Promoting Customer Satisfaction: The Role of Relationship Marketing Practices and Relationship Value

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Abstract: In the current era of growing competition and changing customer expectations within the hotel industry, managers are compelled to devise strategies of promoting customer satisfaction in order to attain a competitive advantage. This study investigated the mediation effect of relationship value in the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry of Uganda. A quantitative survey design was adopted to investigate the envisaged linkage between the study variables from a relational perspective. The results of the study establish that relationship value significantly mediates the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction. In terms study limitations, the study focused on hotel customers in all the four regions of Uganda. The study results provide a reason for hotels to devote more resources towards relationship marketing practices in a bid to propel relationship value, which resonates customer satisfaction. The results of the study support the idea that improved relationship marketing practices through relationship value generate a sustainable psychological satisfaction not only for customers but also high market share for the organization. The study recommends to hotel managers to regularly consider the drivers of relationship marketing practices, which build a long-term relationship and bonds with customers to yield relationship value. As evidenced in this study, it is of great importance to develop relationship-marketing practices that increase relationship value, an aspect that is vital in boosting customer satisfaction. This article is an original piece of work with both empirical and theoretical value. Empirically, this work is the first of its kind aimed at investigating the mediation effect of relationship value between relationship marketing and customer satisfaction within the hospitality setting. Theoretically, the study extends the adaptability of the social exchange theory by expounding relationship marketing in enhancing customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Relationship Marketing Practices, Relationship Value, Customer Satisfaction

1. Introduction

Customer satisfaction in the hotel industry is not only a concern in less developed countries but also across the globe. This is because it plays a key role in influencing customer's attitudes and behavior which in turn shapes the response towards services and goods [4]. Achieving customer satisfaction requires deliberate relationship marketing practices which bleed into a bond that grows further and metamorphoses into relationship value [21]. It is important

therefore that empirical research is carried out to explore the interaction between customers and employees of different businesses in order to identify the embedded output, which in this study is the relationship value [23]. Relationship value can be referred to as a result of the combined relationship between the supplier or service provider and the customer. This perspective recognizes that the foundation in respect to quality or 'value' in a relationship involves the customer and the service organization [4].

Wilson and Jantrania were among the first researchers to clearly define the measurements of 'relationship value [37-

38]. They aligned economic dimensions (investments quality, value engineering, concurrent engineering and cost reduction), strategic dimensions (core competencies, strategic fit, time to market and goals) and behavioral dimensions (social bonding, trust and culture) to construct relationship value. They argued that the underlying point in any relationship is to create value for both partners and how this value is shared and becomes a major issue in the lifetime of the organization and the customer as well. This relationship value enhances customer satisfaction. From the world tourism organization's research, customer satisfaction is regarded as a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product and or service [41]. According to Pizam, Shapoval and Ellis, customer satisfaction is the key player in influencing the quality of services delivered to customers through the product or service including the accompaniments [25]. It is argued that the extent to which goods or services meet customers' needs and requirements is the index by which quality is determined [35].

Previous efforts to maximize customer satisfaction appear to be losing ground which calls for a new approach to customer satisfaction. Crosby, Evans and Cowles have continued to highlight the need to understand the elements of 'quality' in any service encounter on a relationship basis [7]. The scholars suggest that addressing this understanding of customer satisfaction which result from the interaction between suppliers and customers is of great importance if the service industry needs to be competitive. Many studies have established that there exists a positive correlation between customer satisfaction and the profitability of the business [25]. Therefore, examining new strategies to maximize customer satisfaction through relationship marketing practices which propels relationship value continues to attract scholars and practitioners in different business organizations [10, 34].

In view of the importance of relationship marketing practices in propelling customer satisfaction, a quantitative survey design was adopted in this research to examine the degree at which relationship marketing mediated by relationship value affects customer satisfaction [34]. Ongoing efforts to improve service delivery globally makes it relevant to exploit different dimensions of relationship marketing practices and upsurge relationship value from both customers and service providers in less developed countries, as a means of enhancing customer satisfaction. Despite all sectors of the economy being in need to improve customer satisfaction, the much desired sector for improving customer satisfaction in Uganda is the hotel industry. This is because compared to other sectors of the economy, the hotel industry is one of the fastest growing, accounting for more than one third of the total country's services trade [33].

