Tourism Service and Digital Technologies: A Value Creation Perspective

Opute, A, Irene, B & Iwu, G

Tourism Service and Digital Technologies: A Value Creation Perspective

Dr. Abdullah Promise Opute*
GPROM Academic & Management Solutions, Salzkotten, Germany
Email: promise.opute@gpromsolutions.org
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6221-1856

Dr. Bridget Obiageli Irene
De Montfort University, United Kingdom
Email: bridget.irene@coventry.ac.uk
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2864-4767

Prof Chux Gervase Iwu
Cape Peninsula University of Technology, South Africa
Email: iwuc@cput.ac.za
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6290-9864

Corresponding author*

Abstract

Tourism service is globally becoming a significant tool for promoting economic growth: generating immense foreign exchange earnings, combating unemployment and poverty, as well as stimulating domestic consumption. Indeed, theoretical discourse suggests a snowballing contribution to economic growth. To contribute to knowledge development in this area, this study was based on a systematic review of literature. Forwarding a theoretical model that suggests a proactive approach for enhancing tourism customers service experience, and at a profit for tourism providers, this study draws the attention of tourism practitioners to the prominent role that digital technologies play in modern society, consumer socialising influence, as well as tourism customers' service experiential impact. Furthermore, this study draws from the service gaps model of service quality to explain why tourism service providers must embrace customer engagement towards ensuring that their service offerings equate, if not exceed customers' service expectations. Within the aim of advancing knowledge, this study also flags critical directions for future research.

Keywords: Tourism service, digital technologies, value creation, service quality, service gaps model, customer engagement

Introduction

The discourse on travel and tourism, as well as on places as destination brands, has garnered prominent attention in the surge for knowledge development on leisure tourism (Skinner, 2017). The more the brand attributes and images of tourism destinations the more the lasting experience and satisfaction for tourism customers. With increasing development and surging trend in new and more effective ways of enhancing the service package and offering accessible by customers, tourists as customers are raising their expectations of service offerings. Thus, the leisure substance expectation of customers would rise. In such circumstances of increasing customer service expectation of tourists, providers of service packages are compelled to uplift their standards to ensure that actual service equates or does not deviate significantly from customer expectations (e.g. Opute, 2020; Bitner et al, 2010).

The underpinning theoretical substance of this paper is that customer service is a critical factor of positive customer experiential outcome and improved organisational performance (Opute, 2020). The economic stakes and associated challenges are increasingly enormous. Consequently, service providers must ensure a total quality orientation that integrates all employees (management and front-level) in a process of continuous learning towards achieving quality customer service and ensuring satisfactory service experience for the tourist. To contribute to the understanding of tourism management, this paper draws from two main theoretical streams that are critically relevant to the topic of tourism: services management, and technologies and smart cities.

Tourism is a service activity, and illuminating critical service features is essential to the understanding of the experiential values that tourist customers gain. Customer experience is a critical determinant of the extent to which tourism customers may endorse tourism packages, the design and implementation of tourism service, and organisational performance. Equally important therefore, is the need to understand the important role that digital technologies play in tourism service design and delivery and experiential value of tourism customers. In highlighting this importance, this paper underlines the criticality of customer engagement strategy towards improved value creation and experiential outcome for tourism customers. In the past decade, the importance of customer engagement has been lauded, both by academics and practitioners, given contentions of positive association to organisational performance (such as sales increase, high profit and superior competitive advantage) and customer retention, loyalty and purchase decisions (e.g. So et al, 2016; Gummerus et al, 2012; Hollebeek, 2011).

Recognising that knowledge is still lacking with regards to the understanding of consumer engagement (Dessart, 2017), the conceptual framing of this paper draws upon the foundation that value is derived not only from the product or service but even more significantly driven by close engagement with service customers (Opute, 2020), and communicating with service suppliers and wide-ranging cultural influence (Siu et al, 2013). Increasingly, digital technologies are becoming a central factor in modern day society (Opute, 2017) and more importantly for services (Bitner et al, 2010).

This paper proceeds as follows. First, the methodological approach for identifying relevant literature for this paper is explained. Following that, a comprehensive literature review was undertaken, highlighting the core debates in the relevant theoretical realms. This involved explaining tourism and its features, as well as underlining the immense relevance of digital technologies to tourism. Between these, we recognise that tourism is a subset of services, hence the review of relevant services management literature, such as core features of service and the Gaps Model of Service Quality (Parasuraman et al, 1985). In the final section, we underline the conclusions from this study, and pinpoint the theoretical and practitioner implications of this study.

Methodological Approach

Prior to explaining the methodological review approach utilised in this study, it is important to remind that a central motive in this paper was to draw attention to digital technologies evolution, consumer socialising impact and extended implications for tourism services. Within that motive too, we also aim to fuel the discourse on tourism service by highlighting critical directions for further knowledge development.

Methodologically, this study followed the qualitative approach (e.g. Yin, 2003; Silverman, 2016) as this has been documented as a suitable approach for gaining a detailed understanding of existing knowledge in a domain (e.g. Irene et al, 2020; Dana & Dana, 2005). Furthermore, a qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study because as noted

by Dana and Dan (2005), it affords researchers some flexibility in adapting or modifying the research plan as required.

Specifically, the qualitative approach in this study involved reviewing of existing literature, a methodological approach that has been deemed relevant by tourism researchers (e.g. Tshehla, 2019; Dwesini, 2019) as a suitable strategy for synthesising critical information that allows for extensive rigorous empirical investigation of a phenomenon (Alabadi, Sultan & Alkaseer 2019). To collate a robust evidence on the core theoretical themes for this study, a systematic review strategy was used in this study (e.g. Irene et al, 2020; Silverman, 2016; St. John & McNeal, 2017). Using a systematic review in a qualitative study is important because according to St. John and McNeal (2017), systematic reviews use systematic and transparent methods to identify, select, and evaluate relevant literature published on a specific topic or question. Moreover, the use of systematic review strategy was ideal for this study because it enables the identification of key research gaps and relevant cues for driving future research in this explored theoretical domain (Cochrane, 1972), which in this case is tourism and digital technologies relevance.

To identify the literature to include in this study, several databases were scanned using specific search terms (Silverman, 2016). To generate a pool of relevant literature for this study, key access options such as Science Direct, Emerald, Scopus were selected. Also, a search of grey literature was carried out - this involved utilising Google Scholar to capture academic literature on tourism, Digital Technologies and influence on Consumers Behaviour, Service Gaps Model, Service expectation, Service Quality and Customer Orientation.

Literature Review
Tourism: Definition and Features

Tourism, a core service activity, is globally becoming a significant tool for promoting economic growth (e.g. Rather et al, 2019). Its positive impact on generating foreign exchange earnings, combating unemployment and poverty, and stimulating domestic consumption has also been documented (e.g. Steiner, 2006; Habibi et al, 2018). Developing economies perspective documents even a more instrumental impact. Statistically, tourism accounts for 83% of export, and the most significant foreign exchange source after petroleum, in developing countries (Richardson, 2010).

Theoretical discourse on tourism impact has also described a snowballing contribution to economic growth: development of new tourism destinations propels new businesses and NGOs (Honey & Gilpin, 2009; Western, 2008). Thus, tourism service is a central economic boosting activity, hence the theoretical framing of this paper focuses on achieving effective tourism service design and implementation, by leveraging digital technologies to drive and harness the benefits of customer engagement.

The underlying motivation for tourism is leisure or business, the former being the focus in this paper. Thus, people leave their homes to visit other destinations that are accessible to them (Camilleri, 2018). People are attracted to specific destinations for specific interests; such interests could inter alia include recreational, environmental, religious, medical, culinary, culture, ecotourism, educational, entrepreneurial activity, sports and city tourism (Hall 2008; Holloway & Taylor 2006). Thus, tourism involves visiting other destinations to access a product or satisfy a variety of interests. The individual is therefore referred to as a tourist or a visitor.

The use of the term 'visitors' to describe individuals visiting another country was agreed upon in the 1963 UN Conference on International Travel and Tourism. According to Camilleri (2018), this term was used to describe two classes of visitors:

1. Those visiting a location on a temporary basis perhaps for leisure, but staying at least 24 hours for recreation, health, sport, holiday, study or religious purposes were classified as temporary visitors.
2. Tourists, including cruise travellers who stay in a destination for less than 24 hours may be considered as excursionists.

To address the conceptual narrowness of the 1963 UN Conference on International Travel and Tourism, the Institute of Tourism (1976) described tourism as a temporal, short-term movement of people to destinations outside the place of their normal domicile (Beaver, 2002), a conceptual framing that has been supported by scholars (e.g. Cooper, 2008; Holloway & Taylor, 2006) for its emphasis on the movement of people regardless of the purpose and duration. In 1981, the International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism redefined that broader definition thus:

"Tourism may be defined in terms of particular activities, selected by choice, and undertaken outside the home environment. Tourism may or may not involve overnight stay away from home".

In a further enhancement, the UN World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) (1991) notes that:

"Tourism comprises the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside of their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business or other purposes".

Tourism could be either domestic or international (Yuksel, 2004). Domestic tourism relates to travels that are exclusively undertaken by individuals within the national boundaries of their abode while travelling outside of one's own country for the purpose of accessing leisure of interest is referred to as international tourism. The conceptualisation of this paper relates to the latter.

Commentaries on tourism have identified the profile of the individual preferences, consumer behaviour, destination, motivation and interest as core attributes for structuring the nature of tourism (e.g. Chen and Gursoy, 2001; Cooper et al. 1993; Feng & Jang, 2004). These attributes do not only form the basis of classifying tourism into segments, but also the perspective of understanding the influence of applied value, lifestyle, behaviour and consumption pattern to tourism helps in the way of organising the emerging trend of tourism scholarship (Camilleri, 2018). Leisure tourism, is explained next.

Leisure Tourism: This relates to tourism that involves individuals who travel for personal purposes, such as visits to friends and relatives (visiting friends and relatives travel - VFR), study, religious pilgrimages, sport and medical tourism (e.g. Beatty et al, 1985; Madrigal & Kahle, 1994; Nicolaides, 2011). In the traditional sense, leisure is defined as a non-related work activity. In a more elaborated perspective, in describing leisure, Foley et al (1999) emphasise three elements: time-off, recreation and relaxation.

Academic discourse has highlighted a number of motivations for leisure tourism. For instance, Cohen (1979) notes that leisure travellers are driven by the need to achieve valuable experience, while Crompton (1979) flags the effects of socio-psychological and cultural factors as the main drivers for leisure travelling and destination choice. These motivation factors are pointers to important features in designing useful marketing strategies and promotion products for leisure travellers (tourists).

The increase in household income has also spurred the growth of leisure travelling and therefore constitute a major component of household expenditure. The World Travel and Tourism Council estimated over US2,537.8 billion is generated annually from leisure travels (Venkatesh, 2006). Unlike business travel, there is high elasticity of demand in terms of leisure travel as these group of travellers consider pricing as an important factor in the decision making process. Lower prices lead to increased aggregate numbers of travellers going on holidays to particular destinations (Hall, 2008). According to Russo (2002) and Xiang (2013), in order to save cost, some tourists will leverage digital technologies to search for cheaper holiday packages and may even go as far as adjusting their travel dates in order to secure reduced costs.

The UNWTO (2017) report shows that global increase in disposable income is having a significant impact in decreasing price flexibility for leisure travellers, as more expensive leisure packages (such as cruise ships, high-class winter sports holidays and) are offered. Table 1 is a non-exhaustive list of leisure travel categories.

Table 1: A list of tourism categories adapted from Camilleri, 2018	
Type	**Description**
Adventure Tourism	This refers to visitors engaging in or observing activities such as winter sports often in rural areas. In some cases, it may involve visits to mountain resorts.
Culinary Tourism (Food Tourism)	Some tourists are known to visit a location for the sake of its food. Thus, those visiting a place may have a special interest in exploring restaurants, reviewing menu styles, how meals are prepared and served as well as the cost of meals. Food tourism is an important element of tourism experience.
Cultural/Culture Tourism	As is the case with culinary tourism, people may visit a place for the sake of its culture; to understand the people's lifestyle, history, religion(s), architecture and generally trying to understand the full make-up of the people.
Educational Tourism	This refers to visiting a place for the purpose of studying. It may be for student exchange programs or the need to learn the language pf the place.
Health Tourism	Resorts and spas are commonly known to offer this either in rural or urban areas.
Medical Tourism	This refers to seeking medical treatment by people from countries where either the facilities and or personnel are insufficient or lacking and or people seeking specialist medical service.
MICE (meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions OR meetings, incentives, conference and events)	MICE is a business tourism concept which stands for meetings, incentives, conferences and exhibitions (or meetings, incentives, conferences, and events). As the term suggests, it may involve bringing together a large group of travellers for a particular purpose which may include conference or a large or small event.
Religious Tourism	In this case, visits may be for the purpose of worship (pilgrimage or fellowship)..
Rural Tourism	A range of activities take place here including farm visits (fruit picking, etc), visits to lakes and mountains, countryside visits, staying in rural retreats and parks.
Seaside Tourism	This aspect of tourism refers to visiting a place for the sake of enjoying seaside lifestyles including staying in resorts, scuba diving, rental of boats for sight-seeing and jet skiing, etc.
Sports Tourism	In this case, a traveller may participate and or observe sport events.
Urban Tourism	This refers to visiting urban cities.
Wine Tourism	In this case, tourists are in a place to taste, consume or purchase wines from wineries, vineyards or restaurants. This can also take place during wine festivals or other events.

