





A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CUSTOMIZED SERVICES FOR TOURISM INDUSTRY: PERSPECTIVE OF EMOTION AND MODERATOR OF GENDER

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ABSTRACT

Article History

Received: 16 October 2020

Revised: 18 November 2020

Accepted: 4 December 2020

Published: 24 December 2020

Keywords

Customized services

Gratitude

Customer repurchase intentions

Gender

Conceptual framework

Tourism industry.

Customized services allow travelers to receive services that would meet their unique needs. This study establishes a theoretical framework of customized service for the tourism industry including the emotional and behavioral outcomes of customized service, integrating the moderator of gender. In tourism, the interactions between the traveler and the service provider can generate the feeling of gratitude. However, there is a gap in the literature developing a framework integrating customized service and gratitude in tourism contexts. In addition, there is a lack of research investigating the effect of gender on the differences between 'males' and 'females' emotional responses after receiving customized services. This study attempts to bridge this gap in the literature by constructing a theoretical framework of the relationship among customized service, customer gratitude, customer repurchase intentions, and gender. The framework proposed would provide explanations of the effect of the social interactions between travelers and the service provider in the tourism industry. Furthermore, the study would help explain the impact of customized services on 'customers' repurchase intentions from the perspective of emotions and how men and women differ in their emotional responses after receiving customized services. The framework proposed would assist the tourism industry to take advantage of customized services to retain customers in the company and make those customers loyal to the company.

Contribution/Originality: This paper's contribution is establishing a conceptual framework of customized service for the tourism industry. Specifically, the paper proposes the emotional and behavioral outcomes of customized service, integrating the moderator of gender.

1. INTRODUCTION

Customized services in the tourism industry offer opportunities for companies to provide something unique for the tourists visiting the destination. Based on the literature, service customization requires a certain level of adaptation or tailoring of the service offered to satisfy customers' needs (Shostack, 1987). In tourism, customized services can include offering helpful information according to customers' individual needs. Therefore, it is likely that the tourism industry can take advantage of personalized services to provide what travelers desire (Kotler, 1989). The outcomes of customized services can be the increase of customers' willingness to pay and their retention level (Franke & Schreier, 2008). In the current study, the authors establish a conceptual framework including the emotional response of customized services, the moderator of the relationship between customized service and the emotional reaction, and the outcome of customized services. The framework proposed would assist the tourism

industry to take advantage of customized services to retain customers in the company and make those customers loyal to the company.

In tourism, the interactions between the traveler and the service provider can induce moments of kindness, resulting in gratitude (Filep, Macnaughton, & Glover, 2017). Such actions can include helping travelers with bags or a hospitable host preparing meals for tourists. However, a framework integrating customized service and gratitude in tourism contexts is lacking in the literature. Furthermore, there is missing research investigating the effect of gender on the differences between 'males' and 'females' emotional responses after receiving customized services. This study attempts to fill this gap in the literature by constructing a theoretical framework of the relationship between customized service and customer repurchase intentions from the emotional perspective, integrating the moderator of gender. This framework provides explanations of the effect of the social interactions between travelers and the service provider. Furthermore, the study sheds light on understanding the emotional responses after receiving customized services and the effect of those emotional responses on 'customers' repurchase intentions. The framework proposed in the study would help explain the impact of customized services on 'customers' repurchase intentions from the perspective of emotions and how men and women differ in their emotional responses after receiving customized services.

2. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF CUSTOMIZED SERVICE

Based on the literature review, the conceptual framework that explains the relationships among customized service, customer gratitude, gender, and 'customers' repurchase intentions is established. Customer gratitude is the emotional response after receiving customized services, and gender acts as a moderator between customized service and customer gratitude. Lastly, customer repurchase intention is the outcome of customized services. The discussion of each concept and the development of those relationships are presented below.

