

Positive Effects of Deviant Customer-Oriented Behavior

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Abstract—The present study was designed to test the effects of service-employee deviant customer-oriented behaviors (deviant service adaptation, deviant service communication, and deviant use of resources) on the building of customer service friendship through customer-based indebtedness perception. Furthermore, this study empirically examined the moderating role of customer co-production in an effort to enhance the customer-indebtedness effect on service friendship. When customers more constructively understood the employee and service-delivery processes according to the service-participation changes, the customer service friendship perception was enhanced.

Index Terms—Co-production, customer indebtedness, deviant customer oriented behavior, service friendship.

I. INTRODUCTION

As market competition intensifies, the interaction between customers and employees in the service industries become more important to the success of service organizations. Therefore, the building of a strong relationship with customers is a vital strategy that service organizations employ to maintain a competitive advantage. Customer's significant affect (either positive or negative) is transferred from the customer-employee to the customer-firm levels [1]. Thus, service managers should encourage employees to develop social relationship aspects between customers and employees.

Service providers are often motivated to build close and mutually beneficial social ties with customers [2], thereby resulting in the development of service friendships from the customer perspective [3].

Social cognition theory also explains that the close relationship between customers and employees, such as extensive information sharing, leads to inseparability between them, as the customers are encouraged to use interactional behaviors to evaluate the service [4].

Based on the social cognitive theory, this study investigates deviant customer-oriented behaviors as a critical social factor in the building of the service friendship. The deviant customer-oriented behaviors are customer-oriented behaviors that are characterized by the bending of organizational rules and norm violations; therefore, they can be regarded as over-serving and dysfunctional behaviors [5].

As market competition intensifies, the interaction between customers and employees in the service industries become more important to the success of service organizations. Therefore, the building of a strong relationship with customers is a vital strategy that service organizations employ

to maintain a competitive advantage. According to [5], customers who accumulate excellent social capital with their employees gain an advantage from the friendship relationship [6].

[5] found that the deviant customer-oriented behaviors can be categorized in the following three ways: deviant service adoption (DSA; perceived service employee behaviors that adapt service offerings or procedures in a way that defies expectations or breaks higher-authority rules to primarily benefit the customers); deviant service communication (DSC; perceived service employee behaviors that give or share product/service information with customers in a way that defies expectations or breaks higher-authority rules to primarily benefit the customers); and deviant use of resources (DUR; perceived service employee behaviors using human or physical resources to support or help customers in a way that defies expectations or breaks higher-authority rules to primarily benefit the customers).

If customers receive deviant customer-oriented behaviors from service employees, the exchange relationship may become unbalanced due to a feeling of indebtedness. In this situation, customers are likely to experience senses of discomfort and obligation regarding the repayment of employees that affects the formation of service friendship.

The objectives of this research are threefold, as follows:

(1) to examine the effects of various deviant customer-oriented behaviors (DSA, DSC, and DUR) on customer indebtedness, (2) to assess the relationship between customer indebtedness and service friendship, and (3) to analyze whether the strength of the relationship between customer indebtedness and service friendship differs across customer co-production levels.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

A. Social Capital Theory and Customer-Oriented Deviance

According to [7], the buyer/seller-exchange relationships can only exist when both parties provide the social and economic values simultaneously. Here, the social values can be referred to as “the satisfaction with the exchange relationship” [6]. In addition, the social and emotional aspects of the exchange relationships can contribute to the overall value [8]. These results support the idea that a social aspect complements the service benefits that a seller provides.

Thus, researchers argue that the role of the service-provider social capital is critical in terms of the customer service experience [6]. Social capital is defined as a social-relationship benefit that can accumulate in the form of a reciprocity obligation [9]. In this study, it is argued that the customer-oriented deviance is a type of service-provider

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social capital that affects service friendship through customer indebtedness.

Social capital is accumulated when a party provides potential favors or benefits to another party in an exchange relationship [10]. Social capital theory highlights that an individual feels obligated depending upon the value of the resources that are given from another exchange partner. In this regard, the customer-oriented deviance is considered in this study as a form of social capital [11]. If customers perceive that positive deviant behaviors will benefit them, they feel a sense of duty to repay the favors. This feeling of obligation generates customer indebtedness that, in turn, ultimately forms service friendship.

