



INFLUENCE OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES ON CUSTOMER BEHAVIOURAL INTENTIONS IN THE HOSPITALITY SECTOR IN SOUTH-SOUTH NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

This study concerns customer engagement and customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality sector/industry in south-south Nigeria. Operators in the hospitality industry are now required to understand and apply key customer engagement concepts in the design and management of service experiences. Consumer engagement (CE) is receiving increasing attention, yet the current literatures are inconsistent in its dimensionality. Though many studies have been conducted on customer engagement in the hospitality sector, not much to the knowledge of the researcher has been done in the Nigerian setting especially in the oil rich south-south states of the country. The main objective of this study is to ascertain how the antecedents of CE influence the behavioural intentions of the customers. To achieve this objective, survey research was conducted with a statistically determined sample 660 respondents out of which 435 returned valid and usable questionnaire. The major instrument for data collection was questionnaire and data collected were analysed with partial least squares-structural equations modelling (PLS-SEM) with the aid of WarpPLS version 6.0. The findings show that the five antecedents of customer engagement converged into the first-order higher abstract construct of customer engagement. The results further show that the CE dimensions have statistically significant impact on the customer behavioural intentions. Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn, recommendations and implications were discussed, and limitations and areas for further research were discussed.

Keywords: customer engagement, identification, enthusiasm, dedication, absorption, customer behavioural intention.



1. INTRODUCTION

Managing customers has evolved over the years and has been the primary focus of business organisations. Pansari and Kumar (2018), aver that customer management has not changed; what has changed is how customers are managed. Thus, customer engagement (CE) is not a new concept. It is perhaps as old as marketing itself. The advent of information and communication technology especially social media and their wide application in business and marketing is boosted and exacerbated customer engagement. Kotler, Armstrong and Opresnik (2018) state that yesterday's businesses relied mostly on mass marketing to broad segments of customers at arm's length; whereas, today's companies are using online, mobile, and social media to refine their targeting and to engage customers more deeply and interactively. According to Kotler and Armstrong and Opresnik (2018), the old marketing involved marketing brands to consumers; while the new marketing referred to as customer-engagement marketing implies fostering direct and continuous customer involvement in shaping brand conversations, brand experiences, brand community, and customer behavioural intention. Customer-engagement marketing goes beyond just selling a brand to consumers. Its goal is to make the brand a meaningful part of consumers' conversations and lives (Kotler Armstrong, & Opresnik 2018). Consumer engagement (CE) is defined as a kind of mind generated by customers interacting with the brand in a specific service relationship and creating an experience (Qui, Chen & Lee, 2021).

In the business world, it has been considered a strategy, investment, listening to the customer's voice, emotional connection, and interaction with the organization beyond what is necessary (in Pansari & Kumar, 2018). Gallup studies indicate that: in the hospitality sector, fully engaged hotel guests spend 46% more per year; while in the insurance sector, fully engaged policy owners purchase 22% more types of insurance products (in Pansari & Kumar, 2018). According to Manfreda and King (2018), the mature stage of the hospitality industry, characterised by higher levels of customer expectations, increased competition and low product differentiation, has made the importance of staging and managing personalised, high quality guest experiences more paramount. Customer engagement allows marketers to create and sustain a competitive advantage. Pansari and Kumar (2018) identified the antecedents of CE to include personalisation, customisation and multi-tier loyalty programmes among others; while So, King and Sparks (2014) employed attention and interaction etc. as antecedents with trust, brand loyalty etc. as outcomes. This study explores the customer engagement and customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality sector in south-south Nigeria.

The problem that motivated this study is customer behavioural intentions because customer engagement is manifested among others in the spread of positive word-of-mouth that leads to customer behavioural intentions. Operators in the hospitality industry are now required to understand and apply key customer engagement concepts in the design and management of service experiences in order to stimulate customer behavioural intentions. Previously, the primary purpose of relationship marketing was to establish long-term relationships with the firm, thereby promoting efficiency, productivity, effectiveness, and cooperation (Pansari & Kumar, 2018). A firm's initial relationship with the customer was restricted to purchases, ensuring long-term loyalty, and continued patronage. However, this has evolved with the developments in the marketplace based on the ever-evolving needs and interests of the consumers. What this indicates is that customers have evolved from merely conducting transactions with the firm to developing a bond with the firm and its other customers. According to Pansari and Kumar (2018), this bond between the



