



## Effective communication styles for the customer-oriented service employee: Inducing dedicational behaviors in luxury restaurant patrons

Juhee Kang<sup>a,1</sup>, Sunghyup Sean Hyun<sup>b,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Department of Apparel, Educational Studies and Hospitality Management at Iowa State University, 7 Mackay, Ames, IA 50014, United States

<sup>b</sup> Department of Tourism and Convention at Pusan National University, Jangjeon-Dong, San 30, Kumjung-Gu, Busan 609-735, Republic of Korea

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Keywords:

Communication style  
Customer orientation of service employee  
Enhancement  
Cooperation  
Advocacy  
Luxury restaurant

### ABSTRACT

The goals of this study were (1) to identify the optimal facets of communication style for customer-oriented service employees and (2) to examine the ways in which the customer-oriented service employee (COSE) induces luxury restaurant patrons' dedicational behaviors. Customer dedicational behaviors are defined as 'a set of active and positive customer voluntary behaviors towards a business induced by high relationship quality'. Based on the existing body of communication literature, nine types of communication styles were derived. Theoretical relationships between the nine communication styles and the COSE also were developed via literature review, and causal relationships between the COSE and three different types of consumer dedicational behavior styles were subsequently suggested. By integrating the derived theoretical hypotheses, a conceptual model was proposed and then tested utilizing data collected from 527 luxury restaurant patrons. The results of data analysis revealed that five types of communication styles (attentive, friendly, impression leaving, open, and relaxed) bear a positive impact on COSE, while one communication style (contentious) bears a negative impact. It was also found that the customer-oriented service employee plays a critical role in inducing three types of dedicational behaviors in consumers: enhancement, cooperation, and advocacy. The key theoretical and managerial implications of these findings are discussed in the latter part of this article.

© 2011 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

### 1. Introduction

Developing and managing customer relationships are critical components in the success of service marketing (Jamal and Adelowore, 2008; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000), and positive interactions with customer oriented service employees help to create long-term customer relationships (Webster and Sundaram, 2009; Wu and Liang, 2005) and increase economic leverage (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Bove and Johnson, 2000; Brown et al., 2002). The existing literature supports that the customer orientation of service employee helps to induce positive customer dedicational behaviors (including enhancement, cooperation, and advocacy) and thus plays a key role in maximizing the revenue of service companies (Bolton and Lemon, 2004; Bove and Johnson, 2000; Kim et al., 2010; Sui and Baloglu, 2003).

Furthermore, service providers' communication skills play a crucial role in inducing positive/effective interaction between customer and employee, an important indicator of a customer oriented service employee (COSE) (Ring and Van de Ven, 1994; Snavely and

McNeill, 2008; Sparks and Callan, 1992; Vadi and Suuroja, 2006). For this reason, possessing an effective communication style is a key characteristic of a COSE (Rahman, 2004; Webster and Sundaram, 2009), which is clearly supported by the existing theoretical background (Erickson et al., 1978; Goldstein, 2009; Hemsley and Doob, 1978; Koermer and McCroskey, 2006; Norton, 1978; Notarantonio and Cohen, 1990; Scherer, 1982).

However, communication style is composed of a variety of complex dimensions and attributes. Norton (1978) has established a foundational communication style construct which includes nine verbal/nonverbal communication styles: animated, attentive, contentious, dominant, dramatic, friendly, impression leaving, open, and relaxed.

Since communication style significantly impacts the effectiveness of a COSE, it is critical to assess which specific communication styles bear the strongest impact on COSE effectiveness and thus most significantly influence customers' dedicational behaviors. In the luxury restaurant industry in particular, COSEs play a crucial role in the success of a business due to the labor-intensive characteristics of this particular business model (Kim et al., 2005; Walker, 2007). From placing an order to making payment, communication between service provider and patron occurs continually throughout the restaurant visit (Brown, 2004; Kim and Ok, 2010). However, restaurant owners/managers currently do not possess a practical

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +82 51 510 1856; fax: +82 51 512 1853.

E-mail addresses: [jkang@iastate.edu](mailto:jkang@iastate.edu) (J. Kang), [shyun@pusan.ac.kr](mailto:shyun@pusan.ac.kr) (S.S. Hyun).

<sup>1</sup> Tel.: +1 702 321 8471.

model that demonstrates the link between communication style, the COSE, and consumer dedicational behaviors. Restaurant owners/managers are therefore under significant pressure to develop more effective communication styles that can induce positive customer evaluations, but they have no practical guidelines to do so. The goals of this study are to (1) identify the optimal communication style for a COSE and (2) examine the ways in which a COSE influences customer dedicational behaviors within the luxury restaurant industry.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Customer orientation of service employee

Customer orientation is a key concept in relationship marketing (Kohi and Jaworski, 1990). Saxe and Weitz (1982) have defined customer orientation at the employee level as the degree to which service providers interact with customers to fulfill customers' needs and increase their satisfaction. Previous scholars (e.g. Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003) conceptualized the COSE as a service employee capable of satisfying the needs and desires of current and potential customers and identified four dimensions of the COSE: technical skills, social skills, motivation, and employees' self-perceived decision-making authority. Technical skills include a service employee's knowledge, expertise, and competency as required in order to serve customers' needs during the service encounter (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Social skills are related to the service employee's ability to understand customers' perspectives in terms of their perceptions, thoughts, and feelings (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Kim, 2009).

