

# Excellent Customer Experience in the Tertiary Higher Education Sector in Botswana as a Competitive Advantage

Angela Chibungu Chasha<sup>1</sup>, Anthony Tapiwa Mazikana<sup>2</sup>, Precious Hove<sup>3</sup>, Martin Dandira<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lecturer, Department of Business Management, BAISAGO University

<sup>2</sup>PhD student, Department of Economics, University of Zimbabwe

<sup>3</sup>Dean, Faculty of Agribusiness and Entrepreneurship, Marondera University of Agricultural Sciences and Technology

<sup>4</sup>Professor Dandira, Lecturer Bindura University of Science Education

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2024.1108054>

Received: 01 August 2024; Accepted: 08 August 2024; Published: 09 September 2024

## ABSTRACT

This study was aimed at developing a framework for the adoption of social media marketing by Small and Medium Enterprises in the manufacturing sector to improve their sales performance. This study was guided by objectives such as to ascertain how WhatsApp can improve the sales performance of SMEs in Botswana, to assess how Facebook can be used as a tool for increasing SME sales performance, to evaluate how effective LinkedIn is in improving SME sales performance, to determine strategies to implement social media marketing framework for SMEs and to develop a framework for the adoption of social media marketing by small and medium enterprise to improve sales performance. This study adopted pragmatism research philosophy which assisted the researcher in making decisions in regards to what worked best in finding answers for the research objectives mentioned. A sample size of 218 was determined using Taro Yamane sample size determination method. In this study it was established that SMEs have a Facebook page which they use to market its products and communicate with its customers. More so it was established that the majority of SMEs had a limited comprehension of the notion of social media marketing. The notions can be understood in a variety of ways by some. The term social media marketing is frequently used to refer to web-based platforms for engagement that, in addition to facilitating communication, enable users to share content such as photographs, videos, and links to other sites. The study established that WhatsApp has the potential to positively influence consumer purchasing decisions, thereby contributing to the growth of sales for local culinary items. It is important to comprehend the ramifications of Facebook strategies from the customer standpoint, as well as the determinants that contribute to the triumph of brands in the social media realm. It was observed that LinkedIn can assist SMEs to connect with potential customers, enhance brand visibility, and drive sales. The research suggests that policymakers should establish an index on social media marketing to serve as a reference for all small and medium businesses as a way of improving implementation of social media marketing. This research contributes to the academia and industry by identifying some research gaps and providing directions for future researches.

**Date of Submission:** 01/08/2024

## INTRODUCTION

In this dynamic environment having a significant customer base is important for any organization as it provides a competitive advantage over competitors (Lukina, 2019). Many organizations have been failing to provide excellent customer service effectively and efficiently (Arussy, 2015). This research is on excellent customer experience in the tertiary higher education sector in Botswana as a competitive advantage. The theoretical idea over customer experience become more popular when the marketing literature started

incorporating the importance of customers in making sales (De Keyser et al., 2016). According to De Keyser et al (2016) many organizations have improved the way they interact with their customers as a way of achieving a competitive edge. Foran (2015) defined customer experience as the combination of encounters, images, and feelings that a customer forms regarding the organization's operations. Wilburn (2016) denotes that this combination is not a rational decision but it is an experience that is influenced by interpretations and emotions which are made subconsciously. Meanwhile, Nicholson (2017) defined competitive advantage as an attribute that allows an organization to outclass its competitors. To attain a competitive advantage organization have adopted the use of excellent customer experience. This is consistent with Lukina (2019) who conducted a study on great customer experience as a competitive advantage and noted that there is a correlation between excellent customer experience and competitive advantage.

Heimonen (2017), Satel (2017), Meyer & Schwager (2017) & Shaw (2015) conducted a study on excellent customer experience and concluded that customer experience can result in an organization achieving a competitive advantage. Meanwhile, there are other aspects such as stage of industry maturity, industry sector, and economic conditions which play a role in driving competitive advantage. According to Verhoef et al (2019) customer experience is a tool that can be adopted by organizations for them to attain a competitive advantage over competitors. Shaw et al (2016) denotes that many organizations are redesigning their services to reach higher levels of customer satisfaction and create a superior customer experience.

