

A Measurement of Emotional Intelligence in Service Encounters

Wai-Hoe Mok, Yelena Tsarenko, and Mark Gabbott

Abstract

The concept of Emotional Intelligence appears to be able to provide the premise to describe customer aptitude in managing emotions elicited in a service exchange, as well as provide the precedential link to understand customer affective responses. However, given that research in the commercial implications of emotional intelligence has focused predominantly in management literature, no widely accepted scale has yet been developed to assess implications of customer's emotional intelligence in a service context. This paper outlines the development of a new measure, the Customer Emotional Intelligence Scale (CEIS), an adaptation of the Workplace Emotional Intelligence Profile version 3 (WEIP-3) which was designed to profile the emotional intelligence of customers in the context of service encounters. Empirical investigation conducted in the context of service industry supported multidimensionality of the CEIS. Discussion in this paper focuses on the application of the scale in services marketing while outlining avenues for future research.

Keywords: Emotional Intelligence, Measurement, Services, Customer Resource

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1. Introduction

There is a growing interest in the role of emotions and the impact on the consumption experience. Despite acknowledgement of the importance of customer's emotional state as well as emotional response in the service encounter, empirical investigations of customers' affective responses in this area remain scarce. One explanation is that extant studies have yet to develop a conceptual framework to which customer affective characteristics can be captured. A prior study proposed that the concept of Emotional Intelligence (EI) may provide the basis to describe customer intrinsic affective attributes as well as provide the precedential link to understand customer affective responses. The study posited that EI can be conceptualised as a form of resource which customers may harness to serve their co-production role in a service encounter. Emotional

intelligence describes a set of social skills that involves the management and control of intrinsic emotions as well as emotions elicited from a given interactional exchange. Since affective attributes are dynamic and prevalent throughout the entire service encounter, the concept of emotional intelligence may shed light on how customers can utilise their ability to manage emotions to shape and influence the experiential outcome of services.

To successfully test the influence of customer's emotional intelligence on their service experience, development of a measure suitable for capturing emotional expressions in the service context is necessary. Existing scales that measure emotional intelligence are either designed as a broad-based assessment of individual skills in coping with environmental demands, or as a context specific measure of individual or group aptitude

typically administered in the workplace. No scale has yet been developed for general marketing application and specifically in the context of services. Given the unique characteristics in the dyadic interaction between the service provider and the customer, there is a need to develop a specific measure that evaluates customer's emotional intelligence in the service context.

The specific aim of this research was to develop a measure of customer emotional intelligence appropriate for use in service encounters. It is anticipated that the scale development will allow a more in-depth investigation in customer behaviour, particularly in incidental service encounters. This knowledge will provide the premises for the development of more focused marketing strategies in areas such as conflict resolution.

The paper proceeds as follows. We first outline the development of a measure of emotional intelligence for service encounters; the Customer Emotional Intelligence Scale (CEIS). The CEIS is an adaptation of the WEIP-3, a measure of emotional intelligence for workgroups in an organisation developed by Jordan and colleagues (2002). Modifications to the WEIP-3 are focused on changing the context of application from the workplace to the service setting, and from a within-work team interaction to customer-service provider exchange. Second, we assess the psychometric properties of the adopted scale, and finally we discuss limitations and provide suggestions for avenues for further research.

2. Literature Overview

Emotional Intelligence

Since Goleman (1996) asserted that EI explains a higher proportion of variance in individual success than an Intelligence Quotient (IQ), there has been a widespread interest in the topic, particularly in the application of the EI in managerial performance. The study of relating emotions and intelligence is not new. In the 1920s, Thorndike (1920) developed the concept of "social intelligence" to explain aspects of success which could not be predicted by IQ. Gardner resurrected interest in interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligence in the 1980s before the specific concept of emotional

intelligence was mapped in the early 1990s. Salovey and Mayer (1990) described the way individuals can manage emotions, and first coined the term emotional intelligence. Subsequent researchers also advocated their view of what emotional intelligence constitutes. Cooper and Sawaf (1997), for instance, explained EI, or emotional quotient, as a wide array of competencies and skills that drive managerial performance. Bar-On (1997) described EI as a cross-section of interrelated emotional and social competencies, skills and facilitators that impact intelligent behaviour. An appropriate definition of emotional intelligence for the benefit of this study is taken from Mayer and Salovey (1997):

Emotional intelligence is "the ability to perceive, accurately appraise, and express emotion; the ability to access and/or generate feelings when they facilitate thought; the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge; and the ability to regulate emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth" (p. 5).

Mayer and Salovey's model of emotional intelligence is based primarily on four factors: 1) appraisal expression of emotions both verbally and nonverbally; 2) management of intrinsic emotions and emotions of others; 3) emotions as a form of knowledge to cultivate intellectual and emotional growth; and 4) ability to generate emotions to assist problem solving. While in broad terms, Salovey and Mayer (1990) and subsequent researchers in the field have some important differences in the conceptualisation of emotional intelligence, it is in the opinion that Mayer and Salovey's (1997) model is more suited to be applied in the context of a consumer in a service encounter. Their model has a stronger focus on aptitude and intelligence while the other conceptualisations appear to include constructs that have an affinity with individual traits – e.g. empathy, motivation, assertiveness, self-esteem, and independence. As Mayer, Salovey & Caruso (2000) highlight, their original operationalisation of the emotional intelligence construct has developed over time to converge on the affective aspects of cognitive activity. When investigating antecedents to customer response in a service encounter, it will be necessary to distinguish emotional intelligence as a form of competence from

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