There is an increase of local and foreign visitors which necessitates more hotels and strategies to take care of the visitors and maximize customer satisfaction [3]. In recent years, efforts to improve customer satisfaction have continuously concentrated on the quality of the product in disregard of the process. However, many studies on services in the 21st century concluded that emotional interaction is vital in relation to a firm and its customers [21]. The same writer further notes that such relationships are less imitated by rivals and such feelings are highly important for customers. These prevailing circumstances on the debate of customer satisfaction, clearly demonstrate that no much consensus has been made on which strategies optimally maximize customer satisfaction. In order to alleviate the above challenge, it has been hypothesized in this study that embracing relationship marketing practices mediated by relationship value adds more impetus to the realization of customer satisfaction. Existing research shows that much of the effort on relationship marketing practices has concentrated in more developed countries a context that is quite different from less developed countries particularly under sub - Saharan Africa such as Uganda. For example, most studies from developed nations do agree that social, financial and structural programs do influence customer satisfaction [4]. This study introduces relationship value as a mediator to invigorate much revered customer satisfaction in the service industry. This type of study has not been executed in Uganda, one of the developing countries that much needs to improve service delivery and most importantly if it is to harness her tourism industry.

From a theoretical review standpoint, the foundation for arguments relevant to this study is the social exchange theory which explains the manifestations of literature described earlier. According to Luu, Ngo and Cadeaux, social exchange theory looks at the "bright" side of how relationship specific investments can induce gratitude and reciprocity behavior [17]. An integrated interpretation of this study is focused on the logical explanation of how relationship-marketing practices affect relationship value and subsequently maximize customer satisfaction [14]. Although different views of social exchange have emerged, theorists agree that social exchange theory involves a series of interactions that generate obligations to maximize customer satisfaction [2]. The proceeding sections of this paper include a theoretical and empirical review of the literature regarding the study variables, a presentation of the methodology adopted for the study, an analysis and discussion of results, conclusions and recommendations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Theoretical Underpinning of the Study

This study bases on the social exchange theory to explain customer satisfaction [25]. Scholars of social exchange theory based on relational contract theory to develop a framework of buyer–seller relationships in which exchanges lie on a continuum from discrete to relational transaction [18]. This theory was evolved as a result of scarcity of resources which prompted actors to engage one another in order to obtain valuable inputs [8]. The same writers argue that social exchanges may or may not involve extrinsic benefits with an

objective of economic value. Thus, the study exploits social exchange theory (SET) in a physical buying context, identifies the issues or factors which are pertinent to social exchange such as reciprocity, reputation, trust, and seller creativity. This study adopts SET to examine the concept of relational investment to enhance relationship value in a bid to maximize customer satisfaction at the organizational and supplier or service provider level. Relationship value is chiefly determined by interaction between the customer and the service organization which creates an opportunity to attain customer satisfaction [30].

This study bases on social exchange theory to analyze the effect of relationship marketing practices on relationship value and customer satisfaction in four perspectives. The first perspective involves social practices which are espoused to have a positive effect through interpersonal interaction on relationship variables among which satisfaction is inclusive [7]. The second perspective entails financial practices whereby the service provider uses economic benefits such as price, discounts and other financial incentives to regulate customers to secure their loyalty through customer satisfaction [16]. In this perspective, the theory combines the elements of transactional cost theory in enhancing relationship value hence customer satisfaction.

The third perspective emphasizes the structural practices that enable a business to enhance customer relationships by offering solutions to customer problems in the form of service-delivery systems, rather than remaining dependent upon the relationship building skills of individual service providers [16, 29]. The fourth perspective brings out confidence practices. Lima and Fernandes define confidence practices as perceptions of reduced anxiety and comfort in knowing what to expect in the service encounter which in turn decreases the risk in services and builds trust which is key in providing feelings of assurance to customers and improves customer satisfaction [15]. Some scholars argue that besides the core benefits, relationships are central to the success of sustaining relationship value with the service provider [16]. It is upon this background that social exchange theory becomes relevant in antecedents of customer satisfaction.

2.2. Review of Empirical Literature

2.2.1. Relationship Marketing Practices and Customer Satisfaction

Relationship marketing practices are the inducements carried out by the service provider or supplier to build a long-term relationship with the customer. From various scholars, relationship-marketing practices are programs initiated by the supplier or service provider to build a relationship with a customer [17, 3]. In an effort to advance customer satisfaction, a model was adopted for this study from [17]. It should be noted that transaction-specific satisfaction dominated the marketing and consumer behavior literature all through the early 1990s [5]. This line of argument defines satisfaction as a customer's evaluation of his or her experience with and reactions to a particular product

transaction, episode, or service encounter.