Tertiary higher education organizations in Botswana such as Botho University, Ba Isago University, and Imperial school of business and science have been facing challenges in regards to customer care. These organizations have not been able to efficiently improve customer experience (Mashingaidze, 2014). Tertiary higher education organizations have not been able to improve customer experience as this requires copious amounts of data from the customer (Mashingaidze, 2014). Tertiary higher education organizations in Botswana have not been able to place response mechanisms in every channel in which they interact with their customers such as emails, webpages, text, and social media. Tertiary higher education organizations face challenges such as having insufficient technology which tends to affect customer experience. Foroudi (2018) noted that increased use of technologies by organizations has a positive effect on improving customer experience.

Recently Covid 19 has changed the dynamics of the tertiary higher education business and some universities have failed to come up with strategies of attaining a competitive advantage during the covid 19 era (Chue, 2019). According to Mazikana (2020), some organizations have been improving education quality as a way of satisfying customers, increasing sales as well as returning their customers. Despite improving education quality universities such as Botho University, Ba Isago University, and Imperial school of business and science have been facing stiff competition from other education universities such as Botswana International University of Science and Technology, University of Botswana, and Botswana University of Agriculture and Natural Resources and they have been struggling to gain a competitive advantage over their rivals. Despite facing stiff competition from other competitors these organizations are failing to build customer experience with their customers. It is against this background that this study seeks to gain an understanding of excellent customer experience in the tertiary higher education sector in Botswana as a competitive advantage.

## **Research Objectives**

The main objective of the study is to determine the impact of excellent customer experience in the tertiary higher education sector in Botswana on the achievement of competitive advantage. The elements of customer experience include communication, accountability and engagement. Secondary objectives are as follows;

1. To establish the effect of communication on the achievement of competitive advantage of tertiary higher education organizations in Botswana.
2. To examine the impact of engagement on the achievement of competitive advantage of tertiary higher education organizations in Botswana.
3. To examine the effect of accountability on the achievement of competitive advantage of tertiary higher education organizations in Botswana.
4. To determine the relationship between excellent customer service and competitive advantage of Tertiary higher education organizations.

## **Hypothesis of the Study**

The hypothesis of the study will be as follows

H<sub>1</sub>: Communication has a positive impact on the achievement of competitive advantage.

H<sub>2</sub>: Engagement has a positive impact on the achievement of competitive advantage.

H<sub>3</sub>: Accountability has a positive effect on the achievement of competitive advantage.

H<sub>4</sub>: There is a positive relationship between customer service and the competitive advantage.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research is on excellent customer experience in the tertiary higher education sector in Botswana as a competitive advantage. This section seeks to provide a brief literature review guided by the research objectives of the study.

### **Customer Experience**

According to Arussy (2015) customer experience refers to the mind embedded picture that the buying people have on the organization or brand as a whole. The impression that customers have of the brand impacts the revenue and business viability as a whole. The better this view implies the better prospects for the organization. Foran (2015) defined customer experience as the combination of encounters, images, and feelings that a customer forms regarding the organization's operations. Wilburn (2016) denotes that this combination is not a rational decision but it is an experience that is influenced by interpretations and emotions which are made subconsciously.

### **Competitive Advantage**

Nicholson (2017) defined competitive advantage as an attribute that allows an organization to outclass its competitors. A competitive advantage is an attribute that enables a company to outperform its competitors (Abor & Adjasi, 2017). A competitive advantage is a place that an organization attains a return on its investments. Competitive advantage ought to be relevant, unique and sustainable (Watchman, 2018).

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Service quality model**

Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed a conceptual model of quality of service. It identified five gaps that could impact the quality-of-service consumer assessments in four different industries. Those gaps are; Gap 1: Awareness gap in managing consumer expectations. According to Parasuraman (1985), service organizations always understand the features that services need to meet consumer needs and the level of performance they need to deliver quality services. Not always. This affects how consumers evaluate the quality of service. Gap related to management awareness known as quality-of-service specification gap 2.

#### **The effect of communication on the achievement of competitive advantage**

Nwabueze & Mileski (2018) conducted a study on achieving competitive advantage through effective communication in a global environment. According to Nwabueze & Mileski (2018) where there is a lack of effective communication a company's competitive ability is severely impaired. Dennis (2018) also established that there is a positive relationship between effective communication and the achievement of competitive advantage.

#### **The impact of engagement on the achievement of competitive advantage**

Kumar & Pansari (2016) on competitive advantage through engagement noted that there is need of developing

a framework for engagement by reviewing the relevant literature. Kumar & Pansari (2016) discussed the definitions of the focal constructs-customer engagement and employee engagement in the engagement framework, captured these constructs' multidimensional, and developed items for measuring customer engagement and employee engagement. They also observed that the influence of customer engagement on employee engagement is moderated by employee empowerment, type of firm that is business-to-business vs. business-to-consumer and nature of the industry that is manufacturing vs. service; in particular, this effect is stronger for business to business vs business to consumers firms and service vs. manufacturing firms. Kumar & Pansari (2016) established that although both customer engagement and employee engagement positively influence firm performance, the effect of customer engagement on firm performance is stronger.

### **The effect of accountability on the achievement of competitive advantage**

Ngiyo et al (2018) conducted a study on the impact of accountability on the competitive advantage of Kenolkobil Company in Kenya and noted that organizations should ensure that there are ethical practices in the culture of the business. According to Ngiyo et al (2018) transparency, accountability and fairness have a positive significant statistical influence on the competitive strategy of a business organization.

### **The relationship between excellent customer service and competitive advantage**

Jeske (2015) noted that customers are important stakeholders in an organization and their satisfaction should be a priority to any organization and its management. When customers have a positive experience with the service, they are more likely to return for future purchases. This translates to repeat business and a steady revenue stream.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Philosophy**

This study adopted the pragmatism research philosophy that underpins most mixed research methods. Pragmatism is a problem-oriented philosophy that takes into consideration the best research methods which effectively assist in answering research questions. The reason why the researcher is to adopt pragmatism is this philosophy provides an experience-based, action-oriented framework whereby the study aims to assist in addressing issues.

### **Research Strategy**

This study adopted a mixed research strategy that is both quantitative and qualitative research strategies. The use of a mixed strategy relies on the potential strength of both quantitative and qualitative methods thereby allowing the researcher to explore diverse perspectives (Borg, 2019).

### **Research Design**

The use of a cross-sectional survey for this study was determined by the virtue that the study through the use of cross-sectional survey can be conducted relatively faster in an economical way as they are inexpensive.

### **Targeted Population**

The researcher used a population of 1200 employees at Tertiary higher education organizations targeting both managers and non-managerial employees from three organizations namely Botho University, Ba Isago University, and Imperial school of business and science.

### **Sample Size**

In this study, the researcher adopted the use of the raosoft online sample size calculator to determine a sample of 229 respondents.

## Research Instruments

In this study, the research adopted both a structured questionnaire and an interview guide since this study has adopted a mixed research strategy. These research instruments are flexible for respondents and are accurate as well.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### Validity

Adams et al (2018) state that data validity refers to the extent to which research findings accurately represent reality. In order to prevent stigmatization and victimization, the researcher made sure that the questionnaires were anonymous. To determine validity in this study, questionnaires were constructed with a minimal number of leading questions. In this study, the researcher employed correlation or validity to assess the validity of the questions in the questionnaire. The researcher utilized a formula, such as  $df=N(n-2)$  where N represents the total number of respondents in the pilot study (Cohen, 2018). The study included 160 participants, resulting in a degree of freedom (df) of 248 (160-2). The significance level was set at 5%, and the r table yielded a value of 0.02638 (Borg, 2017). The study constructs' validity is demonstrated in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Validity

Statement	R value	R table	Remark
Universities should invest in connection building and customer intimacy with loyal customers, since this will lead to competitive advantage	0.493	0.2638	VALID
Many organizations are redesigning their services to reach higher levels of customer satisfaction and create a superior customer experience	0.539	0.2638	VALID
Customer relationship management adds value to the customer's experience, thus it is of no surprise that it leads to more profitable customer relationships	0.893	0.2638	VALID
Organizations must maintain alignment between the two groups in order to maximize their client experience	0.369	0.2638	VALID

### Reliability

Reliability, as defined by Saunders et al (2018) pertains to the capacity of data collection and analysis techniques to generate precise findings and pertinent research. The study utilized three types of reliability: parallel forms of reliability, test-retest reliability, and inter-rater reliability. In this study, the reliability of the questionnaires was assessed by administering similar questions to various respondents, who subsequently provided similar responses. In order to maintain the relevance of the study, the questions in the questionnaires were carefully aligned with the research objectives. Table 4.2 displays the reliability analysis of the study constructs.

Table 4.2: Reliability analysis of the study construct

Concept	Cronbach Alpha
Customer journey	0.822
Customer engagement	0.697
Customer centricity	0.833

Communication	0.707
Omni channel experience	0.737
Automation	0.673
Customer satisfaction	0.810

The reliability analysis in Table 4.2 demonstrates that the Cronbach's alpha values for customer journey, customer engagement, communication, customer centricity, automation, customer satisfaction, and omni channel experience are all above 0.7. This indicates that the questions designed to measure these concepts are reliable, as supported by Makanyeza (2020) who stated that values above 0.5 are considered reliable.

