

GLIMPSE OF CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT IN HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM: A QUALITATIVE CONTENT ANALYSIS

*Punit Moris Ekka**

Abstract

The work synthesizes the extant literature of secondary research-work and the systematic reviews, by using qualitative content analysis. This research aims to provide an insightful knowledge on contemporary topic of customer engagement through the methodology of an umbrella review, in the context of hospitality and tourism. Current study provides a holistic macro-level understanding of the extant literature of customer engagement in hospitality and tourism. The contemporary literature under investigation were published during consecutive years of recent times by journals of high repute. This work encompasses the antecedents and consequences of customer engagement in hospitality and tourism domain. The two popular online databases namely, Scopus and Web of Science were used for data collection. By applying keywords search, a total of 32 and 927 articles respectively, were collected for the time-period of January 2019 to June 2022. This paper tries to offer insights regarding customer engagement through the content analysis within the hospitality and tourism context along with providing future directions for further research.

Keywords: Engagement, hospitality, tourism, content analysis, customer, review

JEL Classification: M31, M37, M39, Z32

1. Introduction

The word “community” alone is unclear and indeterminate unless its usefulness is leveraged. Most of the times it is used as a vague word, which usually finds its place in cultural and social terms or in a small group. With time, the term “community engagement” emerged and is continuously evolving (Reddel & Woolcock 2004). Community engagement is perceived as a classic medium to address the social and economic issues (Ang, 2006). From a community standpoint, increased involvement with local stakeholders along with the customer engagement, garners several benefits. Community-based participation leverages the strategic win-win situation for hospitality and tourism players. Consequently, the community engagement acts as one of the prime drivers for cultural, economic and ultimately for the social advancement.

Currently in the field of empirical research, there has been a huge inflow of literature related to customer engagement in the domain of hospitality and tourism (Taheri et al., 2019). One of the most affected industry due to the outbreak of Covid-19 is hospitality and tourism (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021), which has generated

* Punit Moris Ekka is (Research Scholar) at the Indian Institute of Management, Sambalpur, India. E-mail address: punitekka2016@gmail.com

significant amount of interest among researchers to study this domain from the lens of consumer engagement afresh (Zhong et al., 2021).

Customer engagement has been widely studied across the hospitality and tourism spectrum with a focus on subsectors such as travel, lodging, heritage tourism, cultural tourism, wine tourism, eco-tourism, food tourism, hiking and rural camping, adventure tourism, and wellness tourism (Hao, 2020; Cahyadi, 2016; Bryce et al., 2015; Ram et al., 2016; Suhartanto, 2011). However, the bulk of this research has been fragmented standalone research with low generalizability, and with little attempt to develop and add to the existing literature and without the intent to develop cohesive literature. Consequently, researchers' understanding of customer engagement and the theoretical understanding of customer engagement differs across studies in the hospitality and tourism context, resulting in inconsistency within the literature.

The concept of customer engagement is firmly grounded in service-dominant logic (Hollebeek et al, 2019; Islam et al, 2019). Service dominant logic postulates that the value can be created through healthy relationship between the firms, its partners, and its customers and the customer is a co-creator of the value which they consume. In service-dominant sectors, the perceived value of a customer is only the contribution of the service, which is phenomenologically accepted for their consumption. Thus, customer engagement is of great significance in the area of hospitality and tourism, as this primarily being a service-oriented sector.

By leveraging the content analysis, an umbrella review is used for the current study to draw insightful conclusions. Among various qualitative methods, the content analysis is primarily used for analyzing the textual data. The qualitative content analysis investigates the data which are an existing outcome of open-ended data collection procedure purposed for detailed and in-depth synthesis. The process of qualitative content analysis may involve the data collection and its synthesis simultaneously.

2. Methodology

Content analysis as a qualitative research technique is used for producing a strong and sound inferences from data of a given context, to provide new understanding, perspective and insights, for decision making useful for practitioners and academicians alike. Elo & Kyngäs, (2008), states that the content analysis is a technique, which can be used in either inductive or deductive way, with qualitative as well as with the quantitative data equally.

