

**ASSESSMENT OF CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS
TOWARDS FRONTLINE SERVICE EMPLOYEES'
ROLE BEHAVIOURS**

By

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KEY TERMS, DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

To provide clarity and to set certain terminologies for the context in which they were utilised in this study, the definitions of selected terms are listed below.

Service quality:

“A measure of how well the service level delivered matches customer expectations (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985: p. 42).” This thesis focuses on the service quality provided by frontline service employees.

Frontline service employees (FSEs):

The FSEs have personal contact with the customers and so are considered as the face and the voice of a service business (Elmadağ, Ellinger, & Franke, 2008). FSEs represent two actors, being the representatives of a firm (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996) and representing for themselves, but also focusing on their customers as well as their firm.

Service encounter:

A period of time in which FSEs and customers focus on a service (Carlzon, 2000). Apart from embodying the firm, the FSE also represents his/her self. Thus, one side of the dyad in a service encounter represents two actors.

Customer service satisfaction:

“The customer's response to the evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between prior expectations (or some other norm of performance) and the actual performance of the product as perceived after its consumption (Tse & Wilton, 1988: p. 204).”

Customer value perception:

Service value perception refers to the customer's assessment of the differences between the sacrifice and the level of quality of the service s/he received (Park, Park, & Dessouky, 2013).

Perceptions of service value are not only a perceptual matter, but are also relative to past experience. However, without a perception of value customers are also unlikely to return.

Role behaviours:

Role performance, or behaviour performance is the outcome of several forces (Levinson, 1959). Both internal and external stimuli and/or motive can arouse an individual to perform role behaviour.

Service-role behaviours:

Both the service offering of the firm and the way in which the services are delivered can be customised by FSEs (Bettencourt & Gwinner, 1996). FSE may undertake a role separate from that required by the firm, but one which is more aligned to a customer.

In-role behaviours:

In service settings, in-role behaviours of FSEs may arise from explicit obligations as specified in the service firm documents such as performance evaluation forms and job descriptions, or from implicit norms in the workplace (Choi, Baek, & Kang, 2013; Liu, Liu, & Geng, 2013; Tsaur, Wang, Yen, & Liu, 2014).

Extra-role behaviours:

Extra-role behaviours refer to FSEs positive, voluntary, and discretionary acts that go outside the scope of role prescriptions (Kang, Stewart, Kim, & Lim, 2012; Liu et al., 2013; Raub & Robert, 2010; Schepers, Falk, Ruyter, Jong, & Hammerschmidt, 2012).

Prosocial behaviours:

“Designate helping, sharing, and other seemingly intentional and voluntary positive behaviour for which the motive is unspecified, unknown, or not altruistic (Ross, Patterson, & Stutts, 1992: p.

94).” The behaviours that an individual performing prosocial behaviours benefits the society, including oneself and others.

Altruistic behaviours:

“The act is unilaterally directed for the benefit of others and the bestower neither expects nor expresses a desire for a comparable return (Millon, 2003: p. 20).” One characteristic aspect of altruism is that people act altruistically without expectation of any external rewards (Eisenberg et al., 1999).

Role-prescribed behaviours:

The services that the FSEs provide to meet customers’ basic need(s) and queries within their duty statement (definition in this thesis, page 87 Chapter 4). In this thesis, the role-prescribed behaviours include FSEs expertise and job requirement.

Expertise (EX):

The service role performance in which FSEs show their professional knowledge, required skills, abilities, suggestions, providing recommendations, adaptability, giving advice and quality of explanation, and competence during the process of service interaction (Barnes, Ponder, & Dugar, 2011; Dagger & Sweeney, 2007; Lin & Hsieh, 2011; Stock & Hoyer, 2005).

Job Requirement (JR):

The performance standards set by the firms are explicitly based on customer expectations, interests, and expectations (Liao & Chuang, 2004).

Beyond role behaviours:

Beyond role behaviours are those when the FSEs exhibit a personal positive feeling and attitude towards their job and customers (definition in this thesis, page 87 Chapter 4). In this thesis, the

beyond role behaviours comprised four themes: considerate manner, personal-involvement expression, empathy, and rapport.

Considerate manner (CC):

The courtesy of FSEs involves integrity, politeness, consideration, kindness, being well mannered, and friendliness (Chonko, 2015; Froehle, 2006; Lam & Zhang, 1999; Rego & Cunha, 2008; Zaim, Bayyurt, & Zaim, 2010). For this thesis, the components of a considerate manner are courteous and/or kind behaviour of FSEs towards the customer during a service encounter (definition in this thesis, page 92 Chapter 5).

Personal-involvement expression (PE):

For this thesis, the employees have enjoyment, a positive attitude, job satisfaction, and are personally connected with their jobs and service roles (definition in this thesis, page 93 Chapter 5).

