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The Nexus Between Service Encounter Performance and Brand Evangelism

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Abstract: Despite its usefulness in business settings, very little is known about branding in the lens of higher education. The purpose of this study was to examine special critical incidents during service encounter performance which can trigger brand evangelism. The study adopted a cross-sectional survey research design, data were collected through administering semi-structured questionnaires to 241 students of one public university in Tanzania. Structural Equation Modelling was used to analyse data due to its strength in testing relationship between variables with multiple measurement items. The findings reveal that, service encounter performance that create unique memorable experience is very useful in triggering brand evangelism. It is recommended that, the best model of HEIs branding should consider students as the central point to HEIs brand. Therefore, HEIs should strive to proselytize students to be brand evangelists by ensuring that each service encounter produce critical incidents that create memorable experience and eventually love to HEIs brand.

Keywords: Service Encounter Performance, Critical Incidents, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Brand Evangelism, Branding

Introduction

Recently, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have turned out to be more commercialized and marketized. They have become increasingly promotionalized, and therefore brand building emerges to be of great importance so as to create positive image and reputation (Finder, 2005; Vidaver-Cohen, 2007). It has been theoretically postulated that, reasons necessitating HEIs branding are not limited to responding to drastic drop of student enrolments; counteracting the challenge of staff retention; improving image, reputation and prestige; moderating stiff competitions; attracting collaboration with other institutions, attracting enough research funds, etc. (Sevier, 2002; Williams, 2012). For instance, for the past four years, higher education industry in Tanzania has experienced

acute challenges related to declining of student enrolment to some HEIs which resulted to operational challenges (Istoroyekti, 2016). It is very crucial to note that, the majority of HEIs (both private and public HEIs) do not receive or they receive very little subsidies from Government and hence they largely depend on school fees to finance their primary operations (Hemsley-Brown and Goonawardana, 2007; Chapleo, 2010). In fact, declining of government subsidies in HEIs is the product of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of 1990s which advocated that, education services and other services which were offered for free should be offered in the form of cost sharing (Mushi, 2014; Muasya, 2012).

Theoretically, scholars have emerged with different measures to address the aforementioned challenges. Of course, while it is not the intention of this study to emasculate other measures, in recent time, branding of HEIs have emerged to be very necessary than it could have been in many years ago. It widely accepted that, largely the success of HEIs in commercialized and marketized settings depends on ability to build positive image, reputation and prestige on the eyes of potential stakeholders and public at large. In the view of Balmer and Liao (2007), HEIs branding should focus on inducing to students and alumni a sense or feelings of identification and a means to represent themselves, not simply as customers but as life-long or permanent institution members of a given corporate brand community. In this regard, branding of HEIs is indeed psychological property of multiple stakeholders with multiplicity of interests who are students and alumni as customers of HEIs and public at large (Lerman and Garbarino, 2002). In this regard, branding of HEIs should be viewed from both external and internal perspectives (Balmer and Liao, 2007). Usually, external settings focus on positioning of HEIs to prospective customers and public as a whole, while internal settings concentrate on promoting institutions values, culture, philosophy, mission, vision, etc. to staff in order to empower and to induce them spirit of commitment to support HEI brand (Ngobeni and Bezuidenhout, 2011; Dean *et al.*, 2016).

In the line of above argument, it is very clear that the central to HEIs branding is alumni, students, staff, society, and other potential stakeholders (Balmer and Liao, 2007; Atakan and Eker, 2007). They act as engine in constructing and sustaining the image, reputations, and prestige of HEIs through demonstrating commitment towards the HEIs brand (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006; Lowrie, 2007; Amani, 2018). Actually, HEIs branding is perceived as a more complex process simply because it should accommodate and reflect key interests of students, staff, alumni, and other potential stakeholders (Nawab and Bhatti, 2011). As a matter of fact, Higher Education as a service industry is characterized with multiple features including, very close interaction and relationship among people, intangible actions, multiple methods of service delivery, etc. (Hemsley-Brown and Oplatka, 2006). In other words, branding HEIs must put special attention to dimensions like intangibility and inseparability as important characteristics of service industry (Lowrie, 2007).

In addition, the fact that HEIs falling under a service brand, then branding of HEIs should pay attention to internal marketing and specifically internal branding, since all staff are the sources of critical incidents to customers and service brands offer the best way of reducing risks related to intangibility (Berry, 2000; de Chernatony and Segal-Horn, 2003). It has been well documented that, brands are very crucial to customers' social status (Hamann, *et al.*, 2007). In fact, students as customers of HEI consider Higher Education degree as something which bestow or signify very unique social status in the society. In reality, students and alumni define the image, reputation, and prestige of their desired HEI in

relation to other HEIs (Ivy, 2001). Usually, they feel to have special status in the society if their preferred HEI's image, reputation, and prestige surpass other HEIs image, reputation and prestige (Joseph *et al.*, 2012; Stephenson and Bell, 2014). From branding point of view, this kind of feeling may trigger or elicit behaviours such as positive recommendations, customer evangelism, etc. which are very crucial in positioning HEIs on the eyes of global society (Wernick, 2006; Bunzel, 2007). This implies that, students as customers of HEIs may play a significant role in HEIs branding if they feel that their desired HEI offers something that exceed their expectations (Edmiston, 2008).