Motivation is indicative of the forces that drive an employee's behavior to serve customers (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Kim, 2009). It includes three elements:

- (1) a positive valence of customer-oriented behavior and the consequences associated with such behavior on the part of the employee;
- (2) the employee's self-perception of being able to behave in a customer-oriented way;
- (3) and his/her expectations of reaching the desired outcome through engaging in such behavior (e.g., happy customers, rewards from the employer). (p. 463)

These three elements are essential for service providers to be motivated towards customer-oriented behavior (Kim and Ok, 2010). Service providers with these three elements tend to convey positive emotions during the service process, typically evoking positive customer reactions and resulting in favorable evaluations of products/services (Puccinelli et al., 2010). However, Puccinelli (2006) contended that customers' emotional reactions can vary depending on situations and that customers tend to be attracted to service providers with similar moods and behavioral inclinations. For example, customers in a bad mood may negatively react to the positive demeanor of a service provider (e.g. a wide smile and upbeat tone of voice) because such positive expressions may aggravate the customers' bad moods. Puccinelli also found that customers in a bad mood tend to prefer a service provider who expresses neutral or negative feelings that match the customers' moods. In a restaurant setting, the COSE who can read customer emotions is likely to increase customer satisfaction through empathizing with customers' emotional states. Service employees therefore require the ability to assess customers' feelings/moods properly in order to induce positive emotional responses accordingly. In this regard, a positive valence of customer-oriented behavior means a service employee's ability to read and satisfy customers' feelings to generate a positive consumption experience.

Self-perceived decision-making authority is a service provider's subjective perception and indicates the extent to which a service provider has authority in making decisions related to customers' interests and needs (Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003). This authority is distinct from employee empowerment, which is the objective authority given by the company (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). If employees subjectively feel greater authority, they are more likely to be motivated to serve customers in a friendly and competent manner (Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003; Kim and Ok, 2010).

### 2.2. Communication style

Communication style is defined as "the way one verbally and paraverbally interacts to signal how literal meaning should be taken, interpreted, filtered, or understood" (Norton, 1978, p. 99) and is closely related to "how things are said" rather than "what is said" (Dion and Notarantonio, 1992). A seminal work in this area is Norton's (1978) multifaceted dimensions of communication style, which consist of nine constructs: animated, attentive, contentious, dominant, dramatic, friendly, impression leaving, open, and relaxed. The next section of this study provides an overview of these nine communication styles.

#### 2.2.1. Animated communication style

An animated communication style demonstrates active nonverbal behaviors, including eye contact, facial expressions, body movements, and gestures (Norton, 1978; Montgomery and Norton, 1981) in order to exaggerate or underscore the contents of a message. In a service environment, appropriate nonverbal behaviors are commonly related to the expression of positive reactions, courtesy, and respect, and thus show courteousness to other communicators (Sundaram and Webster, 2000). Moreover, appropriate eye contact, smiling, facial expressions, body movements, and gestures displayed by service providers enable customers to perceive them as customer-oriented, since the service providers appear to take action in a way that increases active interaction between patron and service provider (Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Hennig-Thurau and Thurau, 2003). In the restaurant setting, nonverbal communication plays a significant role in creating friendly situations for service providers to interact with customers (Drago, 2007), and the nonverbal communication tools discussed above can make customers feel comfortable (Markos and Puccinelli, 2004; Sundaram and Webster, 2000). According to Lundqvist (2008), one person's emotional state often influences that of the other party in the process of an interaction. Thus, during a service encounter, the positive emotions of a service provider can be conveyed to customers and can result in customer satisfaction as influenced by the service provider's positive emotions (Jung and Yoon, 2011; Schoenewolf, 1990). Furthermore, based on Lundqvist's (2008) study, it can be hypothesized that customers' positive emotional responses affect service providers' willingness to maintain their relationships with customers and can motivate service providers to provide even better service. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

**H1.** An animated communication style has a positive influence on customer orientation of service employees.

#### 2.2.2. Attentive communication style

The attentive communication style is reflective of the extent to which a person expresses empathy and exhibits engagement in an interaction with other individuals (Norton, 1977). Attentive communicators use various nonverbal signals, such as smiling, nodding, body posture, and eye contact in order to ensure that the other person in the communication interaction is carefully heard (Montgomery and Norton, 1981). The attentive style is strongly related to listening skills and is categorized as an active

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

**ISI**Articles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات