

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY

COLLEGE OF COMMERCE

MASTER OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT

Assessing the Effect of Communication Management on Customer Engagement: The Case of Start-up Travel Groups in Addis Ababa.

A Thesis submitted for the Award of Master of Arts Degree in Project Management

BY

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June 2026

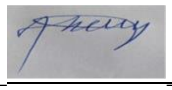
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Assessing the Effect of Communication Management on Customer Engagement: The Case of Start-up Travel Groups in Addis Ababa.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the project thesis entitled “Assessing the Effect of Communication Management on Customer Engagement: The Case of Start-up Travel Groups in Addis Ababa.”, has been carried out by me under the guidance and supervision of Teklegiorgis A. (Ph.D.). The thesis is original and has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma to any university or institution.

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Certificate

This is to certify that the thesis entities "Assessing the Effect of Communication Management on Customer Engagement: The Case of Start-up Travel Groups in Addis Ababa.", submitted to Addis Ababa University School of Commerce for the award of degree in Master of Project Management and its original research work carried out by Yosef Taye, under my guidance and supervision.

Therefore, I hereby declare that no part of this thesis has been submitted to any other university or institution for the award of any degree or diploma.

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_____	_____	_____

Acknowledgment

I would like to begin by expressing my sincere gratitude to God for His constant guidance, strength, and blessings throughout this research journey.

I greatly appreciate my Advisor, Dr. Teklegiorgis Assefa, for his incredible advice and thoughtful responses. Without his help, some aspects of this study would never have been possible or have pushed me to excel.

I also want to send my sincere appreciation to all the people who participated in this research by volunteering their time and by providing valuable information. Everyone's participation and responses contributed significantly on making this research meaningful and comprehensive.

I am also thankful to my family and friends for their ongoing support, patience, and understanding. Their faith in me kept me motivated and pushed me to finish this work.

Lastly, I wish to extend my special thanks to Ms. Aklsieya Seyoum and Ms. Elham Mohamud for providing me with more support and motivation. Their support not only helped me stay committed but also motivated me to push through to finish this journey.

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Abbreviations/Acronyms

PMI- Project Management Institute

PMBOK® – Project Management Body of Knowledge

Abstract

While customer management across different business firms and projects across the nation is highly effective especially on small start-ups travel organizing groups, this research come up with the explanation of the relationship between managing communication and customer engagement. However researches on the effect of communication management on customer engagement are limited. The primary and main objective of this study was to explain how communication management affects customer engagement in small start-up travel organizing companies in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Data were collected from respondents who are involved in at least on trip which is organized by those small start-ups using electronic questionnaire, 81 respondents participated in the survey. Then the data were analysed using Google spreadsheet and Statistical Software Package for Social Science (SPSS), the analysis includes both descriptive and inferential statistical analysis. The analysis revealed that Pearson's Correlation test showed that component of communication management has a positive association with customer engagement and the regression analysis showed the five assumption of regression analysis are fulfilled and the proposed conceptual model fit with adjusted R square value is 0.409. The findings suggest that communication management plays vital role to improve customer engagement. Therefore companies who are involved in organizing tour and travel should put their eyes on their communication management to perform well in the business and project arena they are in.

Key Words: - Communication Management, Customer Engagement,

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years after the corona virus epidemic, we have seen a rise in travel groups and small tour organizing, start-ups across Addis Ababa. What started as a simple travel organizing on weekends has grown into a lively small industry that connects travellers to unique destinations across different regions in Ethiopia. This shows how digital platforms have been essential to discover and participate in local tourism activities (IJRTE, 2020). These groups operate informally with small number of staff and limited resources. Yet they fully depend on trust, and clear communication with their participants. In times like this where everything is moving fast and reputation can easily break overnight, communication is not only a tool but also the heart of the entire operation. Research on customer relations implies that organizations working in such dynamic environments must understand and adhere to customer needs if they want to build and sustain engagement (Freeman, 1984).

This research shows how communication is managed inside these fast growing travel groups, and more importantly, how the quality of that communication affects they engage with their customers. Customers here include customers, partner hotels and lodges, transport providers, local guides, content creators, and even the online communities that help these groups grow. Studies show that timely and accurate communication highly affect the collaboration in between these stake holders, especially in informal or rapidly growing tourism scenarios (Reta & Beldados, 2025). Because these start-ups operate in a fast moving digital space where people expect timely responses and detailed and clear information, effective communication can be the difference between a fully booked tour and one that gets cancelled.

1.1 Background of the Study

Ethiopia has been experiencing a steady but unequal growth in domestic tourism, particularly among young travellers who are drawn to explore locations within their country. An assessment of domestic tourism trends shows that increased access to internet, digital promotion and promotions on online travel experiences have helped increase participation in local tourism (IJRTE, 2020). Addis Ababa has become the centre of this movement where youth led travel groups that were formed through informal social media coordination gradually have grown to a well formed micro tourism startups.

Before the COVID-19 hit, these travel groups were already gaining exposure as young travellers sought affordable, group adventures that were easier to organize through social media platforms. However, the pandemic completely changed how these activities work and their pace. International travel were restricted in which it paved a road to local domestic travels. Studies on customer involvement in Ethiopian tourism suggest that during this period, domestic tourism became a critical backup plan for sustaining tourism activity, This was especially true in areas where local communities were already engaged in tourism related livelihoods (Bekana, 2023).

After COVID hit, there was a very noticeable rise in the emergence and growth of youth led travel groups. Most of this is driven by travelers seeking for a place away during the lockdown period; part of it came from the rise in digital interactions on social media during COVID-19, in return strengthened online communities and made group travel more easier. Research on customer collaboration in Ethiopian tourism further states that recovery of the sector after the pandemic depended mostly on communication, cooperation, and coordinated effort among key tourism actors (Reta & Beldados, 2025). For these informal travel groups, it easily meant having a clear and proper communications with customers to receive increased demand.

This work scenario matches with the logic of customer theory, which shows that an organization succeeds when it fully takes into account, understands, communicates with, and manages the needs of the different groups that influence it (Freeman, 1984). For the start up travel groups in Addis Ababa, these customers are travellers, service suppliers, local destinations, digital communities, and different regulatory bodies. And this pandemic made these relationships even more important, travellers expected clearer communication regarding travel itineraries, and mostly safety, in return service providing partners faced unpredictable operating conditions, and local destinations relied on consistent visitor flow to recover economically.

Tourism studies from abroad also reinforce the same principle, Customer engagement, when supported by transparent and timely communication, has been seen to have a direct influence on customer satisfaction, especially in uncertain scenarios (Nur Adhifa et al., 2025). The rise of domestic travel after the pandemic provided both an opportunity and a challenge for travel groups demand increased, but so did expectations for correct information, reliability, and safety assurances.

Although youth led travel groups have become an active part of Addis Ababa's tourism recovery, academic research slightly explores their internal communication practices or how those practices shape customer engagement. Previous Ethiopian tourism literature has concentrated on a broader structural issues, infrastructure gaps, and national policy concerns. As a result, the communication dynamics of small, increasingly growing, digitally driven travel groups remain largely undocumented.

This fills that gap by examining how communication management influences customer engagement among these travel groups.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The increasing growth of these travel groups in Addis Ababa has created many opportunities for domestic tourism, but it has also introduced communication challenges that affect both their operations and the people who depend on them. Studies show that many small tourism actors operate informally, without any structured systems for information flow or customer coordination (Bekana, 2023). As a result, customers commonly experience confusing itineraries, very delayed responses, last minute changes, cancelations and inconsistent updates issues that loosens trust and reduce the willingness to stay engaged with the travel groups.

Communication gaps extend beyond customers. Research on customer collaboration in Ethiopian tourism highlights that service providers such as guides, local communities, and transport operators rely mostly on precise and accurate information to deliver their services (Reta & Beldados, 2025). When communication is not properly managed, coordination b/n teams and tasks loosens down, leading to operational difficulties and less satisfaction among partners who expect reliable interaction.

These problems are heightened by the reason that most youth led travel groups in Addis Ababa operate with the bare minimum staff, relying on one or two individuals to manage bookings, logistics, and digital communication simultaneously. From a customer management vieew, organizations that fail to address the information requests of their customers often struggle to maintain strong relationships and long term support (Freeman, 1984). This is particularly

significant in small tourism businesses, where customer expectations and service delivery are closely linked.

The gap between expected and actual communication quality affects customer engagement. Evidence from tourism research shows that when communication is not consistent, customer engagement and satisfaction decline, making it difficult for tourism initiatives to build loyalty or maintain credibility (Nur Adhifa et al., 2025).

Although these issues are widely observed in practice, there is not that much academic research showing detaily how communication management within these emerging travel groups influences customer engagement. Most existing literature on Ethiopian tourism concentrates on national level challenges and broad policy and perception issues, leaving the everyday communication dynamics of small, digitally driven travel groups totally unexplored. This study will adress this gap.

1.3 Research Questions

To address the issues raised under the statement of the problem, this study will answer the following research questions.

1. How does start up travel groups in Addis Ababa currently handle their communication with Customers?
2. What communication challenges do these groups face in their daily operations?
3. How does the modes of communication management influence Customer engagement?
4. What factors within proper communication help increase trust, participation, and strngthen lasting relationships with customers?

1.4 Research Objectives

1.4.1 General Objective

The general objective of the study is to assess how communication management influences customer engagement among start up travel groups in Addis Ababa.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

- To examine the communication methods used by startup travel groups.
- To identify key communication challenges faced by these groups.
- To analyze the relation between communication management and customer engagement.
- To explore how improved communication could enhance customer trust, participation, and satisfaction.

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study offers value to different groups. for startup travel organizers, it provides insights into how structured and proper communication can build stronger relationships with customers and. For the tourism industry, it highlights how small travel groups can play a higher role in promoting domestic tourism when communication practices improve. For researchers and academics, it fills a gap in local literature about communication and customer engagement in youth led tourism enterprises, which is an area that is rarely studied in Ethiopia. Finally, for policymakers and support organizations, the findings could guide capacity building programs for tourism startups.