customer and the firm evolves only if the customer is satisfied with the existing relationship with the firm and is also emotionally connected with the firm. In other words, for customer engagement to exist, the customer should have a satisfied and emotionally connected relationship with the firm. However, this relationship evolves over time and varies from customer to customer based on the experience with the firm. So et al. (2014), conducted a study on customer engagement with tourism brands: scale development and validation. According to So et al. (2014), a review of the literature reveals several dimensions that, collectively, constitute a comprehensive understanding of the CE concept, namely, enthusiasm, attention, absorption, interaction, and identification. These dimensions they employed in their attempt to validate a CE construct. Also, in a study on the antecedents and outcomes of online consumer brand experience, Konttinen, Karjaluoto and Shaikh (2022) employed brand trust, e-WOM intentions and behavioural intentions as antecedents of experience. This study utilises the five dimensions of CE from So, et al. (2014) to explore customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality sector in south-south Nigeria. The main objective of this study is to explore the antecedents and outcomes of customer engagement in the hospitality industry in south-south Nigeria.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A review of the literature reveals several dimensions/antecedents that, collectively, constitute a comprehensive understanding of the CE concept, namely, enthusiasm (or vigour), attention, absorption, interaction, and identification. Also, literature show that brand trust, electronic word of mouth (EWOM), and customers behavioural intentions (CBI) are the outcomes. These constitute our research constructs/variables for this study and were used to conceptualise the research model shown in figure 2.2. The constructs were used to form the research hypotheses and we explain these research constructs and variables starting with enthusiasm.

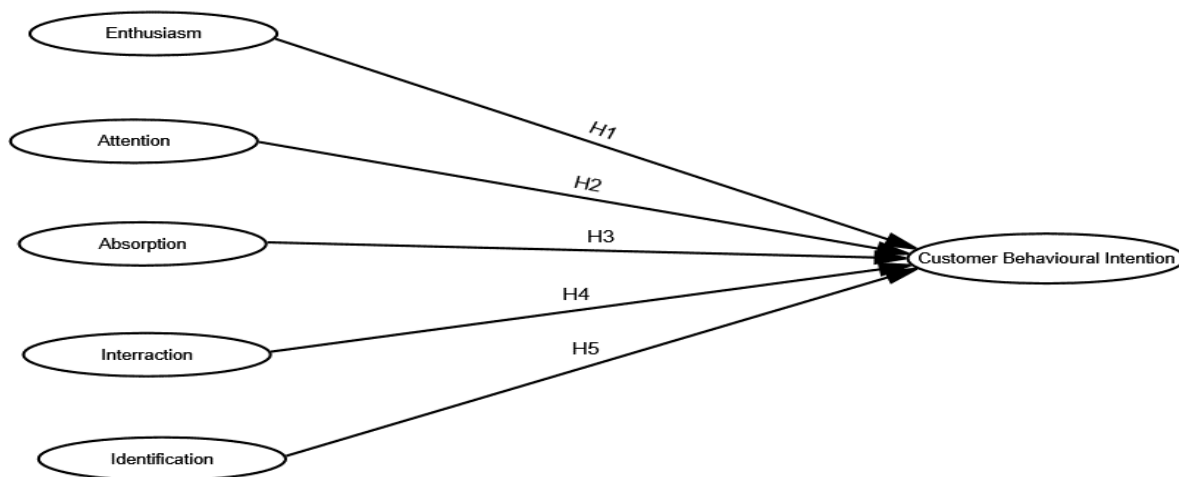


Figure 1: The Research Model.

Enthusiasm. Enthusiasm represents an individual’s strong level of excitement and interest regarding the focus of engagement, such as a brand (Vivek, 2009). Several researchers (e.g., So, et al. 2014) have captured enthusiasm as a positive affective state in the context of both work