Based on equity theorem of social exchange theory, it has been recognized for some time that interpersonal interactions are repetitive and evolve over time. Equity is closely related to the concept of reciprocity in market exchange relationships [18]. This is an indication that one would be right to say customer satisfaction is a cumulative perception resulting from inducement. Previous research argued that supplier's relationship marketing practices enhance relationship value as well as customer satisfaction [24]. This is echoed by Saad and Conway who say that customer satisfaction is a customer's fulfillment of his or her response [28]. This points to the importance of relationship marketing practices in the maximization of customer satisfaction. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides a pleasurable level of consumption related fulfillment. In other words, it is the overall level of contentment with a service or product experience.

2.2.2. The Mediating Effect of Relationship Value Between Relationship Marketing Practices and Customer Satisfaction

Relationship value is essential for both short-term and long-term business success. Relationship value according to Song, Yu, Chatterjee and Jia is the consequence of a collaborative relationship that enhances partner competitiveness between the buyer and the seller [31]. Töytäri, Rajala, and Alejandro defined relationship value as the perception of the benefits received from the relationship minus the costs paid for the relationship [32]. In another approach Luu et al. introduces relationship value which results from buyer-supplier relationship as a "pastry" that is divided between the buyer and the supplier [17]. The resultant value which is perceived by the customers is the focus of the study and its impact on customer satisfaction. Saad and Conway introduced the term "relationship marketing" to the services marketing literature, and defined it as attracting, maintaining, and enhancing customer relationships [28].

This perception is supported by Barnes [2]. The stand point from this perception is that relationships maximize customer satisfaction as evidenced from the definition. A number of studies attested that relationship marketing literature has been awash of a positive relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction concept, the most notable ones include Crosby et al; Morgan and Hunt [7, 18]. It is therefore necessary to examine the universal application of the above position by broadening investigations that accommodate empirical evidence from other contexts. Additionally, from a context perspective, the degree to which customers weigh different relationship marketing practices and their implementation continues to point out the need to align relationship value as a key determinant in the attainment of customer satisfaction [6]. This is because the concept of value is always relative and actor-specific, and that "there is not an idiosyncrasy of value perceptions, but rather an idiosyncrasy of value because no two actors can ever have the same temporal

and spatial latitude [17].

The findings according to Luu et al from Business to business (B2B) study suggest that an increase in supplier's relationship marketing practices can help to create relationship value, but at the same time differently distribute relationship value between two parties, that is the supplier and the customer [17]. Further still, in business to consumers (B2C) particularly in the service industry the phenomena is the same. The findings reaffirm that to develop close relationships, buyers and suppliers' unique investments, such as relationship marketing practices which are in four categories of financial, social, structural and confidence practices that support the relationship is of great importance [17]. From the above empirical review, it is probable to conclude that relationship-marketing practices have a positive effect on relationship value and customer satisfaction. There is a need to test the applicability of such findings in the hotel setting, such as hotels in Uganda, where improved customer satisfaction in terms of services from the hotels is highly necessary and maximizing it is still a desire for the sector [8].

2.2.3. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction (CS) is key to the success of every organization in the hospitality sector and has been extensively studied and discussed in recent years due to its increasing importance to managers [4]. Customer satisfaction takes a key role in this process and a source of sustainable competitive advantage [14]. Based on this argument, it is evident that for any firm/organization to succeed, customer satisfaction should be exploited. According to Eugene et al., customer satisfaction is a cumulative overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time [9]. The conceptual arguments of this study and the hypotheses derived from the theoretical review are summarized in Figure 1.