2.1. Customized Service

Customized services refer to services that accommodate customer needs when customers express or imply a request (Victorino, Verma, & Wardell, 2013). Customized services allow customers to receive services that would satisfy their particular needs. Flexibilities are needed to make the service customized to individual demands (Victorino et al., 2013). Literature suggested that customized offerings are more likely to satisfy customers than standardized products because service customization provides a better fit between customers and products (Ostrom & Lacobucci, 1995).

In tourism contexts, customers evaluate the service based on how the service provider responds to 'customers' requests and adapt the service delivery system to meet the 'customer's unique needs (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). How well the service meets the 'customer's requirements or the evaluation of customized experience plays a critical role in predicting customer satisfaction (Fornell, Johnson, Anderson, Cha, & Bryant, 1996). Customized services result in customer satisfaction, perceived quality, trust, and customer loyalty (Coelho & Henseler, 2012).

2.2. Gratitude

Gratitude is categorized as one of the empathic emotions, associated with the recognition or appreciation of an altruistic gift (Lazarus & Lazarus, 1994). People feel gratitude when they perceive that they are the beneficiary of an intentionally given benefit, which is valuable to the recipient (McCullough, Kilpatrick, Emmons, & Larson, 2001). In other words, an individual feels gratitude when he/she appraises that another person (benefactor) purposefully acting to enhance the 'recipient's well-being (Fredrickson., 2004). Furthermore, gratitude motivates reciprocity (Xia & Kukar-Kinney, 2013) and triggers the recipient to return a favor to the benefactor to reintroduce balance (Weiner & Graham, 1989).

In favorable psychological terms, gratitude can be thought of as an emotional response to life. Gratitude is an interpersonal emotion and cannot be directed towards oneself. Therefore, gratitude can be expressed toward others, as well as toward impersonal (nature) or nonhuman sources (e.g., God, animals) (Emmons & Shelton, 2002). In the current study, the perspective of expressing gratitude toward others is considered. Specifically, customer gratitude is generated toward the service provider or the company. It can be inferred as well-meaning intentions if the individual receives kindness from others resulting in feeling loved and esteemed. In its simplest sense, gratitude can be considered a sense of "wonder, thankfulness, and appreciation for life" (Emmons & Shelton, 2002).

2.3. Customized Service and Gratitude

Customized services refer to the accommodations of 'customers' requests for customized service (Bitner et al., 1990). 'Customers' feeling of having received services, especially to him/her, is induced when customers receive 'employees' customized services. According to general reciprocity (Morales, 2005) reciprocation is triggered when people perceive that they are the recipients of particular benefits available only to themselves. Therefore, reciprocity will be evoked among customers who receive customized services.

Customers are likely to perceive that the service provider intentionally renders a benefit that improves 'customers' well-being (Fredrickson., 2004) when they receive customized services. Gratitude is an interpersonal emotion involving reciprocity toward others. In the current study, the authors suggest that customers who receive 'employees' special treatment benefits (e.g., customized service) tend to trigger gratitude (Kim & Lee, 2013). Therefore, the following proposition is established:

P1: Customized service increases customer gratitude.

2.4. Gender and Gratitude

In the current study, the authors consider the effect of gender on the level of gratitude experienced. In other words, it is expected that males and females have differences in feeling and expressing gratitude after receiving similar services. In general, women are more expressive in emotions than men and experience emotions more intensely and frequently than men (Naito, Wangwan, & Tani, 2005). Scholars indicated that females are more likely to recognize other 'people's goodwill gestures and express their gratitude because females tend to receive greater social support than males (Eagley & Crowley, 1986).

Solomon (1995) suggested that gratitude is related to indebtedness and dependency. Males are likely to consider the experience and expressing of gratitude a gesture to demonstrate vulnerability and weakness, resulting in a threat of their masculinity and social standing (Levant & Kopecky, 1995). Therefore, males might tend to avoid showing the emotion of gratitude (Kashdan, Mishra, Breen, & Froh, 2009). On the other hand, females are more used to feel and express feelings to create and maintain purposeful social relationships. As a result, females are likely to consider gratitude desirable in their life due to their priority for creating and maintaining close relationships (Schwartz & Rubel, 2005).

