



Customer Engagement in Tourism and Hospitality Services in Kasama and Shiwa Ng'andu, Zambia

J. Simumba* and W. Nchito
Department of Geography and Environmental Studies
School of Natural Sciences, University of Zambia
P. O. Box 32379, Lusaka.
jacksonsimumba@gmail.com

Corresponding author*

Abstract

A large and growing body of literature has investigated on tourism development and potentials in Zambia. However, insufficient attention has been paid to the level of customer engagement in hospitality and tourism services in general, in Zambia. This article provides a Zambian case study that focuses on customer engagement in Tourism and Hospitality services in Kasama and Shiwa Ng'andu districts in the Northern Tourism Circuit of Zambia. The objectives of the study were to ascertain means used to engage customers, to find out opportunities and challenges hospitality and tourism organizations encounter when fostering customer engagement, to examine existing and potential consumers' motivations and barriers to engage customers on various platforms. The study used a case study research design with a qualitative research approach. Both Snowball and Convenient sampling techniques were used to select 46 participants in the study. An interview guide was used to collect data from ethically acquired respondents. The findings indicate that lodge proprietors in the hospitality industry, private tourist site proprietor's engage customers on various platforms while government owned tourist sites customers were not actively engaged on any platform. Furthermore, results showed that engagement of customers enabled hospitality and tourism proprietors to improve service delivery. The results of study further showed that disruptions in service provision pose a challenge to engage customers. Furthermore, the study has reviewed that quality of standard and special services offered at no cost to overnight customers at various hospitality and tourist sites motivates customers to be engaged at various platforms while communication breakdown between service providers and customers due to overlapping dates where customers want a service at the same time creates a barrier between service providers and customers to engage on various platforms. It became clear that minimal engagement of customers in hospitality and tourism services has affected the growth of hospitality and tourism industry in Kasama and Shiwa Ng'andu districts in the Northern tourism circuit. These findings have important implications for the management of customer towards brand loyalty and trust in the northern tourism circuit.

Keywords: Customer engagement, tourism enterprises, stakeholders, Zambia.

Introduction

The Zambian government has recently come to view tourism as a major contributing sector towards national economic development. Zambia Development Agency (ZDA) (2013: 2) explains that: "Zambia stands out as one of the prime tourism destinations in Africa offering a wealth of natural tourism assets waterfalls, lakes and rivers holding about 35% of Southern Africa's total natural water resource, 'wildlife protected areas' occupying about 10% of the country's total land area, and a tropical climate a passport to sunshine almost throughout the year". In 2015, the government of Zambia enacted the 2015 Hospitality and Tourism Act and Tourism policy which has recognised the engagement of various players (stakeholders) in the tourism sector for tourism to be sustainable.



The concept of engagement has been studied in various academic disciplines such as marketing (customer engagement), sociology (civic engagement) and organizational behaviour (employee engagement) (Brodie et al., 2011; Taheri et al., 2014). Taheri et al., (2014:322) define Customer Engagement as “a state of being involved with and committed to a specific market offering” Furthermore, Hollebeek et al., (2014) explains that Customer engagement is characterised by repeated interactions between a customer and an organization that strengthen the emotional, psychological or physical investment a customer has in the brand and the organization. Customer engagement (CE) has become a hot topic in business journals emerging in the beginning of 2000s and elucidating the new paradigm of marketing science (Vivek et al., 2012). Despite an increased interest in engagement, both academics and practitioners, lack an explicit understanding of the focal business’s role in the creation of engagement and how a business’s internal factors contribute to the creation of customer engagement. The tourism and hospitality literature widely supports the potential benefits of CE.

Despite the increasingly adoption of Customer engagement strategies in many disciplines, little research into this emerging concept has been evident in the Zambian tourism sector. Thus, the concept of engaging customers is not yet fully explored and understood with respect to provision of hospitality and tourism services in Kasama and Shiwa Ng’andu districts in the Northern tourism circuit of Zambia. However, So (2013) point’s out that despite the importance of engaging existing and potential customer, the comprehension of CE is still emerging.

Many researchers such as (Hollebeek, 2011; Bolton, 2011) have conceptualised CE but there is still a knowledge gap of CE in both the hospitality and tourism services and an absence of this information may retard the growth of the tourism industry in the northern tourism circuit of Zambia and elsewhere as well.

This study also brings new knowledge on the means of customer engagement used thereby contributing to the discussion on the scope of the concept. Empirically, the paper provides a new perspective as it studies customer engagement using stakeholder theory, contrasting with previous empirical research on CE that have mainly addressed customer engagement using other models. The study is significant because there has been less exploration to ascertain customer engagement in hospitality and tourism services in the Northern tourism circuit which has been highly discussed it terms of its potential. Kasama and Shiwa Ng’andu districts were selected as the main sites of the study.

Literature review

Theoretical framework.