However, evidence indicates that, the "objectification" as well as "monetization" of HEIs image and reputation in the context of branding is indeed a recent phenomenon (Sataøen, 2015; Erdo mu and Ergun, 2016; Amani, 2018). Basically, despite its popularity as a tool to overcome various challenges in higher education industry, very little is known about it in the context of HEIs (Williams, 2012; Delmestri *et al.*, 2015). The most critical area that demands special attention is how branding which for many years was affiliated with business organizations can be applied in education settings particularly higher education industry (Balmer *et al.*, 2010; Erdo mu and Ergun, 2016). In addition, scholars debate on the possibility of branding HEIs while accommodating its complexities and dynamisms (Idris and Whitfield, 2014). In other words, how is it possible to brand HEI which has multiple stakeholders with multiplicity of interests (Mourad *et al.*, 2010). In fact, scholars agree in principal that, by considering this nature of HEIs more empirical works are required in order to propose suitable empirical model (s) for branding HEIs (Delmestri *et al.*, 2015; Sataøen, 2015; Amani, 2018). This study therefore, is an extension of the existing knowledge of branding in the context of HEIs, by looking how service encounter performance can trigger brand evangelism to students as customers of HEIs.

Literature Review

Brand Evangelism
As marketing communication techniques undergo drastic changes, business organizations are adopting different techniques to deliver powerful messages to their customers. Evidence shows that, there is a paradigm shift from mass marketing to referral or personalized marketing approaches to marketing communication (Odhiambo, 2012; Hennig-Thurau, *et al.*, 2013; Barutcu *et al.*, 2017; Anggraini, 2018). Experience shows that, the effectiveness in terms of response rates of traditional mass marketing tactics such as advertising has continue to decrease or deteriorate significantly (McConnell and Huba, 2003; Anggarini, 2018). In fact, in the past business firms could spend and gain significant amount of dollars in mass marketing tactics particularly advertising (Schultz, 2016). However, recent evidence indicates that, mass marketing tactics similar to mass advertising requires huge investment in terms of financial and human resources, while generating very low response rate in return (McConnell and Huba, 2003). This is different from referral marketing tactics such as word of mouth that requires very little investment in terms of financial and human resources while prompting significant response rate (Villanueva *et al.*, 2008; Kumar *et al.*, 2010; Lim and Chung, 2011). For instance, by comparing word of mouth and either print or television advertising, word of mouth has been proven to be 10 times more powerful and effective in engendering prospective customers' excitement for new products or services (Anggarini, 2018).

Further evidence indicates that, the majority of customers access information about new products or services through their colleagues, family members, friends, and the like. Statistically, it is only 13% of customers acquire information about products or services from advertising, 20% get information from technological based techniques such as websites, and almost 34% get information from word-of-mouth. Besides, 40% of the customers testify that, when they received information as referrals from their friends, family members, co-workers, colleagues, etc. evoke interests and generate their excitement towards products and services (Euro RSCG, 2001 cited in Anggarini, 2018). These statistics confirm the truth that, in globalized world, the most effective way to communicate to prospective customers is through building individuals who are able and willing to share with others information about the company and its products or services. Therefore, brand evangelism that is relatively advanced level of positive word of mouth is theoretically accentuated to be inevitable in the current business settings. It is inevitable because, boundaries that could hinder flow of information has continued to disappear significantly due to rapid emerging use of social media technologies or social networking sites (SNS) (Thackeray *et al.*, 2008).

Based on the above arguments, one could say customers build trust on information shared or referred to them by social groups like colleagues, co-workers, family members, etc. compared to information from a specific business firm communicated through mass advertising (Söderlund and Rosengren, 2007; Wollenberg and Thuong, 2014). This implies that, a person who receives information about a certain brand from his/her colleagues, family members, or any social group similar to these is likely to buy compared to one who receives the same information direct from the business firm through mass advertising (Amani, 2018; Wollenberg and Thuong, 2014; Anggarini, 2018). Actually, on the eyes of customers mass advertising is likely to contain some information that do not tell the truth about an organization and its products or services (Söderlund and Rosengren, 2007). For that reason, the majority of customers perceive mass advertising as just exaggeration of the truth, and hence unreliable (Saravanan and Saraswathy, 2017; Anggarini, 2018). Based on these customer perceptions on mass advertising, brand evangelism has emerged as the most efficient, reliable, and fastest way of sharing information among customers regarding various available brands (Meiners *et al.*, 2010).

In fact, brand evangelism is considered as the most effective, reliable and quick way of sharing information in the current marketing settings due to its theoretical base (Meiners *et al.*, 2010). It is widely accepted that, brand evangelism has theoretical root from the concept of '*evangelism*' one of the fundamental Christianity doctrine. From theoretical standpoint, the term "*evangelist*" rooted from the Greek word "*euangelion*" meaning "*a person who brings good news or messages*" (Ndekha, 2016; Levine and Brettler, 2017). In the context of Christianity doctrines, an evangelist is a person who has been sent to preach good news or a purveyor of good news (Jovanovi, 2008). The evangelist is willing or ready to be sent to preach good news as a means to reciprocate to strong personal relationship that he/she has with God (Mokaya, 2015). In other words, evangelists are motivated to preach good news given strong personal relationship that they have with God (Ngasura, 2012). Actually, evangelists feel indebted to share their personal relationship and experiences with God for the purpose of proselytizing or converting others to be believers (White, 1973; Allot, 2014).