Furthermore, females tend to hold more positive appraisals about the benefits of gratitude resulting in more willingness to express gentle and other focused emotions such as gratitude. On the other hand, males tend to consider gratitude more challenging and burdensome, resulting in not expressing gratitude. Therefore, the following proposition is developed:

P2: Women are more likely than men to feel gratitude after receiving customized service.

2.5. Repurchase Intentions

Customer repurchase intention refers to 'customers' intent to return to an organization (Khan, Naumann, & Williams, 2012). Repurchase intentions are associated with 'customers' commitment to purchase more goods and services from the organization resulting in revenue increase, customer acquisition costs reduction, lower costs of

servicing repeat customers, and better profitability (Khan et al., 2012). In marketing research, repeat patronage is considered a significant behavioral outcome for measuring relationship marketing success (Reichheld, 1996). The organization anticipates its customer to repurchase with them provided that the organization meets 'customers' expectations (Schneider & Bowen, 1999).

2.6. Gratitude and Repurchase Intentions

In positive psychology, the literature suggested that experiencing positive affect motivates individuals to engage with their environments and participate in activities (Fredrickson, 2001). Similarly, customers who experience positive emotions such as gratitude are more likely to come back to the company to patronage with the company to prolong the feeling of positive emotions. Additionally, research suggested that customer emotions influence their behavioral intentions (Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006). For example, customers who experience positive emotions exhibit approach behavior (Sander, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2005). Furthermore, experiencing gratitude facilitates people to act pro-socially, such as engaging in helpful behaviors toward the benefactor (Raggio & Folse, 2009). In the tourism contexts, approach behavior can equal returning to the same company, and the prosocial behavior can be customer repurchase behaviors to help with company performance. Research also suggested that feelings of gratitude help build trust and develop long-term relationships. Individuals who feel gratitude tend to increase future interactions with the benefactor (Bartlett & DeSteno, 2006).

Gratitude drives reciprocal behavioral intentions by encouraging people to render further benefits to reciprocate the benefits they have received (McCullough et al., 2001). An individual feels gratitude when he/she appraises that another person (benefactor) purposefully acting to enhance the 'recipient's well-being (Fredrickson, 2004). Similarly, customers who receive customized service feel that they receive something special that is beneficial for them. Furthermore, gratitude motivates reciprocity (Xia & Kukar-Kinney, 2013) and triggers the recipient to return a favor to the benefactor to reintroduce balance (Weiner & Graham, 1989). In consumer settings, past literature also indicated that customers who experience gratitude are more likely to make future transactions (Soscia, 2007) and perform pro-firm consumer behavior, including repurchase intention (Soscia, 2007). Given the discussions above, the following proposition is suggested:

P3: Customer gratitude increases repurchase intentions.

Figure 1 shows the framework of customized service for tourism industry including the emotional and behavioral outcomes of customized service, integrating the moderator of gender.

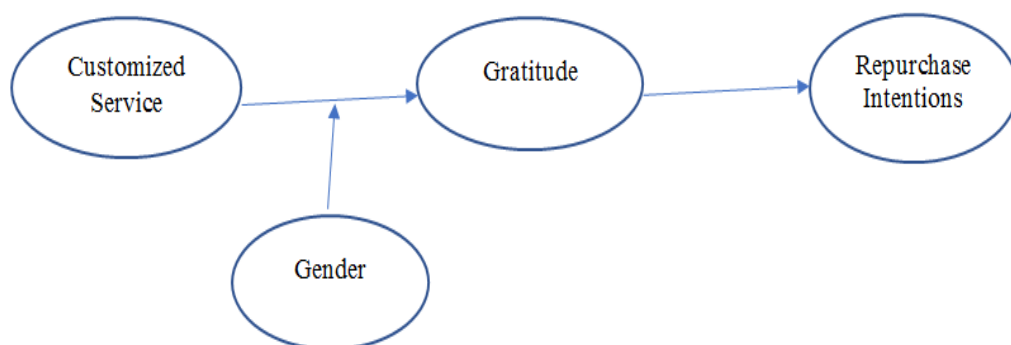


Figure-1. A conceptual framework of customized services for tourism industry.

