EMOTIONAL INTERACTIONS IN SERVICES MARKETING- AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Employees are vital link in building relationships with the stakeholders as they are required to convey the significance of the Brand. Internal branding focuses on employees understanding of the brand value and the way they deliver the brand experience. In this paper the concept of Internal branding has been acknowledged as an important area of research in marketing literature. In the context of Higher Educational Institutions, employees play a crucial role in the internal branding process. In order to inspire customers, Institutions first have to inspire their employees – to understand and believe in the products and brands they represent, to improve performance and ultimately to be more effective advocates with customers, inspiring employees has clear institutional benefits. The objective of this research is to examine the concept and factors of internal branding in Higher Educational Institutions, involving semi-structured interviews and a pilot survey to collect data for the development of measurement scales. The study also focuses on the ways and means of instilling the “Brand Values” in the employees, for establishing “Brand Image” for the Educational institutions, resulting in “Brand Impact” in the society.

Keywords: Emotions, Services, Marketing, Emotional interaction, Brand values

INTRODUCTION

Memories of service encounters may not simply be "cold" impressions of service attributes, but can be filled with affective meaning. This is evident from the growing impact of hospitality, tourism, leisure and entertainment service industries. These are about experiential consumption, and experiences are emotional.

Even the retailing industry knows now that it is in the experiential business, and is trying to put excitement and multi-sensory experience into the act of purchasing (Burbury, 1997). The emotional content can in fact determine the future relationship
between the firm and the customers (Barnes, 1997). On those moments in time when things do not go right, we do not just feel dissatisfied. We feel in order to complete the continuum-dissipated, disappointed, angry, frustrated and cheated.

Different services may be categorised in a customer’s memory by the emotional responses they have garnered in their interactions with the firm. An emotional event is also more likely to result in mental rumination, social sharing and emotional disclosure further reinforcing the effect of "word of mouth" (Zeithaml, 1981). Due to interpersonal nature of services, emotions in service encounters may be highly social in origin and nature, directly linking to the self-concept and feelings of self-worth and self-esteem. This may imply such emotional memories lend itself to priming and recall—due to their central nodal connections to the self-concept in a person’s associative memory networks (Bower, 1981; 1991).

How is affect or emotion been defined in the consumer and service context? Building on the seminal thinking of Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) there has been an increasing interest and exploration over the years of the emotions experienced in consumption situations. The conceptual model of emotions that has been referred to in these studies and more especially in services has concentrated mainly on dimensions of pleasure and arousal or positive and negative affect. Due to this approach, the investigation of individual emotions (other than satisfaction) has been lacking. Recent research interest however is beginning to address this by investigating the appraisals that give rise to specific emotions.

The functional model of emotions takes each emotion as having a particular antecedent or cause, a specific thought or appraisal, a specific feeling and expression, a specific action tendency, a specific action and a specific goal. Range of emotions depends on whether emotions emanate from customers or from marketing contexts. Emotions certainly are a product of specific marketing contexts. Yet consumers face a variety of
marketing situations. Emotions that germinate from marketing activities are context-specific whereas consumers’ responses would exhibit context-free emotions. However, the presence of positive emotions does not preclude the absence of negative emotions (Babin, Darden,& Babin,1998). Positive emotions in respect of expected service and actual service converging are not discussed in this paper.

One can conceptualise an emotion like a script that automatically plays out in response to a situation. For instance, anger can be described as follows: a person is offended; the wrongdoing is perceived as intentional and harmful; the person considers themselves as innocent and thinks that an injustice has been done; the person looks and scolds the offender; the person feels internal oscillation, tension and agitation, as though heat and pressure were rapidly mounting inside; their heart starts pounding and their muscles tighten; the person desires retribution and the person may lose control and strike out, harming the offender (verbally or physically). This chain of sub-events can happen almost simultaneously and not be under conscious control of the person. For those considering satisfaction as a cognitive judgement, this new theory considers the cognition and appraisal as part of the emotional response.

Using the script model we can categorise emotions in terms of appraisal patterns and knowledge structures developed through past experience. These interact sub-consciously with real-time experience in a dynamic process of emotional churn. Thus an understanding of the content of these emotion patterns and structures can give detailed clues as to the focal antecedents, cognitions and behavioural tendencies and outcomes for specific service situations. These emotional knowledge structures may comprise the structural content and dynamic processes behind the expectations and interactions of service providers and the customers.

LITERATURE
Though confirmation and disconfirmation of expectations is well established as a model in the services literature (Zeithamal, Berry and Parasuraman, 1993), there is no consensus as to what expectations are or what they do (Johnson et al, 2010). Conceptualising expectations as emotional knowledge structures may provide this consensus. Emotions can be elicited by exposure to the relevant stimulus (expectations) in service interactions.