In addition, evangelists believe that the fact that God has done something special to them, and by considering their personal relationship with God to remain quite without telling

others about wonderful God's deeds, it is a sin (Lazerte, 2013). They have faith in spiritual dogma that, their personal relationship with God will make sense if they convert non-believers to become believers (Burns, 2012). It is love to God and their fellow neighbours that make evangelists to feel like something is burning in their hearts until they make decision to share good news to their friends, colleagues, neighbour, etc. (Elwell, 1991; Burns, 2012). Usually, sharing testimonies and testifying their personal relationship and experiences with God is an approach to accomplish their mission which is to win at least one soul to God (Ireland, 2014). In fact, evangelists spread the wickedness of the devil by showing the dangerous of living life of sins as a means to persuade non-believers to become believers (Buthelezi, 2011; Kasera, 2012). In other words, evangelists do not just share wonderful God deeds, they share evil deeds of the devil in order to vindicate that they have made prudent or wise decision to become believers (Buthelezi, 2011).

With the same theoretical viewpoint from Christianity doctrine, brand evangelism in business perspective applies in circumstances when customers who are emotionally motivated and committed become passionate to their brands, and hence they feel indebted to share information about the brand with others (Matzler *et al.*, 2007). It is called brand evangelism as it consists of an unpaid spokesperson technically called a "*brand evangelist*" who preach or evangelize on behalf of the brand with intention of proselytizing or recruiting others to buy the approbation brands (Doss, 2013). Hence, a brand evangelist in this regard is a person who demonstrates a very strong emotional relationship with a certain brand to the extent of feeling guilt when he/she fails to convert or recruit someone at the level of being a loyal customer (Riivits-Arkonsuo *et al.*, 2014). Unlike a person who is engaging in word of mouth, a brand evangelists has intention or mission to convert others to become regular users and eventually loyal to the brand (Doss, 2013; Anggarini, 2018). As an advance level of word of mouth, brand evangelism create customer evangelists, customer apostle, as well as advocate (Igwe and Nwamou, 2017). These three dimensions imply that, brand evangelism is more far beyond the idea of word of mouth, as it creates "*brand martyrs*". It builds individuals who have developed a deeper feelings and love as an unpaid and zealous preaching of a brand in order to convert or persuade others to be loyal customers of the brand (Scarpi, 2010).

Moreover, in order for a person to become a brand evangelist and eventually engaging in proselytizing others to become loyal to the brand, that person must develop love to the brand. In this line of thinking, brand evangelism can be viewed as consumers' way to express love to a brand in the form of admiring, developing strong and emotional love, and action loyalty (Chauduri and Holbrook, 2001). It is an advance level of vigorous behavioural and vocal support of a brand comprising actions such as purchasing the brand, spreading positive brand referrals, and convincing others concerning a focal brand by way of disparaging or disapproving competing brands (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Empirical evidence shows that, brand evangelism constitutes three fundamental dimensions namely ppositive brand referrals, brand purchase intention, as well as oppositional brand referrals (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). Usually, positive brand referral or propensity to commend a brand describes a situation where by a consumer is viewed as an evangelists because he/she is willing to share his/her personal experience about a certain brand to others and recommend the same to their friends, colleagues, family members, brand communities, etc. (Thompson and Sinha, 2008; Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013).

In addition, brand purchase intention suggests that a brand evangelist is expected to be committed to the brand, by showing his/her intention to purchase a specific brand regularly and consistently (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013; Anggarini, 2018). On top of that, given its close relationship with a brand, the brand evangelist spreads negative point of view of competitors' brand by recommending their friends to abstain from the competitor's brands (Becerra and Badrinarayanan, 2013). However, the most interested thing is that, this negative form of recommendation is not always created by their own personal experience with the competitors' brands (Japutra *et al.*, 2014). Evidence shows that, the intention of negative form of recommendation while they do not have any experience with the rivals brand is to make their desired or favourite brand looks more superior than competitors' brands and make them feel they have chosen the greatest brand, and hence their colleagues or friends should follow him/her (Scarpi, 2010). This fundamental dimension is the one which differentiate a person who just engage himself/herself in positive word of mouth and the person who is a brand evangelist (Doss, 2013).

Although brand evangelism continues to draw attention of various scholars and practitioners in branding, yet it is not clear on what precisely elicit or trigger brand evangelism (Riivits-Arkonsuo *et al.*, 2014; Anggarini, 2018). Generally, brand evangelism is different by far to other customers behavioural intentions such as word of mouth, loyalty, etc (Anggarini, 2018). Scholars in branding agree that, brand evangelism has not been well examined or explored both theoretically and empirically particularly when brand evangelism is considered as antecedent of unique memorable experience (Igwe and Nwamou, 2017). Simply implies that, brand evangelism is very new concept in studies related to branding (Anggarini, 2018). Thus, this study seeks to explore the nexus between service encounter performance and brand evangelism in the HEIs settings. In addition, the study is more valid considering the truth that, branding in the context of HEIs is still in infancy, and therefore more empirical works are required (Drori *et al.*, 2013; Aspara *et al.*, 2014). It is widely accepted that, given complexities and dynamisms of higher learning institutions, a holistic approach which examine branding in different settings and contexts is necessary (Idris and Whitfield, 2014; Sataøen, 2015; Amani, 2018). In this regard, the study strives to examine service encounter performance which produce special critical incidents as an antecedent of brand evangelism in the milieu of higher learning institutions.