1.6 Scope of the Study

1.6.1 Geographic Scope

This study focuses on startup travel groups operating within Addis Ababa, where most youth owned, and digitally coordinated travel initiatives are based. Although these groups often organize trips to destinations in Ethiopia, the research is limited to their operations, communication practices, and interactions with customers within the city, where planning, coordination, marketing, and customer engagement primarily occurs.

1.6.2 Time Scope

The study examines communication practices and Customer engagement within the period from 2020 to 2025, covering both post COVID growth of travel groups and the growing communication patterns that followed. This timeframe allows the research to capture how

travel groups adapted during the pandemic recovery years and how their communication approaches have changed as domestic tourism continued to expand.

1.6.3 Methodological Scope

This study employed a quantitative research design, focusing on measurable patterns of communication management and customer engagement among selected travel groups. Data were collected through questionnaires **and** distributed to customers and service partners, supported by descriptive and statistical analysis. The research does not include qualitative methods such as interviews or focus group discussions, and it excludes large, registered tour companies.

1.7 Limitations of the Study

Access of data was one of the hardest challenges when it comes to getting data from travellers, even some of them hesitate to discuss internal communication problems. In addition, the growing nature of social media driven businesses means that practices observed during the study might grow quickly. Limited resources may also restrict the number of groups included in the sample. Despite these limitations, the study aims to provide a clear understanding of the core relationship between communication and customer engagement.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. **First Chapter** discusses about introducing the topic, presenting the problem, and outlining the overall reason of the research. **Second Chapter** provides an existing literature review of communication management and Customer engagement, drawing on theoretical foundations and empirical studies. **Third Chapter** describes the research methodology, including the design, data collection tools, sampling approach, and methods of analysis. **Fourt Chapter** presents the results of the study and offers an in-depth analysis of the findings. Finally, **Fifth Chapter** concludes the research by summarizing key insights and offering recommendations for practical application and future studies.

1.9 Definition of Key Terms

Communication Management – The planned and intentional process of creating, sharing, and managing information among customers.

Customer Engagement – The level of involvement, participation, trust, and responsiveness of individuals or groups who interact with or are affected by a travel start-up.

Start-up Travel Groups – Newly emerging, youth-led, often informal travel-organizing teams that coordinate trips, tours, and adventures mostly through digital platforms.

Digital Communication Channels – Social media platforms, messaging apps, and other online tools used to interact with customers and partners.

Chapter Two

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This chapter is devoted to review of relevant literature related to communication management and customer engagement within the tourism sector, with a focus on start-up and small scale travel groups. The reviews were from different books and articles which previously done and written by different scholars, journals and publishers. Communication management and Customer engagement are discussed in detail. Theoretical models which are asserted by previous researchers are depicted, empirical literatures also included and finally the conceptual framework of the study is drawn.

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

2.1.1 Communication and Communication Management

Communication originated from the Latin word *communis.* Lunenberg (2010) that stipulate communication has its root in Latin from the word *communis,* which means 'common', which suggests that there must be a common understanding of the message or idea between the source and the receiver concerning the message being communicated. Communication refers to how people convey and understand messages.

The general view of communication is that it is an interaction within a social context, and it usually involves a sender and a receiver. It involves the interlocutors exchanging signals. These signals could be verbal or graphic, it could be gestural or visual. In essence, communication involves using codes that are done with the eyes, body movement or sounds made with the voice. Whichever way it is done, there is always a process in which someone initiates a meaning intent that is passed to the receiver. Daniel (2016) asserts that it is when feedback, which involves the receiver responding to the signal by initiating another circle of meaning exchange, has been sent to the sender that the communication process has gone full circle and become complete. Communication is not merely exchanging words rather its connecting minds (Shannon and Waver,)

Communication management refers to the planning, implementation, and evaluation of communication activities within an organization and between the organization and its customers. It involves not only transmitting information but also creating relationships,

managing expectations, and ensuring mutual understanding. In service oriented industries such as tourism, communication management plays a central role because services are intangible and highly dependent on customer perception.

Communication Management, as the term implies means systematic supervision of communication related activities with the aim of bringing about a systematic change and an achievement of the stated objectives of the or an extension agency.(The Peoples University)

Brønn, Peggy S. (2014) Defines communication management as the steering of all communications in the context of the organization. The author provides a review and clarification of different conceptual approaches to communication management: as a special way of managing; as, equivalent to public relations defined as managing communication itself; as part of corporate communication, including organizational communication, marketing communication, and management communication; or with a focus on integration, cooperation, and interaction between communication functions.

Gregory and Anne (2018) Defines communication management as a way of managing and organizing communication, which is oriented toward making a strategic contribution at different levels of and adding value to the organization.

Prayudi (2018) describes communication management in tourism as a relational process that connects service providers with customers, communities, and institutional actors. Unlike manufacturing sectors, tourism experiences are created by different customers, making communication a continuous process rather than a one way exchange.

The nature of communication management in startup travel groups differs from that of established organizations. These groups often operate without formal or structured communication or any written strategies. Instead, communication is fully handled informally through digital platforms, personal networks, and different interactions. Despite this communication remains highly strategic because it directly influences booking decisions, customer satisfaction, and customer cooperation.

In current times, Communication management has increasingly shifted toward digital platforms due to growing internet access and extreme mobile phone usage. Wagaw and Mulugeta (2018) noted that technology have transformed tourism promotion and customer interaction, allowing even small operators to reach large audiences. However, this shift also

places greater responsibility on travel groups to manage information accurately and consistently.

Communication Management overview

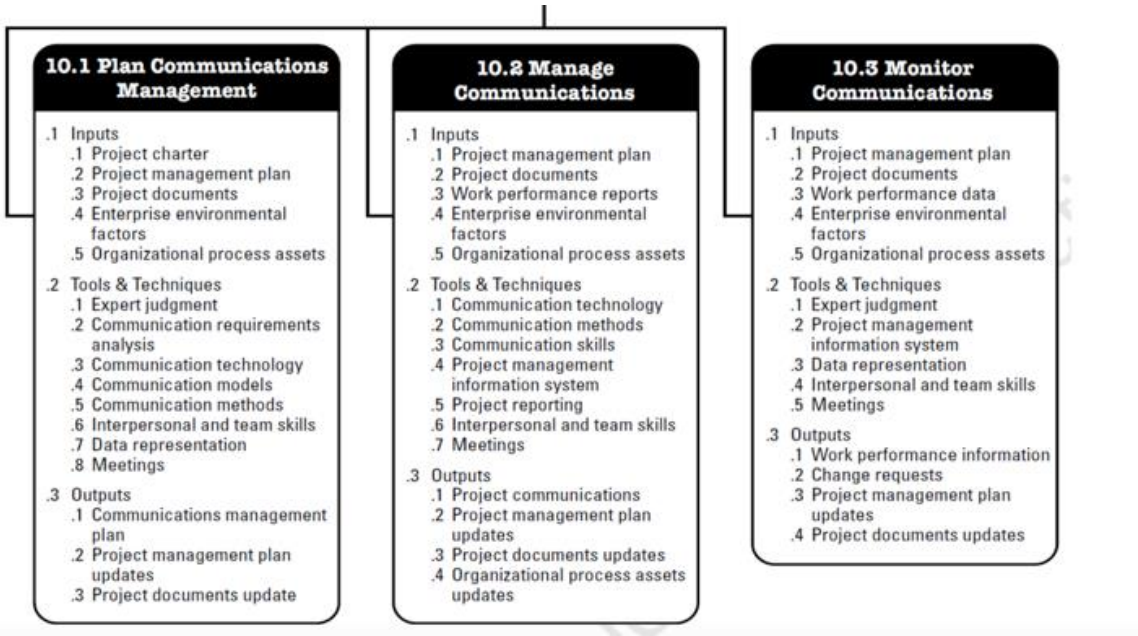


Figure 2. 1 Communication overview (PMBOK 7th Edition)

2.1.2 Customer and Customer Engagement

The broad, inclusive definition of the term customer encompass anyone, or any group, directly or indirectly affected by a project, as well as those who may have interests in a project and/ or the ability to influence its outcome, either positively or negatively. It might does not have to be a direct user of, or directly affected by, project outcomes to be influenced by them (Durham et al, 2014) Institute of Development Studies (2013) defines customer as anyone who has a 'stake' or an 'interest' in a particular initiative. In other words, customers can have an interest in an organisation, in a specific initiative or project, or in an overarching policy or objective to which specific initiatives contribute. Given this diversity, customers are often grouped together into similar categories, like 'direct beneficiaries' or 'policy makers'.

Customer theory emphasizes that each organization's customers is vital to the success of the business, and it is the responsibility of the management to ensure their interests are moving in the same direction and align with the initiative objective. Therefore, the organization policy-making process should involve customer representation. Organization must be able to communicate and build good relationship with all relevant customers. Pyrudin (2018)

Achetkamp & Vos (2007) Defines customer management as the wide range of tools and practices an organization can use as a mechanism for consent, control, cooperation, accountability, employee involvement and participation, enhancing trust, enhancing fairness and corporate governance by involving customers in its organizational activities. It is set of activities that facilitate an exchange of knowledge between customers. This may include one-off activities, but is usually a longer-term process of mutual learning (Ashworth & Skelcher et al, 2005)

Customer engagement refers to the process by which organizations involve individuals or groups that have an interest in or are affected by their activities. Freeman's (1984) Customer Theory provides the foundational framework for understanding this concept. According to Freeman, customers include anyone who can affect or be affected by organizational objectives, such as customers, suppliers, employees, communities, and regulators.

In tourism, customer engagement is somehow complex because the industry relies on interconnected actors. The experience of travel depend on coordination among transport providers, accommodation facilities, guides, local communities, and customers. Engagement therefore involves communication, collaboration, trust building, and shared decision making.