2.2.4. Hypotheses Adopted for the Study

HI: C1: Relationship Marketing Practices positively relates to Customer Satisfaction

H2: a1: Relationship Marketing Practices are positively related to Relationship Value

H3: b1: Relationship Value positively relates to Customer Satisfaction

H4: a1 * b1: Relationship Value mediates the relationship between Relationship Marketing practices and Customer Satisfaction

3. Methodology of the Study

3.1. Research Design, Study Area and Sampling

The study adopted a cross-sectional approach. It was quantitative in nature where hotel customers from all the regions of Uganda participated. The study sought to describe and examine associations among key study variables, namely, relationship marketing practices, relationship value and customer satisfaction. The study design was appropriate

since it allows inferences to be made to the broader populations and permit generalizations of findings to real life situations, thereby increasing the external validity of the study [22]. A sample of 384 out of 28,500 daily walk-in and resident hotel customers of 19 out of 62 registered hotels in Uganda was considered [33, 13]. These were proportionately selected from the four regions of Uganda (East, West, North and Central region) based on the registration categories of Five-star, Four-star, Three-star and Two-star using stratified and simple random sampling approaches [10].
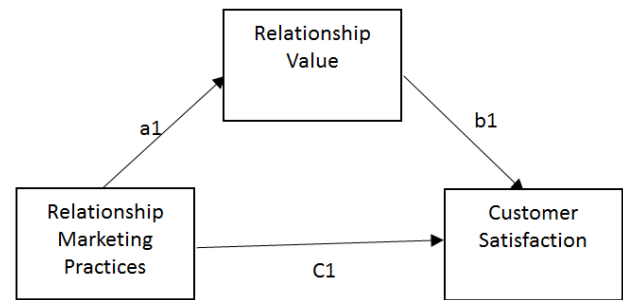

Figure 1. Model and hypothesized relationships.

3.2. Measurement of Variables

3.2.1. Relationship Marketing Practices

Research on relationship marketing practices is still ongoing with no much agreement among the scholars regarding the most appropriate way to measure relationship marketing practices as these programs keep on changing based on circumstances. The measurement tool of relationship marketing practices was adopted from Luu et al. who looked at relationship marketing practices to comprise social practices, financial practices, structural practices, and confidence practices [17]. A Five-Point Likert-type scale anchor was used. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item, where 1 represented' 'Strongly Disagree" and 5 represented ''strongly agree"

3.2.2. Relationship Value

Relationship value was measured by adopting and modifying measures developed by Lin et al. and Woodruff et al. [16, 40]. Based on these scholars, the components of relationship value comprised of service quality, delivery, communication and technical know-how. Relationship value was the mediating variable and was measured using a Five-Point Likert-type scale anchors. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each item, where 1 represented' 'Strongly Disagree" and 5 represented ''strongly agree"

3.2.3. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction was measured by adopting a tool developed by Eugene et al. to study customer satisfaction in retail banking [9]. A subjective assessment of the hotels' efforts to maximize customer satisfaction relative to the competitors in the industry along the three dimensions of customer satisfaction; expectations, disconfirmation of expectations, and perceived

performance. Customer satisfaction items responses were summated to create an aggregated score [32]. A Five-Point Likert-type anchor scale was used in measuring customer satisfaction in this study.

3.3. Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

In assessing content validity, we used the content validity

index (CVI). When assessing reliability, we used Cronbach's alpha test [19]. Results in table 1 show that the study variable scales were above the required minimum threshold coefficient of 0.7 for CVI and reliability test, an indication that the measures used in this study were valid and reliable [22].

Table 1. Reliability and Validity of the Research Instrument.

Variable	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)	Variance Inflation Factors
Relationship Marketing practices	.812	.685	1.167
Relationship Values	.768	.623	1.065
Customer Satisfaction	.838	.634	1.443

3.4. Data Analysis and Presentation

The analysis included interpretation of correlation and regression results. The processes involved cleaning and subjecting data to tests of assumptions of parametric test of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, multicollinearity, and independence of data errors as a condition for carrying out correlation and regression tests. The results in table 1 show that there was no collinearity problem with the data. The Variance Inflation Factors (VIF) were less than 5.000 and the researcher therefore considered these items to be quite relevant for the measurement of the variables since each of them had an acceptable value of the Variance Inflation Factors. The results for statistical test of normality showed that the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test and Shapiro–Wilk tests were not significant (sig. $>.05$) showing that the research data was normally distributed for all the study variables. The result for Durbin – Watson statistic value was 1.643 which is within the recommended range.

This implies that the assumption was not violated. It should be noted that the data passed the test of homoscedasticity using the Levene statistic. Taking into consideration the threshold of $p > 0.05$, the data were found to be homoscedastic, thus according to Nangoli et al. no need for further transformation and the data conformed to the assumptions of regression analysis [19]. In order to establish the mediation effect, the following equation was adopted; $M = a_1 \times b_1$, whereby M is the mediation effect, a_1 = to the effect of relationship marketing practices on relationship value, and b_1 = the effect of relationship value on customer satisfaction.