B. Hypothesis Development

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Service-employee over-serving behaviors may surpass the normal expectations of customers and greatly please customers [12]. Ironically, this will also increase the organizational costs and lead to inconsistent or unfair service treatments [13]. Although adverse effects may result from over-serving behaviors, the potential benefits of the exceptional service provision may well exceed the corresponding costs [14]. Therefore, researchers suggest that organizations should encourage the positive deviant behaviors that help in the achievement of their goals [15].

From the customer perspective, deviant customer-oriented behaviors are defined as a customer's perception of service-employee extra-role behaviors that defy expectations or break higher-authority rules for which service adoption, service communication, and the use of organizational resources are utilized to primarily benefit customers in interpersonal relationships [5].

If customers perceive that service-employee deviant behaviors benefit them, they could feel that they owe something to employees, leading to a feeling of indebtedness that arises from the employee deviant behaviors. This is consistent with a prior study wherein the recipients (customers) felt a sense of indebtedness that closely matched the employee-benefactor concern about the recipient (customer) welfare relative to his/her own concern [16]. In this regard, [17] argued that salespeople possibly bend the rules to accommodate customers by introducing a story that "a customer warranty has expired, but the salesperson arranges for the product to be repaired free of charge (p. 1132)." The rule-bending behaviors make customers feel obligated to repay their debt, resulting in a higher indebtedness toward the salespeople. Therefore, the following effects can be derived:

H1a: DSA exerts a positive effect on customer indebtedness.

H1b: DSC exerts a positive effect on customer indebtedness.

H1c: DUR exerts a positive effect on customer indebtedness.

When customers receive favors or benefits from service providers, customers are likely to feel a sense of obligation to repay the favors. Therefore, customers may find a way to reduce the level of the felt indebtedness [18].

For example, customers may perceive that the unexpected service that is provided by service employees who are acting outside the organizational rules (i.e., DSA, DSC, and DUR) exceeds the organization's rules and expectations for the customer's benefit, leading to a feeling of indebtedness and a great sense to repay the debt or the favor; therefore, customers try to show positive emotions to service employees such as displays of friendliness [19] and respect for the purpose of forming the service friendship.

Social capital theory suggests that social bonds (i.e., service friendship) are the products of past social-capital investments where the social asset can be accumulated in the form of indebtedness and reciprocity expectations [20]. A similar logic indicates that when customers receive benefits from service employees in the form of customer-oriented deviance behaviors, they are likely to feel indebted to service employees. This sense of indebtedness facilitates the generation of positive emotions and trust toward service employees, thereby allowing customers to build the service friendship with service employees.

H2: Customer indebtedness positively affects service friendship.

According to the attribution theory, it is generally agreed that people tend to attribute positive outcomes to themselves, whereas they tend to attribute negative outcomes to external factors [21], and this is known as the "self-serving bias" or self-esteem maintenance. In the case of a high customer co-production level, customers consider themselves as an active organizational member in the service production and the delivery process [22] with special responsibilities. In this case, if customers feel highly indebted due to the service-employee favors or benefits beyond the normal transaction, they believe that the more successful outcomes occurred as a result of the collaborative quality.

Therefore, customers who participate in the co-production feel a greater indebtedness due to their gaining of an increased understanding of service employees, service delivery, and their value, thereby strengthening the effect of indebtedness on service friendship.

H3: The positive effect of the customer indebtedness on the service friendship is stronger when the co-production is high rather than when the co-production is low.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Sampling and Analyses

A total of 380 completed questionnaires were collected from a cross-sectional sample of the financial-service-sector organizations in the Republic of Korea (ROK). A three-stage data analysis was performed to assess the measurement quality of the constructs and to test the proposed hypotheses. To analyze the data, a confirmatory factor analysis using Mplus 6.12 was employed. Next, a structural equation model was used to examine the direct effects among constructs, which are suggested as hypotheses in this study. Finally, a bootstrapping method was performed to test the moderation effect of customer co-production on the relationship between customer indebtedness and service friendship.

B. Measurement

The measure of deviant customer-oriented behaviors was adopted from [5]. They developed multidimensional scales of deviant customer-oriented behaviors including DSA (e.g., “bankers use service processes that depart from their bank’s expected practices”), DSC (e.g., “bankers are open about their bank’s problematic practices when they think it is necessary”), and DUR (e.g., “bankers use extra time to assist me even if it is something they should not be doing”).