Nur Adhifa et al. (2025) emphasize that customer engagement in tourism is linked to satisfaction and sustainability. When customers feel informed, respected, and involved, they are more likely to support organizations initiatives and maintain good relationships.

In Ethiopia, customer engagement has been identified as a key factor in tourism development, especially in community based and cultural tourism initiatives. Bekana (2023) highlights that customer involvement enhances ownership, trust, and long-term benefits, but only when communication channels are clear and inclusive.

2.1.3 Importance of Communication Management in Tourism

Effective business communication is a prerequisite for the successful performance of any company; however, its importance is particularly evident in the service Industry, where it is the essence of the service business. When it comes to tourism and hospitality, the significance of communication is even greater because communication in tourism goes far beyond conveying information and it has a much deeper meaning, especially in the interaction between tourists and employees (Jameson, 2007;Lolli, 2013, Nikolich & Sparks, 1995) Employees in tourism

and hospitality should be carefully recruited and need to receive continuous training, because their communication skills are an important indicator in generating positive interaction with customers especially with customers (Tankovic, 2020).

Communication management is essential in tourism because it shapes others views before, during, and after the travel experience. , Tourism services cannot be tested in advance unlike physical products, making information reliability very essential. Clear communication reduces uncertainty and builds confidence among travellers.

Research repeatedly shows that effective communication improves customer satisfaction, loyalty, and promotion. Nur Adhifa et al. (2025) found that communication quality significantly influences tourist satisfaction, especially when in line with customer expectations and supportive policies.

For any travel groups, communication management is not only an operational function but also a survival mechanism. These groups rely heavily on repeat customers, referrals, and online engagement. A single communication failure such as unclear pricing or last minute schedule changes and cancelation can result in public criticism and loss of trust.

Damte (2023) observed that during the post-COVID recovery period, Ethiopian tourism businesses that communicated transparently and consistently were better positioned to retain domestic tourists. This highlights the role of communication in crisis management and recovery.

2.1.4 Processes and Principle of Communication Management

Communication is a process of exchanging verbal and non-verbal messages. It is a continuous process. The communication process is dynamic in nature rather than a static phenomenon. According to Mohanhlal University Process of Communication consists of the following steps or stages

(i) Message: This is the initial entity and the first step to the process of communication; which, by forming the subject matter of communication necessitates that kick start of a communication process. The message might be a factor an idea, or a request or a suggestion, or an order or a grievance.

(ii) Sender: The actual process of communication is initiated at the hands of the sender called the also the source; who takes steps to send the message to the recipient.

(iii) Encoding: Encoding means giving a form and meaning to the message it through expressing it into – words, symbol, gestures, graph, drawings etc.

(iv) Medium: It refers to the method or channel, through which the message is to be conveyed to the recipient. For example, an oral communication might be made through a person or over the telephone etc.; while a written communication might be routed through a letter or a notice displayed on the notice board etc..

(v) Recipient (or the Receiver): Technically, a communication is complete, only when it comes to the knowledge of the intended person i.e. the recipient or the receiver.

(vi) Decoding: Decoding means the interpretation or translation of the message by the recipient – with a view to getting the meaning of the message It is at this stage in the communication process, that communication is philosophically defined as, 'the transmission of understanding.'

(vii) Feedback: To complete the communication process, sending feedback to communication, by the recipient to the sender is imperative. 'Feedback' implies the reaction or response of the recipient to the message, comprised in the communication. All told, communication is a circular process, as illustrated, by means of the following circular diagram.

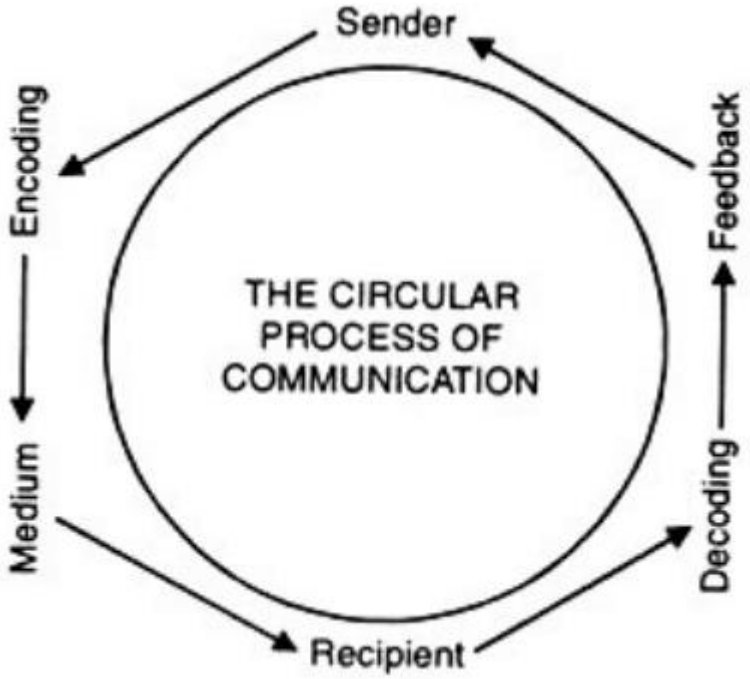


Figure 2. 2The circular process of communication

Principles of Communication:

In order to be effective and meaningful, the managerial function of

(i) Principle of Understanding: Communication must be such, as transmits understanding of the communication message to the recipient as per the intentions of the sender. A practical application of this principle requires that the message must be clearly expressed whether made orally or in writing. Further, the message must be complete – leaving no scope for any doubts likely to confuse the recipient and compel him towards a misinterpretation of the message.

(ii) Principle of Attention: Communication must be made in such a manner, that in invites the attention of the recipient to it. For a practical application of this principle, it is imperative that not only must the message be expressed in a pleasant and sound manner; but also the purpose of the sender making communication must be absolutely clarified.

(iii) Principle of Brevity: The message to be communicated must be brief; as usually the recipient, specially an executive, would not have much time to devote to a single piece of communication. However, brevity of the message must not be sought at the cost of clarity or completeness of the message. The sender must strike a balance among these three factors -brevity, clarity and completeness.

(iv) The Principle of Timeliness: The communication must be timely i.e. it must be made at the high time, when needed to be communicated to the recipient. An advance communication carries with it the danger of 'forgetting', on the part of the recipient; while a delayed communication loses its purpose and charm, and becomes meaningless, when the right time for action on it has expired.

(v) The Principle of Appropriateness (Or Rationality): The communication must be appropriate or rational, in the context of the realization of organizational objectives. Communication must be neither impracticable to act upon; nor irrational, making no contribution to common objectives.

(vi) Principle of Feedback: Communication must be a two-way process. The feedback (or reaction or response) of the recipient to the message, must be as easily transferable to the sender, as the original communication made by

the sender. The idea behind emphasizing on the feedback aspect of communication is that it helps the sender to modify his subsequent communications in view of the reactions of the recipient – making for better and improved human relations.

(vii) Principle of the Constructive and Strategic Use of Informal Groups: The management must not hesitate in making a constructive and strategic use of informal groups, for ensuring and facilitating speedier communication in emergency situations. Such a use of informal groups would also help develop good human relation by upgrading the status of informal groups and their leader.

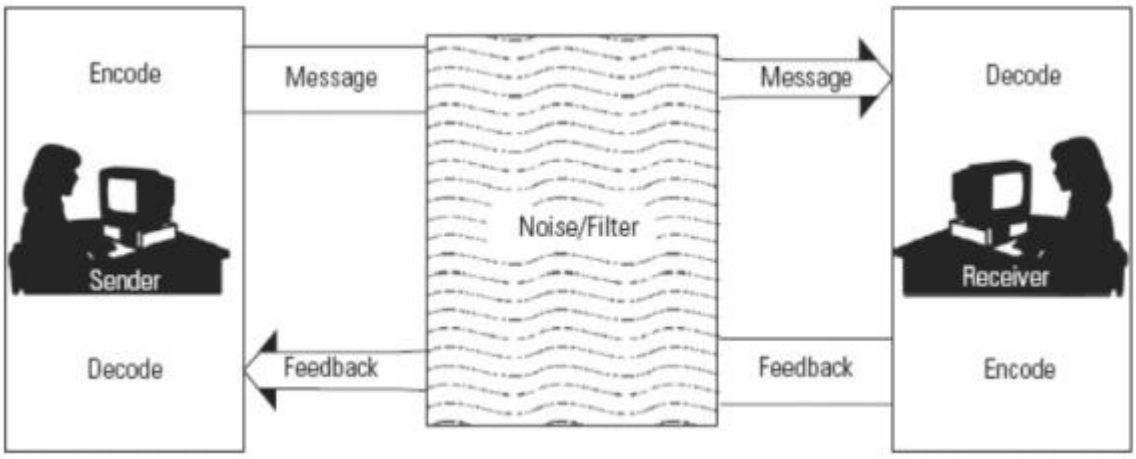


Figure 2. 3 Communication process (Burka & Baron, 2014)

Bayelegne et al. (2022) note that digital communication has become a dominant tool in Ethiopian tourism promotion, allowing small operators to interact directly with customers. However, they also stress the need for consistency and professionalism in digital messaging.

2.1.5 The key elements of a successful customer communication plan

The business firm or a project to be successful in managing customers through their intervention and process they need to plan their communication carefully and diligently and that include the following key elements:

Identify your customers: The first step of any effective communication strategy is to identify and differentiate the people you're going to communicate with. Ask yourself these important questions: Who is going to have an interest or influence on this project? Who is going to be

influenced by the outcome of this project or the business operation? Customers usually fall into two categories: internal customers and external customers. It's important to gather information about customers' roles, levels of interest, and influence. Use a customer map to arrange them from most to least influential and interested. This will help in tailoring the communication through the messages as per their needs and preferences.