### The Effect of Communication on Competitive Advantage

Pearson correlation was adopted in this study and is presented in Table 4.3 below

Table 4.3 The effect of communication on competitive advantage

		When customers feel valued and understood, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and trust towards the company.	Effective customer experience helps in reducing customer churn thereby resulting in customer dissatisfaction.	When customers have positive experiences, they are more inclined to recommend products or services to others through word-of-mouth marketing	Customers who have positive experiences are more likely to view your brand favourably and share their positive experiences with others.	Companies need to continuously monitor customer feedback, adapt their strategies, and invest in improving the customer experience to retain customers in the long term.
When customers feel valued and understood, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and trust towards the company.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 .028 160	.028 .724 160	.014 .116 159	-.115 .148 160	-.163* .040 160
Effective customer experience helps in reducing customer churn thereby resulting in customer dissatisfaction.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.028 .724 160	1 .144 160	.116 .144 159	.140 .077 160	.029 .712 160
When customers have positive experiences, they are more inclined to recommend products or services to others through word-of-mouth marketing	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.014 .859 159	.116 .144 159	1 .247 159	-.092 .247 159	-.058 .471 159
Customers who have positive experiences are more likely to view your brand favourably and share their positive experiences with others.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.115 .148 160	.140 .077 160	-.092 .247 159	1 .054 160	.153 .054 160
Companies need to continuously monitor customer feedback, adapt their strategies, and invest in improving the customer experience to retain customers in the long term.	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.163* .040 160	.029 .712 160	-.058 .471 159	.153 .054 160	1 160

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4.3 above presents Pearson correlation of this study on the effect of communication on competitive advantage. The relationship between when customers feel valued and understood, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and trust towards the company and effective customer experience helps in reducing customer churn thereby resulting in customer dissatisfaction shows an R=0.28 and P=0.724. Since p>0.05 there is no relationship between the customer experience and competitive advantage variables.

Table 4.3 above also shows the relationship between when customers feel valued and understood, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and trust towards the company and when customers have positive experiences, they are more inclined to recommend products or services to others through word-of-mouth marketing. R=0.014 and P=0.859. Since p>0.05 hence there is no relationship between when customers feel

valued and understood, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and trust towards the company and when customers have positive experiences.

Table 4.3 above also presents relationship between when customers feel valued and understood, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and trust towards the company and customers who have positive experiences are more likely to view your brand favourably and share their positive experiences with others with  $R=-0.115$  and  $P=0.148$ . Since  $p>0.05$  there is no association between the two variables.

Lastly the table 4.3 above shows relationship between when customers feel valued and understood, they are more likely to develop a sense of loyalty and trust towards the company and universities need to continuously monitor customer feedback, adapt their strategies, and invest in improving the customer experience to retain customers in the long term with  $R=-0.163$  and  $P=0.040$ . Since  $p<0.040$  there tend to be an association between the two variables.

## SUGGESTIONS

Higher and tertiary organizations should invest in data analytics tools that can glean insights from existing data sources within the organization. Higher and tertiary organizations should implement a robust CRM system to centralize customer data, track interactions. Universities should organize or participate in industry events and workshops in Botswana. Universities should invest in connection building and customer intimacy with loyal customers, since this will lead to competitive advantage (Oly Ndubisi, 2014). Consumers that purchase a company product on a regular basis make more revenue and are significantly less expensive to serve than other customers (Reichheld and Aspinall, 2016). Excellent customer service ensures a competitive advantage. Customer relationship management adds value to the customer's experience, thus it is of no surprise that it leads to more profitable customer relationships. Customer satisfaction is important. Excellent customer service ensures customers' loyalty and positive thoughts regarding a specific brand. Second, it aids businesses in establishing strong, long-term connections with clients, purchasers, or consumers.