engagement and CE. For example, in a work context, engagement encompasses the employee's sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, and pride (e.g., Salanova, Agut, & Peiro, 2005; Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). This finding suggests that an engaged employee feels enthusiastic and passionate about his/her work and role in the organization. From this perspective, enthusiasm is consistent with the dimensions of vigour (Patterson et al., 2006) and activation (Hollebeek, 2009), given that these dimensions signify a high level of energy while playing one's role, reflecting the feeling of enthusiasm. The energy and enthusiasm differentiate the construct of engagement from other similar constructs, such as satisfaction (Macey & Schneider, 2008). Satisfaction represents a customer's overall evaluation of the performance of an offering (Johnson & Fornell, 1991) and is based on past experience, whereas enthusiasm is characterized by a strong feeling of excitement (Bloch, 1986), which is an enduring and active state. For instance, at the brand level, an engaged customer of an airline company can be characterized by strong sense of excitement when seeing an e-newsletter pop up in the e-mail inbox (So, et al. 2014). The literature suggests that the feeling of enthusiasm has a positive affectivity is a central indicator of a customer's engagement with a brand.

Attention. Academics and practitioners alike have consistently highlighted attention as a key dimension of engagement. As a component of EE, attention is the duration of focus on, and mental preoccupation with, work (Rothbard, 2001). In this respect, attention represents an invisible material resource that a person can allocate in multiple ways (So, et al. 2014). Individuals who are highly engaged tend to focus a great deal of attention, consciously or unconsciously, on the object of engagement. Similarly, personal engagement is associated with feeling attentive, connected, integrated, and focused in one's role performance (Kahn, 1992), highlighting the relevance of attention in work engagement. Marketing theory also supports the inclusion of attention as an aspect of CE. For instance, regulatory engagement theory defines engagement as sustained attention, where behaviourally turning attention away from something lowers the level of engagement (Scholer & Higgins, 2009). Engagement is equivalent to focused attention (Lin, Gregor, & Ewing, 2008), and the notion of attention is consistent with the construct of conscious participation (Vivek, 2009), which captures a consumer's level of attention toward a brand. A customer who is engaged with a brand is attracted to information related to the brand. As an example, a highly engaged customer of a tourist hotel or an event centre is likely to focus a greater level of attention toward the brand information, such as news, advertising, or product at information. Accordingly, attention, representing a consumer's attentiveness and focus on the brand, is considered to be an important dimension which factor relate positively to CE.

Absorption. Researchers have recognized absorption as an indicator of both EE (e.g., Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004) and CE (Hollebeek, 2009; Patterson et al., 2006). For instance, in a work context, absorption partially defines engagement (Hakanen et al., 2008), which is characterized by being so fully concentrated and engrossed that time passes quickly and one has difficulty detaching from assigned role. Absorption is a high level of concentration and engrossment, extending beyond feeling efficacious and coming close to what has been called "flow," a state of optimal experience (Salanova, et al., 2002). Absorption represents effortless concentration, loss of self-consciousness, distortion of time, and intrinsic enjoyment. In the marketing domain, scholars have also argued that strong engagement extends beyond concentrating on something to being absorbed or engrossed with it (Scholer & Higgins, 2009). Absorption is a pleasant state in which the customer is fully concentrated, happy, and deeply engrossed while playing his role (Patterson et al., 2006),



and an absorbed customer interacting with the brand or other customers perceives time as passing quickly. For example, an engaged customer of a tourism organisation or event centre can easily lose track of time when reading or writing customer reviews on the Internet. The engagement literature indicates that a deep level of concentration and total immersion in one's role while interacting with the firm, its offering, or other customers, signifies a strong level of CE. Thus, absorption factor is proposed to be positively relate with customer engagement.

Interaction. Another characteristic commonly identified in the CE literature is interaction, which refers to a customer's online and off-line participation with the brand or other customers outside of purchase (So, et al. 2014). Interaction involves sharing and exchanging ideas, thoughts, and feelings about experiences with the brand (Vivek, 2009) and constitutes an important part of the conceptualization of CE. Some researchers promote CE as manifesting in behaviours, such as customer interactions (Bijmolt et al., 2010; MSI, 2010; van Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010), and others include customers' participation with the firm or other customers in exchanging information (e.g., Wagner & Majchrzak, 2007). The significance of the behavioural aspects of engagement is also evident in the organizational behaviour literature, which views EE behaviours as adaptive, typically not prescribed, and causing individuals to go beyond preserving the status quo of their role (Macey & Schneider, 2008). This notion is equally germane to CE behaviours, where engaged consumers actively participate in activities that extend beyond being a passive receiver of a product or service (So, et al. 2014). The relevance of customer interaction at the brand level is supported by the well-established notion of brand community, which represents a structured set of social relationships built among admirations of a brand (Muniz & O'Guinn, 2001). As the intensity of engagement increases, the probability that a customer will participate in these activities is likely to increase. For these reasons, interaction constitutes an important dimension of CE, representing the behavioural manifestation of a consumer's relationship with the brand beyond traditional consumptive behaviour (So, et al. 2014).