Set your communication objectives: Arguably, the most important part of your customer communication plan is to set clear communication objectives upfront and define what you're looking to achieve. Maybe that's educating and knowledge-sharing for awareness with a broad audience or influencing an already engaged subset of people to take a specific action. Navigating your communication goals and defining their objectives with clarity is not just nice to have; it's business critical. Set your communication objectives with confidence and you'll find you win twice—once with your target audience and again with your own customers.

Choose your communication methods: After setting your objectives, it's really important to set the methods of communication that would be most relevant to your customers. Consider where you will have the most success when reaching out to your customers. What message will you be sharing with them? Some of the communication methods you choose may be in the form of newsletters, emails or social media (Sustained.net).

2.1.6 Challenges of Communication Management

According to growthplatform.org Communication affects all areas of the business: how you interact with prospective and active customers; how you communicate internally between teams; how knowledge is utilised; how leadership cascade key messages to managers and teams; and how you present your products and services to the market. Small start-ups often face unique challenges when it comes to effective communication, both internally within the organisation and externally with clients and partners or customers. Ineffective communication is a common dysfunction that can create vulnerabilities in the business and can inhibit an SME from scaling up.

Communication barrier is another issue wherein miscommunication leads to mistrust and misapprehensions as differences might arise from communication styles and cultural trends. Plus, establishing trust is further taxing, which is a strong foundation for a strong customer relationship, oftentimes hard-won but easily lost. Lack of transparency, unfulfilled reckonings, and historical grievances fabricate cynicism among customers that affect businesses explicitly in complex business environments (Raghunath, 2023)

Despite its importance, communication management presents several challenges for small and startup travel groups. One major challenge is limited human and financial resources. Many groups depend on one or two individuals to manage marketing, bookings, customer service, and customer coordination simultaneously.

Reta and Beldados (2025) found that in Ethiopian cultural tourism settings, customer collaboration is often weakened by communication gaps and unclear roles. These challenges are amplified in informal tourism enterprises that lack standardized procedures.

Technological challenges also affect communication effectiveness. Although tech tools offer opportunities, Wagaw and Mulugeta (2018) identified issues such as inconsistent connectivity, limited content creating skills, and access to technology.

Another challenge is managing customer expectations. Customers may expect instant responses and flawless service, while service providers operate under practical constraints. Without clear communication, these mismatches can lead to dissatisfaction and conflict (Raghunath, 2023)

2.1.7 Impact of Communication Management on Customer Engagement

Effective communication has a straight on impact on customer engagement as studies show that transparency, responsiveness, and consistency strengthen trust and encourage participation. Quinlan et al. (2013) emphasize that customer engagement improves when communication allows for dialogue rather than a one way information flow.

In tourism, engaged customers are more likely to work together, recommend services, and maintain a long term relationships. Nur Adhifa et al. (2025) link strong communication practices with higher levels of tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

In Ethiopia, Bekana (2023) demonstrates that customer engagement in tourism development initiatives improves when communication includes inclusion and shared understanding. For startup travel groups, this means actively involving customers and partners through updates, feedback, and open communication channels.

2.1.8 Communication Management Components

2.1.8.1 Quality of Communication

The concept of communication quality encompass different generic communication criteria's such as relevant & comprehensible information content , relevant understandable action aspect which includes truth, sincerity and rightness that can be well rounded to clarity and accuracy of communication in timely manner (Eriksoon, 2000). In the context of business communication quality can be defined as communication actions with qualities that highly contribute to business relationships based on mutual understanding and trust (Gronroos, 1990)

Generic communication quality criteria	Validity claims
C1Communication with a relevant and comprehensible information content	comprehensibility
C2 Communication with a relevant and understandable action aspect	truth, sincerity, rightness
C3 Comprehensible communication	comprehensibility
C4 Trustworthy communication	truth, sincerity, rightness
C5 Communication that can be criticised, controlled and defended	comprehensibility, truth, sincerity, rightness

Table 2. 1Generic Communication quality criteria (Eriksoon, 2000)

Quality of communication encompass message clarity and accuracy refer to how well information is given and how correct that information is. In the context of startup travel groups, this includes clearly explaining travel itineraries, pricing, schedules, safety guidelines, and expectations (Bergman and Kletsjo, 19950). When messages are misunderstood, incomplete, or have errors, customers and partners may misunderstand important details, leading to dissatisfaction or conflict. Clear and accurate communication reduces uncertainty and helps customers make informed decisions. It also signals professionalism and reliability, which are especially important for small travel groups that rely highly on trust rather than formal reputation (Goldkuhl, 1997) Transparency involves freely sharing relevant information with customers, including potential risks, changes, and limitations. Consistency refers to delivering messages that align across different platforms and over time. For start up travel groups, transparency builds credibility and understanding by showing honesty and openness, even when different challenges arise. Consistent communication helps clear confusions and creates trust. When messages change frequently or contradict each other, customers may question the

reliability of the organization. Together, transparency and consistency create a stable communication environment that supports long term engagement.

Timeliness refers to how fast and appropriately information is shared with customer it also depicts the quality of Communication. In tourism, information must often be communicated in real time, particularly when there are schedule changes, delays, or unexpected situations. For startup travel groups, timely updates can determine whether customers feel respected and valued and in return delayed communication also causes confusion, missed opportunities, or frustration among customers and service partners. Timely information helps manage expectations and shows that the organization is responsive and accountable (Puja et al, 2019)

Quality of communication believed to be highly a contributing factor for the engagement of customers in well-established business and small start-ups such as travel organizing small business (Reta & Beldados, 2025)

2.1.8.2 Channel of Communication

The classic definition of a communication channel characterizes it as the technical (or formal) means of the communication process that allows us to transfer information from sender to receiver and vice versa (Reinsch & Lewis, 1984) A communication channel includes all the means for the creation and acceptance of a message A channel is a means of communication that an organization can either select to use or can decide not to use. A particular channel could be a preferred option in certain situations or totally ignored in other circumstances. Channels can be used separately or combined with each other (Anna et al, 2017)

Digital communication channels are flexible and allow companies to present their consumers/ customers with customized information across the different target segments (Anca & Madalina, 2021) Companies expend 5% of their annual budget to facilitate their digital means of communication especially after the incident of Covid-19 pandemic (Statista & Guttamann, 2021)

The adage, '*If a company cannot be found in Google, it does not exist'* seems to typify consumer behaviour today. It should be clear that the utilization of digital channels is important for brands, and it should be a progression that SMEs should follow too if they want to stay competitive and grow (Hein & Heikki, 2015). Digital communication tools include social

media platforms, messaging applications, emails, and websites used to interact with customers. For startup travel groups in Addis Ababa, tools such as Telegram, WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok and Facebook serve multiple purposes like marketing, customer service, booking coordination, and community building. Effective use of these tools allows travel groups to reach larger audiences, share information quickly, and maintain continuous relations with customers. However, misuse or inconsistent use of digital platforms can result in information overload or confusion. Therefore, managing digital tools strategically is a key component of effective communication management.

Digital marketing is a new approach to business, not just traditional marketing boosted by digital elements (Järvinen *et al*., 2012; Liu, Karahanna and Watson, 2011; Rowley, 2008). It has its own characteristics and dynamics, which should be understood in order to be able to select effective marketing tactics and strategies. Digital channels can be classified in various ways. One way to classify the channels is to present them based on the viewpoint of which party controls the communications (the company or the target audience) and whether communications is one-way or two-way.

	High company control	**Low company control**
One-way	Website Email newsletters Online directories Banner adverting	SEO (Search engine optimization) SEA (Search engine advertising)
Two-way	Company generated blogs Company's own communities	Social Media

Table 2. 2 Classification of digital marketing channels (Hein & Heikki, 2015)

2.1.8.3 Feedback Mechanisms

Undoubtedly, feedback as a process is one of the most critical means of influence for shaping customer and improving organizational performance. Positive feedback can be defined as encouraging feedback, while negative feedback can be defined as discouraging feedback. These two types of feedback affect motivation differently (Giamos et al., 2023).

Feedback mechanisms refer to the ways in which organizations collect, respond to, and learn from customer opinions and experiences. In travel groups, feedback may come through

comments, messages, reviews, or direct conversations. Effective feedback systems allow customers to express concerns, suggest improvements, and feel heard. When travel groups actively acknowledge and respond to feedback, they strengthen relationships and improve service quality. Poor or ignored feedback, on the other hand, can damage trust and discourage future engagement (Nejjari, 2025)

2.1.9 Customer Engagement Outcomes

2.1.9.1 Trust

Trust is a belief that an organization is reliable, honest, and capable of delivering what it promised. In tourism, trust is essential because customers often commit time and money before experiencing the actual service. Effective communication is characterized by clarity, timeliness, and transparency and plays a central role in building trust. When customers consistently receive accurate and timely information, they are more likely to trust the travel group and continue their engagement.

2.1.9.2 Participation

Participation explains the level of involvement and active engagement of customers in organizational activities. For travel groups, participation may include booking trips, giving feedback, collaborating as support partners, or promoting trips within different social networks. Strong communication encourages participation by making customers feel well informed and part of the team. When communication is weak or unclear, customers are more likely to disengage.

2.1.9.3 Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction reflects how well expectations are met or exceeded. In tourism, satisfaction is shaped not only by the actual travel experience but also by communication before and after the trip. Clear information, timely updates, and responsive communication contribute to positive experiences and reduce frustration. High satisfaction increases the likelihood of repeat participation and positive recommendations.

2.1.9.4 Long-Term Relationships

Long term relationships explain the sustained engagement between the travel group and its customers through time. These relationships are built through repeated good interactions, consistent communication, and mutual trust. For startup travel groups, long term relationships are essential for sustainability because they lead to customers coming again, loyal partners, and stable networks. Effective communication management supports these relationships by maintaining an open mind and addressing issues smartly.

The framework proposes that improved communication management leads to stronger customer engagement among startup travel groups.

