The Impact of ICTs on Customer Service Excellence in Zimbabwe

Prof. Gabriel Kabanda

Abstract—The diffusion and adoption of ICT innovations permeate through a social system that positively affects customer satisfaction and support customer service excellence. The three discourses with respect to information systems innovation are discussed in the context of Zimbabwe with particular reference to diffusion, social embeddedness, and the transformative nature of ICT interventions. The framework for service excellence links the customer to the service environment, service delivery and the processes. The Xerox Excellence Model represents one of the early excellence pioneering models, and the EFQM European Excellence Model is a representative of international quality award model that informs customer service excellence. The methodology used is a mixed method approach, where the quantitative approach was used in assessing the ICT usage patterns and indicators in Zimbabwe. The research used the quantitative approach on Infodensity covering 18 countries in East and Southern Africa for the period 2000 to 2012, and for Africa in comparison with the rest of the world from 2005 to 2014. The qualitative approach was used in the analysis of online query handling facilities at the Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) website. Through a random sampling technique a total of 42,349 views were collected through the ZOU website on addressing frequently asked questions as a way to improve customer service excellence. The ICT development index in Zimbabwe has grown steadily from the year 2000 to 2012, where Zimbabwe experienced one of the highest mobile density increases from 2007 to 2012 due to the enabling environment created by the Government of Zimbabwe. The infrastructural facilities for ICTs are now sound in Zimbabwe. However, the gap is on the application and effective utilization of ICTs to improve on customer service excellence with some innovation.

Keywords—ICT diffusion, innovation, customer service excellence, model, education, business

I. INTRODUCTION

The service industry in Zimbabwe has since 1980 embarked on various initiatives that have improved quality, productivity, customer experience, human capital development and competitiveness.
It is a special type of communication, in that the messages are concerned with new ideas (Rogers, 2003, page 5). Innovations diffuse through a social system explained by the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 2003). Diffusion of innovation is a theory that analyzes, as well as explain, the adaptation of a new innovation. The purpose of this theory to the research is to provide a conceptual paradigm for understanding the process of diffusion and social change associated with ICTs. African countries are largely end consumers of technology and fall among the late majority (34%) and laggards (16%) with respect to ICT innovations. Innovations that are perceived by individuals as having greater relative advantage, compatibility, trialability, observability, and less complexity will be adopted more rapidly than other innovations (Rogers, 1995).

Therefore, this paper investigates the impact of ICTs on customer service excellence.

Avgerou (2008) has conducted extensive research on discourses on innovation and development in Information Systems (IS) in developing countries. A discourse denotes a generalization of the concept of conversation within all modalities and contexts. In this case, discourses are research approaches emanating from assumptions on the context and consequences of IS innovation in developing countries. Information systems (IS) implementation comprises technology development and organizational change. A discourse arises from a combination of assumptions on the nature of IS innovation processes in developing countries and relevant conceptual constructs in the study of these processes. Developments in information systems for developing countries (ISDC) are severely challenged by financial resources, technology and skills in most developing countries (Avgerou, 2008). The transfer and diffusion discourse can be explained by the theories of diffusion and technology acceptance (Davis, 1989; Rogers, 1995). Avgerou (2008) presents three discernible discourses with respect to research in IS in developing countries (ISDC):

a) IS innovation in terms of transferring of ICT and organizational practices from advanced economies and adapting them in the context of developing countries;
b) IS innovation as a process embedded in local conditions in developing countries; and
c) IS innovation as a transformative intervention and associates it the aspirations and policies for socio-economic development.

Statement of the Problem

Technology change affects both the market dynamics and the organizational response to the changes and opportunities. The ICT service delivery affects customer satisfaction and the journey towards customer service excellence. Rapid developments and advances in ICT, mainly led by the accelerated growth of the internet, have revolutionized service design and delivery, and ultimately customer service excellence.

Purpose or Aim

The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the impact of ICTs on customer service excellence.

Objectives

The objectives of the research are to:
1. Assess commonly used customer service excellence models.
2. Review the range of ICT usage in Zimbabwe in comparison with other SADC countries.
3. Explore and assess the impact of ICTs on customer service excellence.
4. Assess the impact of ICTs on handling online queries and frequently asked questions in higher education application for studies.

Research Questions

1. What is the pattern of ICT usage and adoption in Zimbabwe?
2. What is the purpose of the ICT diffusion innovations theory and diffusion discourse to customer service excellence?
3. What is the framework for excellent service in high performance organizations?
4. How does ICT affect customer satisfaction?
5. What is the impact of ICT on customer service excellence?