To measure customer indebtedness, the items from [6] were adopted. Customers reported the degree of the extent to which they felt indebted to the working relationship (e.g., I feel indebted to bankers due to the favors/special treatment I receive). Service friendship was measured using four items from [23] (2011) study. Customers were asked to rate the extent to which they developed a rapport and a friendship with the service provider (e.g., there is a friendship between bankers and me). In addition, co-production was measured using a 4-item scale that was adopted from [24].

C. Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the constructs’ measurement properties and the psychometric adequacy. The results indicated that the measurement model provides a sound fit to the data ($\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 2.91, p < .01$; CFI = .91; TLI = .90; SRMR = .06; and RMSEA = .07), and all of the item loadings are statistically significant ($p < .01$). Also, relatively high Cronbach’s alpha values ($\alpha \geq .88$) suggest that all of the measures are reliable [25]. Overall, the sound measurement-model fit demonstrated a robust support of the focal-construct unidimensionality.

D. Structural Model Analysis

First, a structural equation model (SEM) analysis was performed to test four linear relationships for the significance. To identify whether the effects of perceived deviant customer-oriented behaviors on service friendship are fully mediated by customer indebtedness, the main-effect model added the direct paths between three deviant behaviors and service friendship. In addition, age and gender were added to the model to control for the participant-demographic differences. The resulting structural model provided a good fit to the data ($\chi^2/\text{d.f.} = 2.89, p < .01$; CFI = .91; TLI = .90; SRMR = .07; and RMSEA = .07).

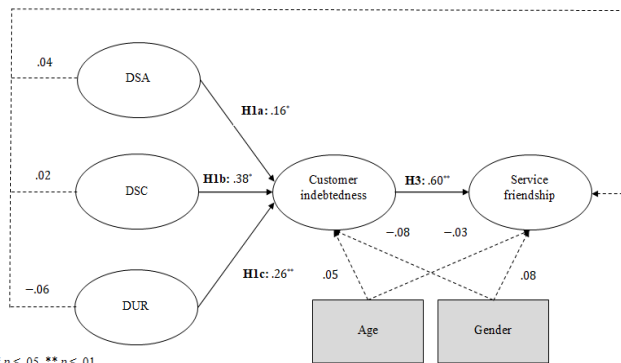


Fig. 1. Results of structural model analysis.

H1a hypothesized that DSA is positively related to

customer indebtedness. The results demonstrated that DSA significantly increased customer indebtedness ($r = .16, p < .05$). H1b predicted that DSC is positively related to customer indebtedness. In support of the path relationship, DSC has a strong positive effect on customer indebtedness ($r = .38, p < .01$). H1c investigated the relationship between DUR and customer indebtedness. The results support the hypothesis by providing a significant link between DUR and customer indebtedness ($r = .26, p < .01$). Additionally, none of the control variables is insignificant in the model (age: $r = .05$, ns, gender: $r = -.08$, ns).

H2 predicted that customer indebtedness positively leads to service friendship. As expected, customer indebtedness significantly enhanced service friendship between buyers and sellers ($r = .60, p < .01$) after controlling for effects of age and gender; however, both age and gender do not significantly affect service friendship (age: $r = -.03$, ns; gender: $r = .08$, ns).

Moreover, the results support the conclusion that the relationships between three deviant behaviors and service friendship are fully mediated by customer indebtedness because none of direct paths from three predictor constructs (i.e., DSA, DSC, and DUR) to service friendship is not significant ($r = .04$, ns; $r = .02$, ns; $r = -.06$, ns, respectively).

E. Moderating Role of Co-Production

TABLE I: RESULT OF MODERATING EFFECT

Predictor	β	SE	T	p-value
Service friendship (SFR)				
Constant	1.570	.534	2.939	.004
Gender	-.236	.107	-1.941	.053
Age	.005	.140	.911	.363
Customer indebtedness (CI)	-.120	.030	.391	.391
Co-production (COPRO)	.213	.121	1.993	.047
CI \times COPRO	.113	.005	3.755	.000
	Effect	SE	LLCI	ULCI
Conditional effects at				
$M \pm 1 SD$				
-1 SD (2.992)	.218	.064	.092	.343
M (4.145)	.348	.049	.251	.445
+1 SD (5.298)	.478	.056	.367	.589

Note: $N = 345$. Unstandardized regression coefficients are reported.

Bootstrap sample size = 5000.

LLCI = Bootstrap lower limit of the confidence interval.

ULCI = Bootstrap upper limit of the confidence interval.

This study proposed that co-production moderates the relationship between customer indebtedness and service friendship. We employed the bootstrapping technique to assess the moderation effect with 5000 bootstrap samples. As shown in Table I, the interaction between co-production and customer indebtedness is positively significant ($\beta = .11, p < .01$), thereby supporting H3.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the service marketing literature by developing a theoretical model exploring the underlying mechanisms through which deviant customer-oriented behaviors facilitate a customer’s perception on service friendship. While most of the extant service-friendship literature on marketing and management examines the impact of positive employee behaviors such as social rapport, attractiveness, social skills, responsiveness, and similarity [1], and the mediating role of the positive side of the customer

cognitive evaluation such as justice, perceived value, social benefit, and trust [26], [1], this research tests a research framework based the reciprocity norm, where over-serving, the dysfunctional employee behaviors, and the customer perception of the service-employee repayment obligation are integrated into the service-friendship mechanism.

The contribution and originality of this study was further enhanced by the addition of a moderating variable, customer co-production, to understand the customer relational investment for the enhancement of the service friendship. These issues were investigated in a service context using a customer sample from a major ROK bank.

The proposed model is supported by the findings, which suggest that the three types of deviant customer-oriented behaviors (DSA, DSC, and DUR) positively influence the service-friendship formation by increasing the customer-indebtedness sense. These results suggest a mediating process wherein service-employee deviant behaviors affect service friendship. In addition, the service-friendship formation is enforced by the voluntary and specific customer-participation forms, meaning that the service-friendship perception is greatly dependent on the customer's own participation in the service process, and it is essential that the service friendship is determined not only by the service-employee behaviors but also by the customer's own behaviors.

Therefore, this result implies that deviant customer-oriented behaviors are an important social resource that helps customers to build a service friendship, and it emphasizes the importance of co-production in the strengthening of the service-friendship formation.

A. Managerial Implications

This study identified the positive results of the deviant customer-oriented behaviors that resulted in the building of a concrete friendship with the customer. For managers who want or need to provide an excellent customer service and build long-term relationships with customers, this study offers useful insights into the management of the strategic dilemmas that stem from negative and taboo prejudices regarding the deviant customer-oriented behaviors that are based on the costs of organizational rule-breaking. However, this study suggests that customers who experience the deviant customer-oriented behaviors may perceive a sense of obligation that leads them to try to balance this unjust relationship with beneficial actions. Every service employee is not responsible for the deviant customer-oriented behaviors, as is shown in the differences in the extents of their service-orientation respectfulness. Considering the positive-rebound effect of the deviant customer-oriented behaviors, service managers should recruit empathetic employees and encourage them to engage in risk-taking service-encounter behaviors. Therefore, Service managers should therefore understand the value of these employee behaviors on the customer-service friendship. Given the mutually beneficial results of deviant customer-oriented behaviors, service managers should encourage and/or empower employees to engage in these specific deviant behaviors.

Finally, the results of the present study provide support for

the notion that customer co-production, in connection with service friendship, is a vital component in the maintenance of the relational exchange. Specifically, the customer's voluntary and collaborative behaviors are necessary in addition to the employee's over-servicing behaviors for the building of the service friendship. Thus, the positive managerial implications are noteworthy for service employees who are willing to take advantage of the opportunities that arise from the customer co-production. Furthermore, service managers should encourage a service-climate cultivation that provides customers with the opportunity to co-produce voluntarily and to actively participate in the service delivery processes.

B. Limitation and Future Researches

This study collected data only from the customer side. Even though deviant customer-oriented behaviors must be examined from the recipient's perspective, a service-employee or manager perspective should be considered in the future research. Furthermore, various employee behavior characteristics should be included to precisely understand the effect of the deviant behaviors. For example, the customer evaluation regarding the deviant customer-oriented behaviors can be changed due to employee characteristics such as authenticity. Moreover, the focus of this study is the psychological process of the service-friendship development, but the future research should consider the positive or negative consequences of the service friendship such as information disclosure, continuance commitment, and financial exploitation.

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