Identification. In addition to enthusiasm, attention, absorption, and interaction—the four dimensions consistently identified as comprising engagement, identification is also a key aspect of CE. While the CE literature contains few discussions of identification, from an employee perspective it forms a foundational dimension of engagement (Bakker et al., 2008; GonzálezRomá, Schaufeli, Bakker, & Lloret, 2006). For example, work engagement is characterized by a strong identification with one's work (Bakker et al., 2008), and identification is a key aspect of definitions of what the engaged person might experience (Macey & Schneider, 2008). The concept of identification originates from social identity theory, which maintains that the self-concept comprises a personal identity and a social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Tajfel & Turner, 1985). Individuals tend to develop a social identity by categorising themselves and others into various social classifications, as in the case of organizational membership (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). In a similar vein, identification can help explain consumers' relationships with companies or brands. Strong consumer–company relationships are based on consumers' identification with the companies that help them satisfy one or more important self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). From a consumer perspective, identification is an individual's "perceived oneness with or belongingness to an organization" (Bhattacharya, Rao, & Glynn, 1995, p. 46), and at the brand level, identification occurs when the consumers see their self-image as overlapping the brand's image (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006). Customers may identify with the Virgin Airlines brand because of its young, innovative, and edgy brand value image (So, et al. 2014). Identification is



active, selective, and volitional and motivates consumers to engage in company-related behaviours (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003) and extra–role behaviour, such as recommending products to others (Bhattacharya et al., 1995), which have been recognized as CE behaviours. Therefore, So, et al. (2014) maintain that identification, as a cognitive component that justifies consumers' engagement behaviours, is central to the conceptualization of CE.

Customer Behavioural Intentions. The outcomes of CE have been widely studied, with the most recognised including brand-related concepts, such as brand trust, brand credibility, brand attitude, satisfaction (Ha & Perks, 2005; Khan & Fatma, 2018) and behavioural intentions (Khan & Rahman, 2015; Morgan-Thomas & Veloutsou, 2013; Zarantonello & Schmitt, 2010). Here, the studied outcome of CE is customer behavioural intentions. Behavioural intentions, such as repurchase intention, willingness to pay (Risitano et al., 2017) and eWOM intentions (Serra-Cantalops et al. 2018), are typical outcomes of consumer brand experience and engagement (Moreira et al., 2017; Serra-Cantalops et al. 2018). In addition, brand-related outcomes, such as brand satisfaction and loyalty (Khan et al. 2016; Serra-Cantalops et al. 2018), are often identified. It is expected that the customer engagement will positively and significantly relate with behavioural intentions. Based on the review, the following hypotheses are formulated for the study and they are stated in alternate forms only:

- H₁: There is a significant positive relationship between identification and customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality sector in south-south Nigeria.
- H₂: There is a significant positive relationship between enthusiasm and customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality sector in south-south Nigeria;
- H₃: There is a significant positive relationship between attention and customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality industry in south-south Nigeria;
- H₄: There is a significant positive relationship between absorption and customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality industry in south-south Nigeria;
- H₅: There is a significant positive influence of interaction on customer behavioural intentions in the hospitality industry in south-south Nigeria.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the quantitative research design which is seen as been in line with the adopted research philosophy of positivism. Survey research design is associated with quantitative methods/designs and is directly and specifically related to the descriptive, diagnostic and hypothesis-testing research studies. Questionnaire was administered to the respondents in the six states of the south-south states of Nigeria. Five socio-demographics: gender, age bracket, education, occupation and monthly income were added among the constructs. The study was based on a sample of 660 respondents. Discriminant validity was analysed using Pearson correlation and Fornell-Larcker criterion while Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used to test the internal consistency (reliability) of the multiple-item scales items. Data collected were analyse with SPSS statistics and WarpPLS 6.0, which was used to analyse and test the hypotheses of the study.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Out of the 660 copies of questionnaire distributed to respondents in the hospitality sectors in south-south Nigeria, 435 copies were returned and validated as duly filled and usable questionnaire. This represents a response rate of 65.9 percent which is considered quite appropriate for marketing



research of this nature and which is in line with previous researches. The chapter is subdivided into the following: presentation of the socio-demographics, data presentation of the impulsive variables, validity analysis, reliability analysis, hypotheses testing and discussion of findings.