This umbrella review approach aims to develop cohesion and clarity by addressing the deficiency of the existing literature, by drawing from a series of research article and systematic literature reviews, published during consecutive years of 2019, 2020 and 2021.

Table no. 1 Details of three literatures used for the synthesis

Year of publication	Title	Author	Journal	Publisher
2019	Tourism-based customer engagement: The construct, antecedents, and consequences	Rather, R. A., Hollebeek, L. D., & Islam, J. U.	Service Industries Journal	Taylor & Francis
2020	A decade of customer engagement research in hospitality and tourism: A systematic review and research agenda	So, K. K. F., Li, X., & Kim, H.	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	Sage
2021	Customer engagement research in hospitality and tourism: a systematic review	Chen, S., Han, X., Bilgihan, A., & Okumus, F.	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management	Taylor & Francis

Aromataris et al., (2015), states that the investigation of an extant systematic reviews can be denoted by various distinct labels, and umbrella review is one of them. Such reviews enable the researchers to review the relevant piece of existing literature through comparison and, supplies an organized means of new findings and insights to policymakers, practitioners, and academicians alike (Aromataris et al., 2015).

For current study a research article and two systematic review literatures from reputed journals of ABDC index were selected. These literatures were related to the topic of customer engagement in the context of hospitality and tourism. By applying a search string of keywords as "Customer Engagement" OR "Consumer Engagement" AND "Tourism" AND "Hospitality", in two major online databases namely, Scopus and Web of Science (WoS), a total of 32 and 927 articles respectively were collected. The time period of the published literature was chosen from January 2019 to June 2022. Identified literatures are mentioned in Table 1.

3. Results

Content analysis is used to examine the content of a range of data including visual, as well as the verbal data. It makes possible to reduce the phenomena into specific categories to better study and simplify them. Word clouds are visually appealing, straightforward and an excellent method for general text analysis (Heimerl et al., 2014). As per Lohmann et al., (2015), a qualitative evaluation through word cloud provides an arrangement which integrates the most frequent words from several text documents into a single visualization.

As can be inferred from the word cloud, by ignoring the most generic words, the predominantly discussed keywords related to the literature on customer engagement in hospitality and tourism domain are future, present, consequences, temporal, context, evolution, online, and antecedents (see figures 1). It signifies that those mentioned are the dominating keywords on which researchers are interested to conduct their research associated with customer engagement, in the domain of hospitality and tourism.

Figure no. 1 Word cloud from the selected literature

Below mentioned Table 2, provides an analysis of key findings drawn from the literature of under investigation.

Table no. 2 An analysis of identified literatures

Title	Tourism-based customer engagement: the construct, antecedents, and consequences	A decade of customer engagement research in hospitality and tourism: A systematic review and research agenda	Customer engagement research in hospitality and tourism: a systematic review
Author	Rather, R. A., Hollebeek, L. D., & Islam, J. U.	So, K. K., Li, X. R., & Kim, H.	Chen, S., Han, X., Bilgihan, A., & Okumus, F.
Year of publication	2019	2020	2021
Journal	Service Industries Journal	Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research	Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management
Number of articles reviewed	112	37	89
Research objective of the paper	To identify the structural model, related with customer engagement with an aspect of service-dominant logic.	To identify key tenets of customer engagement within the context of hospitality and tourism.	To identify the prime research streams of customer engagement in hospitality and tourism.
Context	Tourism	Hospitality and tourism	Hospitality and tourism
Central arguments of review	This review identified tourism-based customer engagement antecedents as place authenticity and place attachment and their consequences as customer trust, co-creation, and brand loyalty. Authors argue that consumers might have some degree of place attachment to a destination even if they have never been there, thereby motivating them to visit these places.	This review identified the antecedents of customer engagement in the hospitality and tourism context as motivational, relational, organizational, and situational drivers, the pursuit of special interests, and organizational barriers.	This review explores customer engagement in hospitality and tourism, in the context of online as well as in offline mode. Authors argue that in hospitality and tourism domain, there is a change in trend from “customer” to “tourist” and finally to just a “visitor”.