2.2 Review of Empirical Studies

Studies on communication management and customer engagement in mostly shows that communication plays a very big role in shaping customer relationships, satisfaction, and participation. However, the context, scope, and depth of this study vary highly across regions, revealing important gaps that shows further research is needed.

At the international level, Prayudi (2018) examined customer engagement and communication practices in sustainable tourism development in Indonesia using survey data and interviews. The study found that effective communication particularly two way communication and transparency significantly enhanced community participation and long term loyalty and commitment from customer. The study shows that communication is not merely an information sharing tool but a relational way that brings trust and collaboration among customers. While Prayudi's study provides strong empirical evidence on the importance of communication, it focuses mainly on community based tourism initiatives and does not address informal, startup driven travel groups operating in highly digital environments.

Similarly, Nur Adhifa et al. (2025) investigated the relationship between customer engagement, government policy, and tourist satisfaction. Their studies revealed that proper and clear communication between tourism operators, customers, and policymakers positively influenced tourist satisfaction and engagement levels. The study highlights communication as a mediating factor between institutional actions and customer outcomes. However, this research is carried out at a macro policy level and does not fully study communication management practices at the organizational or project level, especially around startup or small tourism groups.

Quinlan, Lally, and O'Donovan (2013), through a systematic review of customer engagement in destination management, found that destinations with that are properly communicated and received proper updates got higher levels of customer trust and cooperation. This study showed the need for proper and clear dialogue and feedback mechanisms in sustaining engagement. Despite its comprehensive nature, the study remains conceptual and synthesis based, offering limited empirical evidence from developing countries or informal tourism settings.

In the Ethiopian context, empirical research on tourism has largely concentrated on infrastructure, policy, marketing, and development outcomes rather than internal communication practices. The study published in the International Journal of Recent Technology and Engineering (IJRTE) on domestic tourism in Ethiopia highlights the growing use of digital platforms and promotional marketing in stimulating domestic travel. While the study provides valuable insights, it primarily examines tourism trends and promotional strategies, offering limited analysis of how communication is managed within travel organizations or how it affects customer engagement at the operational level.

Damte (2023) conducted a case study on the marketing strategies of star rated hotels in Addis Ababa following the COVID-19 outbreak and internal conflict. The findings indicate that hotels that adopted clearer communication strategies, particularly regarding safety measures and service changes, were better positioned to attract domestic tourists. Although this study undermines the importance of communication during crisis recovery, it focuses exclusively on formal hotel establishments and does not consider informal or start-up travel groups that operate largely through digital platforms and project based activities.

Reta and Beldados (2025) study focused on a review of the influence of several factors on collaboration among tourism customers. They indicate that customer collaboration is influenced by the communication quality, the overall understanding of each customer by all customers, and by the mechanisms used to coordinate customers. While the study does not analyse the use of communication management as a formal process of communication, the authors do not address the use of digital communication tools in creating customer engagement.

Beckana (2023) studied the involvement of customers in creating tourism development for poverty alleviation in Suba Forest, Ethiopia. He indicates that customers' involvement was limited by a lack of established communication channels, inadequate flow of information among customers, and a lack of transparency in the development of tourism. This study provides several contributions to understanding involvement by customers; however, it is limited to developing community-based tourism and to identifying outcomes for socio-economic development, rather than identifying customers involved in initiating the start-up of tourism or managing communications between customers in travel cooperative groups.

Overall, the studies reviewed above provide evidence that communication is a critical variable that affects customer engagement. While numerous empirical studies have been conducted on collaborative tourism in objective settings, few have focused on the systematic study of communication management as a formal process for informal and youth-led start-up tourism groups, particularly in a digital, project-based environment.

2.3 Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study adopts Freeman's (1984) Customer Theory as its theoretical foundation. Communication management is treated as the independent variable, while customer engagement is the dependent variable.

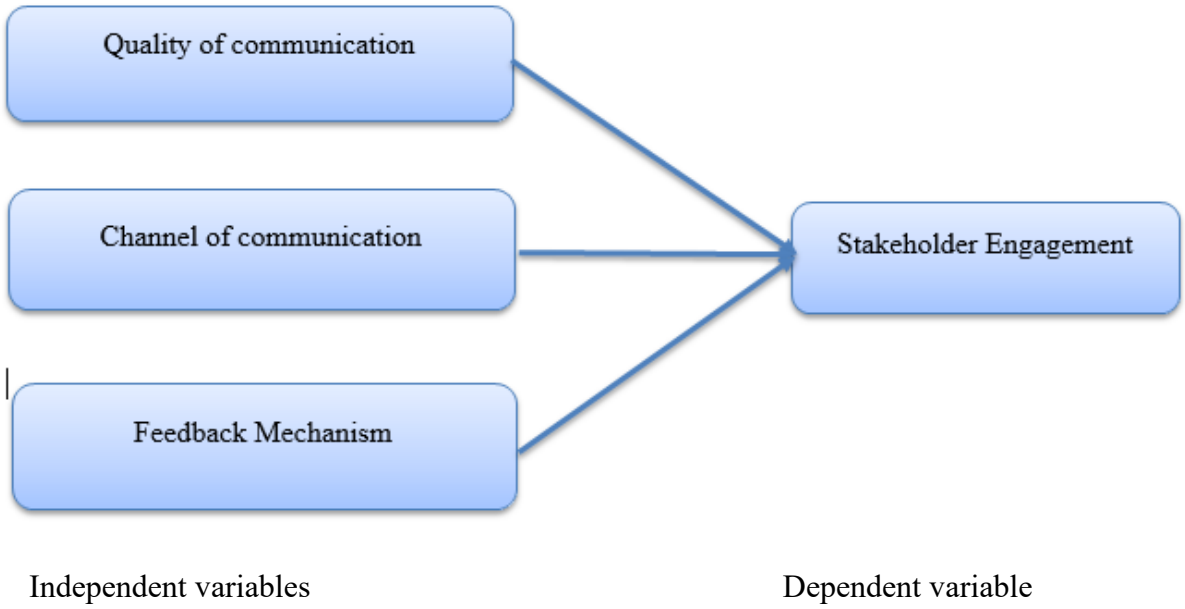


Figure 2. 4 Conceptual framework of the study (source: own study)

Chapter Three

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter shows the methodological choices taken to investigate how communication management affects customer engagement among startup travel groups in Addis Ababa. It explains the research design, key study variables, study area and population, sampling procedures, data collection and analysis methods, as well as reliability, validity, and ethical considerations. Overall, it demonstrates that the study was conducted through a structured research process that aligns with accepted academic and ethical standards.

3.1 Research Design

Research design is an inquiry for research methods (qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods) used to conduct the research. The research design is the general plan of how the research will going to answer the research questions (Saunders et al. 2016). A research design is a grand plan of approach to research topic, it depends on a range of factors such as research topic, audience for the research, timeline of the research and resource available for the study (Sue and Joe, 2018). It is overall plan for relating the conceptual research model to relevant and practicable empirical research, strategic selection of research design should consider an approach that allows for solving the research problem in the best possible way (Pervez et al. 2020) the research design constitute the research blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data (Cooper,2011). Hence the main objective of this research is to assess the effect of communication management on customer engagement explanatory research design is employed. Therefore to collect and analysed the data quantitative type of research design was employed.

Quantitative research is an approach for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among construct variables (Creswell, 2018). Quantitative research examines relationships between variables which are measured numerically and analysed using a range of statistical and graphical techniques (Saunders et al. 2016). This research investigated the impact of communication management on customer engagement by using quantitative research approach and using strategy of inquire (questionnaire) which fits quantitative analysis.

3.2 Research Approach

The objective of the study and source of relevant information for the study requires to employ quantitative research approach where numerical data about the impact of communication management on customer engagement were gathered through structured questionnaire adopted from Downs & Hazens' (1977) standardized metrics from communication satisfaction questionnaire and the Project Management Institute (2017) framework for customer engagement using five point Likert scale rating. Then the collected data were analysed to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis.

3.3 Description of Study Variables

After conducting careful review of different literature regarding the topic and in addition getting good insights regarding communication management and its impact on customer engagement and the researcher come up with the following variables (both dependent and independent variables)

Independent variables

- Quality of communication
- Channel of communication
- Feedback mechanism

The dependent variable is customer engagement that encompass trust, satisfaction, participation and long term relationships with the start-ups.

3.4 Study Area and Target Population

The study is conducted in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Addis Ababa was chosen because it functions as the central hub for youth-led start-up travel groups and digital tourism initiatives. Many of these groups operate informally and rely heavily on social medias such as Telegram, WhatsApp, and Instagram to coordinate and organize travel activities and interact with customers.

A population is a group of individuals having one or more characteristics in common (Thomas, 2021). Due to precise nature of the research topic the population of the study were consists of 81 individuals who were part of the travel which is organized by those small start-ups at least one time. Those respondents are believed to be customers in the start-ups and also have different roles in the start-ups.

3.5 Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

A census is the total collection of element about which the researcher wish to make some inferences. It is obtaining information from everyone in the population set it's just like complete enumeration of the population and participated them in the study. Two conditions are the driving reason to implement census over other sampling techniques they are: if the population is smaller and elements of the population is smaller and elements of the population is variable (Cooper, 2011). This study uses census method to address the target population because the population is smaller and include concerned customers for the study only who involved in trips which is organized by the small start-ups.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

Data collection is an important and vital part of the whole process of research. Measured facts as basis for reasoning calculation and decision making. The intention is to make inference based on collected data (Thomas, 2021). The study use both primary and secondary data from different sources. The primary data for the study were collected through structured questionnaire electronically using Google forms and secondary data has been gathered from journals, books, articles, previous researches and different publication. The study used census survey as data collection method through structured self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire proposed for this research is adopted from the work of Downs & Hazens' (1977) standardized metrics from communication satisfaction questionnaire and the Project Management Institute (2017) framework for customer engagement. . For this research. The questionnaire consists of closed ended questions measured on a five point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

The study relies mainly on primary data collected directly from respondents. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire which is adopted from Downs & Hazens' (1977) standardized metrics from communication satisfaction questionnaire and the Project Management Institute (2017) framework for customer engagement

The questionnaire is divided into three sections: demographic information, communication management practices, and customer engagement outcomes. Distribution is carried out online, depending on respondent accessibility.