The authors adopted Freeman’s (1984) Stakeholder Theory as the theoretical framework. Freeman (1984) argues that the inclusion and participation of stakeholders in an organisation’s operations is an imperative. Freeman’s (1984) stakeholder theory suggests that an organization is characterized by its relationships with various groups and individuals, including employees, customers, suppliers, governments, and members of the communities. This concept holds that each organisation has a network of relationships with interested parties who have diverse and sometimes conflicting interests. According to Freeman (1984:46), a stakeholder is “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives”. In the light of the above, this study considers tourism development stakeholders to be people or communities associated with tourism development and therefore, have the potential to affect or be affected by tourism development activities. From a managerial perspective, the stakeholder theory posits that the various groups can and should have a direct influence on managerial decision making (Jones, 1995). Thus effective effective management demands synchronous attention to the genuine interest of all appropriate (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). Furthermore, Clarkson (1995) cited in



Saulter and Leisen (1999: 314) emphasizes this premise and cautions that failure to retain participation of even a single primary stakeholder group, will result in the failure of an organization. Thus 'Stakeholder Theory' in this study consider customers to be major stakeholders who are thus critical for the success and failure of hospitality and tourism services. Thus the significance of stakeholder theory in this study is that customers are major stakeholders in the provision of hospitality and tourism services and as such non-engagement of customers may affect the growth of the hospitality and tourism industry in Kasama and Shiwa Ng'andu districts in the Northern tourism circuit. Furthermore, the stakeholder theory is significant because it will help to determine and explain the past, present and future state of affairs of customer engagement in tourism and hospitality services in Kasama and Shiwa Ng'andu districts.

Customer engagement

So et al., (2016) explain that the tourism and hospitality literature widely supports the potential benefits of CE. Several scholars acknowledge the importance of CE by suggesting that the outcomes of CE is a developed understanding of customer experience (Bowden, 2009; Mollen & Wilson, 2010; Verhoef, Reinartz, & Krafft, 2010), customer retention, as well as an increased loyalty towards a brand through affecting the customers positively (Hollebeek, 2011a; Van Doorn et al., 2010). It further enhances profitability (Hollebeek, 2011b; Verhoef, Reinartz & Krafft, 2010). Customer engagement has emerged in the marketing literature as an important concept defined with a strong behavioural focus (So et al., 2016). Contemporary research further suggests that there is a great potential to engage customers in order to enhance business performance and customer value (Hollebeek, 2011; Jakkola & Alexander, 2014).

Vivek (2009) explains that Customer engagement is behavioural and therefore participation by the customer is critical. Furthermore, So (2013) explain's that the customer participation and interaction with a business and other customers in sharing information and knowledge such as thoughts, feelings and experiences, are central to customer engagement. A number of scholars have tried to define customer engagement. Hollebeek (2011) cited in Kandampully and Zhang (2015), points out that there appears to be no consensus on the definition of customer engagement or its dimensions. So, King, and Sparks (forthcoming) cited in So et al., (2016:65) define CE as a customer's personal connection to a brand as manifested in cognitive, affective, and behavioural responses outside of the purchase and conceptualize CE as a higher-order construct comprising five first-order factors, including enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction, and identification.

Managers must implement innovative strategies to gain the trust and loyalty of their existing customers (Dominici & Guzzo, 2010). Faced with increasing competition, many service companies recognize the importance of building strong relationships with their existing customers (Morgan & Rego, 2006. Social media are the dominant enablers of customer engagement, and these technologies are very different from previous marketer-customer technology platforms (Harrigan et al., 2016). It is suggested that within interactive, dynamic business environments customer engagement (CE) represents a strategic imperative for generating enhanced corporate performance, including sales growth (Neff, 2007). On the other hand, Brodie et al., (2011) explains that the rationale underlying this assertion is that engaged customers play a key role in viral marketing activity by providing referrals and/or recommendations for specific products, services, and/or brands to others. Furthermore, Engaged customers can also play an important role in new product/service development (Hoyer et al., 2010).

Tourism and hospitality services

In the tourism and hospitality industry, the success or failure of our businesses and destinations depends on service. Providing high quality customer service should be at the top of every business entity agenda. Customer service is therefore more important than ever before, especially during



difficult economic times when customers are looking to increase value for money and are less forgiving of mediocre service (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). Customer service remains an integral part of delivering on tourism marketing promises to guests. Customer service is a critical factor for tourism success, both as a means of satisfying ever-increasing customer expectations, and as a way to achieve business profitability (Erdly & Kesterson-Townes, 2002). The survival of hotels depends on the delivery of service quality resulting in customer contentment (Mohsin & Lockyer, 2010). But despite its importance, quality customer service is the exception rather than the norm, in many parts of the world. There are a number of reasons for this fall in standards. When economic conditions become more demanding, many organizations focus on cost cutting and acquiring new customers which invariably puts the relationships with their existing customers at risk (Hudson & Hudson, 2013). Furthermore, a study by the Bain Company, reported in the Harvard Management Update, revealed that 80% of 362 companies surveyed believed they delivered superior service to their customers. When the customers of those same businesses were surveyed, only 8% agreed. Nine out of ten companies who confidently assert the high level of their customers' satisfaction are completely misinformed. In addition, many organizations simply don't understand the significance of customer service, despite the exhaustive literature that has made the connection between service excellence, satisfaction and loyalty and therefore profits (Hudson & Hudson, 2013).