Emotions brought out during various types of service interactions can be positive or negative, solitary or a set, experienced or expressed. It can be happiness, joy, and pride for positive emotions and disappointment, anger, or frustration for negative emotions. According to Mehrabian and Russell (1974), emotions consist of three basic domains:

1. Pleasure
2. Arousal and
3. Dominance.

The unipolar model of Mehrabian and Russell will not be applicable here. As enumerated before, the occurrence of a positive emotion does not preclude feeling a negative emotion. Consumers may feel happy and unhappy at the same time. Positive and negative emotional states then determine the resultant behaviour.

Consumers start with positive emotions but may be trapped by negative emotions due to ‘unreasonably slow service’, ‘unavailable service’, ‘improper information’ (Bitner et al, 1990). Management can start automated phone systems, rebate programmes, and deceptive advertisements and so can plunge consumers into emotional stress. Marketing persons can bring their own personal issues to the workstation, or try to socialize instead of paying attention to consumer needs. Hence consumers may cite poor hiring practices, lack of training and supervision, unethical managerial decision-making, cost-cutting measures (Gerstner and Libai, 2006). Service quality specifications may also differ from actual service provided due to unchangeable prejudicial behaviour like age,
race, ethnicity, physical ability, and/or gender types.

There is the role of both negative and ‘normal’ behaviour. In that case, both positive and negative emotions will emanate. Previous research focussed more on negative or abnormal behaviour. Lacking knowledge of insurance is not outside the norm but can result in the insurance buyer being spoken to (dealt) in an ill-manner. Here the consumer suffers from an overarching negative emotion because he/she feels is singled out for one of those momentary behaviour lapses. Here customers fall into negative emotions not due to the lapse of the service provider, but due to lack of own knowledge. Here the negative bias is self-centred. Marketers face a nagging question on this platform as to how to address this self-centred bias. Hereafter, this bias will be called fleeting (momentary) bias.

**Fleeting bias**

In **fleeting bias**, consumers play an intentional role or an unintentional role in germinating displeasure or dissatisfaction and therefore run into negative emotions. Previous literature has identified service delivery failures, atmospherics, paucity of music, gaps and so on, services capes, experience and the like. From the side of consumers, Literature has also pointed out their complaints, negotiations, deviant behaviour, attire, and issues of loyalty(Jensen,2011). No study has tried to study interactive customer behaviour that affects customer’s own emotional plague.

The SERVQUAL gap model points to five gaps that can cause problems in service delivery and influence emotions in that regard. (Zeithaml et al 2006). There are gaps between what customers expect and what they actually receive; but researches point to ill treatment meted out by service providers as the sole source of dissatisfaction and so negative emotions. Core product failures do not evoke so many sentiments as much as mistreatment by company representatives. It
is interpersonal exchange of words and the finesse of behaviour which accounts for the emergence of negative emotions. Consumers accept their fait accompli to an extent possible but the backlash remains. Feelings of disloyalty erupt.

A case in point is the automated service model which renders occasionally blunt and brusque behaviour on the part of call centre professionals. Managers take it that they complete as many calls as possible for their incentives. It may be an efficient call on the part of the company representatives but the moot question is lack of respect, empathy, and basic courtesy. There is no gratitude, no happiness, no civility that can predict repurchase intention and so a positive word of mouth(Soscia,2007). Cognition, affect, and behavioural components do not work in tandem in such a milieu.

The purpose here is to investigate fleeting bias and to what extent it affects perceived customer dissatisfaction resulting in emotional overtones of affect. It is different from inaccurate product performance, ill-treatment, or concepts of misdelivery-fairness or justice. Here the focus is on disrespect for the individual buyer basing on temporary customer characteristics. Accordingly, research questions for this paper are as follows:

1. Is fleeting bias a common form of dissatisfaction and complaints?
2. Is there any subcategory of this bias?
3. How do examples of bias compare with other forms of service misperformance in terms of dependent variables such as likelihood of repeat purchase, or recommending to others, and generate word-of-mouth?