Rationale/ Justification

The service industry sector in Zimbabwe has suffered dents in information for handling customer complaints and managing expectations due to problems of completeness, consistency, accuracy, timeliness, believability, added value, interpretability and accessibility of the information and data. Organizations may be drowning in data and yet starving in knowledge that adds value to customer service excellence. ICT innovations are required in example areas of data mining, target marketing, customer relation management, market basket analysis, cross selling, and market segmentation.
The study examines customer service excellence models that are appropriate for the Zimbabwean and African environment and explores how ICT innovations can improve customer satisfaction. Customer service excellence is a necessary and sufficient condition for competitiveness of the organizations and ultimately of the country. The three discourses with respect to information systems innovation by Avgerou (2008) are discussed in the context of Zimbabwe with particular reference to diffusion, social embeddedness, and the transformative ICT interventions. Customer service excellence models are assessed for suitability for use in Zimbabwe. The Xerox Excellence Model represents one of the early excellence pioneering models, and the EFQM European Excellence Model is a representative of international quality award model that informs customer service excellence.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Avgerou (2008) challenged the feasibility of transferring generic technical know-how into developing countries organizations with the expectation that it will result in the same organizational practices and outcomes as in their context of origin. It is noted, however, that they retain the general assumptions on the validity of purpose of the attempted innovation as well as the validity of the underlying objectives and rationality of the transferred methods in their new context of practice. ICT innovation and organizational change are socially embedded actions. The social embeddedness discourse view IS innovation as a locally socially constructed course of action. Innovation is studied as a locally constituted process of technology construction and organizational change, whose purpose arises from local problematizations and whose course is determined by the way local actors make sense of it and accommodate it in their lives (Avgerou, 2008). The transformative ISDC discourse associates IS innovation with processes of change of the social, economic, and political conditions in developing countries. This specifically addresses the development struggle in which IS innovation is implicated (Avgerou, 2008). Transformative research is often based on the same theoretical underpinnings regarding social context as the social embeddedness discourse. However, while socially embedded analyses tend to take social, economic, and political relations in a developing country community or the world at large as given, the transformative discourse is explicitly concerned with the way ICT is implicated in the dynamics of their change.

According to Avgerou (2008), the distinctiveness of the ISDC research lies in its attention to the developing countries’ context of IS innovation and problematization of the developmental role of IS innovation.

The essence of the significant contribution by Avgerou (2008)’s three discourses are summarized below:

i. The first discourse, the diffusion discourse, assumes that the material/cognitive entities that comprise ICT and associated best practices of organizing are adequately independent from the social circumstances that give rise to them to be transferable, more or less intact, into any other society. Consequently, subject to suitable adaptation, these entities can make a desirable impact.

ii. The second discourse, social embedded innovation discourse, interrogates the nature of IS and questions the assumptions. More elaborate ontologies of IS innovation have been developed as socially constructed entities, and therefore contingent in their perceived significance and their interplay with human actors and their social institutions (Avgerou, 2008). A good example for the Zimbabwean context is Ecocash, a mobile payment platform that was introduced by Econet Wireless Zimbabwe that has revolutionised e-banking in Zimbabwe. The focus should be on the process of innovation in situ, thus tracing the cognitive, emotional, and political capacities that individuals nurtured in their local social institutions bring to bear on unfolding innovation attempts. Through this approach the socially embedded innovation discourse sheds light on what, regarding an attempted innovation, is locally meaningful, desirable, or controversial, and therefore how innovation emerges (or is retarded) from the local social dynamics.

iii. The third discourse, the transformative IS innovation intervention, introduces new elements in the IS research field by expanding the domain of IS research beyond the organization or inter-organizational links and addresses questions related with institutions of broader social collectivities. In this case, we extend the IS innovation to all facets of customer service excellence. It is argued that ICT positively affects customer satisfaction.