Sonkova and Grabowska (2015) point out that since the customers of today are more demanding than they were 20 years ago, customer service has become a crucial part of the marketing strategy. Customers desire excellent service, which is empathic, responsive and of a high quality.

Consumer motivation and barriers for engagement

Consumer motivation has often been scrutinized in terms of customer decision making, satisfaction, experiences, environment and interactions with others. Hotel management staff are taught that all decisions about management of the hotel should begin with understanding of the guest and determination of which option favours success for the hotel as the policy most likely to produce a high measure of guest satisfaction. Furthermore, motivation is an important dimension in tourism research. It is a central concept in the comprehension of consumer behaviour and in the tourism decision process.

Kim (2008:195) defines customer orientation "as the set of activities, behaviours, and beliefs that place high priority on customers' interests and continuously create superior customer value".

Van Doorn et al. (2010) cited in Brodie et al. (2011), explain that "customer engagement behaviours result from motivational drivers including word-of-mouth activity, customer-to-customer (C2C) interactions and/or blogging activity". Thus understanding the consumer is crucial to success in the hospitality industry (Goeldner et al., 2000).

Materials and method

Research Design

The study used a case study research design within a qualitative research approach. A qualitative methodological approach was selected as it is considered the most appropriate way to produce detailed findings (Creswell, 2009). Snowball and Convenient sampling techniques were used to select participants in the study. Convenient sampling was used to select tourists visiting tourist sites and customers lodging in lodges. Bryman (2012: 201) explains that "A convenience sample is one that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility". In view of the facts given above, the study used the non-probability sampling design to collect data from both inbound and domestic tourists. Convenience sampling technique was adequate and appropriate because there was no sample frame of all the tourists and customers who visited the tourist destination sites.



Thus in this study, the researchers used convenience sampling to select customers and tourist who were found visiting tourist destination sites and customers who were overnight guests in lodges. Although tourists and customers were selected by convenient sampling, they had extensive travel experience in Zambia, Africa and Europe.

Furthermore, Snowball sampling techniques was used to select hospitality and tourism enterprises proprietors or managers. Snowball sampling is sampling techniques in which the researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and these sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research. These participants will then suggest others and so on (Bryman, 2012:424). Thus researchers used snowball sampling because hospitality and tourism enterprises proprietors recommended to researchers whom to interview, and as such, a snowball sampling technique was applicable in which the chairperson for Hotel and Catering Association (HCAS) was selected first who in turn nominated other members of the hospitality and tourism association. Thus a sample size of 46 was used after reaching saturation point. There was no proper record of hospitality and tourism enterprises, number of customers and tourist at the office of the Regional tourism Coordinator. Thus it was not possible to draw a random sample since there was no knowledge of the population from which it could be drawn (Becker, 1963). A total of 46 respondents were interviewed after ethical considerations were applied and reaching theoretical saturation which is simply defined as data satisfaction, a point where no new information is obtained from further data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Saturation point determines the sample size in qualitative research as it indicates that adequate data has been collected for a detailed analysis. However, there are no fixed sizes or standard tests that can be used to determine the required data for reaching saturation (Kendall, 2008).

Data Collection

Primary data was collected from two groups who included the lodge manager's, tourism enterprise managers, overnight customers in lodges and tourist visiting tourist sites. The researchers collected data from overnight customers, tourists and service providers in hospitality and tourism services through interviews. 46 participants were interviewed using an interview guide. Managers in hospitality and tourism enterprises were interviewed using a similar interview schedule while overnight customers in lodges and tourists were also interviewed using a similar interview since both tourists and overnight guest possess similar characteristic.

Results

This section presents the findings resulting from analysis of the interviews with lodge managers, customers (guests) and tourists. This section will first present findings for the demographic characteristic of respondents. This is followed by results on the means used to engage customers in hospitality and tourism services. It is then followed by results reporting on Opportunities and Challenges for customer engagement, and what motivates consumers to engagement. Finally, barriers to engage customers will be presented.

Demographic Profile

The demographic characteristics of respondents for Kasama and Shiwangandu are shown in Table 1.