Service Encounter Performance
A service involves interaction or interface between a service provider and customers. Therefore, the term service encounter simply refers to interaction between a service provider or a server and a customer during service delivery (Winsted, 2000; Farrell *et al.*, 2001; Zeithaml and Bitner., 2013). It is a specific situation or event where customer and service provider or specific resources of the service provider meet (Srijumpa *et al.*, 2007). It is any point or episode in the interaction during which the customer has an opportunity to gain an impression of the service provided by the company (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2014). In the view of Winsted (2000); Patterson and Mattila, (2008) service encounter is the primary social exchanges process in which customers assess and judge the quality of service with the help of evaluation regarding personal experiences throughout service encounter. It is a point in service delivery where customers interact with service employees or self-service equipment and the outcome may affect perceptions of service quality (Kelly *et al.*, 2016). In fact, in some occasions, service encounter can exist when there is an interaction between customers and physical facilities, equipment, machines, etc. (Kelly *et al.*, 2016). For

instance, when customers interact with Automated Teller Machines (ATM) is indeed service encounter performance, and therefore, customers can judge service quality by evaluating how the machine works, how user friend it is, how the machine meet their expectations, etc.

Moreover, Fitzsimmons *et al.*, (2014); Kelly *et al.*, (2016) ascertained that, employees and customers are the key players in management of service encounter. According to service encounter phases as suggested by Bitran and Lojo (1993), each participants i.e. customers and service providers have something to do to ensure a considerable service experience. Thus, each participant is expected to act and behave in a way that is appropriate for a particular service. It is important to understand that, when service encounter go unmanaged, the quality of service regresses to mediocrity. Generally, irrespective of the nature and length of the contact, each encounter represents an important moment of truth for the customer which is the outcomes of specific memorable critical incidents (Edvardsson *et al.*, 2000). A critical incident is an event that can be described in detail and that deviates significantly, either positively or negatively from what the guests expects or considers normal in a service encounter and memorable to one self (Zainol and Lockwood, 2014).

Evidence unveils that, most of the time customers present or tell these critical incidents as stories (Paulin *et al.*, 2000; Edvardsson and Roos, 2001). Principally, each service has its own critical incidents which may cause strong memorable or unmemorable experience (Bitner *et al.*, 2000; Grace, 2007). For example, several studies in banking services has treated waiting time as a critical incident of which customers judging service quality (see. Jun and Cai, 2001; Lau *et al.*, 2013). In situation like this, a service provider must capitalize on waiting time as a means to ensure a customer satisfaction. Further evidence confirms that, each person has his/her own critical incident on the same service (Grace, 2007). This implies that, not all critical incidents may have the same impact in building memorable experience to all customers (Chung-Herrera *et al.*, 2004). Empirical studies show that, individuals characteristics, attributes, etc. differentiate their level of satisfaction when are exposed to various critical incidents (Söderlund and Julander, 2013). In this way of thinking, some scholars pointed out that the way customers respond to various critical incidents take form of cognitive or affective behavior (Gremler, 2004).

In this study, a researcher intends to examine the nexus between service encounter performance and brand evangelism. Theoretically, service encounter dimensions differ in terms of importance from one service to another service (Chung-Herrera *et al.*, 2004; Keillor *et al.*, 2007). Additionally, the extent to which different dimensions of service encounter influence behaviours or responses differ among customers who receive the same service (Sharma *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, recent empirical studies indicate that, service encounter differ in term of impact on customer satisfaction across different cultures (Raajpoot, 2004; Sizoo *et al.*, 2005; Wang and Mattila, 2010). This implies that, it is very important to test different dimensions of service encounter to different settings and contexts to validate its influence on customers' satisfaction (Walter *et al.*, 2010; Sharma *et al.*, 2012; Paulssen and Sommerfeld, 2015). The aim of this study is to explore the relationship between various dimensions of service encounter performance and brand evangelism in the context of HEIs. It intends to explore whether proposed service encounter dimensions can unveil special moment of truth in higher education sector to the extent of evoking brand referral. It has been recommended that, more empirical studies are

required to explore the influence of service encounter in determining satisfaction in different sectors, settings, and contexts (Sharma *et al.*, 2012; Paulssen and Sommerfeld, 2015; Lee, 2016). This study therefore, is an attempt to integrate two marketing concepts which have been less examined both empirically and theoretically in different settings and contexts.

Social Exchange Theory

Theoretically, this study will be guided by social exchange theory that advocates relationship building in environment with mutual understanding. The theory was propounded by Blau (1964) who highlighted that, social exchange covers an individual action that are dependent on rewarding responses from others. This means, when two parties are engaging in social exchange, each part expect to acquire something in return from the other part in the form of rewards including social and economic rewards (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005; Prizer *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the theory proposes relationship between two parties which are built under give and take principle (Rousseau 2001). The principle of give and take applies in situation of reciprocity, meaning that mutual exchange must exist in order to build strong relationship between two parties. Thus, solid relationship surfaced as an outcome of appreciation which one part expresses when its expectations have been met by the other part (Thomas *et al.*, 2014). In this regard, any form of response similar to appreciation is technically understood as reciprocity. In the view of Shore *et al.*, (2009) it is only if constructive reciprocity is upheld by each part then social exchange can be expressed in the form of very strong behavioural responses.

Actually, some scholars define service encounter as a social exchange construct as it involves exchange of value between two parties (Patterson and Mattila, 2008). In the context of marketing, service encounter is the social exchange construct which offers both social and economic rewards to parties which participated in the exchange. It has been unveiled by current empirical studies that, satisfaction in the context of service delivery can be realized if service providers and customers collaborate to achieve jointly favourable results (Katsaridou and Wilson, 2017). This means, in order create memorable experience during service encounter, both service providers and customers must work together or collaborate under a consent. It further implies that, positive service encounters are likely to occur if and only if both parties participate in the interaction by sharing a mutually satisfactory experience, and acquiring different types of benefits (Chandon *et al.*, 1997; Sierra and McQuitty, 2005). The concept of mutual satisfactory experience suggests that, each part in the encounter should fulfil his/her obligations in order to create memorable experiences to the other part. It is this mutual and satisfactory memorable experience which is theoretically postulated in this study as something which can trigger brand evangelism.