A total of 435 copies of questionnaire were analysed. Of which 60.8% were males while 39.2% were females. 54.5% are singles, 43.1% are married, 1.0% are separated while 1.3% are divorced. Also, 57.3% fall within the middle-income bracket of ₦15,000.00 – ₦451,000.00, 31.1% have monthly income below ₦15,000.00 while the remaining 10.6% have monthly income of ₦451,000.00 and above. In terms of the age bracket, 71.5% are in 20 – 35 years, 25.5% are within the 36 – 55 years while 3.0% are 56 years and above. 41.4% are students/apprentice, 5.6% do clerical work, 12.2% are in trading, 34.8% are in technical/administrative jobs, while 6.0% are casual workers. On education 0.9% have primary/non formal education, 16.2% secondary, 71.7% have HND/BSc while 11.1% have post graduate degrees. The implication of the above is that the majority of the respondents are young people, have tertiary education and therefore have reasonable education to understand the import of the study.

Assessing the Measurement Model in PLS-SEM

Partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) has two components: the measurement model and the structural model. While the structural model is for hypotheses validation, the validation of the measurement model involves the estimation of internal consistency reliability as well as the convergent and discriminant validity of the study constructs, which indicates the strength of the measures used to test the proposed model. Validation of the measurement is very necessary to assure that when used in the structural model it will be dependable (see Okeke et al, 2020). In this measurement model validation, we look at the items' loadings and cross loadings, validity analysis as well as reliability analysis.

Validity Analysis

Validity analysis in research is multiple and varied and for research reports, researchers typically use the table of combined loadings and cross-loadings provided by the PLS-SEM software when describing the convergent validity of their measurement instrument. The constructs used in this study were measured with multiple items.

Combined loadings and cross-loadings

Items	IDE	ENT	ATT	ABS	INT	CBI	SE	P value
IDE1	0.804						0.048	<0.001
IDE2	0.681						0.048	<0.001
IDE3	0.782						0.048	<0.001
IDE4	0.760						0.048	<0.001
IDE5	0.787						0.048	<0.001
ENT1		0.745					0.048	<0.001
ENT2		0.577					0.049	<0.001
ENT3		0.703					0.048	<0.001
ENT4		0.625					0.049	<0.001
ENT5		0.771					0.048	<0.001
ENT6		0.760					0.048	<0.001
ATT2			0.754				0.048	<0.001
ATT3			0.863				0.047	<0.001



ATT4			0.872				0.047	<0.001
ATT5			0.734				0.048	<0.001
ATT6			0.673				0.048	<0.001
ABS1				0.683			0.048	<0.001
ABS2				0.680			0.048	<0.001
ABS3				0.706			0.048	<0.001
ABS4				0.738			0.048	<0.001
ABS5				0.635			0.049	<0.001
ABS6				0.579			0.049	<0.001
INT1					0.645		0.049	<0.001
INT2					0.742		0.048	<0.001
INT3					0.874		0.047	<0.001
INT4					0.773		0.048	<0.001
INT5					0.857		0.047	<0.001
BI1						0.855	0.047	<0.001
BI2						0.920	0.047	<0.001
BI3						0.911	0.047	<0.001

A measurement instrument has good convergent validity if the question-statements (or other measures) associated with each latent variable are understood by the respondents in the same way as they were intended by the researcher of the question-statements (Kock, 2019). In this respect, he added, two criteria are recommended as the basis for concluding that a measurement model has acceptable convergent validity: that the p-values associated with the loadings be equal to or lower than 0.05; and that the loadings be equal to or greater than 0.5 (in Kock, 2019). All our items loaded well above 0.5 and have p-values well below the 0.05 margin of error. This indicates that our research instrument has good and acceptable convergent validity.

Next, we look at discriminant validity using the Fornell-Larcker Criterion.