Table: 1 :Characteristics of Participants

	Kasama (N=35)		Shiwangandu (N=11)	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Gender				
Male	27	77.1%	8	72.7%
Female	8	22.9%	3	27.3%

The Kasama sample (N=35) comprised 27 males representing 77.1% males and 8 females representing 22.9% females. Out of this sample, 7 participants representing 20% were male managers running hospitality and tourism enterprises while 28 participants representing 80% were customers and tourists. Additionally, 10 tourists representing 76.9% were international tourists while 3 tourists representing 23.1% were domestic tourists.

The Shiwangandu sample (N=11) comprised 8 males representing 72.7% and 3 females representing 27.3% females. Out of this sample, 3 participants representing 27.3% were managers running hospitality and tourism enterprises while 8 participants representing 80% were customers and tourists. Additionally, 7 tourists representing 87.5% were international tourists while 1 tourist representing 12.5% of tourists was a domestic tourist.

Although the characteristics do not enable the data to be generalized to the wider population of Kasama and Shiwangandu districts, the aim was to achieve a purposeful sample of overnight customers in lodges and tourists found visiting the tourist destination with recent domestic and international travel experience. Managers working in hospitality and tourism enterprises were also considered. Furthermore, it is suggested that the number of 46 in the sample was suitable enough to access how customers are engaged in tourism and hospitality services in Kasama and Shiwangandu districts in the Northern tourism circuit of Zambia.

Table: 2: Means use to engage customers

Means of Engagement	Frequency	%
Customer to Front office	32	69.6%
Customer to Manager	10	21.7%
Manager to customer	4	8.7%
Total	46	100%

The findings of the study revealed that a customer to front-line office engagement was mentioned 32 times by respondents as the most common means of engagement between customers and service providers. Customer to manager engagement was mentioned 10 times by the respondents. "It's us customers who normally engage service providers on many occasions on issues pertaining to conditions in the room"(Mwaya Cosmas, overnight customer). Finally, Manager to customer engagement was mentioned 4 times as another means used to participate with customers. "I give a book to my customers to comment on the quality of products and services" (Kabunda, proprietor of Mapalo Lodge).

Opportunities and Challenges for customer engagement

The results of the study showed that engagement with customers enabled hospitality and tourism proprietors to improve service delivery which seemed to be the outstanding opportunity among hospitality and tourism service providers. Another opportunity which emerged from this study is that managers of hospitality and tourism enterprises learn new ideals from customers which in turn enable service providers to introduce new and more suitable packages to customers.

Furthermore, results of the study also revealed that fostering customer engagement was a great opportunity that gave hospitality and tourism service providers a chance to know the kind of customers they attract and also what kind of products they need. "Engagement helps me to know the kind of customers because some customers carry their portfolio and by engaging them, it helps me to know how to handle them by providing services in their interests" (Kabunda, proprietor Mapalo Lodge).

Furthermore, the results of the study showed that disruptions in service provision pose a challenge to engage customers on various platforms. Non-provision of a DSTV full package service came out first as a barrier to engagement from service providers which was mentioned 40 times, and disruption in water supply came out second from service providers, as another impediment to engage customers effectively. "Some customers are very hostile, they feel some problems such as the disruption of the water supply was based on negligence and they feel a stand-by alternative of water supply is supposed to be in place"(Simbaya, Manager, Sinamu Lodge). Customers also mentioned an inability to meet the Manager poses a challenge to engagement. One customer lamented that "In most cases seeing the manager is difficult, and as a result I change guest house from time to time because I fell the problems we face in the rooms are supposed to be sorted out by the manager"(Chanda Chisulo, Overnight guest). Furthermore, inadequate necessary education and training to run a hospitality and tourism industry operation, was cited as another challenge to customer engagement. "Most of these workers I have employed have no education training in either hospitality or tourism; hence this lack of hospitality skills may have a negative effect on how to effectively engage a customer", (Kangwa, Proprietor Muntanga Guest House). The study revealed that some customers do not want to be known to either the manager or proprietor and this creates a challenge to engage with them at all. "Some customers give a cold shoulder when you approach them and this makes it difficult to engage such a customer", (Kabunda, proprietor Mapalo Lodge).

Consumer motivation and barriers for engagement

The study has reviewed that quality of standards and special services like free gymnasium, and swimming offered at no cost to overnight customers at various hospitality and tourist sites motivates customers to be engaged on various platforms. One customer said that "At this lodge breakfast is sometimes given for free if you are a regular customer and this motivates me to be engaged by the owner of the lodge", (Phiri, overnight customer). Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that some customers willingness to be known to hospitality and tourism proprietors was another motivation for good engagement. A discount on services provided to customers such as rooms, was also mentioned as having an impact that motivates customers to be engaged at various platforms.