New ICTs are penetrating countries in all regions of the world as more people are getting connected. The introduction of mobile-broadband services coupled with the availability of smartphones and tablet computers, has contributed to the phenomenal increase in mobile broadband subscriptions.
In Zimbabwe, we have seen the shift from the traditional mobile-cellular services, such as voice and SMS, towards mobile-web services, and thus shifting mobile traffic volumes from voice to data. More data and information is now being exchanged and transmitted through various ubiquitous devices. Automated data collection tools and mature database technology lead to tremendous amounts of data stored in databases, data warehouses and other information repositories. Some organizations in service industry are drowning in data but starving for knowledge. Service quality for ICT enabled or supported systems considers attributes such as technical competence, business empathy /understanding, problem management, service timeliness, service completeness, application and technology infusion and diffusion, training, staff turnover, and overall relationship. Therefore, the systems quality must also be excellent with respect to data accessibility, management reporting, security, auditability and confidentiality, reliability, integrity and continuity, scaleability, interoperability, performance/responsiveness, ease-of-use and strategic fit. A well-accepted set of quality attributes includes completeness, consistency, accuracy, timeliness, believability, added value, interpretability and accessibility.

Successful service organizations constantly strive for higher levels of customer service. Modern customers are increasingly sophisticated, educated, confident and informed. Excellent service is exceeding customer expectations. Service excellence is a direct consequence of attention to people. Customer satisfaction and loyalty are the consequence of excellence in a series of encounters between people and the customer. According to Cook S. (2008, page 2), excellent service enables a business to:

- differentiate itself from the competition;
- improve its image in the eyes of the customer;
- minimize price sensitivity;
- improve profitability;
- increase customer satisfaction and retention;
- achieve a maximum number of advocates for the company;
- enhance its reputation;
- ensure products and services are delivered ‘right first time’;
- improve staff morale;
- increase employee satisfaction and retention;
- increase productivity;
- reduce costs;
- encourage employee participation;
- create a reputation for being a caring, customer-oriented company;
- foster internal customer/supplier relationships;
- bring about continuous improvements to the operation of the company.

The framework for service excellence is illustrated in Figure 1 below, after Snow D. and Yanovitch T. (2010, page 3). This is based on observations of outstanding, service-driven organizations and analysis of the activities that make these organizations great. The framework uses four components: the Customer, the Service Environment (physical setting), the Service Delivery (employees), and the Processes. Information is the blood flow which is inevitably best supplied by ICTs.

Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems offer organizations the opportunity to manage their relationship with customers using the information the company has about its customers. Companies that have been successful in CRM appear to have the following characteristics (Cook S., 2008, page 30):

- strong commitment from the top;
- clearly defined and measurable goals;
- involvement of the customer;
- a business-focused rather than technology approach;
- the right team to design and implement the project;
- an incremental approach rather than step change.

To encourage high performance in organizations, it is recommended that organizations consider the following strategies (Cook S., 2008, page 268):

- Integrating customer service as a key component of appraisals.
- Instigating a programme of staff care.
- Encouraging upward or 360-degree appraisal.
- Rewarding complaint-free departments.
- Devising non-monetary awards such as plaques and badges.
• Developing bonus schemes linked to attainment of quality service.
• Holding formal presentations and thank you’s for service heroes.
• Developing prize schemes based on feedback from customers.
• Instigating good manager awards based on staff feedback.
• Instigating internal customer service awards for the quality of service provided internally.
• Recognizing the efforts of service teams rather than individuals.
• Conducting surveys among employees to develop a suitable motivational scheme.
• Holding company-wide competitions to encourage service improvements.
• Regularly reviewing and publishing the results of motivation schemes.
• Training all managers in performance review techniques.
• Encouraging regular feedback and review sessions between managers and their staff.

The Xerox Excellence Model represents one of the early excellence pioneering models, and the European Excellence Model is a representative of international quality award model that informs customer service excellence. The Xerox Business Excellence Model defined excellence as being certified with a high score on the following six excellence criteria, where the the excellence criteria 1-5 were called enablers (Dahlgaard-Park S.M. and Dahlgaard J.J., 2006). When people provide customer value this leads to good business results. The Xerox Business Excellence model is illustrated in Figure 2 below. Each of the following enablers is heavily dependent on ICT for information flow and optimal performance.

1. Management Leadership,
2. Human Resource Management,
3. Business Process Management,
4. Customer and Market Focus,
5. Information Utilization and Quality Tools,

One of the most used models in Europe for self-assessment and strategic change is the EFQM Excellence Model, which is based on following 8 fundamental concepts (Dahlgaard-Park S.M. and Dahlgaard J.J., 2006), and uses nine criteria shown Figure 3 below:

1. Results orientation,
2. Customer focus,
3. Leadership and constancy of purpose,
4. Management by processes and facts,
5. People development and involvement,
6. Continuous learning,
7. Innovation and improvement,
8. Partnership development and public responsibility.
The first five criteria on the left are the enabler criteria: 1. Leadership, 2. People, Policy & Strategy, 4. Partnerships & Resources, 5. Processes. The four criteria on the right of the enabler criteria are the result criteria: 6. People Results, 7. Customer Results, 8. Society, 9. Key Performance Results. The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) emphasizes that an assumption behind the model is that the results of the organization are achieved through excellent performance in the enabler criteria (Dahlgaard-Park S.M. and Dahlgaard J.J., 2006). An organization achieving excellence in the enablers will experience sustainable developments through improved customer, people, society and financial results.