Critiques and scope of future research	Authors did not incorporate the role of other relational constructs such as consumer involvement, service experience, brand connection, or brand affiliation into their customer engagement model. These constructs could have potential mediating or moderating effects, the role of which has been ignored in this study. Future research should also give attention to the role of demographic and psychographic variables and how they affect customer engagement.	Authors found that the role of customer engagement moderators has been infrequently discussed and recommends further research on customer engagement moderators in the context of hospitality and tourism be undertaken. Authors also denoted that there's a high degree of ambiguity regarding the concept of customer engagement within the hospitality and tourism context. The existing literature primarily consists of micro-level studies undertaken using one-time use customer survey data with little effort to develop comprehensive literature. This review recommends that efforts be directed towards the development of comprehensive macro-level literature. Authors observed that studies have been primarily customer-centric, and the perspective of other stakeholders has been largely ignored. The review recommends that future studies incorporate the perspective of other stakeholders.	Authors mentioned that the marketers need to design and execute focused actions, either online or offline for stimulating customer engagement. Most of the work here were targeted towards the impact of customer engagement on firm's performance. Authors discussed the strategic stakeholders' engagement only from the service ecosystem's perspective. Authors argued that in hospitality and tourism context, handling both the positive and negative feedbacks on an offline mode, needs to be researched further.
--	---	--	--

4. Discussion

The current study undertakes the qualitative content analysis through an umbrella review of existing literatures published on customer engagement in the hospitality and tourism domain. The popularity of customer engagement in an online platform has drastically transformed the main characteristics of customer experience in the hospitality and tourism domain (So & Li, 2020). As per the study conducted by Romero (2017), the word-of-mouth and the value co-creation in an engaging platform are the two critical factors, which are vital in hospitality and tourism domain from the customer engagement perspective. The online platform has provided excitingly rich medium which enables hospitality and tourism players to connect, network and interact with their customers even beyond their physical offerings. To engage in an online platform with the potential or existing customers, the hospitality and tourism players have established themselves in an engaging manner across the online social platforms (So et al., 2014).

Content analysis is a systematic process to analyze the documented, spoken, or pictorial form of messages (Cole 1988). As we discussed, qualitative content analysis is one among various other approaches useful for conducting textual synthesis of data.

Content analysis as a research technique is a structured and an orderly manner of evaluating and reporting the phenomena (Sandelowski 1995). It is also known as a method of analysing documents. Content analysis enables researchers to examine theoretical issues to enhance the interpretation of the data. Through content analysis, it is feasible to refine words into relatively fewer number of content-related categories. It is presumed that when grouped into the same categories, words, phrases and the like share the same meaning (Cavanagh 1997).

Rather et al., (2019), in their paper “Tourism-based customer engagement: the construct, antecedents, and consequences”, states that the customer engagement mediates the relationship between place authenticity and place attachment, and also between customer trust, co-creation, and brand loyalty. This indicates that customer-perceived place authenticity and place attachment should be cultivated to facilitate customer engagement to nurture customer trust, co-creation of the service experience, and brand loyalty. Authors statistically validated hypothesized tourism-based customer engagement antecedents and consequences. Authors argue that consumers might have some degree of place attachment to a destination even if they have never been there, thereby motivating them to visit these places. This indicates some degree of pre-consumption customer engagement. Once such consumers have visited the destination, their post-consumption customer engagement may be lower in comparison. The findings of this review also suggest that the process of customer perceived place attachment positively enhances the perception of tourism site authenticity. Rather et al., (2019), argued that the theoretical foundation of customer engagement lies in service-dominant logic, and customer engagement in the hospitality and tourism context can only be studied from a service perspective.

So et al., (2020), in their paper “A decade of customer engagement research in hospitality and tourism: A systematic review and research agenda” states that the consequences of customer engagement are based on their cognitive, affective, behavioral, and economic evaluation. The correlation between these constructs is mediated through relationship quality, perceived cohesion, emotional experience attached to specific destination and, by the perceived intimacy. Authors observed that such mediators only mediate the correlation between customer engagement and its antecedents and do not mediate the relationship between customer engagement and its consequences.