Following prior tourism contextualisation (Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture, 2013), the conceptual framing of tourism in this paper includes attractions, adventure and recreation, accommodations, events and conferences, food and beverage, tourism services, transportation, and travel trade.

Service Management: Definition, Core Features of Service, and Managing Service Gaps

Without doubt, services dominate economies across the globe, especially the advanced nations (Bitner and Brown, 2008). According to more recent commentaries (e.g. Bitner et al, 2010; Triyanto, Iwu, Musikavanhu & Handayani, 2018), this dominance has become a global phenomenon and services are profoundly shaping the economies of the world and impacting people's lives. Despite the unabated growth of service economies, research is limited from the point of understanding service excellence and service innovation compared to the extent of research effort on tangible products and technologies (e.g. IfM & IBM, 2007; Bitner et al, 2010).

Academics and practitioners alike underline the need for illuminating tools, techniques and frameworks that facilitate and differentiate service excellence and innovation in diverse settings. Services discourse has largely recognised the Gaps Model of Service Quality as a strategic framework for understanding service excellence and innovation (Bitner et al, 2010). Conceptually, this paper supports that theoretical perspective and invokes the Gaps Model in contributing to tourism service theory. To enable better understanding of the Gaps Model to the conceptual framing of this paper, services management is defined, as well as core features pinpointed in the following section and the Gaps Model of Service Quality explained afterward.

Services: Definition and Core Features of Service

Unlike tangible products, services have traditionally been difficult to define (Lovelock et al, 2004). According to Grönroos (1994), a plausible reason for the lack of consensus in the definition of services is that service management is rooted in diverse views and have not been merged into one concise management theory.

Lovelock et al (2004, p.4) forward two approaches that capture the essence of service:

1. Services are economic activities that create value and provide benefits for customers at specific times and places, as a result of bringing about a desired change in- or on behalf of- the recipient of the service.
2. A service is an act or performance offered by one party to another. Although the process may be tied to a tangible product, the performance is essentially intangible and does not normally lead to ownership of the factors of production.

Two core takes stand out in the above definitions. First, services relate to performance of a task. Second, the customer does not take possession of the services, but simply makes use of the service at the point in time.

Marketing challenges for processing services differ in many ways from that of tangible products, due to unique differentiating features. To understand how best to implement customer engagement towards improving experiential value for customers, and optimised performance for services providers, it is important to understand the key distinguishing features between services and tangible products. The unique features of services include intangibility, heterogeneity (or variability), perishability, simultaneity of production and consumption, and lack of ownership (Lovelock et al, 2004; Bitner et al, 2010).

Intangibility: This implies that when purchasing services, it cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard or smelled before they are bought. The customer cannot try out service before purchasing, and as a result there is some perceived risk.

Heterogeneity (or Variability): This implies that there might be slight changes in the way that service products are provided to clients, especially when human beings play an active role in providing the service. Thus, service customers may receive different service due to the time of service delivery or the mood of the service delivery person.

Perishability: A piece of service is not tangible and cannot be stored for use at a future time. Consumption is immediate and at the point of production. A service cannot be carried over to another service episode nor can it be sold.

Simultaneity of Production and Consumption: Also referred to as inseparability, this implies that the production and consumption of services happens simultaneously. Thus, the customer is an integral part of the production of the service, and experiences services errors immediately when they happen.

Lack of Ownership: Unlike in the case of tangible products, when a client purchases a service, he/she does not take ownership of any tangible item, but rather he/she purchase the right to temporarily use a service product.

The Gaps Model of Service Quality

The importance of integrating customer focus across functions and providing a service foundation as a competitive strategy has been reiterated in the literature (Nicolaides, 2008; Bitner et al, 2010). Founded on that importance, industries across the world have, over the last two decades, utilised the Gaps Model of Service Quality to enable them formulate appropriate service quality strategies and drive customer focus across functions.

Since the seminal works of Parasuraman et al (1985) and Zeithaml et al (1990), the Gaps Model of Service Quality has served as a strategic foundation for organisations aiming to deliver service excellence to their customers. Aligning with this framework, more attention has been attached to competitive strategies that leverage integrative framework that incorporates service quality, service innovation and customer focus. A further hallmark of the Gaps Model of Service quality is that it is anchored on the customer and integration of the customer across all gaps within the model. The strategy is anchored on the customer and all efforts are geared towards closing the gaps in the model - meet or exceed customer expectation.

Parasuraman et al (1985) categorise five levels in the Gaps Model of Service Quality:

1. Customer Gap,
2. The Listening Gap,
3. The Design and Standards Gap,
4. The Service Performance Gap, and
5. The Communication Gap.

At the centre of the model is Customer Gap which implies the gap between customer expectations and service perceptions as it is actually delivered. To close this gap, the focus is on meeting or exceeding customer expectations. The other four gaps are described as "provider gaps", each reflecting potential cues for a firm's inability to meet customer expectations, namely, not listening to customers (Gap 1); not designing services to meet expectations (Gap 2); failures in performance and service delivery (Gap 3); and failure to communicate service promises accurately (Gap 4). The centrality of the model is that Customer Gap is a function of any or all of the provider gaps. Thus, the model draws attention to the pertinence of a committed effort to strategically align operational activities towards effectively meeting or exceeding customer expectations.

Recent developments however document a shift in the nature of services and strategies embraced in closing the service quality gaps, driven significantly by technology infusion. This shift was however essential, for unlike at the time of its introduction where service was mainly a local function provided in the intimate setting of a provider-customer relationship (Bitner et al, 2010), the intervening years have ushered in evolutional development of technologies that

have vastly impacted the communication, design and delivery of services and also enhanced the innovative service options for customers. Thus, technology has enabled remote provision of services, leading to increased accessibility and globalisation of services that can be delivered and consumed anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, technology enables customer service options, their learning capacity, how they process accessible information through contact with other customers of like-minds, and their service evaluation and resulting purchase decisions. Thus, technology influences customer expectations, a substance that must be borne in mind by a service provider aiming to close the Service Gaps.