Figure 3: The EFQM European Excellence Model.
Source: Dahlgaard-Park S.M. and Dahlgaard J.J., 2006

Mobile communications have emerged as a key technology to bridge the digital divide in least developed countries (LDCs) and as a means to accelerate the diffusion of government, health and environmental information throughout their territories (ITU, 2011) promoted by the multiple transformations of the regulatory environment in telecommunications.

Telecommunications is a critical information infrastructure and its regulation include provisions that support universal access to telecommunications, the management of scarce resources such as electromagnetic spectrum, the facilitation of a seamless network of networks via orderly wholesale markets, interconnection, and interoperability provisions, the continued monitoring of competition in the industry with remedial interventions if necessary, and the protection of consumers. Competitive restructuring, tariff rebalancing, and the gradual elimination of price controls typically result in price and service innovations that support the further adoption of telecommunications services (ITU, 2011). In spite of its recognized benefits, the availability of ICTs in Africa has remained inadequate. Telecommunications Services are now considered to be a basic necessity of all citizens in order to enable them participate in the new information economy. Promotion of ICT entails the availability of telecommunications and broadcasting infrastructure at National and Continental level.

III. METHODOLOGY

Mixed methods often combine nomothetic and idiographic approaches in an attempt to serve the dual purposes of generalisation and in-depth understanding, to gain an overview of social regularities from a larger sample while understanding the other through detailed study of a smaller sample. The methodology used is a mixed method approach, where the quantitative approach was used in assessing the ICT usage patterns and indicators in Zimbabwe. The qualitative approach was used in the analysis of online query handling facilities at the Zimbabwe Open University website.

The methodology used the qualitative approach in order to discover meaning and potential relationships. The research also used the quantitative approach on Infodensity covering 18 countries in East and Southern Africa for the period 2000 to 2012 and for Africa in comparison with the rest of the world from 2005 to 2014. The 18 countries covered by the qualitative study are South Africa, Angola, Botswana, Burundi, D.R. Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Swaziland, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. Data on infodensity was obtained from the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) (http://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/stat/default.aspx).
The Zimbabwe Open University (ZOU) website (http://www.zou.ac.zw/) was used as an electronic platform to ask and respond to the most frequently used questions (FAQs) concerning applications and queries for potential students to the university’s 43 programmes. Through a random sampling technique a total of 42,349 views were collected through the ZOU website on addressing frequently asked questions as a way to improve customer service excellence.

The table, Table 1 below, shows the list of frequently asked questions (FAQs), institutional responses and the number of views recorded on the ZOU website since 2nd August, 2012 (http://www.zou.ac.zw/faqs/). A questionnaire was administered to the Marketing officers at ZOU concerning the elements of the FAQs on the online query handling facility on the ZOU website.