Chen et al., (2021), in their paper “Customer engagement research in hospitality and tourism: a systematic review” states that players operating in hospitality and tourism domain can further be benefited by harvesting their customer engagement strategies more effectively. Authors also highlighted the importance of others’ opinion. Authors argue that potential customers’ perception largely depend upon the opinions of others. Therefore, both the positive as well as the negative feedback and comments shared on an online platform must be dealt carefully, as it may enhance or hamper firm’s profitability.

All the authors Rather et al., (2019), So et al., (2020), and Chen et al., (2021), agreed with the multidimensional characteristics of customer engagement concerning the hospitality and tourism domain. Customer engagement in the hospitality and

tourism, can be understood to be composed of cognitive, emotional, and behavioural components, and while the behavioural component has been more widely studied, the psychological aspects of cognition and emotion cannot be ignored.

However, the authors Rather et al., (2019), So et al., (2020), and Chen et al., (2021), found the available research works on customer engagement in the hospitality and tourism context to be insufficient in certain ways. So et al., (2020), argued that there exists substantial ambiguity regarding customer engagement and its related constructs within this context and therefore, research in this area is hindered. So et al., (2020), and Chen et al., (2021), both found that the existing research has primarily been conducted mostly in developed countries. Studies undertaken have also been predominantly cross-sectional and there is a need for longitudinal studies to be undertaken. So et al., (2020), states that the existing literature had been primarily customer-centric, ignoring the role of other stakeholders and only a little attempt had been made to develop literature in this area.

So et al., (2020), and Chen et al., (2021), both agreed that there exists a significant lack of consensus regarding customer engagement within the hospitality and tourism, and the research work in this area needed more clarity.

5. Conclusion

Harmeling et al., (2017) and Pansari & Kumar, (2017), observed that customer management research prior to the 1990s primarily focused on customer transactions with emphasis on share of wallet, recency, frequency and monetary value. The research focus subsequently shifted to relationship marketing till the early 2000s with practitioners focusing increasingly on driving customer satisfaction and loyalty via superior marketplace offerings (Pansari & Kumar, 2017). However, it has been empirically argued by (Aydin & Özer, 2005) and (Mittal & Lassar, 1998) that customer satisfaction does not necessarily induce customer loyalty. Hollebeek et al, 2019; Li & Petrick, 2008 and Kumar & Pansari, 2016, observed that traditional marketing dimensions of quality and satisfaction are insufficient to ensure loyalty when engagement is lacking. As a consequence, the focus of researchers in this domain has shifted towards studying customer engagement with focus on actively engaging customers as fully as possible, and having consumers be socially invested with the brand (Pansari & Kumar, 2017).

The antecedents of customer engagement in the hospitality and tourism context include motivational, rational, organizational, and situational drivers, the pursuit of special interests, organization barriers (So et al., 2020), place authenticity, and place attachment (Rather et al., 2020). The consequences of customer engagement in this context include cognitive evaluation, affective evaluation, behavioural or intentional evaluation, economic outcomes (So et al., 2020), customer trust, co-creation, and brand loyalty (Rather et al., 2019). Mediators include perceived brand cohesion, perceived brand intimacy, relationship quality, and destination service quality (So et al. 2020). The authors So et al. (2020), also pointed out that these mediators mediate the relationship between customer engagement and the antecedents: motivational, rational, organizational, and situational drivers, the pursuit of special interests, organization barriers.

As the study conducted by various researchers, the conclusion drawn showed that the motivational, rational, organizational, and situational drivers, along with the pursuit

of special interests, organization barriers, place authenticity, and place attachment works as the antecedents of customer engagement in the hospitality and tourism context. Further it concluded that the cognitive evaluation, affective evaluation, behavioural or intentional evaluation, economic outcomes, customer trust, co-creation, and brand loyalty serves as the consequences of customer engagement in the context of hospitality and tourism. The study also suggested that the perceived brand cohesion, perceived brand intimacy, relationship quality, and destination service quality working as the mediators for customer engagement in hospitality and tourism. The analysis also suggested that the motivational, rational, organizational, and situational drivers, the pursuit of special interests, and the organization barriers fulfils the mediating purpose of the relationship between customer engagement and its antecedents.