Furthermore, results of the study revealed that cleanliness of the place and rooms having all the necessary items in place such as coffee machines and safes, motivate customers to be engaged. Additionally, the results of the study revealed that free laundry services to overnight guests greatly motivates customers to be engaged. Service quality and satisfaction, and positive customer experiences are vitally important, because a positive experience will cause the customer to return for repeat visits or stay longer and additionally to recommend the establishment to others (Nasution & Mavondo, 2008). Furthermore, Feather and Chun (2008) posit that Customer Engagement is largely driven by the employees' ability to enhance their customers' self-esteem. Providing consistent service quality, valuing customers and fulfilling promises positively impacts levels of engagement and bodes well for sustainability.

The Quality of the Service Environment came out as another strong motivation for effective engagement. Feather and Chun (2008) point out that the actual environment of any establishment is also a key driver of Customer Engagement within the retail sector. The variety of offerings available and the convenience of for example, a store, are essential to securing fully engaged customers.

While several consumer motivation behaviours encouraged customers to be engaged on various platforms, a number of barriers inhibit the engagement process between customers and service providers. The study revealed that a communication breakdown between service providers and customers due to overlapping dates where customers want a service to be provided at the same



time as other customers, creates a barrier between service providers and customers in engagement initiatives.

Discussion and implications

This research involved interviewing owners or managers of tourism businesses and overnight customers/ tourists found visiting tourist sites in Kasama and Shiwangandu district. The results are consistent with the literature such as (So, 2013; Jonsson & Ohlson, 2015) who have pointed out that quality of service has an impact on CE. Nevertheless the quality of the service itself is prominent in order to engage customers and the importance of a well-working solution cannot be overestimated as fundamental criteria for enhancing CE. Because of the importance attached to CE, lodge proprietors in the hospitality industry and tourism enterprises proprietors, engage customers on various platforms which help hospitality and tourism service providers to improve service provision. Engaged consumers generate product/brand referrals, co-create experience and value and contribute to organizational innovation processes and consumer loyalty (Hoyer et al., 2010). Government owned tourist site customers were not actively engaged on any platform. Many tourists expressed ignorance on the engagement process. However, tourists were of the view that if site managers engaged them, their contribution would help in terms of changing the way sites are being managed as they had extensive travel experience in Zambia, Africa and Europe.

The results revealed that there is minimal usage of social media as a means for engagement despite overwhelming evidence of its importance in fostering customer engagement. Kandampully and Zhang (2014) explain that social media has significantly influenced how marketers attempt to engage customers. Furthermore, Harrigan et al. (2016) point out that tourism brand managers using social media will be able to better understand and shape the nature of customer engagement. Given the significant impact and potential reach of social media, hospitality and tourism enterprise managers should also encourage sharing of recommendations on social media platforms to complement traditional forms of engagement, such as word of mouth, because some engaged customers would enjoy the opportunity to have personal social interaction to share their experience with others and to express the sense of pride derived from the brand (So et al., 2016). However, word of mouth (WOM) was the prominent means of engagement which was mainly customer to service providers, and vice versa, and this form of engagement seemed to be effective on the part of both customers and service providers. Similarly, the result consolidates the finding of Kandampully and Zhang (2014) that customers regard WOM information as reliable because a business cannot easily manipulate it, so it attracts prospective customers' interest, as a trustworthy source of information, due to its personalized transmission and the content and the context reflecting personal experiences of guests and patrons.

The study revealed several opportunities arising from engagement of customers such as customers marketing of packages of the business. For example Kandampully and Zhang (2014) point out that as customers participate in, and become more involved in the service process, they tend to share the credit, and the blame, for service outcomes, as well as develop new social bonds. It is important for hospitality organizations to keep their customers involved throughout the product life cycle and develop services to meet their ever-changing needs. This assertion is buttressed by Solnet and Kandampully (2008) who have explained that because product and service features no longer constitute unique differentiating attributes, it is the customer as a brand ambassador that has become the most important asset central to a business's success. Furthermore, Hospitality business's acknowledge that their existence and growth depend on their ability to create unique, memorable and positive experiences for customers (Walls et al., 2011).

For this study, CE enabled hospitality and tourism proprietors to improve service delivery which seemed to be the outstanding opportunity among hospitality and tourism service providers. It was evident in this study that CE enabled managers of hospitality and tourism enterprise to learn new



ideas from customers which in turn enabled service providers to introduce new packages to customers to satisfy their needs and wants. These results are consistent with the findings of Jonsson and Ohlson (2015) whose study provides support that CE is becoming increasingly important in the Swedish pension context in order to enhance business performance and create competitive advantage from becoming more customer-centric. Due to competition in the hospitality and tourism business, improving service delivery is critical for customer attraction. According to Kandampully and Suhartanto (2000), one of the greatest challenges facing hotel organizations today is the ever-growing volume and pace of competition. Competition has major implications for the customer, providing increased choice, greater value for money, and augmented level of service. Thus better service provision will enable hospitality and other tourism enterprises to compete favourably in the tourism industry as customers are interested in associating themselves with service providers who furnish quality and better services to them and offer basic good value for money.