Methods

Area of Study

The study was carried out in Dodoma Region in Tanzania. Specifically, the study was conducted at one public university located in Dodoma Region. However, the fact that the results of the study could have some negative effects to HEI, it was therefore agreed by both a researcher and university management to hide the name of the University. By considering that the study did not intend to trace changes occured after intervention, a

cross-sectional survey research design was adopted. In other words, this research design is suitable for this study because data were collected at one point of time and place.

Population

The study population was all students pursuing various degree and non-degree programmes offered by the university.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The university has a total of 26,004 students. In order to determine sample size for the study, the statistical formula by Yamena (1976) was adopted. According to the formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1 + N(e)^2)}$$

Whereby n = Sample Size, N = Total Population, and e = Detection error expressed into percentage (5%   10%). Therefore, given the study total population of 26,004 and e = 6.74% then,

$$n = \frac{26,004}{\left(1 + 26,004 \left(\frac{6.74}{100}\right)^2\right)}$$
$$n = 218$$

On the other side, the sampling frame for the study was determined using a systematic sampling technique which is relatively more advanced compared to simple random sampling. Therefore, respondents were selected systematically from different degree programmes offered by the HEI.

Data Collection Procedures

In this study, data were collected from 218 undergraduate students pursuing different degree programmes offered by the HEI. In addition, respondents were third, fourth, and fifth year undergraduate students from different degree programmes. In fact, third, fourth, and fifth year students were expected to have a lot of experience related to service encounter performance given their long stay at the HEI. Thereafter, structured and self-administered questionnaire were distributed or administered to respondents to collect data.

Data Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software Version 21 was used to analyse data in this study. In a very specific way, Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was adopted to establish statistical significances between services encounter and brand evangelism. From statistical point of view, analysis of relationship between variables of this nature could also be done through the use of Multiple Regression Analysis. However, SEM is more preferable as it offers the best way to estimate precisely indirect effects of given exogenous variables on endogenous variables (Hair *et al.*, 2006). In addition, SEM is the most recommended multivariate statistical model of analysis when a researcher deals with multiple constructs, each defined or measured by a couple of measurement items (Hair *et al.*, 2006). In this study therefore, SEM was considered more suitable because, the intention

was to establish relationship between two latent constructs i.e. service encounter and brand evangelisms. The majority of empirical studies on service encounter and brand evangelism unveils that, both constructs can be well operationalized or measured by using multiple items.

Operationalization and Measurement of Variables

The study variables were operationalized and measured by using measurement scales proposed or suggested by different scholars who conducted empirical studies related to service encounter and brand evangelism. The construct service encounter performance was measured by using measurement scales proposed by Price *et al.*, (1995) and Chandon *et al.*, (1997). However, the measurement scales were modified slightly to fit the study objectives. On the other side, measurement scales as suggested by Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) were used to measure brand evangelism. In addition, data were captured by using 5-point Likert scale, 1-Strong agree and 5-strong disagree. Typical examples of statements used to measure service encounter performance includes; *the members of staff care about customers, the members of staff are very polite, the members of staff tried eagerly to solve my problems, I could talk with the members of staff easily, the members of staff gives enough time for interacting with students* . On the other side, in operationalizing brand evangelism construct, the following are typical examples of statements which were used; *in the future, I would probably join the university for further education, I recommend the university to my friends, I denigrated or degraded (dishonour) the other universities to my friends, when my friends ask me for advices, I spread positive word of mouth (good messages) about the university, I recommend the university to my friends.*

Results and Discussion

Respondents' Characteristics

The respondents' characteristics show that, out of 241 respondents, males were 154 which is 63.9% and females were 87 which is 36.1%. On the other side, married were 2 which is 0.8% and single were 239 which is 99.2%. In addition, age categories from 18-35 were 241 which is 100%.

Measurement Model

In the first place, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted with the main intention of establishing if there is consistent between the proposed measures of a given construct or factor and a researcher's theoretical understanding of the nature or structure of that construct or factor. It is a multivariate statistical process or procedure aiming at testing the extent of which measured variables represent well the number of factors or constructs. It intends to test if the data fit well a hypothesized or theorized measurement model. In this view, the results generated from Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) are very useful for researchers in making decisions of either to confirm/accept or reject the measurement theory. In this study CFA shows good fit of model by considering the value of Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.921, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.957, Tucker-Lewis Coefficient (TLI) = 0.942, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.957, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.944, and Adjusted Goodness of Fit index (AGFI) = 0.909. The value of these indexes should be close to 1. RMSEA = 0.067 and value for this index should be 0 to 0.1. CMIN/DF (χ^2/df) = 2.091 and the value of this index should be ≤ 3. (see. Kline, 2005; Hooper *et al.*, 2008).

On the other hand, factor loadings of all measurement items range above the acceptable value which is ≥ 0.5, meaning that the measurement items provided good and acceptable explanation of service encounter performance construct. Additionally, Cronbach alpha coefficient (α) for service encounter performance is good having the value 0.867 above the acceptable range of α ≥ 0.70. In addition, Composite reliability was 0.896 significantly above the acceptabe range of ≥ 0.50 (see. Reynaldo and Santos, 1999; Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). This is an indication that, the level of reliability that a set of measurement items used to measure service encounter performance is good and hence measurement theory is acceptable.