4. Study Findings

Demographic characteristics of sampled respondents
For demographic characteristics, majority of the respondents were males with 60.4% (201) and females were 39.6% (132). On such a basis, it can be seen that the study findings mainly comprise views from males compared to females. Besides gender, the age group of the respondents included; 21-30, 31- 40, 41-50 and 50 years above. Most of the respondents were below 50 years. Those above 50 years of age were only 13.5% and those below 50 years were 86.5%, an indication that data were collected from a highly active age group.

4.1. Correlation Results

The relationship between relationship marketing practices, relationship value and customer satisfaction was tested using Pearson (r) correlation coefficient. The results in table 2 show that Relationship marketing practices significantly relate to customer satisfaction ($r = 0.501$, $P < 0.01$), relationship value is significantly related to customer satisfaction ($r = 0.577$, $P < 0.01$), and Relationship marketing practices are significantly related to Relationship Value ($r = 0.473$, $P < 0.01$).

Table 2. Correlation Analysis.

Predictors	1	2	3
1. Customer satisfaction	1		
2. Relationship marketing practices	501**	1	
3. Relationship Value	.509**	.473**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)

4.2. Hypotheses Testing

The study's focus was to examine the mediation effect of relationship value in the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction. This was examined following Hayes recommendation of using Bootstrapping technic to generate the most credible and conclusive results [12]. Table 3 indicates that there is a positive effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction as indicated by ($\beta = .338***$, $p < 0.05$) in the regression model-2. The results clearly indicate that investing in relationship marketing practices by hotel management enhances customer satisfaction, thus supporting Hypothesis One (H1). Table 3 also indicates a positive relationship between relationship marketing practices and relationship value (β .514***, $p < 0.05$). The results indicate that increasing relationship marketing practices creates relationship value, thus supporting Hypothesis Two (H2). The prediction levels of customer satisfaction improved as a result of relationship value inclusion (H03), in model 2. This was from 26.6% (R Square $=.266$) to 33.6% (R Square $=.336$).

The results show that the direct effect of relationship marketing practices on customer satisfaction is significant (Beta $=.338***$, sig. $<.001$) and the indirect effect from the

Relationship Marketing practices – Relationship Value – Customer Satisfaction (H04) is also significant (Beta =.487***, sig. <.001). The reduction in the direct effect from .514 to .338, is truly significant as noted from the Confidence Interval levels (CI =.083,.220) without a Zero in the confidence interval range. The results therefore show that Relationship Value partially mediates the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction. These results indicate that if hotel management establishes a strong bond with the customers, it will result into a strong relationship that subsequently enriches customer satisfaction.

It is important to note that customers obtain certain values in the relationship which develop their trust and sought mutual benefits [39]. Further, in the second model, the results showed that relationship marketing practices and relationship value are both significant predictors of customer satisfaction. The introduction of relationship value in the equation increases the prediction level. The findings point to the need of supplementing relationship marketing practices with refining relationship value in order to maximize customer satisfaction. The relationship that the customers have with the hotel management once perceived to be of value, results into improvements in customer satisfaction.

On the side of the hotel, the relationship in this case tends to lead to a complementary relationship whereby customers are able to advise hotel management on the changes that they desire and how these changes should be effected. Such practices make customers feel that they are part of the hotel and their views are taken seriously hence attaining a greater sense of contentment with the entire services offered by the hotel. It should be noted that most behavioral studies in marketing specifically in the area of relationship marketing practices like the mediation of relationship value to predict customer satisfaction, have been done in developed countries mainly focusing on business-to-business relationship. However, this study was carried out in a less developed country- Uganda focusing on business to consumers (B2C) in the service industry. It is important that the established findings of this study are harmonized with those of other established studies as a way of enhancing the power of the research model to predict customer satisfaction.

Table 3. Mediating effect of RV on the relationship between RMPs and Customer satisfaction.