Technology infusion brings with it immense advantages, but also sometimes disadvantages (Bitner et al, 2010; Mpofu & Nicolaides, 2019). Grounded in the former component, the conceptual focus of this paper is on customer engagement and experiential service value association in the tourism service setting. In line with that focus, the next section focuses on digital technologies and tourism. In doing that, the discourse centres on closing mainly the Customer Gap, that is enhancing customers experiential value by ensuring that actual service exceeds or at least equals expected service.

Digital Technologies and Tourism

In the last decade where information technology has advanced enormously, daily life has become increasingly shaped by the internet of things (IoT) (Balaji & Roy, 2017). Though still in the formation stage, the definition of IoT reflects a paradigm where everyday things leverage technology for detecting, networking and processing so as to effectively interconnect with other devices and services via the world wide web to achieve goals (Whitmore et al, 2015; Balaji & Roy, 2017). IoT is a strategic technology trend that would tremendously impact business opportunities (Gartner, 2015). This impact notion is reinforced by McKinsey's prediction that IoT's impact potential is within the region of US$11 trillion annually by 2025 (Manyika & Chui, 2015).

Recognising the impacting potential of IoT in driving new opportunities and business perspectives, this paper forwards a tourism perspective that aims to optimise value creation for tourism customers. Within that aim, a central notion underpinning this paper is that value for customers is not located innately in a product or derived specifically through market exchange, but also hinges on other factors that condition the consumption experience (defined in this paper to include designing and implementation features) for customers. According to Dowell et (2019) and Nicolaides (2008), value is assessed when a customer has consumed a product or service. Therefore, customer value resides neither in the product purchased, in the brand chosen, nor the object possessed but rather in the consumption experiences outcome (Holbrook, 1999). Value is derived not only from the product or service but even more significantly driven by close engagement with service customers (Opute, 2020), and interactions with service providers and broader cultural influence (Siu et al, 2013). Close relationships with customers drive structural support for sustaining value creation (Ballantyne & Varey, 2006; Nicolaides, 2008; Opute, 2020).

Service management has been, and will continue to be influenced by technology (Bitner et al, 2010). With regards to the Customer Gap, two central influence points of technology relate to nature of services and delivery pattern. With technology becoming a core feature of the modern society, service delivery has shifted from the traditional direct and contact based modus to one of remote self-service and technology-enabled service. Situated within and underpinned in these technology influences on services, we conceptualise a customer engagement framework towards enhanced experiential value for tourism service customers. Hence, as underlined in the introductory sections of this paper, the core theoretical substance underpinning this paper is that customer engagement is a critical factor of positive customer experiential outcome and improved organisational performance (Opute, 2020). Understanding

clearly the term 'customer experience' is essential to grasping the conceptual framing of this paper. Therefore, prior to explaining the importance for tourism providers to leverage digital technologies, the theoretical framing of customer experience is explained next.

Invoking a perspective that has been operationalised in understanding customer engagement in the tourism destination (Huang and Choi, 2019), our tenet of experience relates to the interactive, and value co-creation process between customers and firm, one that recognises that given technology-enabled self-service proliferation, customers assume a co-production role. Specifically, 'experience' is conceptualised here to include all interactions that the tourist has before, during and after a tourism service episode. To elaborate, a tourism customer experience usually:
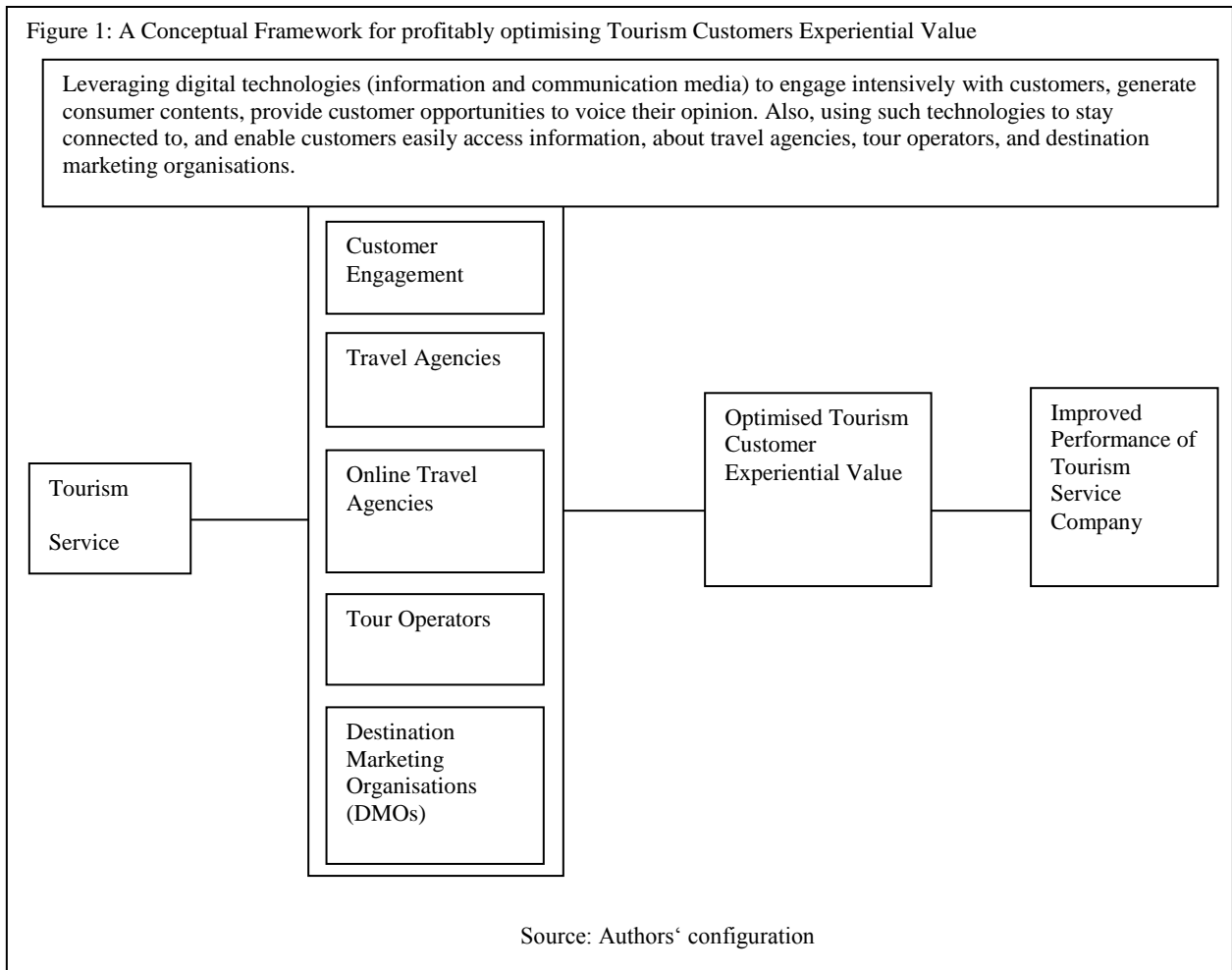
1. begins with 'the where to go' decision (e.g. Prebensen et al, 2013),
2. continues with on-site interactions with other actors (e.g. Kastenholz et al, 2013), and
3. ends with sharing the experience afterward (e.g. Kim & Fesenmaier, 2017).

