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## **Influence of Customer Service on the Performance of Hospitality Enterprises: Lessons from Sunbird Tourism Limited in Malawi**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the influence of customer service on the success of hospitality enterprises. The paper argues that in order to deliver excellent services that will result into profitable hospitality business, there is need to bring into close alignment the understanding of customer service and its relationship to service customer relationship management (CRM), service quality and internal relationship marketing. If these aspects are carefully harnessed, they will result into a more delighted and satisfied customer, who will later become loyal to the hospitality business in the long run. If the service is consistently delivered to customer satisfaction, then this will eventually lead to increased and successful business performance. A proposed conceptual framework showing the relationship among these elements has been provided. This paper is based on a document analysis of a 2015 annual report of Sunbird Tourism Limited (STL), the largest and leading operator in the hospitality industry in Malawi. A review of relevant and related literature on customer service and the related elements has been undertaken. The study has utilized secondary data for it was easy to link it to theory about the concepts. The findings of this study can therefore help hospitality operators in Malawi to appreciate the importance of embracing strategies that can inform the customer service and its influence on business performance. The paper, however, recommends a thorough investigation of the validity of proposed conceptual framework in the country in order to gain insights into how customer service can truly influence the performance of a hospitality enterprise.

**Key words:** *Hospitality Industry; Customer Service; Service Quality; Internal Marketing; Customer Satisfaction; Customer Loyalty; Hospitality Enterprise Performance*

### **1.1 Introduction - Hospitality Industry as a Service Sector**

Recent years have witnessed the hospitality industry, fast becoming an important social and economic activity in most countries around the world. The industry is growing at a more rapid rate than both the wider economy and other significant sectors such as automotive, financial services and health care (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2015). As the result, the hospitality service industry enormously possesses great potential as a vehicle for creating employment, and elevating the social environment in which the industry operates (Langvinienė and Daunoravičiūtė, 2015).

Following this growing trend, Crick and Spencer (2011) have commented that there is rapid transformation of the hospitality and hospitality industry concepts due to the ever changing operating environment and the agility of present day customer who has become more sophisticated and demanding. Increasingly, the hospitality description has often been associated with activities such as assisting such customers, and involving them as co-producers of certain hospitality activities (Wood, 2013). In this case, all hospitality service providers and players have a huge task on their shoulders to ensure that service provision for consumers in hospitality is carried out to satisfy their needs.

Langvinienė and Daunoravičiūtė (2015) recently argued that in order to provide the most competitive advantage, any hospitality business model must not only satisfy customers' needs, but also exceed them, help to maintain long-term relationship with the customers, suppliers and partners. Serrat (2012) in support of this view, further opines from an economic perspective that one of the ways to acquire the competitive advantage can only be by delivering the unique products and services for which customers are willing to pay more.

The purpose of this paper is to examine the influence of customer service on the success of hospitality enterprises. The paper will specifically postulate that in order to deliver excellent services that will result into profitable hospitality business, there is need to bring into close alignment the understanding of customer service and its relationship to service customer relationship management (CRM), service quality and internal relationship marketing. If these aspects are carefully harnessed, they will result into a more delighted and satisfied customer, who will later become loyal to the hospitality business in the long run. If the service is consistently delivered to customer satisfaction, then this will eventually lead to increased and successful business performance. A proposed conceptual framework showing the relationship among these elements has been provided.

Following the critical analysis of Sunbird Tourism Limited (STL) as one of the successful hospitality enterprises in Malawi, several important customer service dimensions in line with the model proposed emerge, underpinning the success of the company as it continues to operate in Malawi. The sections below will discuss these emerging elements drawn from the report to confirm how hospitality enterprises such as Sunbird put this type of model at the heart of their business operations.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

### **2.1 Customer Service**

According to Kandampully (2014) customer service is one of the most widely-debated issues and has gained a lot of attention in literature. A more encompassing and educative definition of customer service connotes a number of activities aimed at driving the level of customer

satisfaction, a pleasurable feeling that a particular product or service has met or exceeded the customer's expectations. It can be seen that customer service is rather treated as a process designed to create and deliver a performance or deed while the customer is present by providing information, taking reservations and receiving payment with the ultimate goal of delighting the customer (Kandampully, 2014). He adds that service providers should use customer service to establish a relationship with the customers throughout the delivery process. On the other hand, Mosoma (2014) brings in a related concept of customer care which includes all ensuing activities and efforts carried out by various businesses to ensure customers feel that the business companies take into account their welfare, as well as their present and future needs as they relate to the companies.