3. IMPLICATIONS

The suggested conceptual framework of customized service for the tourism industry provides potential outcome and moderator for the relationship between customized services and gratitude. Along with the moderator of gender for the relationship between customized service and gratitude, companies can utilize customized service in the tourism industry and consider gender to generate the desired outcome of repurchase intentions. From a

theoretical perspective, the proposed framework would contribute to the literature regarding the relationship between customized service and customer repurchase intentions in the tourism industry from an emotional standpoint and how males and females can respond differently to customized services based on the gender difference in feeling and expressing gratitude.

Regarding the positive impact of customized services, the service provider or the company in the tourism industry will need to consider each customer as a unique individual with particular expectations and needs. The service providers are suggested to pay attention to 'customers' special needs and make efforts to satisfy those requests. Customers would be grateful if they receive customized services, and customer gratitude would induce the customer to return to repurchase with the company. On the other hand, gender will need to be considered when establishing the relationship between customized service and gratitude. Past literature has suggested that males are less expressive in emotions and experience emotions less intensely and frequently (Naito et al., 2005).

Furthermore, men are less likely to recognize other 'individuals' goodwill and well-intentioned gestures (Eagley & Crowley, 1986). Based on those findings, customized services might have a less emotional effect on men than on women. Therefore, it is suggested that the service provider in the tourism industry can pay extra attention to provide customized services for women so female customers can feel grateful for the service received and facilitate positive behaviors of coming back to the company.

Although providing customized services may not have a strong emotional effect to generate gratitude in men and result in repeat purchase behavior. However, it is recommended to consider the impact of customized service from another perspective. Ostrom and Lacobucci (1995) suggested that men value the core service provision, whereas women focus more on the relationship with the service provider. Also, Mattila, Cho, and Ro (2009) indicated that males emphasize the outcome of the service even if they do not receive a positive emotional response from the service provider. Based on the research above, it is suggested that the service provider should approach customized service differently for men and women. For women who value the social relationship, the service provider needs to emphasize that the service provided is unique for each individual based on their needs. In this way, women would value the special treatment received and feel grateful for customized services. Furthermore, the service provider can focus on the process and the emotional aspect of the delivery for female customers, such as understanding other people and friendliness. On the other hand, the service provider in the tourism industry should focus on the outcome of customized service provided when they interact with male customers. In contrast, the service provider should focus on the outcome, such as product knowledge and technical assistance in their interaction with male customers (Mohr & Henson, 1996).

4. CONCLUSION

This paper discusses the conceptual framework of customized services for the tourism industry, presenting gratitude as the emotional response of customized service, gender as the moderator of customized service, and customer repurchase intention as the outcome of customized service. Based on the review of the relevant literature, three propositions are developed, and implications for academics and the tourism industry are provided. As discussed in the sections above, customized service offers opportunities for companies to generate favorable customer behaviors such as repurchase intentions through the emotion of gratitude. However, males and females react differently in their feelings after receiving customized services. Therefore, the tourism industry's service provider would need to focus on various aspects of customized services to induce desirable customer behaviors. Specifically, the service provider would need to emphasize the outcome of the service for male customers.

In contrast, female customers, the service provider is suggested to focus on the emotional and interactional aspect of customized service. The development of a conceptual framework has been based on past literature. The framework can help the tourism industry retain customers in the company. For future studies, the paper's proposed relationships can be empirically examined with quantitative data evidence for further validation.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Acknowledgement: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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