Empathy (EM):

Refers to interpersonal process (Wieseke, Geigenmüller, & Kraus, 2012) of an individual to sense and understand another's feelings, thoughts, ideas, experiences, and perspectives (Pilling & Eroglu, 1994; Wieseke et al., 2012). The Interpersonal Reactivity Index explains four separate aspects of empathy: perspective taking, fantasy, empathic concern, and personal distress (Davis, 1980, 1983). This thesis uses two of these four dimensions to explain the empathy, namely perspective taking and empathic concern (page 95 in Chapter 5).

Rapport (RA):

“A customer’s perception of having an enjoyable interaction with a service provider employee, characterised by a personal connection between the two interactions (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000: p. 92).” Rapport is an indicator of relationship quality (Delcourt, Gremler, van Riel, &

van Birgelen, 2013). FSE is the key role in building and keeping relationships with customers (Fatima, Razzaque, & Di Mascio, 2015).

Helping behaviours:

Helping behaviours are when FSEs volunteer to help customers outside of their duty boundary (definition in this thesis, page 87 Chapter 4). In this thesis, the helping behaviour includes only one theme, the performance of tasks that are outside of the formal tasks.

Helping without concern for the duty boundary (WC):

Helping behaviours are an action that provides benefit to a person(s) in need of aid and when there is no prior promise to give a reward in return (Bar-Tal, 1982). Helping behaviours are a voluntarily act. However, there is no guarantee that the recipient will give an external reward in return.

ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates the perceptions of customers towards service-role behaviours, both in-role and extra-role. These two sets of role behaviours have been studied by a number of researchers. Nevertheless, the definitions and distinctions in the role behaviours have received considerable criticisms. Several studies explain that the boundary between both behaviours was poorly defined and led to multiple interpretations. Differentiating in- and extra-role behaviours must be emphasised owing to its importance for both academic and managerial contributions. Role definition is also a powerful factor to encourage extra-role behaviours. Further, in previous studies, both in-role and extra-role behaviours have been considered in the context of employees and supervisors to improve FSEs' performance to meet the firm's interests. Very few studies on FSE role behaviours are placed in the context of customers. The absence of a research focus on customers' perspectives is a reason why the distinction between in-role and extra-role behaviours remain unclear. This thesis, therefore, aims to redefine and clarify the distinctions between in-role and extra-role behaviours by involving the customers.

A mixed method approach was used to conduct this study. First, a qualitative study focused on how FSEs consider firm regulations and rules, what factors drive them to perform role behaviours and how they see their roles towards customers. This study for the first time reveals that there is a three-category classification of service-role behaviours: role-prescribed, beyond role, and helping behaviours. FSEs undertake role-prescribed behaviours to meet the formal role requirements imposed by the firm and customers. On the other hand, beyond role behaviours involve the FSEs' feelings and attitude expression towards their jobs, roles, themselves, and customers. For helping behaviours, the FSEs volunteer to help customers outside of their firm's duty boundary.

The second study, based on a quantitative survey and a structural equation model, investigated how customers perceive the three-category classification of service-role behaviours. The study proposes seven constructs, which reflect a three-category classification of service-role behaviours, to examine how these behaviours affect customer satisfaction and value perception. The empirical evidence demonstrates that the helping behaviours affect value perception, whereas the *considerate manner* construct of beyond role behaviours has an impact on customer service satisfaction. Interestingly, another construct of beyond-role behaviours, *rapport*, positively influences both satisfaction and value perception. This suggests *rapport* acts as a bridging behaviour that links the FSEs actions and emotions to customer perception. However, role-prescribed behaviours had non-significant effects on customer satisfaction and value perception. This thesis contributes to the knowledge of service literature and managerial implications by suggesting that the beyond role and helping behaviours of FSEs have crucial positive effects on customer satisfaction and value perception. Improved perceptions may help to build long-term relationships, customer retention, word of mouth intentions, and customer loyalty.

DECLARATION

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Signature: _____

Date: December 12, 2016

(Phiangdao Chaoluck)

LISTS OF REFEREED CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The following publications are based upon the research presented in this thesis, and may contain materials presented herein.

Chaoluck, P., Medlin, C. J., & Conduit, J. 2012. The Distinction between Helping Behaviour, Prosocial Behaviour, and Altruism: Improving Service Quality. Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference (ANZMAC), Adelaide, South Australia, Australia

Chaoluck, P., Medlin, C. J., & Conduit, J. 2013. The Distinctions between In-Role and Extra-Role Behaviours in Service Quality: The Perceptions of Frontline Service Employees and Customers. Paper presented at the Australia and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference (ANZMAC), Auckland, New Zealand.

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