In other words, Johnson, Clark and Shulver (2012) treat the customers in this relationship as an input resource for many service operations. Therefore, firms or companies, for example, in the hospitality industry, should thus not only need to know how to manage customers but also need to understand what they expect from the operation. Most importantly, customers are, in most cases, the final judges as to how well the quality of the service delivered matches up to their requirements, and, by their continued support, determine its long-term success (Johnston *et al.*, 2012).

The impact of customer service on the key drivers of business performance has been established, for example, Kandampully (2014) has argued that customer service is where a firm integrates its resources with its customers' resources, however, not all customers want to be fully integrated with an enterprise's resources. Additionally, Goodman (2009) believes that providers of services should realize that poor customer service can also harm a business, but this however, cannot be incorporated into decision making process yet unless it can be quantified since the quality of service provision may be assessed both objectively and subjectively by customers. In this regard, hospitality enterprises, generally being service providers, are not privy to this.

### **2.1.1 Internal Marketing - Employees as Input Resource to the Customer Service Process**

Excellent customer service which may improve customer satisfaction is largely dependent on the performance of a company's workforce (Watkis 2015). In order for a company to achieve its ultimate profitability goal, it should consider its 'human capital as a critical success enabler in achieving strategic business objectives' (Sunbird, 2015, p.15). Besides, Heskett, Sasser Jr. and Schlesinger (2014) have strongly challenged that for an excellent service to be executed, it relies on recruiting the right personnel and training current workforce to perform happily and willingly at optimum levels. But, it is also apparent that many enterprises struggle to justify the time and expenses associated with training, especially in a business environment typically susceptible to seasonality and infested with high staff turnover (Wescott, 2015). He continues to argue that although the benefits of training are imperceptible and hence problematic to assess, there is an indication of a significant return-on-investment. For example, Wescott says, employee competence and job satisfaction cannot be easily evaluated, however, they have the potential to enhance productivity and organisational profitability.

While employees are not the only cause of most customer dissatisfaction, in sharp contrast to the conventional wisdom, employee attitudes and errors are responsible for only about 20 percent overall customer dissatisfaction (Goodman, 2009). Ramphal(2014) argues that customer satisfaction should consider both internal and external customers to attain high value creation. Organisational performance depends on the wellbeing of an institution's human resources, processes and material in the due course of value creation. In this regard, Heskett *et al.* (2014) have made their thoughts clear by confirming that today's employee satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment strongly influence tomorrow's customer satisfaction, loyalty, and commitment and ultimately the organization's profit and growth - a quantifiable set of associations the authors dub as the value-profit chain.

Mosoma (2014) laments that the extant literature has seriously neglected the extent to

which employees, as internal customers, are to be regarded as the most important customers whose satisfaction affects the way they serve the external customers. He carefully concludes by mentioning that when hospitality enterprises put employees first, they are also in return putting customers first since happy employees work towards the betterment of the establishment.

### **2.1.2 Service Quality in Customer Service**

Coming hot on the heels of hospitality service growth is the service quality construct which is undoubtedly linked to the creation of a competitive edge of many hospitality enterprises and value of their products and services in the midst of growing number of competitors (Grönoos, 2016). For example, Sohail, Roy, Saeed and Ahmed (2007, p.64) while making specific reference to hotels, argue that "to remain profitable, hotels need to continuously improve customer experiences". This is emanating from earlier studies of a conceptual gap model of Zeithaml, Berry and Parasuraman(1993) and later, Grönoos' (2016) image model of the perceived service quality. The scholars explain that perceived quality emanates from the comparison of a consumer's real experiences with his or her expectations of the service offering, a view equally shared by Johnson *et al.* (2012).