Intense competition for consumer attention has become a norm in modern-day marketplace. Keeping in tune with this development, tourism firms are increasingly recognising the pertinence of embracing customer engagement initiatives. In pursuing customer engagement, tourism, like other firms, must equally recognise and leverage the benefits of digital technologies and smart cities features. The business landscape is changing tremendously due to technology revolution induced influence. Digital technologies such as web pages, search engines, virtual worlds, social media, internet, e-mail, smart phones, etc., offer customers broad options that shape how they behave as customers. These digital technologies fundamentally change customers' behaviour and the way they seek to enact self through their preference formation for goods and services (Opute, 2017). Tourism operators must recognise the important role these technological devices play in the way customers search for and seek to achieve their desired experiential value in the tourism packages that they subscribe to.

To gain the loyalty of customers in the current marketplace where the competition for customer attention is ever becoming challenging, tourism service providers must embrace and leverage digital technologies opportunities to interactively engage with customers towards enhancing experiential value for customers. Consequently, a learning culture that enables employees to acquire relevant skills to enable them adapt and respond effectively to new customer service challenges must be embraced. Furthermore, in the drive to optimise service design and delivery, tourism service providers can leverage customer generated information by exploiting information and communication technology media, such as websites and tools that enable customers to voice their unedited and honest opinions - blogs, podcasts, wikis and personal pages on social network sites, to document and/or share service experiences. Beyond that, tourism service providers can leverage digital technologies to ensure a more effective service package and better networking and alignment with related supporting service actors that play a role in the tourism service offerings.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The management of tourism destinations and marketing organisations that design and deliver the tourism package should ensure an adequate and effective coordination and promotion of the tourism destination. To maximise the customer experience of tourists, the tourism package must reflect diversity in its wholeness, and event planners must organise more trips and ensure variety and inclusivity in improving the service experience of tourists. Further on the inclusivity point, this paper draws on customer service foundation (e.g. Opute, 2020) to suggest an active involvement of tourists in the push to improve the design and delivery mechanisms of tourist destinations, and ultimately the service experience of tourism customers, and at a profit for tourism providers (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: A Conceptual Framework for profitably optimising Tourism Customers Experiential Value

Leveraging digital technologies (information and communication media) to engage intensively with customers, generate consumer contents, provide customer opportunities to voice their opinion. Also, using such technologies to stay connected to, and enable customers easily access information, about travel agencies, tour operators, and destination marketing organisations.

Customer Engagement

Travel Agencies

Online Travel Agencies

Tour Operators

Destination Marketing Organisations (DMOs)

Tourism Service

Optimised Tourism Customer Experiential Value

Improved Performance of Tourism Service Company

Source: Authors' configuration

Furthermore, a customer engagement focus must be embraced towards ensuring adequate experiential value for customers (Nicolaides, 2008). Increasingly, digital technologies are becoming a central factor in modern day society (Opute, 2017) and more importantly for services (Bitner *et al*, 2010). Consequently, the spectrum of dynamics that service providers must address and respond to are equally increasing, and commensurate steps must be taken to ensure customer service that gives customers the motivation to patronise a given service. The growing revolution of the internet and related media technologies is one that offers a strategic direction for enhancing the experiential value for tourism customers.

Electronic commerce is a strategic tool that tourism service providers should leverage in designing and implementing their tourism service package. The modern-day marketplace has vastly transited from the industrial to the information age. This is evident in technology-assisted customer service functions (e.g. paying bills, responding to queries, updating account records, tracking orders), purchase transactions (retail and business-to-business), and learning and information seeking.

> Future hotel guest swill have quite different expectations when lodging at a property. They will expect top notch well-designed experiences and usability of their own device to operate room facilities and other hotel services. Guests will have many options from which to select a hotel at which to stay and will likely use Airbnb. Hotel companies will need to resort to online bookings in a drive to achieve high rates of occupancy. This means that employees at hotels will need to be tuned in to the latest technology and learn the requisite

skills. This means that employees will require higher quality education that integrates general knowledge in both the hospitality sector with emerging technologies. (Mpofu & Nicolaides, 2019:6)

Also, technologies enable customers to learn, and obtain information about other like-minded customers and collaborate among themselves. The ways that customers learn about services have been transformed by technology. Customers are able to access and compare service features, and compare service experiences, and can ultimately leverage massive (quantity and variety) information prior to purchasing services. This range of information resource influences customers' service expectations and how they compare and judge services. Leveraging modern technologies and multi-media devices is a practical way to effectively ensure knowledge seeking for better customer understanding, and responding effectively to their stimuli through the design and implementation of service packages. For tourism service providers aiming to achieve improved customer experiential value at a profit, the focus should be to leverage digital technology to align with the Fourth Industrial Revolution, so as to fundamentally optimise customer satisfaction. Therefore, the focus should not be limited to leveraging digital technology to ensure more effective service design and implementation, but also leveraging such technology to drive an integrated implementation strategy that recognises the importance of reaching out to customers, engaging actively with them to access customer ideas and suggesting cues for improving their overall experience.

Tourism service providers can leverage digital technologies and smart cities features to drive a customer engagement focus for achieving high customer experiential value, customer retention and improved organisational performance. Achieving these targets requires that tourism service providers interactively engage with customers and leverage customer generated information to fine-tune tourism service design and delivery in a way that the tourism service episodes would leave an indelible and memorable impression in the mind of the customers. When customers attach a high experiential value to a tourism service episode, they would not only be motivated to undertake a repurchase or re-endorsement of the service episode or related service episodes from the same provider, but also share their positive service experience afterward (Nicolaides, 2008). Such information and communication technology media can be leveraged not only to ensure positive engagement with the customer but also in coordinating the network of relationship and interdependence between the main tourism service provider and related supporting service actors (e.g. travel service, restaurants, etc.).