Discriminant Validity Analysis (Fornell Larcker Criterion)

Constructs	IDE	ENT	ATT	ABS	INT	CBI
IDE	0.764					
ENT	0.542	0.701				
ATT	0.365	0.401	0.783			
ABS	0.358	0.528	0.680	0.672		
INT	0.231	0.363	0.699	0.522	0.783	
CBI	0.481	0.532	0.460	0.506	0.450	0.896

A measurement instrument has good discriminant validity if the question-statements (or other measures) associated with each latent variable are not confused by the respondents answering the questionnaire with the question-statements associated with other latent variables, particularly in terms of the meaning of the question-statements (Kock, 2019). The following criterion according to Kock (2019) is recommended for discriminant validity assessment: for each latent variable, the square root of the average variance extracted should be higher than any of the correlations involving that latent variable which is known as the Fornell-Larcker Criterion (see: Kock, 2019).



That is, the values on the diagonal of the table containing correlations among latent variables, which are the square roots of the average variances extracted for each latent variable, should be higher than any of the values above or below them, in the same column. Or, the values on the diagonal should be higher than any of the values to their left or right, in the same row. Our results from the PLS_SEM analysis demonstrate this hence our instrument is distinct and has discriminant validity. High correlations other than those on the diagonal relate to independent variables hence do not violate the rules. Next, we look at reliability analysis.

Reliability Analysis

Reliability Extent to which a variable or set of variables is consistent in what it is intended to measure. If multiple measurements are taken, the reliable measures will all be consistent in their values (Hair, et al. 2014). According to Hair, et al. it differs from validity in that it relates not to what should be measured, but instead to how it is measured. In PLS-Sem analysis, reliability analysis is usually assessed using the average variance extracted (AVE), Cronbach’s alpha, and composite reliability coefficients.

Reliability Coefficients

Constructs	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Cronbach’s Alpha (CA)	Composite Reliability (CR)
Identification (IDE)	0.584	0.821	0.875
Enthusiasm (ENT)	0.519	0.789	0.851
Attention (ATT)	0.613	0.839	0.887
Absorption (ABS)	0.452	0.755	0.831
Interaction (INT)	0.613	0.838	0.887
Customer Behavioural Intention (CBI)	0.802	0.876	0.924

In our study as shown, all the AVE coefficients are above 0.5 showing further that our data have convergence. All our study constructs have Cronbach’s alpha above 0.7 hence are acceptable. All our constructs have construct reliability of .8 and above hence merit further analysis hence we proceed to the structural model.

Evaluation of the Structural Model

In assessing the structural model, we first look at the coefficient of determination R-Square. R-square, the coefficient of determination is the overall effect size measure for the structural model, as in figure 4.1, the R-Square at CBI is 0.56 indicating that 56% of the variations in customer behavioural intentions are accounted for by the five components: identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption and interaction. The R-Square is moderate and show that CE is a veritable factor in inducing about behavioural intentions. We now look at the hypotheses.

Assessment of the structural model

Paths	Coefficients	Effect sizes	SE	t-values	p-values	Decision
IDE -> CBI	0.190	0.125	0.052	3.648	<0.001	Supported
ENT -> CBI	0.244	0.195	0.052	4.723	<0.001	Supported



ATT -> CBI	0.272	0.231	0.051	5.298	<0.001	Supported
ABS -> CBI	0.262	0.221	0.051	5.094	<0.001	Supported
INT -> CBI	0.253	0.193	0.052	4.909	<0.001	Supported

Structural path coefficients (loadings), in the path diagram after computation like figure 4.1, are the path weights connecting the factors to each other. As data are standardized, path loadings vary from 0 to 1 (Garson, 2016). The larger the coefficient, the stronger that path in the structural (inner) model. we use the path coefficients in validating the hypotheses earlier formulated for our study. The path coefficient IDE -> CBI ($\beta = 0.190$; t-values = 3.648; and p-value = <0.001) has p-value Well below the 0.05 margin of error hence accept alternate hypothesis one is validated. The path coefficient ENT -> CBI ($\beta = 0.244$; t-values = 4.723; and p-value = <0.001) has p-value well below the 0.05 margin of error hence accept alternate hypothesis two is validated. The path coefficient ATT -> CE ($\beta = 0.272$; t-values = 5.298; and p-value = <0.001) has p-value well below the 0.05 margin of error hence accept alternate hypothesis three is validated. The path coefficient ABS -> CE ($\beta = 0.262$; t-values = 5.094; and p-value = <0.001) has p-value well below the 0.05 margin of error hence accept alternate hypothesis four is validated. The path coefficient ENT -> CE ($\beta = 0.244$; t-values = 4.723; and p-value = <0.001) has p-value well below the 0.05 margin of error hence accept alternate hypothesis five is validated.