3.7 Method of Data Analysis

The data is initial collected using structured self-administered questionnaire using Google forms and Google spread sheets. Then main data analysis is conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) latest version software. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, are used to summarize respondent characteristics and key variables. Correlation analysis and Regression analysis were applied to examine the relationship between communication management and customer engagement, while descriptive analysis is used to assess the effect of communication management components on customer engagement. Findings are presented using tables and charts for clarity.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

In order to make sure the measurement of this study are reliable and valid the research consult both and education expert and research professionals and also conduct Cronbach's Alpha reliability test. As per the comments and feedback given from those professionals, the researcher made amendments toward the instrument and rearrange it into sensible order and proposed procedure of data gathering process. The gathered data through questionnaires has been crosschecked with documents so as to make sure authenticity and accuracy.

To assure consistency and determine whether test items are answered and if individual scores remain similar through, the researcher conduct Cronbach's Alpha test and retest method to assure reliability and found out that the reliability of the study is 0.798 which shows its reliable to use the data.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.717	7

Table 3.1 Reliablity statistics for quality of communication (source own survey)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.879	4

Table 3.2 Realiablity statistics for Channel of communication (source own survey)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.828	3

Table 3.3 Realiablity statistics for Feedback mechanism (source own survey)

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.778	7

Table 3.4 Reliablity statistics for Customer Engagement (source own survey)

3.9 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are given due attention throughout the research process. Participation in the study is voluntary, and respondents are clearly informed about the purpose of the research before taking part. Confidentiality and anonymity are maintained by avoiding the collection of personal identifiers and ensuring that data are used solely for academic purposes. Participants are also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any negative consequences.

Chapter Four

Data Analysis and Interpretations

Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to present data analysis and interpretation of the findings of the study. This is done by presenting the result of analysis after carefully analysing the collected questionnaire statistically. This section consists four major statistical analysis and findings such as demographic information of respondents, descriptive statistics of survey's key findings, correlation analysis and then regression analysis respectively. The findings are presented in tables and interpreted accordingly and justified by appropriate literatures.

4.1 Demographic Information of respondents

In the questionnaire first part, respondents were requested to answer general questions about their gender, age group, education level and their year of experience in attending tour events that are organized by the small start-ups. This information's are vital for showcasing respondents' personal and travel related aspects so that they can be identified. As a result this section presents detail demographic information of the respondents.

4.1.1 Gender distribution of respondents

The findings from the study shows that male to female ratio is higher. Men make up 59.3 % of those participated in the study, while women accounts for the remaining 40.7%. This suggests there is no much higher difference in participating both genders in the study.

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	48	59.3	59.3	59.3
	Female	33	40.7	40.7	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. 1 Distribution of respondents by gender (Source: own survey)

4.1.2 Respondents Age Group

As the table 4.2 indicated the age group of 26-35 Years accounts 45(55.6%) which is the highest one in the category. It followed by age group of 18-22 Years by 22 respondents which covers 27.2 % of participants. The third in the ager group coverage rank is goes to age group of 36-46 Years which accounts 11 (13.6%) in the study. The least age group in the study is that of 46

Years and above age group with 3 (3.7%) respondents. According to the respondents age distribution those who are in the age group of 26 to 35 Years are better experiencing travel with small start-ups who operate different tour operation and made up the majority of the respondents in this study.

Age group

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	18-26	22	27.2	27.2	27.2
	26-35	45	55.6	55.6	82.7
	36-45	11	13.6	13.6	96.3
	46 and above	3	3.7	3.7	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. 2 Age group of respondents (source: own survey)

4.1.3 Respondents Educational level

Among the respondents 4 participants which constitutes 4.9 % of respondents' educational level is secondary schooling. 7 (8.6%) respondents are diploma holder. Masters and above holders are 11(13.6%) in the study. Bachelor Degree holders are the majority by 59 respondents which is 72.8 % of the total respondents.

Educational Level

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Secondary	4	4.9	4.9	4.9
	Diploma	7	8.6	8.6	13.6
	Degree	59	72.8	72.8	86.4
	Masters and above	11	13.6	13.6	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. 3 Educational level of respondents (source: own survey)

4.1.4 Respondents number of trips taken with start-up travel groups

According to the findings 13 (16%) have less than one trip experience with start-up travel groups. 37 (45.7%) of respondents have 1 to 3 travel experience with the start-ups. 31 (38.3%) respondents have 4 to 6 trip experience with the small start-ups. This shows the respondents experience with the high number of respondents have more than one travel experience with start-up travel groups.

Number of trips taken with startup travel groups

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	less than 1	13	16.0	16.0	16.0
	1-3	37	45.7	45.7	61.7
	4-6	31	38.3	38.3	100.0
	Total	81	100.0	100.0	

Table 4. 4 Respondents number of trips taken with start-up travel groups (source: own survey)

4.2 Descriptive Statics

Respondents were asked to provide their opinion about the effect of communication management on customer engagement through electronic questionnaire. Various statements have examined every variable in the questionnaire. For the purpose of this study, the statements investigating the same variable were computed to give a composite variable by computing mean and standard deviation values of the responses. The questionnaire concerning about variables such as Quality of communication, Channel of Communication, Feedback Mechanism and finally about Customer Engagement. All the questions are all closed ended and ladled with five point Likert scale rating range from 1 up to 5 where, 1 represents “Strongly Disagree” , 2 for “Disagree” , 3 for “Neutral” for those who undecided on the issue and its neither nor disagree , 4 for “Agree” , 5 for “Strongly Agree”. The mean value which is greater than 3.75 consider as to be positive perception and less than that is negative perception (Alkharusi, 2023). The standard deviation is the measure of the variability of sample distribution value from the mean (Hair et al., 2007).

The first group of questions are regarding “***Quality of Communication***” which measured through questions such as (1) Information regarding travel packages and updates is shared in a

timely manner. (2) The content of the communication provided by the start-ups is clear and easy to understand.

(3) There is a formal schedule or consistency in how the start-ups communicates with its members. (4) The tone of communication used by the start-ups is professional and encouraging. (5) Information shared by the start-ups is consistently accurate and reliable. (6) There is transparency regarding pricing and logistics. (7) There is localized content in language aspect to inform the customers. As indicated in Table 4.5 the mean and standard deviations for Quality of Communication are μ=4.1464 and **σ=.46619** respectively. Thus the result indicates positive perception towards quality of communication for customer engagement.

The second group which consists question for "***Channel of Communication***" to measure it the questions are (1) The start-ups uses variety of communication channels (Telegram, Email, and other social medias) to reach customers. (2) The start-ups provides adequate platforms for customer to communicate. (3) The start-ups effectively uses digital tools to manage and track customer inquiries. (4) There is frequent update on their channels of communication that increase customer engagement. According to Table 4.5 the mean and standard deviation for channel of communication are μ=4.2284 and **σ=.46300** respectively. This result indicates channel of communication is important to customer engagement.

The third group of questions are designed to measure the variable "***Feedback Mechanism***" they are three in number and focus on scaling communication management on (1) The start-ups make quick responses for my inquires. (2) There is digital engagement and feedback mechanism that implemented by the start-ups. (3) There is clear communication during a crisis or change of plans and it participate the customers and scored a mean and standard deviation is as indicated on Table 4.5 it turn out to be μ=3.84477 and **σ=.81317** respectively. This result indicates positive perception of respondents towards the contribution of feedback mechanism to customer engagement.

Variable	N	Mean (μ)	Std.Deviation (**σ**)
Quality of Communication	81	4.1464	.46619
Channel of Communication	81	4.2284	.46300
Feedback Mechanism	81	3.8477	.81317
Customer Engagement	81	4.1323	.4544

N	81		

Table 4. 5 Respondents number of trips taken with start-up travel groups (source: own survey)

4.3 Correlation Analysis

The correlation analysis is a statistical analysis which measures association between variables, which determines how one variable reacts to the change on the other end of paired variable such that if one variable increase 1ow the other variable reacts (Cooper, 2011). When examining relationships/ associations between variables that are linearly linked Peasrson's Product Moment coefficient r is important because it reflects the linear association of variables based on sampling data. The range of **r** is -1 to 1 (Julie, 2020). Values which are lays on the positive range indicates positive correlation between variables such that if one variable increases the paired variable also increases in the same direction simultaneously meanwhile, the negative values shows invers relation/ association of variables which demonstrate if the one variable increases the paired or the other variable may decreases in opposite direction, If **r** is 0 it shows there is no any real relationship between the paired variables. And also +1 value of **r** shows perfectly positive relationship among the variables meanwhile -1 shows perfectly negative association between variables. **r** values near ± 1 are generally exhibiting high degree of relationship (Khotari, 2004).

This study is evaluating the strength of the association between communication management and customer engagement. Communication management represented by Quality of communicaton, channel of communication and feedback mechanism. Those variables were associated using 2 tailed Pearson's coefficient at significant level of 0.01.