**Table 1**
List Of Most Popular Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) And Their Responses

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Most Popular Questions (FAQs)</th>
<th>Response</th>
<th>Number of recorded Views</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the entry requirements if I wish to study at undergraduate level?</td>
<td>ZOU’s minimum entry requirement for an undergraduate degree programme is 5 ‘O’ levels including English language and Mathematics at grade C or better. Mathematics is not a pre-requisite in some programmes as stated in the University’s regulations. Any qualification higher than ordinary level is an added advantage to the prospective student.</td>
<td>7340</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Is ZOU’s ODL education qualification internationally recognised and will it improve my job prospects? | Yes, very much internationally recognised. In fact, ODL qualifications are the mark of academic success and also have added value because they show that you have commitment, ambition and self discipline, qualities that are important to prospective employers. The ZOU is a highly respected centre of higher learning and ZOU degree is equivalent to a degree from any other university in world. Many professional bodies recognise ZOU courses, modules and qualifications. Thus ZOU is very popular with employers because they know that ZOU students:  
• Get the most up-to-date knowledge  
• Continue working while they study, and apply what they learn immediately | 6763                     |
| How do I apply to study for any programme at ZOU? | The University advertises calling for applications for admissions each semester. Once the advert is flighted, you can either download or collect our application form from your nearest ZOU Regional Centre Office. You need to select a programme of your choice in which you suit the requirements. You complete the application form and submit it to your nearest Regional Centre. The application fee is currently pegged at USD10. The University will consider your form for admission and after the process has been conducted, you will be contacted by our representatives. | 4847                     |
| What are the entry requirements if I wish to study at postgraduate level? | Entry requirements for postgraduate study vary by programme. To study for a Masters degree, the prospective student should have a relevant first degree at 2.2 degree class and for a Doctorate, a pass at Masters Level. | 4245                     |
| Can I view the study/learning materials before I register? | Yes, any prospective student is allowed to view the learning material. ZOU Regional Centres have plenty of study materials at their Regional Libraries to view and more so, learning materials can be viewed online: www.zou.ac.zw. | 3525                     |
| Will my previous study qualification count towards a ZOU qualification? | You might be eligible for credit transfer/ exemptions towards certain ZOU courses if previous study was relevant to the current course being studied and from a recognised institution of Higher Learning at the same level of qualification. This should have been undertaken within the previous 8 to years period. Exemptions are only applicable to relevant degree programmes only. | 3294                     |
The ICT indicators are measured by penetration rates with respect to teledensity, internet, number of computers per 100 people and the mobile density. The ICT usage patterns in Zimbabwe were assessed through Infodensity for various ICT indicators. The fixed telephony, mobile cellular subscriptions and individuals with internet for Africa for the period 2005 to 2014 as a percentage of the population are shown on Figures 4, 5 and 6, respectively. Africa has lagged behind in fixed telephony subscriptions but is slowly catching up on mobile cellular phones.

The questionnaire administered to the Marketing Officers of ZOU concerning the FAQs on the ZOU website included the following questions:

1. How up to date is this information?
2. How does this information assist in promoting and encouraging registration for undergraduate programmes at ZOU?
3. How is customer service excellence achieved using this wonderful online query handling facility?
4. What are your suggestions for the way forward or improvements concerning this tool on the website?

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The ICT indicators are measured by penetration rates with respect to teledensity, internet, number of computers per 100 people and the mobile density. The ICT usage patterns in Zimbabwe were assessed through Infodensity for various ICT indicators. The fixed telephony, mobile cellular subscriptions and individuals with internet for Africa for the period 2005 to 2014 as a percentage of the population are shown on Figures 4, 5 and 6, respectively. Africa has lagged behind in fixed telephony subscriptions but is slowly catching up on mobile cellular phones.
Individuals with access to internet in Africa has grown significantly from 2.4% in 2005 to now 19.0% in 2014. However, fixed telephone has stabilized and has not grown globally for the period 2005 to 2014.

The Southern African Development Community (SADC) fixed telephony, mobile cellular and internet penetration rates for the period 2000 to 2012 are shown below on Figures 7, 8 and 9, respectively using data obtained from the ITU. The fixed telephony penetration rates have not changed for the period 2000 to 2012. The mobile cellular penetration rate has grown significantly for the SADC countries, notably Botswana and Zimbabwe are on the leading edge. Botswana, Mauritius, South Africa and Zimbabwe now have a mobile density that is 100% and above, as shown on Figure 8. Individuals with access to internet are shown on Figure 9, where Mauritius and South Africa have 40% penetration rate and Zimbabwe is at 17.9%.
The penetration rate for internet and mobile density for Zimbabwe for the period 2000-2012 are shown on Figures 10 and 11, respectively. Individuals with access to internet in Zimbabwe were 15% of the total population in 2012 and this has been rising steadily. The mobile density of Zimbabwe experienced a phenomenal growth between 2008 and 2012, now about 100% in 2014.
Zimbabwe, together with the rest of the SADC countries, has experienced a significant growth in mobile cellular subscriptions and internet penetration rates. The ICT development index has grown steadily from the year 2000 to 2012. However, Zimbabwe experienced one of the highest mobile density increases from 2007 to 2012 due to the enabling environment created by the Government of Zimbabwe. The introduction of mobile-broadband services coupled with the availability of smartphones and tablet computers, has contributed to the phenomenal increase in mobile broadband subscriptions. In Zimbabwe, we have seen the shift from the traditional mobile-cellular services, such as voice and SMS, towards mobile-web services, and thus shifting mobile traffic volumes from voice to data.

