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The impact of mood on customer behavior: Staff mood and environmental factors

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ABSTRACT

This review looks at the effect of staff/server mood on customer/client mood and various outcome behaviours such as product and service evaluation. It also looks at the role of other stimulus factors such as scent, sound and light on customer affect and cognitions and thence the effects on purchase behaviours. Based on the service-profit chain model, this review considers the scattered research which empirically demonstrates the impact of staff mood upon customer mood and behaviour. The review then goes on to discuss the various ways in which a customer's mood influences their buying behaviour, as well as considering why and when this occurs. Other physical factors that influence customer mood are also considered. Implications for the management of sales staff and sales environments are considered.

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1. Introduction

Since it was first proposed nearly 20 years ago (Heskett et al., 1994) there has been a tremendous interest in the service-profit chain concept (Kamakura et al., 2002; Yee et al., 2009). The service-profit chain establishes relationships between profitability, customer loyalty, and employee satisfaction, loyalty, and productivity. The argument is essentially this: Company profit and growth are stimulated primarily by customer loyalty which is a direct result of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction is, in turn, largely influenced by the value of all of the services provided to customers. Value is ultimately created by satisfied, loyal, and productive employees. Employee satisfaction then directly influences customer loyalty which, in turn, results primarily from management services and policies that enable employees to deliver results to customers.

In short, profit is driven by customer loyalty and satisfaction which is the result of their overall perception of the consumer experience they have, particularly with customer providers. The theory asserts that management practices directly and consistently influence service staff attitudes and behaviours which influence customer responses. Employee satisfaction drives customer satisfaction which leads to profitability through repurchasing and loyalty, which in turn influences employee satisfaction (Yee et al., 2008, 2009).

This review focuses specifically on how the mood of the customer service provider influences the mood of the customer, and thence in turn, the latter's behaviour. It is a topic that has attracted considerable research over the years (Cohen and Areni, 1991; Gardner, 1985). Grönroos (1990), who focused on customers' perceptions of face-to-face interaction with service employees, considered service provider mood to be one of the most important determinants for service satisfaction and loyalty.

2. Mood at work

Gardner (1985) described mood as a *phenomenological property of a person's subjectively perceived, affective state*. It is not an intense emotion directed at specific targets, but is instead a generalised and pervasive state, without a particular focus. Moods may be distinguished from emotions, which comparatively are more intense, tied to specific behaviours and last longer. Moods are transient and relatively easy to manipulate (Clark and Isen, 1982; Isen, 1984).

A service encounter can be defined as *the duration in which a customer interacts with a service* (Bitner, 1990). This usually involves face-to-face interactions, as well as interactions with the physical elements of the shopping environment (Bitner, 1992; Chandon et al., 1996). The "backdrop" view of mood (Luomala and Laaksonen, 2000) proposes that service provider moods may be so "mild" that customers are not consciously aware of experiencing them.

Research studies have focused on many factors within store having been found to impact upon customer mood, including the

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atmospherics of the service (Baker and Cameron, 1996; Bitner, 1990, 1992), service quality dimensions (Grönroos, 1990; Parasuraman et al., 1985), favourable or unfavourable incidents (Bitner et al., 1990), and employee behaviours (Winsted, 1997, 1999, 2000).

Depending upon the type of service encounter in question, customer mood may vary to a larger or lesser degree throughout the encounter (Holbrook and Gardner, 2000). Customers may enter the service environment in a positive, negative or neutral mood; this mood may remain constant throughout the encounter and shopping experience, or it may alter due to interaction with either the service employees or physical environment. Further, some customers may be fairly “moody” and volatile in their mood swings while others are more stable and less likely to varying over time and in different situations.

In this review we will focus on the impact of employees mood upon customer mood, and consequently, the impact of customer mood upon their shopping and spending behaviour.

3. The influence of staff mood on mood of the customer

Tsai and Huang (2002) termed an employee's expression of emotions in a service encounter ‘*employee affective delivery*’. Expressing desired emotions during a service transaction has been found to enhance the positive mood of customers, as well as increasing their satisfaction with the service received (Brown and Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Pugh, 2001).

Researchers have attempted to identify specific staff behaviours, reflective of their mood state, which impact on customer mood and thence their consumer behaviour. Tsai (2001) focused on friendliness, operationalised by discrete behaviours including smiling, greeting, thanking and eye contact. Tsai and Huang (2002) found, as expected, that staff member friendliness was positively related to customers' positive mood following a service experience.