Correlations

		Quality_of_Communication	Channel_of_communication	Feedback_Mechanism	Customer_Engagement
Quality_of_Communication	Pearson Correlation	1	.515**	.678**	.575**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	81	81	81	81
Channel_of_communication	Pearson Correlation	.515**	1	.525**	.347**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.002

	N	81	81	81	81
Feedback_Mechanism	Pearson Correlation	.678**	.525**	1	.585**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	81	81	81	81
Customer_Engagement	Pearson Correlation	.575**	.347**	.585**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.002	.000	
	N	81	81	81	81

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

Table 4. 6 Pearson's Correlation results (source: own survey)

As indicated on Table 4.6 the Pearson's correlation coefficient shows that all the variables has positive relationship with customer engagement at significance level of 0.01 and 2 – tailed. Particularly Quality of communication ***r*** is ***r=0.575***, Channel of communication ***r=0.347*** and Feedback mechanism ***r=0.585.*** This shows the value of Pearson's coefficients lays all in the positive range which shows positive relationship of independent variables with the dependent variable customer engagement.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis is a statistical analysis which analyses relationship between one independent and one dependent variable. It shows how significant their relationship is. It also reveals relative strength of different independent variables effect on a dependent variable and also make prediction about the relationship (Marko and Erik, 2014). Regression analysis includes different model analysis such as non-linear, linear and multi-linear models. The two most recognized and used models are simple linear and multiple linear test models (Sebastian, 2020). We need to take into consideration the following assumption whenever we make regression analysis:

I. The regression model can be expressed in linear way therefore the relationship between dependent variable and independent variable is linear.
II. The expected mean error (ε) of the regression model is zero.
III. The variance of the errors is constant (Homoscedacity)
IV. The errors are independent (No Autocorrelation)
V. The errors need to be approximately normally distributed (optional).

4.4.1 Diagnosis Tests

4.4.1.1 Linearity

Linearity is a kind of diagnosis test that assesse the linear relationship between the measured values of a measured and the true or assigned values in a given samples data set (Jhang et al, 2004). Figure 4.1 depicts the linearity of the study presented in the plot and we can conclude that the relationship between independent variables which represent communication management and dependent variable customer engagement.

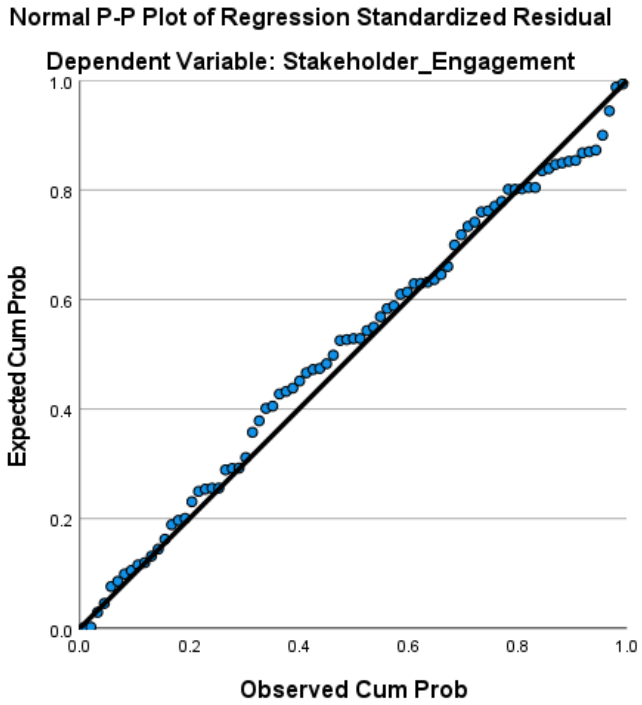


Figure 4. 1 Test output for linearity (Source: own survey)

4.4.1.2 Normality Test

Normality test is a kind of regression analysis test in which analyse the distribution of population to check whether population is normally distributed or not (Nasrin, 2021). Normality analysis can be taken out using graphical and mathematical methods , it is recommended to use graphical method to more experienced users while mathematical method present normality more easier for any user to understand normality of the analysis (Gupta et al, 2019) Figure 4.2 shows normality of the study.

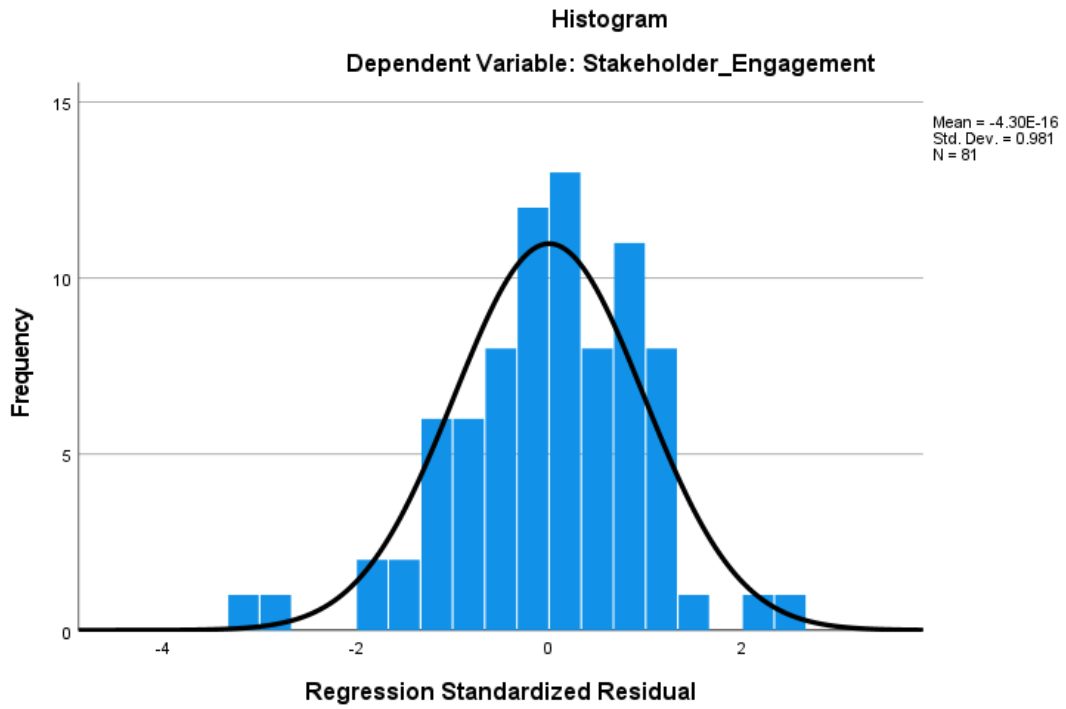


Figure 4. 2 Normality test output (source: own survey)

Tests of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Customer_Engagement	.102	81	.038	.975	81	.120
Quality_of_Communication	.102	81	.037	.976	81	.139
Channel_of_communication	.153	81	.000	.949	81	.003
Feedback_Mechanism	.142	81	.000	.943	81	.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 4.7 Test of Normality (Source own survey)

According to Table 4.7 that shows Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk test of normality for the collected data. As it shows on the result its significant because its p value is less then 0.05 which shows that the data is not normally distributed and can not fulfill some assumptions of regressions such as homescedacity and normality therefore we have to make non parametric tests such as Man Whithny U test and Kurskal Wallis tests.

	Quality of Communication	*Channel of Communication*	*Feedback Mechanism*	*Customer Engagement*
Total N	81	81	81	81
Mann-Whitney U	812.500	797.500	727.000	737.000
Wilcoxon W	1373.500	1358.500	1288.000	1298.000
Test Statistic	812.500	797.500	727.000	737.000
Standard Error	103.387	102.600	102.883	103.475
Standardized Test Statistic	.198	.054	-.632	-.532
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	.843	.957	.528	.595

Table 4.8 Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary (Source: Own Survey)

4.4.1.3 Multicollinearity Test

Multicollinearity occurs when the multiple linear regression analysis includes several variables that are significantly correlated not only with the dependent variables but also with to each other (Noor, 2020). If value of VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) is between 1< and < 5 it said to be the variable are moderately correlated to each other. If the value is smaller that shows the variables show no problem of collinerity (Julie, 202). Table 4.8 shows VIF of variables. As the result indicates the VIF of all the variables lays between 1 and 5 therefore the variables are said to be moderately correlated to each other.

Coefficients [a]

Model		Collinerity Statistics	
		Tolerance	VIF
1	Quality_of_Communication	.505	1.980
	Channel_of_communication	.677	1.476
	Feedback_Mechanism	.498	2.008

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement

Table 4. 7 Collinerity Statistics (source: own survey)

4.4.2 Linear Regression Analysis

Linear regression analysis is a widely used statistical technique for assessing and modeling the relationship between variables. Linear regression model is represented by the following

formula and regression equation is valid only over the region of independent variable contained in the observed data (Douglas et al, 2012)

$$y=\beta_0+\beta_1 x_1+\beta_2 x_2+\ldots\ldots$$

Where x = independent variable (regressor)

y = dependent variable (response)

4.4.2.1 Model Summary

The model fit of the study can be assessed by using adjusted R square and significance of F value. Adjusted R square is a coefficient of determination that shows the degree of the model explains the variation in the dependent variable relative to the mean. The values of adjusted R square is ranges from 0 to 1 where higher value of adjusted R square shows better model fit and it interprets as the variation in dependent variable is explained by variation of independent variable (Douglas et al. 2012). According to Marko and Erik (2014) for academic researches like this one adjusted R square value of 0.75, 0.50 and 0.25 can be described respectively as substantial, moderate and weak.

Model Summary [b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.633[a]	.401	.378	.35848

a. Predictors: (Constant), Feedback Mechanism, Channel of communication, Quality of Communication

b. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement

Table 4. 8 Model Summary (source: own survey)

As shown in Table 4.9 the result of regression analysis multiple coefficients of determination or adjusted R square is R^2= 0.378 that indicates 37.8 % of variance in measurement (customer

engagement) can be explained by quality of communication, channel of communication and feedback mechanism while the remaining 62.2 % are explained by other variables other than this model. The possible explanation for this may be like formality of communication, communication model and accessibility of information and other factors beyond the scope of this study.

4.4.2.2 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA [a])

The result from analysis of variance (ANOVA) tells us whether the proposed model is in a significantly good degree of model fit of the outcome variable (Marko and Erik, 2014) As shown on below on Table 4.10 above the significance result of ANOVA is 0.000 which is way less than p value $p<0.05$, the regression analysis indicates good degree of prediction and fit.