Variables	Model 1 (RV)		Model 2 (CS)		Model3 (Total Effect)	
	B	*p-v*	B	*p-v*	B	*p-v*
Gender	.042	.509	-.144	.047	-.102	.089
Age	-.022	.486	-.009	.744	-.015	.600
Education	-.039	.232	.070	.017	.059	.055
RMPS	.514***	.000	C'=.338***	.000	.487***	.000
RV	-	-	b_1=.290***	.000	-	-
R^2	.266		.336		.268	
F	29.752***		33.078***		29.958***	
Mediation =	$a_1 \times b_1$ =.514 ×.290		=. 149, SE = 035		CI =.083,.220	

Note: *p <.05, ***p <.001

5. Discussion of Findings

The study results showed that relationship marketing practices provide a foundation on which the hotel develops tools to lean on in the pursuance of its marketing objectives in a target market [11]. The findings are in agreement with many scholars on relationship marketing role in enhancing relationship value which in turn propels customer satisfaction [1, 42]. The findings showed that relationship marketing practices significantly affect customer satisfaction as suggested by Rizan, Warokka, and Listyawati [27]. The results indicate that there is an association between building long-term relationship with customers through relationship marketing practices in order to maximize customer satisfaction as pointed out by Morgan and Hunt [18]. Also the study resonates the views of Ndubisi that customer satisfaction is an important component in fostering a long term relationship with customers [20]. This study also mirrors the findings of Ranaweera and Prabhu; Wilson et al. on customer satisfaction that customers can be satisfied by offering increased levels of relationship with the organization [26, 36].

As noted in this study, customer satisfaction in less developed countries can be more realized through social and financial relationship marketing practices rather than structural and confidence practices as it is with more developed countries [17]. The study indicates that relationship making can explicitly be achieved through appropriate methods of utilizing financial and social practices in complementarity with other practices to enhance customer satisfaction. Further, the findings point to the need of paying much attention to relationship value in predicting customer satisfaction. The study argues that relationship value relates to the expectations of the customer and the responsibility of the company to meet these expectations in a short term and long-term relationship with the service providers contributing to a reduction in the sacrifice of the customer thus customer satisfaction [23]. The findings echo the views of Töytäri et al. in their approach to understanding relationship value within relationships [32].

The results support the views of Töytäri et al. who noted that a positive perception of the relationship as a whole is important for the supplier in this case the hotel, to maintain a good relationship with the customer [25]. This makes the customers more tolerant towards occasional inferior performance delivery thus customer satisfaction. Woodruff and Gardial adds that total relationship marketing emphasizes long-term win-win relationships with customers, which

transcends boundaries and disciplines in the endeavors to attain customer satisfaction [40]. It is also noted that relationship value in the discipline of relationship marketing is one of the drivers of customer satisfaction [7]. The findings reaffirm that the relationship itself can have a major impact on the total value received by the customer. These findings emphasizes the relational context of marketing that relationship value is not only in a transactional exchange of a product for money but rather is created and delivered over time.

As evidenced in the study, the effective approaches to customer satisfaction among others is implementation of relationship marketing practices with a purpose of enhancing relationship value which boosts customer satisfaction. The above ideas are chiefly aligned with the findings of luu et al. [17]. Additionally, the marketing environment is not static and it is important that service industry specifically the hotels should implement relationship marketing practices in a way that reflects the context in which they operate [14]. Based on the findings, implementation of relationship marketing practices in disregard of the context in which hotels operate and failure to amplify relationship value makes organizations less competitive.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the extent to which relationship-marketing practices through relationship value explain variations in satisfaction levels of customers. The results confirmed the positive relationship between the three variables in the study. It is within a theoretical analysis that the research gap identified in the maximization of customer satisfaction by the hotels' management particularly in developing countries can be addressed through adopting strategies of this model. This study extends previous relationship marketing and customer satisfaction frameworks from developed countries by considering another environmental set-up from developing countries like Uganda. The study adds relationship value as the mediating variable in the relationship between relationship marketing practices and customer satisfaction. The findings strongly point to the need of relationship value if relationship-marketing practices are to increase customer satisfaction. The findings support a multi-faceted approach through relationship marketing practices and relationship value in order to maximize customer satisfaction.

Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that management of hotels endeavor to develop relational programs that customers perceive as a product from both parties; hotel management and the customers. This makes customers feel that they are participants in decision making of the hotel thus getting the desired satisfaction from the hotels' services.

The findings in the study are based on the administered questionnaires within the hotel sector. Thus, there is a need to carry out a similar study within different settings other than the hotel sector in order to assess the similarities and differences that may prevail or establish whether the findings of the study hold. There is also need to carry out such a study in the East African region across member countries in order to assess whether there are any regional or country-specific characteristics with regard to the topic of investigation.

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