Whether in the academic field or business practice, studies of service quality have gained a considerable attention in the hospitality management (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Consequently, many scholars acknowledge that the perceived service quality paradigm was introduced as a conceptual framework to assist managers and researchers understand how customers perceive the service quality features, or what really a service is at the back of a customer's mind (Grönroos, 2016).

The model has since registered a wide recognition in literature and has been used to determine characteristics of service quality features from the customer's point of reference. This in turn, has resulted in various hospitality enterprises such as hotels instituting improvement programmes which range from introduction of a unique service culture, rigorous recruitment and training of service personnel, to empowerment and establishment of appraisal systems to match the demanding needs of the

customer (Johnson *et al.*, 2012; Zeithaml *et al.*, 2013). The authors argue that benefits resulting from a good service include increased customer loyalty, increased market share, higher return on investment, reduced costs and establishment of a competitive advantage.

### **2.1.3 Customer Relationship Management**

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) has recently become one of the most hotly debated issues and a point of attention in many business enterprises (Mohammed and Rashid, 2012). CRM is mainly premised on the belief that establishing a long-lasting relationship with customers is the cornerstone for obtaining loyal customers who are much more profitable than non-loyal ones.

Therefore, Westcott (2015) defines CRM as a mechanism used by enterprises to choose customers that a business can establish and maintain relationships with, in the interest of increasing their lifetime value to the business. Actually, Kotler and Keller (2012) concur that it is not enough to attract new customers, rather, an enterprise must also strive to retain them and increase their business transactional relationship with them. Too many companies suffer from what Kotler and Keller (2012) describe as customer churn or defection.

Although scholars such as Langvinienė and Daunoravičiūtė (2015) and Wu and Lu (2012) believe that CRM has gained popularity and is becoming one of the most pursued academic subjects in the business field, they lament that there are few studies that reveal the relationship between CRM dimensions and hotel performance in the hospitality industry. Nonetheless, CRM still remains one of the most effective ways to facilitate developing and expanding the customers' base that, in turn, will assist in enhancing profitability and customer loyalty (Dominici and Guzzo, 2010; Mohammed and Rashid, 2012). In general, the main factor which limits many hotels' ability to achieve higher customer satisfaction levels is the standardisation of services that reduces the possibility to customize the service offer to meet specific guest needs (Dominici and Guzzo, 2010).

## **2.2 Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty in Hospitality Enterprises**

Customer satisfaction is regarded as customer's post consumption evaluative judgement of a product or service in terms of whether the product or the service has met customer's needs and expectations (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2013). Customer satisfaction is related to other customer feelings such as a sense of fulfilment, contentment, pleasure, delight, relief, and ambivalence.

Zeithaml *et al.* (2013) argue that although customer satisfaction tends to be measured at a particular point in time as if it were static, satisfaction is dynamic, evolves over time, influenced by a variety of factors particularly when product usage or service experience takes place over time. In case of very new services or a service not previously experienced, customer expectations may be barely forming at the point of initial purchase and will be concretized as the process unfolds and the customer begins to form his or her perceptions.

The most widely accepted conceptualization of customer satisfaction has been the disconfirmation model (Zeithaml *et al.*, 2013). Given the attention customer satisfaction debate has received in research (Chand, 2010; Markovic and Raspor, 2010; Reid and Bojanic, 2009) a number of determinants of customer satisfaction have been investigated. However, what is evident is that various studies have established different attributes of a service offering ranging from room cleanliness, security, value for money, and courtesy and attitudes of staff to convenience of location (Chand, 2010; Markovic and Raspor, 2010), confirming the heterogeneous nature of services. Zeithaml *et al.* (2013) propose several categorical determinants of customer satisfaction. These include: product and service features, customer emotions, attribution for service success or failure, perceptions of equity or fairness and other customers, family members, and coworkers. Whether these suggested determinants remain relatively stable and consistent or not for all types of services, is another challenge that future studies may need to confirm.