Furthermore, results of the study revealed that fostering customer engagement was a great opportunity that gave hospitality and tourism service providers the need to know the kind of customers they attract and what kind of products they need. Knowing products customers need allows service providers to introduce new packages to them and this makes the tourism industry grow because customers tend to inform families, friends and others about services being provided, Carev (2008) shares a similar view that happy customers are the cheapest and most effective form of advertising.

Disruptions in service provision pose a challenge to engage customers on various platforms which include non-provision of DSTV full package service, and a disruption in water supply. For instance it come out clearly that even when service providers made alternative measures to solve certain problems like providing hot water in a bucket, some customers were not happy at all, making engagement difficult. The most significant threat to service delivery is disruption. Hospitality and tourism service providers must make every effort to minimise the effects of disruption. Disruption in service delivery may destroy the reputation of the business as customers may inform their friends, families about the bad experience at the business in terms of service delivery. The finding reinforces Carev's (2008:17) assertion that a disappointed customer not only takes their business elsewhere, but most likely tells several others about the poor experience too. It is therefore important that when disruption occurs, whether minor, major, planned or unplanned, hospitality and tourism enterprise providers need to be prepared to deal with every eventuality with confidence and ensure that they put the customer first in decision making by keeping employees and customers fully informed of any progress in dealing with an incident and service recovery. Furthermore, customers are usually very clear about their view on the management when disruption occurs, yet it remains a critical challenge for hospitality and tourism enterprise providers to have competent managers if they are to meet and exceed expressed customer needs.

Customers also mentioned that an inability to meet the manager poses a challenge to engagement. Customers felt that engaging the manager of the lodge was the effective way of solving the problems which various customers were facing. Furthermore, inadequate necessary education and training on how to run a hospitality and tourism industry operation, was also mentioned as another challenge to customer engagement. For instance most workers employed in hospitality and tourism enterprise in Kasama and Shiwa Ng'andu have no education or training in either hospitality or tourism; hence there is lack of hospitality skills which has an adverse effect on how to effectively engage a customer. Lack of education in running hospitality and tourism enterprises was also mentioned by Gronroos (1981) cited in Jonsson and Ohlson (2015). The latter have explained that in order to ensure high-quality services, all employees need to be well trained and motivated to act in a service-oriented manner in accordance to the management's philosophy and mission. Education competence in hospitality and tourism related services is necessary for making employees operate effectively and making internal processes successful in achieving any organizational goals. Furthermore, even when employees have positive attributes, it may not be



enough to ensure positive customer engagements unless they are specifically trained toward customer orientation and have requisite skills and personalities (Kim, 2008).

The study revealed that some customers do not want to be known to either the manager or proprietor and this creates a challenge to engage with such people. Managers and proprietors of hospitality and tourism enterprises expressed the opinion that the profession of some customers inhibit them when it comes to interacting with people, and as such engaging them was a challenge. However, this situation makes it difficult for service providers and customers to engage satisfactorily.

Consumer motivation and barriers for engagement

The study has reviewed that quality of standard and special services like gymnasias, swimming offered at no cost to overnight customers at various hospitality and tourist sites motivates customers to be engaged at various platforms. Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that some customer's willingness to be known to hospitality and tourism proprietors was another motivation for engagement. A discount to services provided to customers such as rooms was also mentioned having an impact that motivates customers to be engaged at various platforms. Furthermore, results of the study revealed that the cleanliness of the place and rooms having all necessary items motivates customers to be fully engaged. Additionally, the results of the study revealed that free laundry services to overnight guest greatly motivates customers to be engaged at various platforms.

The quality of the service environment came out as another motivation for engagement. The findings of the study revealed that customers were satisfied with the quality of services provided by lodges and other tourism enterprises. These findings are in line with Amin et al's (2013) findings whose study discovered that the majority of the hotel customers were satisfied with the overall quality of the service provided by their hotels. Furthermore, the finding are in line with the observation of Feather and Chun (2008) who have pointed out that the actual environment of any establishment is also a key driver of customer engagement within the retail sector. The variety of offerings available and the convenience of the store are essential to securing engaged customers. Thus service quality and satisfaction, and positive customer experiences are vitally important, because a positive experience will cause the customer to wish to return or stay longer and to recommend the establishment to others (Nasution & Mavondo, 2008; Lu et al, 2015; Amin et al, 2013). Furthermore, due to the huge competition in the hospitality and tourism industry, providing consistent service quality, valuing customers and fulfilling promises positively impacts levels of engagement and creates a good relationship between customers and service providers. This is what is referred to as relationship marketing which aims to get in touch with customers internally and externally with the key aim of reaching and hopefully even exceeding a customer's expectations.