ANOVA [a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.627	3	2.209	17.189	.000[b]
	Residual	9.895	77	.129		
	Total	16.522	80			

a. Dependent Variable: Customer_Engagement

b. Predictors: (Constant), Feedback_Mechanism, Channel_of_communication, Quality_of_Communication

Table 4. 9 Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) (source: own survey)

4.4.2.3 Coefficients [a]

The aim of this study is to identify which variable contributed the most to predict the dependent variable. This can be demonstrated via standardized coefficient Beta. The standardized coefficient mean that "Values for each of the different variables have been converted to the same scale so they can be compared" (Julie, 2020) Thus the next phase requires the function of Beta coefficient or standardized regression coefficient explains the average amount of change in dependent variable that caused by a unit of change in the independent variable.

Coefficients [a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	2.067	.439		4.713	.000
	Quality_of_Communication	.326	.121	.335	2.697	.009
	Channel_of_communication	-.019	.105	-.019	-.176	.860

Feedback_Mechanism	.206	.070	.368	2.946	.004

a. Dependent Variable: Customer Engagement

Table 4. 10 Regression Analysis Summary for Predictor Variable (source: own survey)

As the regression analysis result revealed that for quality of communication, the coefficient parameter (β) is 0.326 and p-value 0.009. This is interpreted as, all other factors held constant, a unit increase in quality of communication will cause a 0.326-unit increase in customer engagement and it is statistically significant at p value < 0.05 confirming that, quality of communication has a positive and statistically significant effect on customer engagement. The coefficient parameter Beta for Feedback mechanism is β=0.206 and p-value 0.004.The interpretation of this result is that if all other factors are held constant a unit increase in feedback mechanism will cause 0.206 increase in customer engagement and it is statistically significant at p-value p<0.05. Whereas channel of communication showed not significantly associated with customer engagement with beta value of (ß= -0.19) with significance of 0.860 which is greater than p=0.05 this indicating no significance. This result align with some scholarly observations that channel of communication does not guarantee in improving customer engagement. According to Daft and Lengels' (1986) richness theory they stipulate a communication channel needs to meet the complexity of the task hence customers dealing with routine, simple information, a lean channel such as email is just effective rather than that of social media posts. Also Cho et al. (2011) noted that channel expansion does not always lead to better customer engagement because it might bring fatigue to the customer and neutralize the specific impact of the communication medium. Mitchell et al. (1997) conclude that engagement of the customer is determined by their power, legitimacy and urgency, not by whether you sent them an email of a newsletter. And also they stipulate the "Human Element" which argued about interpersonal factors such as empathy, listening and responsiveness outweigh the technical channel used to communicate.

Chapter Five

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation

Introduction

This chapter presents discussion summary on the key data findings, conclusion which is drawn from the findings and recommendation for future research works and usage of the study. The conclusion and recommendations emphasizing on the objective of the study.

5.1 Summary of Findings

The study required to examine the effect of communication management on customer engagement with a specific area of small travel organizing groups. It assess the impact of quality of communication, channel of communication and feedback mechanism on customer engagement.

As per the findings all the constructs quality of communication, channel of communication and feedback mechanism had positive correlation with the dependent variable customer engagement thus the result showed those variables can contribute for the high engagement of the customer. The statistical analysis results also support this fact.

The result of descriptive statistics of the study shows all the constructs score more than 3.75 which shows positive perception towards customer engagement that means they contribute for customer engagement.

The regression analysis of the study shows that the data is normally distributed, the independent variable do not have multicollinear relationship the variables (quality of communication, channel of communication and feedback mechanism) of the study shows 40.9% of the variability of customer engagement and the model is fit because the ANOVA significance coefficient is less than p value $p<0.05$.

5.2 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to know and understand how communication management impact customer engagement in small travel start up groups. The finding of the research showed that communication management has impact on customer engagement. The result of the study are discussed regarding to the objectives listed and effect on overall on customer engagement either directly or indirectly. The result showed that there is direct association/ correlation between dependent and independent variables.

To comprehend the fundamental concept and different insights regarding communication management and customer engagement theoretical and empirical literature review was thoroughly conducted. Then conceptual framework was developed to clearly depict the independent variables (quality of communication, channel of communication and feedback mechanism) and dependent variable (customer engagement).

To assess the effect of communication management on customer engagement the study employed explanatory research design. The questionnaire for the study were adopted from Downs & Hazens' (1977) standardized metrics from communication satisfaction questionnaire and the Project Management Institute (2017) framework for customer engagement. The questions designed and send to respondents electronically using Google forms and responses were registered and cleaned using Google spread sheets before it was analyzed using Statistical Software Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27. Using SPSS demographic information of respondents, descriptive statistics of the study, correlation and regression analysis were made.

One of the construct selected to evaluate in the study was channel of communication and it was found out that is not significant because it is way more than the designated p- value compared to other constructs. Therefore those small start-ups should improve their communication channels to make their customers more engaged in the future endeavors.

5.3 Recommendation

As the study indicated and other study's showed communication management plays vital role in customer engagement especially for those small travel organizing start- ups. The three constructs (quality of communication, channel of communication and feedback mechanism) were carefully analyzed and based on the finding of the study and literature review there are some recommendations

- ✓ To be successful and performing well in any projects and business companies should be careful on their communication and they have to manage it with high attention. It is a strategic center especially when the company is small start-up.
- ✓ To improve customer engagement the small startup business should focus on making communication management their strategic center hence their business and projects requires high and frequent engagement through flow of information back and forth.
- ✓ The companies should make highly skilled team to manage their communication with the customers because it became vital to survive and thrive in the business arena.

- ✓ The small start-ups should equip themselves with the necessary technologies to properly reach out to their customers and keep updating it with the state of art technologies.
- ✓ The companies should introduce cut tinging edge communication manage designs to make their customers engage.
- ✓ Companies needs to evaluate and review their communication strategy and performance periodically.

5.4 Research limitation and Areas of further research

5.4.1 Limitation of the study

This research topic "Assessing the effect of communication management on customer engagement" has not been adequately studied especially on small startup business in general and in Ethiopian. Finding prior studies regarding to the topic is rare and difficult. There is little to no literary works regarding to the topic in Ethiopian context that make theoretical and empirical literature reviews bit difficult. The research is limited to start ups who are operating in Addis Ababa only and this also one of the limitation of the study. This kind of groups are new concepts for the tourism sector in Ethiopia and most people have no idea whether they are exist in Ethiopia or not. Other factors that can influence both communication management and customer engagement are not taken into consideration in this research.

5.4.2 Suggested Areas of Further Research

This study is bound itself with a some small start-ups working on organizing travels future researchers are better advised to make vast assessment of more groups across the country not only in Addis Ababa like this research. Also future researches could do:

- ✓ What kind of communication strategy should companies implement to engage their customers effectively.
- ✓ How effective communication management strategy implement and matured through time within the companies' structure.
- ✓ Thoroughly assess the effect of communication management on customer engagement on high level business firms.

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Appendix 1

Questionnaire

ADDIS ABABA UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF COMMERCE OFFICE OF GRADUATE STUDIES

MA IN PROJECT MANAGEMENT

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondent

You are kindly requested to participate on a research study for partial fulfilment of master's degree in Project Management. This questionnaire is designed to collect the necessary information for the research titled "Assessing the Effect of Communication Management on Customer Engagement: The Case of Startup Travel Groups in Addis Ababa". Therefore, your genuine participation in giving reliable information is important for the success of this study. So, I respectfully request your kind cooperation in answering the questions as clearly as possible. I would like to assure you that the information you provide will be used for academic purpose only and all responses will be treated in strict confidentiality. Please keep in mind that all your answers are going to be used only for this study purpose and will be kept strictly confidential.

Please don't write your name or any personal identifier on the questionnaire!

For any clarification needed please contact me on: +251943194836
Thank you in advance, for your time.

Yosef Taye

Part I: General Background of the respondent

Please put "✓" mark for corresponding to the choice that most represents you.

1. Gender Male ☐ Female ☐
2. Age Group 18-25 ☐ 26-30 ☐ 31-35 ☐ 36-40 ☐ Above 40 ☐
3. Educational level Primary ☐ Secondary ☐ Diploma ☐ Degree ☐
   Masters and above ☐
4. Year of experience in organizing travel
   Less than 1 Year ☐ 1-3 Years ☐ 4-6 Years ☐ 7 Years and above ☐

Part II: Communication Management

Your level of agreement using the scale: (Tick inside the box)

Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1)

Quality of Communication

No	Description	1	2	3	4	5
1	Information regarding travel packages and updates is shared in a timely manner.					
2	The content of the communication provided by the start-ups is clear and easy to understand.					
3	There is a formal schedule or consistency in how the start-ups communicates with its members.					
4	The tone of communication used by the start-ups is professional and encouraging					
5	Information shared by the start-ups is consistently accurate and reliable					

6	There is transparency regarding pricing and logistics					
7	There is localized content in language aspect to inform the customers					

Channel of Communication

No	Description	1	2	3	4	5
1	The start-ups uses variety of communication channels (Telegram, Email, and other social medias) to reach customers					
2	The start-ups provides adequate platforms for customer to communicate					
3	The start-ups effectively uses digital tools to manage and track customer inquiries					
4	There is frequent update on their channels of communication that increase customer engagement					

Feedback Mechanism

No	Description	1	2	3	4	5
1	The start-ups make quick responses for my inquires					
2	There is digital engagement and feedback mechanism that implemented by the start-ups					
3	There is clear communication during a crisis or change of plans and it participate the customers					

Part III: Customer Engagement

No	Description	1	2	3	4	5
1	I feel well-informed about the start-up's future travel plans and activities					

2	I frequently participate in the discussions or polls initiated by the start-ups.					
3	I feel that my feedback is valued and acted upon by the start-ups management.					
4	I am likely to recommend this travel group to friends or colleagues.					
5	I feel a sense of belonging to the start-up's travel community.					
6	I prefer booking with this start-ups over others due to the way they interact with me					
7	I feel empowered to contribute ideas for new travel destinations or activities					