However, Johnson *et al.* (2012) contend that delivering excellent service does not necessarily mean exceeding expectations. Consumer research has shown that excellent service is about doing four things: delivering the promise;

dealing well with customer problems and queries; providing a personal touch; going the 'extra mile'. The service quality factors such as access; aesthetics; attentiveness/helpfulness; or care (Johnson *et al.*, 2012), are those attributes of service about which customers may have expectations and which need to be delivered at some specified level.

Kotler and Keller (2012) confidently summarize that a highly satisfied customer generally will become loyal, purchase more as the enterprise launches more innovative products and services on its portfolio, tell favorably others about the enterprise and its products, ignore competing brands and will be less sensitive to price, offer product or service ideas to the enterprise, and costs less to serve than new customers because transactions can become routine. Simply put, customers highly evaluating service tend to use, for example, the hospitality enterprise services repeatedly and recommend it to friends and acquaintances (Jasinkas, Streimikeine, Sygzdiene and Simanavicius, 2016).

However, Johnson *et al.* (2012) warn that hospitality enterprises need to be especially concerned with their customer satisfaction level today because in this age of technology, Internet, for example, provides a tool for consumers to quickly spread both good and bad word of mouth to the rest of the world. Some customers set up their own Web sites and other social media platforms to air grievances and even agitate for protest, targeting high-profile brands (Kotler and Keller, 2012). To this end, Westcott (2015) candidly advises that every enterprise's success depends on keeping its customers satisfied with the goods or services that it offers, yet most executives tend to view the customer service function of their business as little more than a necessary nuisance, a perception which can eventually lead to disastrous ramifications for the enterprise.

The consequences of any service experience will result in a number of service outcomes. As suggested by Johnston *et al.* (2012), these outcomes are in four categories: benefits (things such as food or drink); emotions (pleasure, frustration, delight, or disgust of the tangibles); judgements (opinions formed about an experiences and outcomes, e.g. views about

fairness or perceived value); and intentions (repurchasing or going to tell others or even complain about the service experience). Interestingly, supporting Johnston's *et al.* (2012) categorisation of service outcomes, Ramphal (2014) quickly adds that in case a customer is not satisfied with an experience, he/she does not normally show outright his/her discontentment to the management of an enterprise, rather on average, he/she will inform at least nine other people about poor service experiences.

Unfortunately, the truth is that a satisfied customer will, by contrast, only inform very few people, say three, about his/her good service experiences in an establishment (Ramphal, 2014). It is therefore not surprising to note that lately managers, for example in the hotel industry, are facing enormous challenges to maintain customer satisfaction (Dominici and Guzzo, 2010). As the result, many enterprises are injecting a lot of financial resources to improving service quality and the perceived value for their customers in order to achieve a desired level of customer satisfaction and loyalty, thus resulting in better relationships with each customer according to Dominici and Guzzo (2010).

### **2.3 Hospitality Performance**

The measurement of organization performance is more severe in service organisations such as hospitality enterprises than in the manufacturing setting (Korir, 2012) because the nature of the business is susceptible to more variability in the service experiences (Gronroos, 2016). Financial measures have widely been used in the hotel industry (Ojugo, 2010). Examples of financial success indicators used by hotels, include operating profit or margin, return on investment (ROI), pricing, revenue per room available (RevPar) and yield percentage (Bardi, 2007; Korir, 2012). The latter reflects hotel performance in both occupancy and average daily rate (ADR) charged to the customers (Bardi, 2007; Korir, 2012).