Limitations of the Study and Future Research Directions

Like in every piece of research, this study has some limitations that must be borne in mind when adopting the arguments forwarded in this paper. This study was based mainly on review of existing literature. While that approach in itself enables one to gain a deep understanding of the explored topic, drawing from extant literature, there is a danger that conclusions may not be completely reflective of the entire body of knowledge. We recognise this danger, and the possibility that there could be relevant literature that may have been ignored in this paper. Our conclusions and suggested way forward for knowledge development have been based on the body of knowledge captured in our reviewed literature.

Information technology has influenced the nature of services, their delivery pattern, service innovation and management practices (Bitner et al, 2010). Although tourism scholars and practitioners have reiterated the importance of tourist experience, there still remains a vacuum in identifying meaningful experiences (Huang and Choi, 2019). Drawing on customer service foundation (Opute, 2020) and customer engagement (Opute, 2020; Huang & Choi, 2019) foundations, aligned to digital technologies and business opportunities impact view (Balaji & Roy, 2017), this paper contributes to the understanding of value creation and experiential value for tourism customers. Further on the contribution point, this paper furthers the calls for

researches that are focused on enhancing the service experience of tourism customers which is essential for tourism sustainability.

Specifically, this paper advocates for researches that illuminate the pro-active strategies that organisations and practitioners are embracing to understand the service and experiential expectations of tourism customers, and the actions organisations are taking to ensure that they respond effectively to these expectations. In other words, how are tourism providers ensuring that actual service (tourism provision) matches the expectations of tourism customers? This paper also calls for researches that contribute to the understanding of how technological advancement, multi-media devices and smart cities evolvement are motivating and facilitating innovation in tourism design and delivery. Within that premise, efforts should be made also to illuminate the facilitating role of multi-media technology to customer engagement and customers' experiential value impact. Thus, future research should illuminate the ways that tourism providers are leveraging digital technology to drive effective tourism service design and implementation, including also engaging effectively with tourism customers.

In recent tourism discourse (Skinner, 2017), it has been documented that not much research effort has been invested into improving the general understanding of tourism, a viewpoint that finds support in prior literature. Mody et al (2016) portend that while limited research has been carried out into business tourists' perceptions of the image of the destination to be visited, more research effort has been invested into understanding business tourists' perceptions of the image of the actual event.

Reinforcing the existent research gap is something that researchers have long yearned for. For instance, as far back as 1996, Oppermann lamented that attention should move away from event planners in terms of understanding tourists' perceptions of a destination but instead the tourist should be the one providing such intelligence. To this end, there have been calls (e.g. Oršič & Bregar, 2015; Swart, George, Cassar & Sneyd, 2018) for researches that may explain how destination selection is linked to tourism dynamics. This paper lends support to the call for the investigation of the core research gaps identified above. Scholars can utilise different methodological approaches, ranging from qualitative to quantitative, or a combination of both to shed more light into the aforementioned knowledge streams relating to tourism. Furthermore, efforts to enhance knowledge in this area could involve a comparative analysis between tourism service settings or geographical contexts.

References

Alabadi, H.F., Sultan, Y.H. & Alkaseer, N.A., (2019). Integration of strategic wellness and sustainable marketing to achieve competitive advantage in the Tourism Industry: An empirical study in a sample of Iraqi tourism agencies. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure,* 8(5), 1-12.

Alrawadieh, Z., Prayag, G., Alrawadieh, Z. & Alsalameen, M. (2019). Self-identification with a heritage tourism site, visitors' engagement and destination loyalty: the mediating effects of overall satisfaction, *The Service Industries Journal*, DOI:10.1080/02642069.2018.1564284

Balaji, M. S. & Roy, S. K. (2017). Value co-creation with Internet of things technology in the retail industry, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(1-2), 7-31.

Ballantyne, D. & Varey, R. J. (2006). Creating value-in-use through marketing interaction: The exchange logic of relating, communicating and knowing, *Marketing Theory*, 6(3), 335–348.

Bayighomog, S. W. & Araslı, H. (2019). Workplace spirituality – customer engagement Nexus: the mediated role of spiritual leadership on customer–oriented boundary–spanning behaviours, *The Service Industries Journal*, DOI:10.1080/02642069.2019.1570153

Beaver, A. (2002). A Dictionary of Travel and Tourism Terminology. Wallingford: CAB International. p. 313. ISBN 978-0-85199-582-3. OCLC 301675778.

Bitner, M. J. & Brown S. W. (2008). The Service Imperative, *Business Horizons 50th Anniversary Issue*, 51 (January-February), 39-47.

Bitner, M. J. & Zeithaml, V. A. (1996). *Services Marketing*. McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc. First Edtion.

Bitner, M. J., Zeithaml, V. A. & Gremler, D. D. (2010). *Technology's Impact on the Gaps Model of Service Quality*. DOI: 10.1007/978-1-4419-1628-0_10

Brons, M., Pels, E., Nijkamp, P. & Rietveld, P. (2002). Price elasticities of demand for passenger air travel: a meta-analysis. *Journal of Air Transport Management*, 8(3), 165–175.

Camilleri, M. A. (2018). *The Tourism Industry: An Overview*. In Travel Marketing, Tourism Economics and the Airline Product (Chapter 1, pp. 3-27). Cham, Switzerland: Springer Nature

Chen, J. S. & Gursoy, D. (2001). An investigation of tourists' destination loyalty and preferences." *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*,13(2), 79–85.

Cochrane, A. L. (1972). Effectiveness and efficiency: random reflections on health services. London: Nuffield Provincial Hospitals Trust. doi: 10.1017/cbo9781107256644

Cohen, E. (1979). Phenomenology of tourist experiences, *Sociology*, 13(2), 179-202.

Cooper, C. (2008). *Tourism: Principles and practice*. London: Pearson Education.

Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Gilbert, D., Shepher, R. & Wanhill, S. (1993).*Tourism: principles and practice*. Harlow: Longmans.

Crompton, J.L. (1979). Motivations for pleasure vacations. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 6(4), 408-424.

Dana, L. P. & Dana, T. E. (2005). Expanding the scope of methodologies used in entrepreneurship research, *International Journal of Entrepreneurship & Small Business,* 2**,** 79-88.

Davidson, R., & B. Cope. (2003). *Business Travel: Conferences, Incentive Travel, Exhibitions, Corporate Hospitality and Corporate Travel*. Harlow: Prentice Hall.

Dessart, L. (2017). Social media engagement: a model of antecedents and rational outcomes, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(5-6), 375-399.