Figure 1. **Measurement Model**
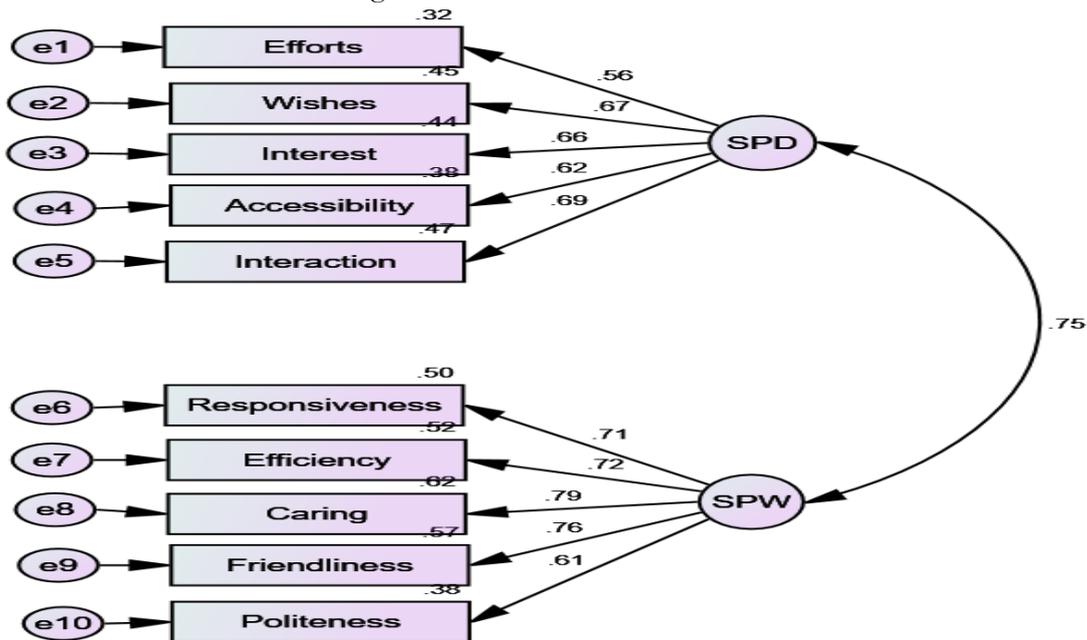
Findings

From statistical analysis point of view, structural model is part of statistical analysis which establish the link between given research constructs or variables that define the core structure of the specific phenomenon under study. Therefore, structural model intends to provide estimate of both causal and correlational links between the study latent variables in a given theoretical model. In a specific way, structural model shows good fit of model given the goodness of fit indexes. The model indicates that, Normed Fit Index (NFI) = 0.836, Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.901, Tucker-Lewis Coefficient (TLI) = 0.885, Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.900, Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) = 0.863, and Adjusted Goodness of Fit index (AGFI) = 0.827. The value of these indexes should be close to 1. RMSEA = 0.073 and value for this index should be 0 to 0.1. CMIN/DF (χ^2/df) = 2.281 and the value of this index should be ≤ 3. (see. Kline, 2005; Hooper *et al.*, 2008).

In addition, all structural items confirm that their good measures of brand evangelism with factor loadings range above the acceptable value which is ≥ 0.5 (see. Tabachnick & Fibell, 2007). Besides, Cronbach alpha coefficient (α) for brand evangelism is good having the

value 0.862 above the acceptable range of $\alpha \geq 0.70$. Furthermore, the value for Composite reliability was 0.877 above the acceptable range of ≥ 0.50 (see. Reynaldo and Santos, 1999; Tavakol and Dennick, 2011). This is an indication that, the level of reliability that a set of structural items used to measure brand evangelism is good and hence the model is acceptable.

Figure 2. **Structural Model**
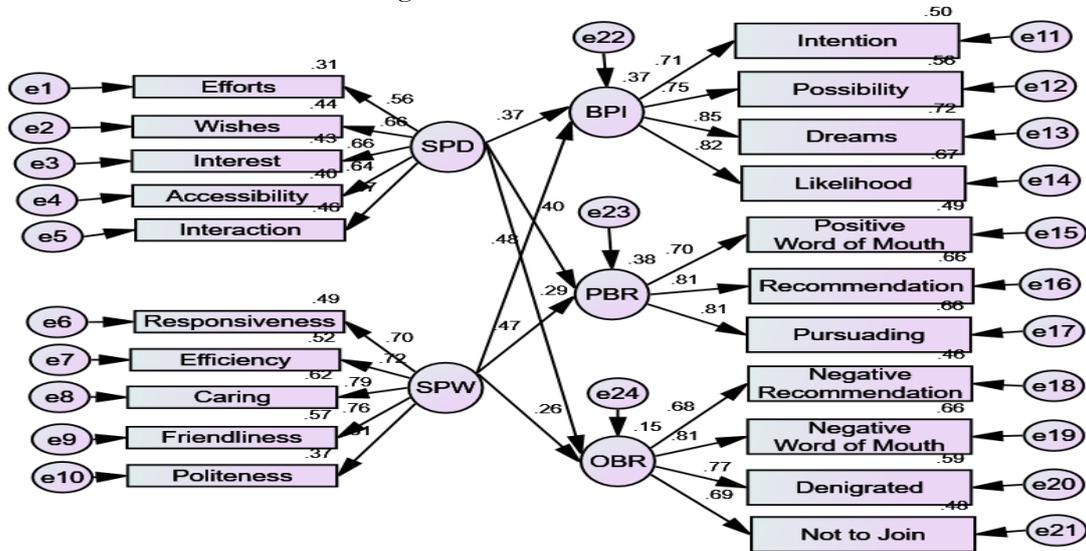
Regression Analysis

In testing relationship between service encounter performance and brand evangelisms, regression weights were established. Table 1 below indicate that, there is strong positive relationship between service encounter performance and brand evangelism. The results show that, service providers dedication has strong positive relationship with brand purchase intentions, positive brand referrals and oppositional brand referrals with p-value < 0.05 and value of 0.342, 0.313 and 0.319 respectively. Besides, service providers welcome has found to have strong positive relationship with brand purchase intentions, positive brand referrals and oppositional brand referrals with p-value < 0.05 and value of 0.521, 0.429, and 0.325 respectively. From these results, it can be concluded that, service encounter performance has strong positive significant influence on brand evangelism.