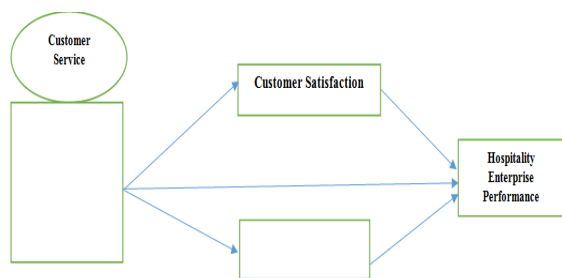
From the hotel perspective according to Bardi (2007), yield percentage, which is the hotel's effectiveness at selling its rooms at the highest rate available to the most profitable guest, reveals a facility's success in selling its room inventory on a daily basis. On the other hand, RevPAR is used to indicate the ability of

each guest room to produce a profit. Once the daily sales opportunity has presented itself, it cannot be repeated (excluding the opportunity to sell a room at a half-day rate).

It should however be noted that elsewhere Heskett *et al.* (2014) introduced a Service Profit Chain model which links the non-financial with the financial results. In this case, Heskett *et al.* (2014) suggest that the non-financial measures include internal quality, employee satisfaction, employee loyalty, productivity, organization value customer satisfaction and loyalty. They assumed that these aspects result into profitability and growth of an organization.

In conclusion, drawing from the debate above, it is abundantly clear that the success of a hospitality enterprise is largely influenced by customer service elements such as adherence to service quality; embracing sound internal marketing strategies such as empowering and training of employees as input resources to customer service process; and instituting a customer relationship strategy in the business. All these elements if properly aligned, will create a formidable synergy for the success of the business resulting into services experiences that will make customers satisfied and consequently loyal. In the long run, this harmony will eventually lead into a productive and profitable hospitality enterprise.

A simple conceptual framework that summarises the relationship among the various elements of customer service as discussed above, is given in the **Figure 2.1**.



**Figure 2.1:** A proposed conceptual model depicting relationship among customer service, its elements (internal marketing, service quality and customer relationship management), customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and hospitality enterprise performance. (Authors)

### 3.0 Methodology:

This paper has drawn arguments related to the influences of customer service on the success of hospitality enterprises purely based on tracking down useful extant published academic works (also known as secondary research) from various journal articles and other relevant publications. Additionally, one of the biggest Malawian hospitality company's (Sunbird Tourism Limited) 2015 annual report sourced from the company's website, has largely been used as a case study to inform the paper. The basic technique employed was to find documents and sources pointing in the direction of the information related to the study. The methodology of the paper is purely based on the systemic literature analysis, synthesis, and generalization, an approach adopted from Langvinienė and Daunoravičiūtė (2015).

Sunbird Tourism Limited (STL) is the largest and leading operator in the hospitality industry in Malawi and has as its main activity, the ownership, operation and management of seven hotel properties scattered across Malawi in strategic geographical locations. Catering Solutions Limited, a subsidiary, is involved in the provision of catering services. The company comprises of the Company and its subsidiary and its primary business is in hospitality. Its business thrust is well entrenched in her vision and mission statement (Sunbird, 2015).

The company's vision is to be a preferred brand in the hospitality industry and the mission is to provide excellent accommodation, catering and related hospitality services with the intention of increasing shareholder value (Sunbird, 2015). STL enjoys its market leadership position in the hospitality industry in the country through differentiation in their service delivery. Differentiation is achieved through innovative products and services, personalized customer service, and customer relationship management. Apparently, these are the elements that have already been incorporated in the conceptual framework above.

### 4.0 Results and Discussion:

Drawing lessons from the Sunbird (2015) report, several customer service issues that have led to

the successful performance of the company emerge. Clearly, such customer service aspects have a bearing on the conceptual framework drawn from various discussions and debates reported in the literature.

Firstly, Sunbird (2015) reports that as the result of the reliable service delivery standards the company instituted, it has successfully managed to retain a high proportion of their client base, both at national and international market levels. This is partly due to what Jasinkaset *al.* (2016) observe in their study of the impact of hotel service quality on the loyalty of customers. They noted a rapidly growing trend of demanding customers on hotel services. Consequently, hotel businesses are not lagging behind by aggressively providing quality services that have stimulated increased competitiveness of the hotel business as hotels continue to face demanding customers. Not surprisingly, in line with this position, Sunbird (2015) confirms how the company positively reacted by providing facilities long demanded by the customers at one of company's hotel units:

*"...in response to guest complaints we opened an up-market gym at Sunbird Mount Soche, 'the Soche Wellness Centre.' Since it opened we have had very positive comments from our guests."* (Sunbird, 2015, p.10).