Dowell, D., Garrod, B. & Turner, J (2019). Understanding value creation and word-of-mouth behaviour at cultural events, *The Service Industries Journal*, 39(7-8), 498-518, DOI: 10.1080/02642069.2019.1568997.

Doyle, J. & Nathan, M. (2001). *Wherever Next? Work in a Mobile World*. London: The Industrial Society.

Dwesini, N.F. (2019). Causes and prevention of high employee turnover within the hospitality industry: A literature review. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure,* 8(3), 1-15.

Enzo, P. (1998). WTO's Activities in the Field of Tourism Statistics. *Tourism and Hospitality Management.* 4(1),3-9. Available on https://hrcak.srce.hr/file/268443 [retrieved on 26th May 2019].

Feng, R. & Jang, S. (2004). Temporal destination loyalty: A structural initiation. *Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 9, 207–221.

Fernandez, A., Richardson, R. B., Tschirley, D. & Tembo, G. (2009, September). Wildlife Conservation in Zambia: Impacts on Rural Household Welfare. (Food Security Research Project, Working Paper No. 41).

Foley, M., Maxwell, G. & McGillivray, D. (1999). Women at leisure and in work - unequal opportunities?' *Equal Opportunities International*, 18(1), 8-18.

Gartner (2015). Gartner says the Internet of things installed base will grow to 26 billion units by 2020. Retrieved May 30, 2019, from https://www.mcit.gov.sa/en/media-center/news/91424

Goldsmith, R. E. & Lafferty, B. A. (2002). Consumer response to Websites and influence on advertising effectiveness. *Internet Research: Electronic Networking Applications and Policy*, 12(4), 318-328.

Grönroos, C. (1994). From scientific management to service management, *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 5(1), 5–20.

Gummerus, J., Liljander, V., Weman, E. & Pihlström, M. (2012). Customer engagement in a Facebook brand community. *Management Research Review*, 35(9), 857–877.

Gustafson, P. (2012). Managing Travel: Developments and Dilemmas in Corporate Travel Management. *Tourism Management* 33(2), 276–284.

Gustafson, P. (2013). Business Travel from the Traveller's Perspective: Stress, Stimulation and Normalization. *Mobilities*, 9(1), 63–83. doi:10.1080/17450101.2013.784539

Habibi, F., Rahmati, M. & Karimi, A. (2018). Contribution of tourism to economic growth in Iran's Provinces: GDM approach. Future Business Journal, 4(2), 261-271.

Hall, C. M. (2008). *Tourism planning: Policies, processes and relationships.* London: Pearson Education.

Haywood, L. J., Kew, F. C., Branham, P., Spink, J., Capenerhurst, J. & Henry, I. (1995) *Understanding Leisure*, (2nd edn), Cheltenham, Stanley Thornes (Publishers) Ltd.

Holbrook, M. (1999). Consumer value: A framework for analysis and research. London and New York: Routledge.

Hollebeek, L. (2011). Exploring customer brand engagement: Definition and themes. *Journal of Strategic Marketing*, 19(7), 555–573.

Holloway, J. C. and Taylor, N. (2006). *The business of tourism.* London: Pearson Education.

Honey, M. & Gilpin, R. (2009). *Tourism in the Developing World: Promoting Peace and Reducing Poverty.* Washington: United States Institute for Peace.

Huang, S. & Choi, H-S. C. (2019) Developing and validating a multidimensional tourist engagement scale (TES). *The Service Industries Journal*, 39(7-8), 469-497, DOI: 10.1080/02642069.2019.1576641.

IfM & IBM (2007). *Succeeding Through Service Innovation: A Discussion Paper,* Cambridge, United Kingdom: University of Cambridge Institute for Manufacturing.

IMF. (2006). *Growth and Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper.* Washington: International Monetary Fund, IMF Country Report No. 08/121.

Irene, B. N., Opute, A. P. & Ibidunni, A. S. (2020). Competency-Based Entrepreneurship Education: Analysis of the Disruptive Innovation Theory in African HEIs. *International Journal of Business and Globalisation*, Inderscience Publishers.

Jafari, J. & Pizam, A. (2002). *Tourism Management*. In International Encyclopedia of Business Management, M. Warner, ed., pp. 6499-6508. London: Thomson Learning.

Kastenholz, E., Carneiro, M. J., Eusébio, C. & Figueiredo, E. (2013). Host–guest relationships in rural tourism: Evidence from two Portuguese villages. *Anatolia*, 24(3), 367–380.

Kesgin, M. & Murthy, R. S. (2018). Consumer engagement: the role of social currency in online reviews, *The Service Industries Journal*, DOI:10.1080/02642069.2018.1553237.

Kim, J. & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2017). Sharing tourism experiences: The post-trip experience. *Journal of Travel Research*, 56(1), 28–40.

Larsen, J., Urry, J. and Axhausen, K. (2006). *Mobilities, Networks, Geographies*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Madrigal, R. & Kahle, L. R. (1994). Predicting vacation activity preferences on the basis of value-system segmentation, *Journal of Travel Research*, 32(3), 22-28.

Manyara, G. & Jones, E. (2007). Community-based tourism enterprises development in Kenya: an exploration of their potential as avenues of poverty reduction. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism,* 15(6), 628-644.

Manyika, J. & Chui, M. (2015). By 2025, Internet of things applications could have $11trillion impact. Retrieved May 30, 2019, from. http://www.mckinsey.com/insights/mgi/in_the_news/by_2025_Internet_of_things_applications_could_have_11_trillion_impact

Mathieson, A. & Wall, G. (1982). *Tourism: Economic, physical and social impacts*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Mody, M., Gordon, S., Lehto, X., So, S.-I. & Li, M. (2016). The augmented convention offering: The impact of destination and product images on attendees' perceived benefits. *Tourism Analysis*, 21, 1–15. doi:10.3727/108354216X14537459508739.

Moliner, M. Á., Monferrer, D. & Estrada, M. (2018). Consequences of customer engagement and customer self-brand connection. *Journal of Services Marketing*, 32(4), 387–399.

Moutinho, L. (1987). Consumer behaviour in tourism, *European Journal of Marketing*, 21(10), 5-44.

Mpofu, R. & Nicolaides, A. (2019). Frankenstein and the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR): Ethics and Human Rights Considerations, *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*, 8(5), a71.

Murray, N., Lynch, P. & Foley, A. (2016). Unlocking the magic in successful tourism destination marketing: The role of sensing capability. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 32, 877–899. doi:10.1080/0267257X.2016.1192557

Nicolaides, A. (2008). Service Quality, Empowerment and Ethics in the South African Hospitality And Tourism Industry and the Road Ahead Using Iso9000/1. A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Doctor of Commerce degree at the University of Zululand.