6. Limitations and future scope

The current work is an attempt to consolidate customer engagement literature holistically and cohesively in the context of tourism and hospitality by collating insights from the three reviews. Through this approach, the current work summarizes the following insights from the selected reviews: the theoretical foundation of customer engagement in the tourism and hospitality context can only be studied from the service-dominant logic perspective; customer engagement in the tourism and hospitality perspective is a multi-dimensional concept having cognitive, affective and behavioural components, however, some components might manifest more predominantly than others based on the specific circumstances under study; there exists significant disharmony regarding the typology of customer engagement in the hospitality and tourism context, to address this (Chen et al. 2021), has proposed stratification of studies into online customer engagement, tourism engagement, customer engagement behavior, and customer brand engagement; a majority of studies reviewed have been context-specific, lacking generalizability and with little attempt to contribute towards a cohesive body of literature. The current work also identifies motivational drivers, relational drivers, organizational drivers, situational drivers, the pursuit of special interests, organizational barriers, place authenticity, and place attachment as antecedents of customer engagement in the tourism and hospitality context, cognitive evaluation, affective evaluation, behavioral evaluation, economic outcomes, customer trust, co-creation and brand loyalty as consequences, and perceived cohesion, perceived intimacy, relationship quality and destination emotional experience as mediators. It does not incorporate any knowledge which may exist in the greater literature but hasn't been mentioned by any of these three reviews. The relationships identified among constructs, and their nature require testing through empirical validation. Further research on moderators, longitudinal studies regarding customer engagement, studies to explore the influence of technology adoption towards customer engagement, and research undertaken to validate fundamental concepts within the tourism and hospitality ecosystem are also advised.

Table no. 3 Directions for further research

Sl. No.	Research question	Future research direction
1	What role cultural differences play in customer engagement in hospitality and tourism?	Investigating the various elements of culture, which may affect the customer engagement.
2	What factors trigger the customer disengagement in hospitality and tourism domain?	Investigating about customer disengagement, its causes and potential impact on hospitality and tourism.
3	What role the social identity plays in customer engagement in hospitality and tourism?	Investigating the relationship between social identity and customer engagement.

The current work has some limitations. This study is confined to the researcher's subjective review of the chosen article and the systematic review literatures. Firstly, since the study includes the articles published only from an existing systematic literature review article, therefore a cross-sectional study needs to be conducted. Secondly, due to an immense inflow of published literature in hospitality and tourism domain, might possible that some important articles could have been left out by the earlier authors. Thirdly, apart from the chosen systematic literature review articles, there may be several other articles which would have published in relatively lower ranked journals, which can be studied and analyzed further for adding fresh perspective. Future researchers may also consider non-English literature. Lastly, to examine the change in trends on hospitality and tourism, a comparative study of published articles during pre-Covid and post-Covid times needs to be conducted.

References

1. Ang, I. (2006). From cultural studies to cultural research: Engaged scholarship in the twenty-first century. *Cultural Studies Review*, 12(2), 183-197.
2. Aromataris, E., Fernandez, R., Godfrey, C. M., Holly, C., Khalil, H., & Tungpunkom, P. (2015). Summarizing systematic reviews: methodological development, conduct and reporting of an umbrella review approach. *JBIC Evidence Implementation*, 13(3), 132-140.
3. Aydin, S., & Özer, G. (2005). The analysis of antecedents of customer loyalty in the Turkish mobile telecommunication market. *European Journal of marketing*.
4. Bryce, D., Curran, R., O'Gorman, K., & Taheri, B. (2015). Visitors' engagement and authenticity: Japanese heritage consumption. *Tourism Management*, 46, 571-581.
5. Cahyadi, H. (2016, May). Integrating Archaeo-Tourism with geotourism development in Bantimurung National Park, South Sulawesi Province. In *Asia Tourism Forum 2016-the 12th Biennial Conference of Hospitality and Tourism Industry in Asia* (pp. 558-563). Atlantis Press.
6. Cavanagh, S. (1997). Content analysis: concepts, methods and applications. *Nurse researcher*, 4(3), 5-16.
7. Cole, F. L. (1988). Content analysis: process and application. *Clinical nurse specialist*, 2(1), 53-57.
8. Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 62(1), 107-115.
9. Forman, J., & Damschroder, L. (2007). Qualitative content analysis. In *Empirical methods for bioethics: A primer*. Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