Table 1. **Regression Analysis**

Structural Model Variables	Standardized Regression Weight ( )	S.E.	C.R.	P
BPI (Brand Purchase Intentions) **<---** SPD (Service Providers Dedication)	.342	.072	4.773	***
PBR (Positive Brand Referrals) **<---** SPD (Service Providers Dedication)	.313	.063	4.945	***
OBR (Oppositional Brand Referrals) **<---** SPD (Service Providers Dedication)	.319	.089	3.584	***
BPI (Brand Purchase Intentions) **<---** SPW (Service Providers Welcome)	.521	.090	5.788	***
PBR (Positive Brand Referrals) **<---** SPW (Service Providers Welcome)	.429	.077	5.575	***

Structural Model Variables	Standardized Regression Weight ( )	S.E.	C.R.	P
OBR (Oppositional Brand Referrals) <--- SPW (Service Providers Welcome)	.325	.098	3.305	***

Discussion

By considering recent theoretical and empirical understanding of brand evangelism, the findings of this study extend knowledge on the sources of brand evangelism. The findings indicate that, service encounter performance which build special memorable experience influence brand evangelism. Therefore, service providers should ensure all incidents during service encounter create favourable atmosphere for creating unforgettable experience. These findings confirm theoretical understanding that, in order to build brand evangelists, it is necessary to use service provision techniques or tactics which create memorable experience through exceeding customer expectations. In a special way, all service encounter performance indicators i.e. service provider dedication and service providers welcome influence significantly brand purchase intentions, positive brand referrals, and oppositional brand referrals. Thus, service provider commitment and readiness to offer premium services (service dedication) and their caring behaviour or mind-set (service provider welcome) are very fundamental in creating brand evangelists.

In addition, the more influential contribution of this study is on the debate regarding why people are engaging in behaviour such as oppositional brand referrals which is one of the most prominent indicators that differentiate brand evangelism from other customer behaviour intentions such as Word of Mouth. In fact, oppositional brand referrals involve denigrating or disparaging competitors brand without prior experience of the same. In other words, a person decides to share negative experience of competitors brand without any experience about the brand. However, scholars are still debating on ethical issues regarding this behaviour, but scholars propose that if service providers pay no attention to these behaviour significant side effects can be observed on the organization brands. In this study, service ecnounter perfomance indicators (service provider dedication and service provider welcome) confirm to be antecedents of this form of behaviour to customers who are exposed to memorable experience from service providers. The idea behind this behaviour is that, when a customer experience constant memorable experience during service encounter is expected to develop brand love which influences affection behaviour like oppositional brand referrals. It is believed that, the majority of customers engage in oppositional brand referrals because of in-depth feelings of love on desired brand, and hence they feel happy if competitors brand could disappear in the market or underperform.

These findings are similar to result by Marticotte *et al.*, (2016) who investigated the impact of brand evangelism on oppositional referrals towards a rival brand. The findings reported that, self-brand connection, brand community identification, and brand loyalty influence oppositional brand referrals that eventually affect rival brand. The study indicates that, oppositional brand referrals may sometimes take form of desire to harm and trash talking regarding competitors brand in favour of consumers preferred brand. In fact, trash talking is well defined in the study as form of negative recommendation or negative word-of-mouth focusing on disapproving the rival brand by concentrating and arguing on its

weaknesses or failures (imaginary or real) which is a means to strengthening another brand, the one desired by the consumer. The study findings posit that, a consumer can engage in trash talking if he/she feels self-brand connection, and self-identification to a certain brand community. A brand community includes groups of people or consumers who share some similar attributes or characteristics. In fact, among other things, brand community is the most critical sources of trash talking and desire to harm rival brand. Experience shows that, it is through these brand communities, consumers share personal memorable experience, stories, incidents, etc. about different brands. In the context of this study, the consumer can develop self-brand connection and identification if the preferred brand exceed their expectations. In other words, consumers are confident in doing trash talking if the performance of preferred or desired brand exceed their expectations.

Additionally, the study by Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) reported that, consumer-brand relationship has influence on brand evangelism. The study used two variables in describing consumer-brand relationship i.e. brand trust and brand identification. Specifically, brand trust found to have influence on purchase intentions and positive referrals while brand identification relevel significant influences on positive and oppositional brand referrals. From identification theory point of view, a person develop willingness to support a given brand if the brand fit well to the person expectations and personalities. It is through brand identification, a person can be ready and willing to be affiliated or associated with a brand. It enables a person to develop very strong emotional links that prompted brand love. As it has been stated above, through brand love customers are engaged in oppositional brand referrals. Therefore, it is not surprising that this study posits that brand identification influence oppositional brand referrals.