This finding is in line with Sonkova and Grabowska (2015) who have argued that relationship marketing strategy is long-term oriented and it emphasizes providing quality customer service, which leads to customer retention. In addition, Jonsson and Ohlson (2015) explain that the quality of the service itself is prominent in order to engage customers and the importance of a well-working solution cannot be overestimated as fundamental criteria for enhancing CE. Furthermore, Feather and Chun (2008) point out that the actual environment of any establishment is also a key driver of customer engagement within the retail sector. The variety of offerings available and the convenience of the store are essential to securing engaged customers. The results are in general consistent with Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) whose argument is that the influencing behaviour of customer recommendations implies a collective dissemination.

By sharing experiences and information through recommendations, customers influence each other's expectation and are over time likely to affect other stakeholders and the interpretation of



value of a business. Furthermore, engaged consumers generate product/brand referrals, co-create experience and value and contribute to organizational innovation processes and consumer loyalty (Hoyer et al., 2010). Furthermore, Feather and Chun (2008) explain that customer engagement is largely driven by the employees' ability to enhance their customers' self-esteem. Providing consistent service quality, valuing customers and fulfilling promises positively impacts levels of Engagement. The findings suggest that service quality dimension makes a significant contribution to the prediction of customer satisfaction.

Communication breakdown between service providers and customers was the greatest barrier to engagement and this was mostly due to overlapping dates where customers want a service at the same time. This problem was mostly created by the front line office (reception) inability to document bookings, and as a result, creating a clash in venue among customers requesting services. Most customers were not willing to be engaged as this situation highly disturbed their programmes as they were forced to change the venue for their programmes. Neves and Eisenberger (2012) explain that satisfactory and effective communication contributes to an organizations success and customer satisfaction. Thus, poor communication with customers can result from the poor internal communications as well poor coaching of front line workers. Regardless of the direct causes, poor communication between employees and customers limits any hospitality and tourism enterprise's ability to build a loyal customer base. The finding thus, reinforces Tsai et al's (2009) assertion that employees do not always realize the importance of communication to organizational goals, or know how to establish and maintain healthy communication systems. It is the responsibility of managers to improve communication in the workplace, and train employees in basic needed communication skills and also to encourage informal communication.

Conclusion

This study explored customer engagement in hospitality and tourism services. The research was anchored by the stakeholder theory which has come out clearly in this study. It asserts that customers are major stakeholders in the provision of hospitality and tourism services. This study contributes to the tourism and hospitality literature by testing stakeholder theory in advancing the effectiveness of customer engagement in hospitality and tourism services. It became clear that minimal engagement of customers in hospitality and tourism services has affected the growth of hospitality and tourism industry in Kasama and Shiwa Ng'andu districts in the Northern tourism circuit. The finding of this research have a number of important implications for effective engagement of customers in hospitality and tourism services. Furthermore, these findings have important implications for the management of customers towards brand loyalty and trust. They also highlight that hospitality managers and other managers in tourism related services have a need to offer services that are more authentic to customers while they are staying in their operations, so as to increase their good value for money perceptions.

Future research

This article provides a foundation for further theoretical and empirical research in the emerging area of CE in hospitality and tourism services. The use of stakeholder theory for the first time to advance CE in Zambia, serves as a basis for the further exploration of CE practicability of using stakeholder theory. Although these empirical findings provide compelling evidence and encouraging results in support of the significance of stakeholder theory in advancing customer engagement, much work remains to be done, including research into customer perceptions on significance of communication on customer engagement process. Furthermore, our study explores one particular CE scheme, which appears to deliver benefits to a wide range of both customers, and hospitality and tourism enterprise service providers. The study also explored that idea that quality service delivery motivates customers to be engaged. It is suggested that future research adopting stakeholder theory could further explore exactly which services motivate customers to be



engaged at various platforms, customer engagement and their perceptions on the quality and standard of lodges in the area.