Discussion of Findings

This study established that there is a strong positive relationship between identification and customer behavioural intentions. This finding is in line with literature that strong consumer–company relationships are based on consumers’ identification with the companies that help them satisfy one or more important self-definitional needs (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). This finding also agrees with So, et al. (2014) that identification, as a cognitive component that justifies consumers’ engagement behaviours. This study established that enthusiasm has a strong positive influence and relationship with customer behavioural intentions. This is in line with Vivek (2009) and So et al. 2014) that enthusiasm as a positive affective state in the context of both work engagement and CE. From this perspective, enthusiasm is consistent with the dimensions of vigour (Patterson et al., 2006) and activation (Hollebeek, 2009), given that these dimensions signify a high level of energy while playing one’s role, reflecting the feeling of enthusiasm. We also established that attention has a strong positive relationship with customer behavioural intention. This finding agrees with Lin et al. (2008), and is also in line with So et al. (2014) that a customer who is engaged with a brand is attracted to information related to the brand; as attention, representing a consumer’s attentiveness and focus on the brand, is considered to be an important dimension which factor relate positively to customer behavioural intentions. Our study also established absorption has a strong positive relationship with customer behavioural intentions as researchers have recognized absorption as an indicator of CE (Hollebeek, 2009; Patterson et al., 2006). Our finding also agrees with the customer engagement literature which indicates that a deep level of concentration and total immersion in one’s role while interacting with the firm, its offering, or other customers, signifies a strong level of customer engagement. We also established that interaction has a strong positive influence on customer behavioural intentions. This is in line with some researchers that promote CE as manifesting in behaviours, such as customer interactions (van



Doorn et al., 2010; Verhoef et al., 2010), and others include customers' participation with the firm or other customers in exchanging information (e.g., Wagner & Majchrzak, 2007). This is equally in agreement with (So et al. 2014) notion germane to CE behaviours, where engaged consumers actively participate in activities that extend beyond being a passive receiver of a product or service and for these reasons, interaction constitutes an important dimension of CE, representing the behavioural manifestation of a consumer's relationship with the brand beyond traditional consumptive behaviour (So, et al. 2014). These findings agree with (Serra-Cantallops et al. 2018); and also conforms with (Khan et al. 2016) that the customer engagement will positively and significantly relate with behavioural intentions.

5. CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study offers an important contribution to the tourism and marketing literature by utilising a reliable and valid CE measure to gain further insights into customer psychological and behavioural connections with hospitality brands beyond the service consumption experience. The CE impact on the customer behavioural intentions were tested using the scale as developed and validated in So et al. (2014) study. For these reasons, the development of the CE scale constitutes an important step in the advancement of customer brand intentions. This study show that the customer engagement constructs are adequately and significantly reflected in the antecedents of identification, enthusiasm, attention, absorption and interaction impact customer behavioural intentions. Collectively, all five dimensions were found to be significant in representing CE. This result suggests that, when attempting to develop CE, managers should focus on the enhancement of each of the five CE dimensions, with particular emphasis on attention and enthusiasm, given their high factor loadings. For example, to increase attention, managers need to provide information their customer groups may find relevant and interesting, as personal, relevant knowledge or information can induce attention. CE may lead to various consequences, such as customer equity, long-term reputation of the firm, brand recognition, and financial outcomes. The effects of CE on these consequences could be tested using the antecedents as employed in this study. For these reasons, the development of the CE constitutes an important step in the advancement of brand management knowledge.

While CE is manifested beyond the service transaction, enthusiasm may be enhanced by outstanding service delivery, features that thrill customers, and a positive brand image. In building strong customer brand identification, brand managers must create a unique and clear identity that is desired by the target customer segments as this allows a sustainable differentiation of the offering and helps to enhance customers' identification with the brand. Additionally, firms need to provide opportunities for customer interaction as well as incentives, such as recognition and reward schemes to encourage customer participation. Collectively, these actions help customers to immerse themselves in the interactive experience with the brand, thereby forming their engagement with the brand.

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