## REFERENCES

1. Arora, D. (2017). Do Emotions Play a Role in Running a Business? Available at
2. <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/302078>. Accessed on 29th October 2018.
3. Arussy, L. (2015). Customer experience strategy - the complete guide from innovation to execution. Place of publication not identified: Strativity Group.
4. Broughton, P. 2013. The art of the sale: learning from the masters about the business of life. New York
5. Chue, M. (2019). Winning Customer Experience Examples to Inspire Your Brand's Marketing
6. Strategy. Available at <https://blog.digimind.com/en/insight-driven-marketing/execute/5-winning-customer-experience-examples-to-inspire-your-brands-marketing-strategy>
7. Coughter, P. (2015). The art of the pitch: persuasion and presentation skills that win business. New York: Palgrave Macmillan
8. De Keyser, A., Lemon, K. N., Klaus, P., & Keiningham, T. L. (2016). A framework for understanding and managing the customer experience. Marketing Science Institute working paper series.
9. Dennis, C. (2018). Your Customer Service Is More Important Than Your Product. Available at: <http://knowledge.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/customerserviceproduct.pdf>
10. Foran, S. (2015). Why Service is more important than the product. Available at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-service-more-important-than-product-steve-foran> Accessed on 29th October 2018.
11. Foroudi, P (2018). Investigating the effects of smart technology on customer dynamics and customer experience. Computers in Human Behavior. Volume 80, March 2018, Pages 271-282 Available on <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0747563217306489>
12. Gentile, C., Spiller, N. & Noci, G. (2017). How to Sustain the Customer Experience: An Overview of Experience Components that Co-create Value with the Customer. European Management Journal, volume 25, issue 5, pages 395-410.
13. Hammel, G. (2016). Reinventing the Technology of Human Accomplishment. Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aodjgkv65MM>

14. Holbrook, M. & Hirschman, E. (2017). The Experiential Aspects of Consumption: Consumer Fantasies, Feelings, and Fun. *Journal of Consumer Research*, volume 9, pages 132-40.
15. MacDonald, S. (2018). 7 Ways to Create a Great Customer Experience Strategy. Available at <https://www.superoffice.com/blog/customer-experience-strategy/> Accessed on 29th October 2018.
16. Magliozzi, T. (2016). Car Talk Show. Available at <https://www.cartalk.com/content/tom-magliozzi-june-28-1937-november-3-2014> Accessed on 29th October 2018.
17. Mashingaidze, S. (2014). Customer experience management: New game strategy for competitiveness. *Journal of Governance and Regulation*, volume 3.
18. Meyer, C. & Schwager, A. (2017). Understanding Customer Experience. *Harvard business review*, volume 85, 116-26 157.
19. Michaelson & Associates. (2017). Taking The Mystery Out of Mystery Shopping. *Quirk's Marketing Research Review*. Available at <http://www.michelson.com/aboutus/article1.html> Accessed on 29th October 2018.
20. Myler, L. (2016). Acquiring New Customers Is Important, but Retaining Them Accelerates Profitable Growth. Available at <https://www.forbes.com/sites/larrymyler/2016/06/08/acquiring-new-customers-is-important-but-retaining-them-accelerates-profitable-growth/#f446c0666711>. Accessed on 29th October 2018.
21. Nicholson, M. (2017). How Customer Experience Can Drive More Sales. Available at <http://customerthink.com/how-customer-experience-can-drive-more-sales/> Accessed on 29th October 2018.
22. Nwabueze, U & Mileski, J (2018). Achieving competitive advantage through effective communication in a global environment. *Journal of International Studies*, 11(1), 50-66. doi:10.14254/2071-8330.2018/11-1/4
23. Satell, G. (2017). Here's Why So Many Companies Find It So Hard to Innovate. Available at <https://www.inc.com/greg-satell/heres-why-so-many-successful-companies-find-it-so-hard-to-innovate.html> Accessed on 29th October 2018.
24. Sharma, I. (2017). How Ikea is Redefining Customer Experience. Available at <https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/how-ikea-redefining-customer-experience-ishan-sharma> Accessed on 29th October 2018.
25. Shaw, C. (2015). *Revolutionize your customer experience*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
26. Shaw, C., Dibeehi, Q. & Walden, S. (2016). *Customer Experience: Future Trends and Insights*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
27. Verhoef, P., Lemon, K., Parasuraman, A., Roggeveen, A., Tsiros, M. & Schlesinger, L. (2019). Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies. Available at [https://www.rug.nl/staff/p.c.verhoef/jr\\_customer\\_experience.pdf](https://www.rug.nl/staff/p.c.verhoef/jr_customer_experience.pdf) Accessed on 29th October 2018.
28. Wilburn, M. (2016). *Managing the customer experience: a measurement-based approach*. Milwaukee, Wisconsin: ASQ Quality Press.