Nicolaides, A. (2011). Lessons for South Africa from Asia on medical tourism's practice and potential : peer reviewed special article, *Medical Technology SA,* 25(2).

Oppermann, M. (1996). Convention destination images: Analysis of association meeting planners' perceptions. *Tourism Management*, 17, 175–182. doi:10.1016/0261-5177(96)00004-0

Opute, A. P. (2017). Exploring Personality, Identity and Self-Concept among Young Consumers (Chapter Five), *Young Consumer Behaviour: A Research Companion*, Routledge (Taylor and Francis). ISBN: 978-0-415-79008-6 (hbk).

Opute, A. P. (2020). Teamwork and Customer Service (Chapter 14), in *Customer Service Management: A Strategic and Operational Perspective*. Taylor and Francis.

Oršič, J. & Bregar, B. (2015). Relevance of the world economic forum tourism competitiveness index for international association events: The case of new EU member states. *Academica Turistica*, 8, 45–54.

Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A. & Berry, L. L. (1985). A Conceptual Model of Service Quality and Its Implications for Future Research, *Journal of Marketing*, 49 (4), 41-50.

Prebensen, N. K., Woo, E., Chen, J. S. & Uysal, M. (2013). Motivation and involvement as antecedents of the perceived value of the destination experience. *Journal of Travel Research*, 52(2), 253–264.

Rasoolimanesh, S. M., Md Noor, S., Schuberth, F. & Jaafar, M. (2019) Investigating the effects of tourist engagement on satisfaction and loyalty, The Service Industries Journal, 39(7-8), 559-574, DOI: 10.1080/02642069.2019.1570152

Rather, R. A., Hollebeek, L. D. & Ul Islam, J. (2019). Tourism-based customer engagement: the construct, antecedents, and consequences, *The Service Industries Journal*, 39(7-8), 519-540, DOI: 10.1080/02642069.2019.1570154

Richardson, R. B. (2010). The contribution of tourism to economic growth and food security. USAID Office of Economic Growth Report.

Rozas, L.W. & Klein, W.C. (2010). The value and purpose of the traditional qualitative literature review. *Journal of Evidence-based Social Work,* 7(5), 387-399.

Russo, A. P. (2002). The "vicious circle" of tourism development in heritage cities. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 29(1), 165–182.

Silverman, D. (2016). *Qualitative Research*, SAGE Publications Inc. London.

Siu, N. Y.-M., Zhang, T. J.-F., Dong, P. & Kwan, H.-Y. (2013). New service bonds and customer value in customer relationship management: The case of museum visitors. Tourism Management, 36, 293–303.

Skinner, H. (2017). Business tourists' perceptions of nation brands and capital city brands: a comparison between Dublin/Republic of Ireland, and Cardiff/Wales, *Journal of Marketing Management*, 33(9-10), 817-834.

So, K. K. F., King, C., Sparks, B. & Wang, Y. (2016). The role of customer engagement in building consumer loyalty to tourism brands. *Journal of Travel Research*, 55(1), 64–78.

St. John, K. & McNeal K. S. (2017). The Strength of Evidence Pyramid: One Approach for Characterizing the Strength of Evidence of Geoscience Education Research (GER) Community Claims, *Journal of Geoscience Education*, 65(4), 363-372.

Steiner, C. (2006). Tourism, poverty reduction and the political economy: Egyptian perspectives on tourism's economic benefits in a semi-rentier state. *Tourism Hospitality Planning and Development,* 3(3), 161-77.

Swart, K., George, R., Cassar, J. & Sneyd, C. (2018). The 2014 FIFA World Cup™. Tourists' satisfaction levels and likelihood of repeat visitation to Rio de Janeiro. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management,* 8, 102-113.

Taheri, B., Hosany, S. & Altinay, L. (2019). Consumer engagement in the tourism industry: new trends and implications for research, *The Service Industries Journal*, 39(7-8), 463-468.

Tajdddini, K., Ratten, V. & Denisa, M. (2017). Female tourism entrepreneurs in Bali, Indonesia, *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 31, 52-58.

Triyanto, Iwu, C.G., Musikavanhu, T.B. & Handayani, R.D. (2018). Rural tourism as a way to build economic independence, *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure,* 7(4), 1-11.

Tshehla, M.F. (2019). Determining critical success factors of construction projects in the hospitality industry: A conceptual framework. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure,* 8(5), 1-9.

UN (1963). Recommendations on International Travel and Tourism. United Nations Conference on International Travel and Tourism. Rome, 21 August-5 September 1963.

UNWTO (2016). World Tourism Organization UNWTO: Tourism Highlights. Retrieved from http://www.e-unwto.org/doi/pdf/10.18111/9789284418145

UNWTO. (2006). *Poverty Alleviation Through Tourism: A Compilation of Good Practices.* Madrid: United Nations World Tourism Organization.

Venkatesh, U. (2006). Leisure – Meaning and Impact on Leisure Travel Behaviour *Journal of Services Research*, 6, Special Issue

Whitmore, A., Agarwal, A. & Xu, D. L. (2015). The Internet of things—A survey of topics and trends. *Information Systems Frontiers*, 17(2), 261–274.

World Travel and Tourism Council. (2011). Travel and Tourism Economic Impact 2011. London: World Travel and Tourism Council.

WTTC. (2010). *The Economic Impact of Travel and Tourism: Mali.* London: World Travel and Tourism Council.

Xiang, Y. (2013). The characteristics of independent Chinese outbound tourists. *Tourism Planning and Development*, 10(2), 134–148

Yin, R.K. (2003), *Case study Research: Design and Methods*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Yukon Department of Tourism and Culture. (2013). *Tourism sectors.* Accessed on 25, June, 2019, at: http://www.tc.gov.yk.ca/isu_sectors.html.

Yuksel, A. (2004). Shopping experience evaluation: A case of domestic and international visitors. *Tourism Management*, 25(6), 751–759.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L. & Parasuraman, A. (1993). The Nature and Determinants of Customer Expectations of Service, *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science,* 21 (Winter), 1-12.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L. & Parasuraman, A. (1996). The Behavioural Consequences of Service Quality, *Journal of Marketing,* 60 (April), 31-46.

Zeithaml, V. A., Bitner, M. J. & Gremler, D. D. (2009). *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm,* 5th edition, New York: McGraw-Hill.

Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A. & Berry, L. L. (1985). Problems and strategies in services marketing, *Journal of Marketing,* 49(Spring), 33-46.

Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A. & Berry, L. L. (1990). *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations,* New York: The Free Press.