Luong (2005) presented participants with videos of a service interaction whereby the service provider displayed either positive or neutral affect towards the customer. Participants' mood before and after viewing this footage was assessed. Positive service provider mood was found to be significantly higher after watching a friendly service encounter than after watching a neutral one. This study thus provides some experimental evidence to show that the affective display of a service provider has a quantifiable impact on customer mood.

The influence of employee mood on customers can be seen in the restaurant industry, where tips can be used as a measure of customer-service satisfaction. Lynn (2001) performed a meta-analysis on 24 studies to examine the relationship between perceived service and tipping behaviour. Although weaker than expected, the relationship proved significant, with better evaluations of the service or dining experience resulting in higher tips. Social pressures and norms about tipping an appropriate amount is thought to explain why the correlation was not stronger.

Lynn (2006) manipulated customers' perception of service by teaching waitresses in a cocktail lounge to display either an open-mouthed smile or a close-mouthed smile. Customers tipped 148 percent more in the open-mouthed smile condition. This result suggests a very strong relationship between employee behaviour and satisfaction with service. Lynn (2006) theorised that such behaviours increase tipping though improving customers' moods. This argument is supported by Howard and Gengler (2001), who find that smiling improves others' moods through emotional contagion. It is sensible to assume that those in a good mood will tip more highly and perceive service to be better than those in a worse mood.

The strength of the relationship in comparison to that found in the meta-analysis (Lynn, 2001) may be because of the difference in contexts in which the study occurred. There is probably less social pressure to adhere to tipping norms in a cocktail lounge situation than in a restaurant.

3.1. Dyadic relationship

To what extent does the customer mood, upon entering the store, mediate the relationship between staff and customer mood? Service interactions are dyadic, with customers also contributing to the process and outcome of the encounter (Grove et al., 1998). A study investigating dyadic negotiations found that those interactors in positive moods were less likely to display hostility and more likely to see another's point of view, adopting a problem-solving approach to negotiations (Carnevale and Isen, 1986). Gardner (1985) proposed that customer mood impacts on ones thoughts and behaviours within a service encounter due to the interpersonal nature of such encounters.

Liljander and Mattsson (2002) found that pre-consumption customer mood affected perception of employee service behaviours. This research is considered to be highly reliable and valid as it was conducted in real service settings, with customers completing self-report questionnaires regarding their experience and mood in banks, food outlets and travel agents. This suggests that a customer's mood on entry to a store may mediate the effect of a service encounter, and it thus is likely to be more difficult to enhance mood of certain customers. It is clearly important to take into consideration individual differences in customer moods which may be a function of their personality. This may, in part, account for the variability in experimental studies attempting to manipulate customer mood.

3.2. Why does staff mood influence customer mood?

Many assume that customer mood is influenced by job satisfaction and engagement experienced by the staff with whom they interact. The view that customer mood and satisfaction is derived from employee satisfaction is based fundamentally upon three conceptual models: *emotional contagion* (Hatfield et al., 1993), *the service-profit chain link* (Heskett et al., 1997), and *service climate* (Schneider, 1990). The emotional contagion framework proposes that affect transfer occurs in employee–customer interactions. The mood of each individual in an encounter will influence another, so customers will leave an interaction happier when the employee is in a good mood, and vice versa. It should be noted that different studies measure satisfaction in different ways, but most often this is done by answering a few specific questions (by interview or questionnaire) about the appearance, attitude and/or behaviour of a service provider as well as the total customer experience of a specific episode.

This theory has a micro-focus in the context of person-to-person interactions (Brown and Lam, 2008). The service-profit chain framework takes a more broad view, concluding that happier employees are more productive and able to give a superior service in long-term customer relationships. The service climate framework takes a similar approach to the service-profit chain. It also posits that effects of employee mood will result in improved productivity; however this model focuses on how the employees' perception of management support services affects customer satisfaction. Thus, employees' judgments of their employers will directly affect their customer service and therefore customer satisfaction.

Wilson and Frimpong (2004) argued that employees who are satisfied with their jobs are more likely to engage in pro-social behaviour, such as helpfulness and respectfulness to internal and

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