Based on the study by Becerra and Badrinarayanan (2013) marketers can cultivate brand evangelism through building brand trust and brand identification. In addition, the findings are in line with the findings by Anggarini (2018) who reported that, brand satisfaction, opinion leadership, brand trust, brand salience, and consumer-brand identification have significant positive influence on brand evangelism. Again, Fierro *et al.*, (2014) revealed that, any quick service recovery from service failure is one of the most prominent way of creating powerful brand evangelists. Riivits-Arkonsuo *et al.*, (2014) defined this situation as consumer journey from its first experience to brand evangelism. Therefore, every step of the journey should create extraordinary memorable experience for a customer to be brand evangelist

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion
As it has been previously noted, brand evangelism is a very new concept in studies related to branding, and hence this study contributes towards extending knowledge in this important area. In fact, the most critical area that has not been explored in depth is the causative of brand evangelism. By comparing similar studies in this area, this study revealed that, anything that creates memorable experience to customers may create brand evangelist. Therefore, it is very important to view brand evangelism from the context of memorable experience building that intends to transform customers into brand evangelist. However, this memorable experience should make sure customers develop self-brand connection and

self-brand identification without this customers cannot become evangelists. As a matter of fact, for a person to become a brand evangelist he/she must have emotional link that builds feelings of love to a particular brand. In other words, a customer should see that brand personalities represent his/her personalities or traits.

Recommendations

By considering the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed, given the current stiff competition among HEIs, students could be the most important weapons to overcome competition. Experience indicates that, higher HEIs are competing for student enrolment, staff retention, research funds, collaboration, etc. and hence students who are ready and capable to evangelize HEI to potential stakeholders may become helpful to HEIs when competing for students, research funds, etc. For instance, experience indicate that, the majority students do not make choice of HEIs from information gathered through HEIs website, brochures, advertising, exhibitions, etc. Rather, students make choice of which HEI to join for higher education based on very positive and influential recommendations given by others who are technically called brand evangelists. This implies that, HEIs should invest on students as they offer the most effective way of disseminating and delivering powerful information about HEIs products and services.

In addition, in recent time higher education industry has experienced dramatic shift towards the so-called commercialization and marketization of higher learning education. Under this particular milieu, very stiff competition has surfaced that requires application of some business approaches to address them. However, scholars and practitioners are still debating on the question of applying business strategies in addressing challenges related to competition in higher education industry Therefore, given theoretical background of brand evangelism; it may bring into consensus two groups which are debating on the relevance of applying business strategies in addressing competition challenges in higher education industry. In fact, brand evangelism emphasizes on proselytizing others to be loyal to a given brand, by disparaging competitors brands. This can be applied to higher education industry, as HEIs are advised to put greater emphasis to stakeholders notably students in building positive image and reputation. In this regard, it is high time now for HEIs to view students as the most valuable assets in commercialized environments of higher education industry. Actually, the findings of this study indicate that, HEI could spend very little on traditional advertising techniques if they could have been able to transform their students into brand evangelists.

The most critical task of HEIs is how to convert students into brand evangelists. The findings indicate that, it is through proper delivering of services which surpass students expectations, HEIs could be able to convert their students to brand evangelists. Thus, if service encounter during service deliver is not good enough to create memorable experience, nothing can happen to students at the level of making them evangelists. In addition, HEIs should monitor every stage of service encounter so as to ensure each stage create special and unique experience to students. In other words, HEIs should monitor their enrolment procedures, admission procedures, teaching procedures, and other supporting services procedures. As a matter of fact, students may start to build specific experience from the point he/she start to look for admission in HEI up to the point when he/she graduates from studies. Empirical evidence indicates that, students have several incidents in the form of stories to share with others that describe their life in HEIs.

The findings of this study has confirmed theoretical understanding that, a student who has special memorable experience of his preferred HEIs he/she is ready to engage in trash talking or to harm other universities image, reputation, or prestige. In fact, this is what scholars called oppositional brand referral. Generally, the impact of oppositional brand referral could be very significant to HEI if deliberate measures are not taken to address it. The side effects of oppositional brand referral can be seen during student enrolment, or when a HEI is looking for collaboration with other reputable institutions to improve learning environments. It is widely accepted that, most of time trash talking or desire to harm other HEI brands is commonly done in social community i.e. groups of people who share different things or characteristics in common. In fact in the globalized world, these social communities have specific forum to engage in trash talking i.e. social media which normally constituted by former and current students, and other relevant stakeholders. It has been well documented that, the most prominent way to overcome trash talking is to develop committed brand evangelists who are ready to defend an HEI brand regardless of environments or situations. In addition, brand evangelists may be perceived as whistle blowers who ensure the HEI brand is not spoiled.

Limitations and Future Studies
Despite the findings of this study, it has some limitations which provide a room for further studies or researches. First, the study involved respondents from only one public HEI in Tanzania, therefore, further studies could be done by involving respondents from other HEIs to solidify the results. In addition, the fact that service encounter performance differ across higher education industry, a comparative study can be done to compare the same service encounter performance in different HEIs and their influence on brand evangelism. On top of that, the study use a quantitative approach which do not provide a qualitative side of the story about service encounter performance and brand evangelism. In fact, service encounter performance usually produce critical incidents which can be well explored and examined in the form of stories or storytelling. It is recommended that, other studies should be done to get a naturalistic picture of service encounter performance and brand evangelism. It is very important to use Critical Incident Techniques (CIT) to collect information regarding specific incidents during service encounter performance which may influence brand evangelism. CIT is recommended in studies related to service encounter performance due to its strength in collecting in-depth information about critical incidents which occur during each stage of service encounter. It has ability to capture narratives or stories which emerge out of critical incidents which customers experience during service encounter performance.

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