The responses to the questionnaire administered to the Marketing Officers of ZOU concerning the online query handling facility on FAQs are summarized in the table below, Table 2.

**Table 2**

**Responses To The Questionnaire Administered To The Marketing Officers Of ZOU**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. How up to date is this information?</td>
<td>1. Since the questions and responses were compiled and uploaded in August 2012, there is likelihood that some information is still up to date, for example, entry requirements at undergraduate level, application procedure, ODL model and its nature or benefits. However, it is possible that some of the information is now obsolete given the developments that took place from 2012 to date, such as the recognition of the ZOU degree programmes by the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE), flexibility in application and admission processes, viewing of e-learning materials before one registers, enrollment ranking, additional faculties and names, distribution and so on.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How does this information assist in promoting and encouraging registration for undergraduate programmes at ZOU?</td>
<td>2. Such information, if well revised, helps to create awareness of the programmes offered by ZOU to prospective students. They: a. Can plan on which semesters they can apply/register to study with ZOU, b. Can plan their finances well in advance in line with fees payment options in place (e.g. Eduloan, POSB, ZB, Staggered, Cash, etc), c. Would know and appreciate the mode of delivery (ODL), d. Would know the location of their nearest Regional/District centres where they can get relevant assistance for their studies to be effective, e. Can be able to give feedback to the right location on various needs and areas that they need improved, f. Know that they will be able to access e-resources in order to get relevant study information, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. How is customer service excellence achieved using this wonderful online query handling facility?</td>
<td>3. Service excellence can be achieved since prospective students, current ones, Alumni and other stakeholders will be able to view real facts while they have the opportunity to interact with ZOU through giving feedback via our <a href="mailto:information@zou.ac.zw">information@zou.ac.zw</a> platform. The feedback can be in the form of suggestions, complaints, compliments, etc., and then these will be reviewed in liaison with concerned units so that solid stakeholder relationships are created and natured. The ZOU can also be able to...</td>
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</table>
share feedback promptly with the concerned parties. Those who get access to this online facility can be able to spread information to colleagues using the word of mouth as they encourage each other to study with ZOU through ODL. Some online links with ZOU information on various issues may also help to achieve service excellence.

V. CONCLUSION

The diffusion and adoption of ICT innovations permeate through a social system that positively affects customer satisfaction and support customer service excellence. The framework for service excellence links the customer to the service environment, service delivery and the processes. The Xerox Excellence Model represents one of the early excellence pioneering models, and the EFQM European Excellence Model is a representative of international quality award model that informs customer service excellence. Innovations diffuse through a social system explained by the diffusion of innovation theory (Rogers, 2003). Averrou (2008) conducted extensive research on discourses on innovation and development in Information Systems (IS) in developing countries which informs appropriate approaches worthy of consideration in achieving customer service excellence supported by ICTs in Zimbabwe. The ICT service delivery affects customer satisfaction and the journey towards customer service excellence. Rapid developments and advances in ICT, mainly led by the accelerated growth of the internet, have revolutionized service design and delivery, and ultimately customer service excellence.

The purpose of this research paper was to investigate the impact of ICTs on customer service excellence. The study examined customer service excellence models that are appropriate for the Zimbabwean and African environment and explores how ICT innovations can improve customer satisfaction. Customer service excellence models were assessed for suitability for use in Zimbabwe. ICT innovation and organizational change are socially embedded actions, and so it was argued that ICT positively affects customer satisfaction. Successful service organizations constantly strive for higher levels of customer service, where excellent service is exceeding customer expectations.

The ICT development index in Zimbabwe has grown steadily from the year 2000 to 2012, where Zimbabwe experienced one of the highest mobile density increases from 2007 to 2012 due to the enabling environment created by the Government of Zimbabwe. The introduction of mobile-broadband services coupled with the availability of smartphones and tablet computers, contributed to the phenomenal increase in mobile broadband subscriptions and a notable shifting of mobile traffic volumes from voice to data. The infrastructural facilities for ICTs are now sound in Zimbabwe. However, the gap is on the application and effective utilization of ICTs to improve on customer service excellence with some innovation. For example, the online query handling facility at ZOU can be utilized more extensively to support applications for undergraduate degree programmes. However, internal research should be conducted with all the relevant units of the university to gather current developments, validate high enrollment claims against competitors, and support the online platform with customer feedback boxes at strategic positions at each Regional/District centre of the university throughout the country.

REFERENCES