10. Hao, F. (2020). The landscape of customer engagement in hospitality and tourism: a systematic review. *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, 32(5), 1837-1860.
11. Heimerl, F., Lohmann, S., Lange, S., & Ertl, T. (2014, January). Word cloud explorer: Text analytics based on word clouds. In *2014 47th Hawaii international conference on system sciences* (pp. 1833-1842). IEEE.
12. Hollebeek, L. D., Srivastava, R. K., & Chen, T. (2019). SD logic-informed customer engagement: integrative framework, revised fundamental propositions, and application to CRM. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 47(1), 161-185.
13. Harmeling, C. M., Moffett, J. W., Arnold, M. J., & Carlson, B. D. (2017). Toward a theory of customer engagement marketing. *Journal of the Academy of marketing science*, 45(3), 312-335.
14. Islam, J. U., Rahman, Z., & Hollebeek, L. D. (2019). The role of consumer engagement in recovering online service failures: An application of service-dominant logic. In *Handbook of research on customer engagement*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
15. Kaushal, V., & Srivastava, S. (2021). Hospitality and tourism industry amid COVID-19 pandemic: Perspectives on challenges and learnings from India. *International journal of hospitality management*, 92, 102707.
16. Kumar, V., & Pansari, A. (2016). Competitive advantage through engagement. *Journal of marketing research*, 53(4), 497-514.
17. Li, X., & Petrick, J. F. (2008). Tourism marketing in an era of paradigm shift. *Journal of travel research*, 46(3), 235-244.
18. Lohmann, S., Heimerl, F., Bopp, F., Burch, M., & Ertl, T. (2015, July). Concentri cloud: Word cloud visualization for multiple text documents. In *2015 19th International Conference on Information Visualisation* (pp. 114-120). IEEE.
19. Mittal, B., & Lassar, W. M. (1998). Why do customers switch? The dynamics of satisfaction versus loyalty. *Journal of services marketing*, 12(3), 177-194.
20. Pansari, A., & Kumar, V. (2017). Customer engagement: the construct, antecedents, and consequences. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 45(3), 294-311.
21. Ram, Y., Björk, P., & Weidenfeld, A. (2016). Authenticity and place attachment of major visitor attractions. *Tourism management*, 52, 110-122.
22. Reddel, T., & Woolcock, G. (2004). From consultation to participatory governance? A critical review of citizen engagement strategies in Queensland. *Australian Journal of Public Administration*, 63(3), 75-87.
23. Romero, J. (2017). Customer engagement behaviors in hospitality: customer-based antecedents. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 26(6), 565-584.
24. Sandelowski, M. (1995). Qualitative analysis: What it is and how to begin. *Research in nursing & health*, 18(4), 371-375.
25. So, K. K. F., & Li, X. (2020). Customer engagement in hospitality and tourism services. *Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Research*, 44(2), 171-177.
26. Suhartanto, D. (2011). Hotel brand of origin: Do guests perceive service differences?. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality & Culinary Arts (JTHCA)*, 3(3), 1-24.
27. Taheri, B., Hosany, S., & Altinay, L. (2019). Consumer engagement in the tourism industry: new trends and implications for research. *The Service Industries Journal*, 39(7-8), 463-468.
28. Zhong, Y., Busser, J., Shapoval, V., & Murphy, K. (2021). Hospitality and tourism student engagement and hope during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of hospitality & tourism education*, 33(3), 194-206.