References

- Amin, M., Ismayatim, W.A., Nasharuddin, S.Z. & Kassim, E. (2013). Service Quality Dimension and Customer Satisfaction: An Empirical Study in the Malaysian Hotel Industry. *Journal of Services Marketing Quarterly*, 34(2), 115-125.
- Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. New York: The Free Press.
- Bolton, R.N. (2011). Comment: Customer engagement. *Journal of Service Research*, 14(3), 272-274.
- Brodie, R. J., Hollebeek, L. D., Juric, B. & Ilic, A. (2011). "Customer Engagement: Conceptual Domain, Fundamental Propositions, and Implications for Research". *Journal of Service Research*, 14(3), 252-271.
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research Methods*. Oxford, 4th edition, Oxford University Press.
- Carev, D. (2008). "Guest satisfaction and guest loyalty study for hotel Industry, Master of Science in Hospitality-Tourism Management". *Rochester Institute of Technology*.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design. Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approach*. (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Clarkson, M.B.C. (1995). A Stakeholder Framework for analysing and evaluating corporate social performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 20: 92-117
- Dominici, G. & Guzzo, R. (2010). Customer satisfaction in the hotel industry: a case study from Sicily. *International Journal of Marketing Studies*, 2 (2), 3-12.
- Donaldson, T. & Preston, L.E. (1995). The stakeholder theory of the corporation: Concepts, evidence, and implications. *The Academy of Management Review*, 20(1), 65-91.
- Erdly, M. & Kesterson-Townes, L. (2002). Experience rules, IBM Business Consulting Services' vision for the hospitality and leisure industry, IBM Business Consulting Services.
- Feather, K. & Chun, Y. (2008). *Enhancing the Customer Experience and Engagement in Retail*. PeopleMetrics Inc.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A stakeholder approach*. Boston: Pitman.
- Goeldner, C.R., Ritchie, J.R.B. & McIntosh, R.W. (2000). *Tourism: Principals, Practices, Philosophies*. John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY.
- Glaser, B. & Strauss, A. (1967). *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. New York, NY: Aldine
- Harrigan, P., Evers, U., Miles, M. & Daly, T. (2016). Customer engagement with tourism social media brands. *Tourism Management*, 59, 597-609.



Hoyer, W.D., Chandy, R., Dorotic, M., Krafft, M. & Singh, S.S. (2010). Consumer co-creation in new product development. *Journal of Service Research*, 13 (3), 283-296.

Hollebeek, L.D. (2011). Demystifying customer brand engagement: Exploring the loyalty nexus. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 27(7/8), 1-23.

Hudson, S. & Hudson, L. (2013). *Customer Service for Hospitality and Tourism*. Oxford, Good fellow Publishers Ltd.

Jaakkola, E. & Alexander, M. (2014). The role of customer engagement behaviour in value co-creation: a service system perspective. *Journal of Service Research*, 17(3), 247–261.

Jones, T.M. (1995). Instrumental Stakeholders theory: A synthesis of ethics and economics. *The Academy of Management Review* (18), 208-218.

Jonsson, E. & Ohlson, L. (2015). Key Strategic Drivers of Customer Engagement - A managerial perspective in the Swedish pension industry. [Master's Thesis], Department of Business Studies Uppsala University.

Kandampully, J. & Suhartanto, D. (2000). Customer Loyalty in the Hotel Industry: The Role of Customer Satisfaction and Image. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 12(6), 346-351.

Kandampully, J. & Zhang, T. (2014). Customer loyalty: a review and future directions with a special focus on the hospitality industry. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 3 (15), 1.

Kendall, L. (2008). The Conduct of Qualitative Interview: Research Questions, Methodological Issues, and Researching Online. In J. Coiro, M. Knobel, C. Lankshear and D. Leu (Eds.), *Handbook of Research on New Literacies* (pp. 133-149). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Kim, B. (2008). Mediated effects of customer orientation on customer relationship management performance. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 9(2), 192-218.

Lu,C., Berchoux, C., Marek, M. W. B. & Chen, B. (2015). Service quality and customer satisfaction: qualitative research implications for luxury hotels. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, 9(2), 168-182.

Mohsin, A. & Lockyer, T. (2010). Customer perceptions of service quality in luxury hotels in New Delhi, An exploratory study. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 22(2).

Nasution, H.N. & Mavondo, F.T. (2008), Customer value in the hotel industry: what managers believe they deliver and what customer experience, *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 27(2), 204-213.

Neves, P. & Eisenberger, R. (2012). Management communication and employee performance: the contribution of perceived organizational support. *Human Performance*, 25(5), 452-464.

So, K.F. (2013). An investigation of the role of customer engagement in strengthening service brand loyalty. [PhD Thesis], Griffith University.



So, K.F., King, C., Sparks, B.A. & Wang, Y. (2016). The Role of Customer Engagement in Building Consumer Loyalty to Tourism Brands. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(1) 64–78.

Sonkova, T. & Grabowska, M. (2015). Customer engagement: transactional vs. relationship marketing. *Journal of International Studies*, (8)1, 196-207.

Tsai, M., Chuang, S. & Hsieh, W. (2009). An integrated process model of communication satisfaction and organizational outcomes. *Social Behavior and Personality: An international journal*, 37(6), 825-834.

Taheri, B., Jafari, A. & O'Gorman, K. (2014). Keeping your audience: Presenting a visitor engagement scale. *Tourism Management*, 42, 321-329.

Vivek, S.D. (2009). A scale of consumer engagement. [Unpublished Doctoral Thesis], The University of Alabama, U.S.A

Vivek, S.D., Beatty, S.E. & Morgan, R.M. (2012). Customer engagement: exploring customer relationships beyond purchase. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, (20)2, 127-145

Walls, A.R., Okumus, F., Wang, Y.R. & Kwun, D.J.W. (2011). An epistemological view of Consumer experiences. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 30(1), 10-21.