At another hotel unit, Sunbird Capital, a new bar and restaurant were opened:

*"... [The] restaurant and bar will offer the ultimate dining experience and will raise the standard for fine dining, city and countrywide."* (Sunbird, 2015, p.11).

Additionally, in the quest to providing better food services, the company hired one of the top-notch South African chefs to set food quality standards and train chefs of the entire chain of hotels in the company. Menus were revised in the light of new food and gastronomical trends, and food presentation was equally enhanced (Sunbird, 2015).

Realizing that information technology plays a critical role in delivering customer care, the company also implemented eRes – an on line

web-based Central Reservations System to allow prospective customers to book online, thereby eliminating the manual system which necessitated the presence of manpower at all the times to attend to various customer needs.

The findings of DominiciandGuzzo (2010) in a study on customer satisfaction in the Sicilian hotel industry are resonance with what STL has embarked on as demonstrated above. The scholars have crisply appraised the efforts made by hotels that they are investing heavily to improve service quality and the perceived value for customers in order to attain desired customer satisfaction and loyalty, ultimately yielding better relationships with the customer (Dominici and Guzzo, 2010).

On human resources and internal marketing aspects, STL recognises the role the workforce plays in the delivery of meaningful customer service experiences. The company has initiated a number of programmes and interventions aimed at enhancing service delivery (Sunbird, 2015).

*"Realising that exceptional service delivery can only be achieved by well-trained people, Sunbird is in the process of establishing a fully-equipped training centre ... with the sole objective of inculcating a culture of continuous learning."* (Sunbird, 2015, p.15).

Additionally, the company has instituted a more robust succession planning drive. For example, quite recently, the company sent some management trainees abroad who upon return, have been given substantive positions in various units within the chain. At more operational level, an apprenticeship programmes in food production, kitchen management and housekeeping have been institutionalised and conducted on a regular basis. Human resource development activities have not eluded some executive managers at corporate office level who have undergone executive coaching sessions while others in executive management have participated in relevant profession-related workshops outside the country. On-the-job training as well as training in Standard Operating Procedures is also carried out. Lastly, the company also rewards what it calls "Star performers" in the categories of Employees and



Supervisors of the year. The company also recognises long serving employees (Sunbird, 2015) and the statement below summarises candidly why these aspects of human resource are critical to customer service:

*“Since quality and value are defined by the guest, the employee who provides the guest experience must not only be well-trained but highly motivated to meet the guest’s quality and value expectations and must do so consistently. In the hospitality industry if you take care of your staff they will take care of your guests because the guest contact employee usually is the key to having a satisfied guest.”*

(Sunbird, 2015, p.16).

All these internal marketing and human resource development initiatives are in resonance with what Mosoma (2014) established in his study and are aimed at successfully inculcating what Westcott (2015) is describing as a spirit of customer orientation in the workforce across all levels. Drawing from the work of Kim (2008), Westcott (2015) in this case defines customer orientation as activities, behaviours, and beliefs exhibited by employees and prioritise customers’ interests and constantly generate greater customer value in the process. He adds employee training in customer orientation is imperative and this is exactly what STL is doing. To this end, Watkis (2015) suggests that overall, the objective of activities related to internal marketing, is to make all company employees aware that they need to work as a team in order to fully satisfy customer’s requirements, thus achieving the corporate objectives. Additionally, Mosoma (2014) underscores all these aspects by concluding that when an employee is satisfied in his or her job, there is a resultant positive psychological contract within an individual employee, which assures employees that the success of the business and that of the individual employees are intimately in sync and support each other.

While, the hospitality industry in Malawi remain highly competitive and fragmented, Sunbird has taken a strategic decision to offer quality service that meets and exceeds the guests’

needs and expectations as well as offering value for money. With this approach, STL has consolidated its market position by establishing a sound customer relationship management (CRM) policy for dealing with customers so as to enhance customer loyalty and consequently profitability, a view shared by Mohammed and Rashid (2012).

