at the Dylan hotel.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

John Staunton or I will be glad to answer your questions about this study at any time. You may contact my supervisor at (supervisor details here - confidential)
You may contact me at (researcher's details here - confidential)

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: An evaluation of marketing strategies in 5-star boutique hotels: A case study, Dylan hotel

PROJECT SUMMARY:

This is a research study on the marketing strategies used by 5-star boutique hotels. It involves a qualitative case study of the Dylan hotel marketing strategies. Information will be gathered via a literature review, and via a semi-structured interview. The study will be carried out by the researcher, Mr. Eduardo Pereira, and will be supervised by Mr. John Staunton. The study is affiliated with Dublin Business School and is being completed in partial fulfilment of the researcher's Master of Business Administration degree.

Your assistance will be required in the form of a semi-structured interview. This will be held face-to-face with the researcher, Mr. Eduardo Pereira, and will be audio recorded. The interview will involve the researcher asking you questions about the marketing practices of the Dylan hotel and the rationale behind these choices. The interview will be transcribed from the audio recording afterwards without identifying features. The audio recording will be destroyed once the transcription has been completed.

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation required from you. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn / destroyed. You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you. You have the right to have your questions about the procedures answered.

By signing below, you are agreeing that: (1) you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet, (2) questions about your participation in this study have been answered satisfactorily, (3) you are aware of the potential risks (if any), and (4) you are taking part in this research study voluntarily (without coercion).

Participant's Name (Printed)

Participant's signature

Researcher's Name (Printed)

Researcher's signature

Date: _____

Appendix 5: Photographic evidence of Dylan hotel

Photos from Dylan website (Dylan, 2017).

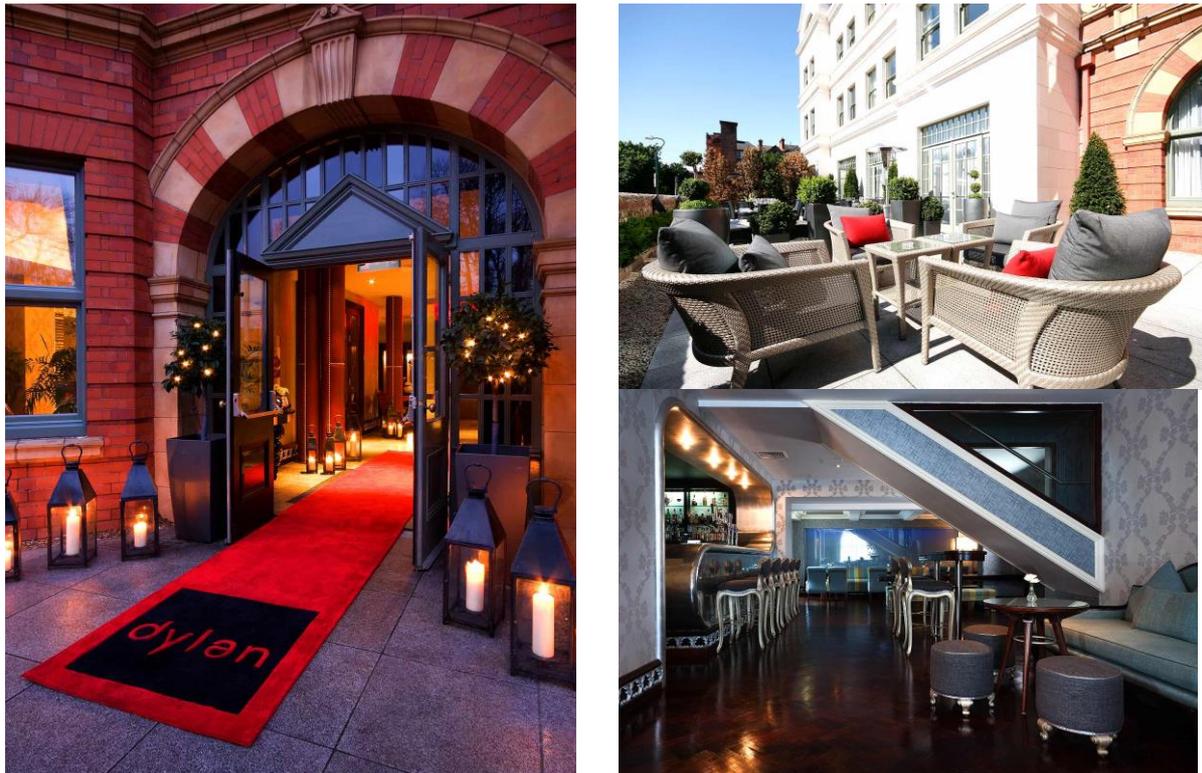


Figure 3: Dylan hotel's main entrance and bar.



Figure 4: The bedrooms of Dylan hotel.



Figure 5: Meeting room, Lounges and library of Dylan hotel.