*“Sunbird therefore acquires and retains customers with greater precision by focusing on customer retention management through intensified account and relationship management, adoption of competitive pricing, reviving dormant accounts and getting market feedback and demands with the intention of meeting and exceeding guests’ need and preferences.”* (Sunbird, 2015, p.12).

The statement above confirms what Bagdan (2013) believes that the success of the hospitality business enterprise is derived from placing attention squarely on the customers and their needs.

In confirming what Bardi (2007) has suggested as a measure of business performance for hotels where yield percentage is used as the hotel’s effectiveness at selling its rooms at the highest rate available to the most profitable guest, Sunbird (2015) reports that STL made a strategic decision not to compete on price but rather, offering quality service that met and surpassed the guests’ expectations and value for money.

*“With this approach Sunbird was able to achieve 30% market share. In spite of the stiff competition Sunbird attained a very competitive average room rate of MK49,170 [approximately, US\$68] against the competition’s MK34,816 [approximately, US\$48]. This is a testament to the effectiveness of the policy of avoiding price wars in favour of providing value for money.”* (Sunbird, 2015, p.13).

It is also worthy mentioning that business performance of STL was further bolstered by the

marketing and promotion campaign mounted by the company. It is reported that in 2015, the company promoted many special revenue generating activities such as: organizing special conference and accommodation packages; special occasion packages (i.e. weddings, Valentine's promotion; Easter; Mother's Day promotion; theme lunches and dinners; midweek and weekend special rates, Xmas; low season, etc.). All of which are reported to have been very successful in garnering more customer patronage, consequently boosting the sales revenues.

Despite all these efforts by STL to demonstrate its commitment and attempt to offer service excellent to its customers, however, Hudson and Hudson (2013) warns that quite often, quality customer service is treated as an exception rather than the norm by many service providers. There are a number of reasons for these disparities in standards. The scholars provide genuine reasons for this occurrence. When an economic situation becomes more volatile, many enterprises tend to focus on cost cutting on activities such as training and also, instead of focusing on strengthening relationships with their existing clientele, they begin to venture into more expensive routes of acquiring new customers which invariably puts the relationships with their existing customers in jeopardy (Hudson and Hudson, 2013). Interestingly, STL has demonstrated an impeccable amount of resilience in the middle of growing and tough competitive environment as evidenced from its performance which has exceeded expectations as demonstrated in the company's financial statements.

### **5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations:**

In conclusion, this study has provided an academic framework explaining the relationship between customer service aspects such as service quality, internal marketing and customer relationship management (CRM) and customer satisfaction and loyalty which ultimately have influence on the success of an enterprise such as Sunbird Tourism Limited.

Critical attention should be focused on the quality of the service offer that meets the customer's needs and requirements, provided that the employee delivering it, is well looked

after. A job-satisfied employee will always look forward to satisfy an external customer in the manner that will ensure a sustained relationship with the customer. A customer who is satisfied with the service experience will definitely repeat the purchase and associate himself or herself with the enterprise in the long run. The customer will remain loyal to the business because of the guaranteed confidence he or she has established. At this point, hospitality enterprises should endeavour to create mechanisms that will guarantee retention of the customer and be able to offer innovative products or services that will attract value for money. Consequently, the business will remain profitable regardless of the behavior of the operating environment.

It is worth mentioning that this paper will also raise awareness among hospitality operators to pay more attention to customer service dimensions discussed, and assist them in improving hospitality enterprise performance and competitiveness. However, there are limitations associated with this study. Firstly, there is need for further verification by collecting data from the hospitality industry in order to test the proposed framework and further interrogate the hypothesised relationships. Second, the model is more focused on one hospitality enterprise in Malawi and therefore, lacks generality, there is a need to test it in different hospitality establishments countrywide to confirm the consistency and stability of the dimensions in the framework.

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