The basic model investigated is:
Fleeting bias, Intentional or not  

Fig1: Model

METHODLOGY

Data was collected from 380 business graduates over two years. Forty four responses were discarded due to having incomplete reports. They were asked to narrate detail of negative service interactions they had. Critical incident technique was used (Yan and Lotz, 2009; Zhang et al. 2010). Sample represented a wide range of services viz. Restaurant, repairing vehicles, online retailers, traditional retailers, hair salons, beauty salons, telecom units, and doctors’ chambers. Responses were coded by independent students in categories of mistreatment or poor product performance etc. as said before. Data analysis related to categorization, comparison, dimensionalisation, integration, and iteration (Spiggle, 1994). Creswell’s (2006) narrative approach was used. Narratives were classified further into fleeting bias and discriminatory biases. Where disagreements came, cases were resolved by joint judgements including the author. Halfway through the process of collecting data, the process was recalibrated that resulted in an ‘iterative or spiral process’ of collection. This refined the process of collecting responses. A constant comparison method was used (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) integrating narratives with different services. Efforts were made to consult extant literature to develop a rounded view of fleeting bias. Over-representing narratives were avoided by attempts to eliciting the main driver of customer discontent. If a customer came to the Doctor late, and was subjected to rude behaviour by the attendant, the coding was done properly. It was the inconvenience and discomfort of coming
late and not the rude behaviour that was recorded in the narrative. On this basis, a proportion of interjudge agreement of 90% with reliability of 92% was achieved. This was greater than Nunnally’s(1978) rule of thumb of 70% for exploratory work. This sufficed for conceptualization and rigour of the classifications. Dependent factors were measured using a five-point Likert scale. Results came out of conducting MANOVA tests.

Table 1 below depicts frequency of service type in negative customer narratives. Table 2 shows demographic indicators.

Table 1  Frequency of service type in negative customer narratives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of service</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Restaurant/bar</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>29.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Automotive repair</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brick and mortar retail</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beauty saloon/barber</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telecommunication</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical services</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>3.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet retail</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous services</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>11.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total</td>
<td>380</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

RESULTS

200 episodes revealed (about 50%) mistreatment, where fleeting bias would be
common. These fleeting instances would be distributed in different product categories, prices paid, and customer characteristics. This is Research question 1.

As to question 2, numerous product categories were available for fleeting bias. Narratives were classified as intentional or unintentional depending on customer actions. Within these two broad types of bias, several others were identified as follows:

**Intentional bias**

*No to expert wisdom*

Customers frequently do not purchase items suggested by professionals because they think it unnecessary. It may be knowledge or lack of knowledge, inadequate explanation on the part of the expert, or a fear of being oversold (Taylor and Bower, 2004). Such refusal may look offensive to the provider of advice and trigger an outburst of emotion. A Doctor in India suggests normally 4-5 diagnostic tests for a normal ailment; patient or relatives may scoff at that and go with few tests. The motive here is also economic benefit not to be withered away.

*Negotiations*

Customers engage in negotiations with plumbers, electrical repairmen, and construction workers for the quality of materials used. If customers believe they are taken for a ride, they flare up and display negative emotions. Some customers swallow ill behaviour with an eye to repair work to be done at a future date with likes of such unmannerly people.

*Own condescension*

High-ego customers enhancing self-perception frequently question work-related skills, knowledge, and credibility of the service provider ending with personal attacks. Another instance of intentional flare-up of emotions.

**Unintentional sources of fleeting bias**

*Wordless*
Here customers are unwillingly involved in behaviour that induces fleeting bias. Customers may identify a problem but lack the requisite words to identify the problem. It can be idiosyncratic or an issue happening off and on. Cable TV picture quality, computer glitch, or medical hazards. Being unable to substantiate, consumers may feel their authenticity, judgment, credibility, and even sanity are questioned by the service representative. A consumer may set unrealistically high expectations for product performance. Outcome is emotional upsurge as before.

**Fairness**

Customers may see their compatriots of high-value receiving better treatment than them relegating the humble ones to the background. Violation of justice principles triggers perceptions of unfairness. Intangibility of service augments customers’ sensitivity to fairness. To customers, ‘fairness and service quality are inseparable’ (Berry, 1995). Critical interchanges sometimes take two minutes and can produce great satisfaction or frustration. Service fairness significantly affects repatronage intentions.

**Infrequent Visits**

New customers visit less a retail store and bias may show up against them in longer wait time, less experienced staff doing service, or less desirable accommodation (hotels).

**Absence of sophistication**

Garry (2007) reported long back about lack of customer sophistication while purchasing goods and services. This is more reflected in the use of information which relatively unsophisticated folks lack. They also cannot differentiate product bundling options given to them. Novice buyers may feel disrespected as sales associates fail or do not furnish the basic information.
Research question 3: How do examples of bias compare with other forms of service misperformance in terms of dependent variables such as likelihood of repeat purchase, or recommending to others, and generate word-of-mouth? It was analysed using Manova. Manova was taken because of the three sources of dependent variable measures. Manova revealed no significant difference between any of the three sources of emotional outrages or outbursts. Mistreatment, fleeting bias, and poor product performance. (Wilks’ Lambda=0.863, F(9,530.7)=0.896, p=0.551). Likert scale responses showed in similar fashion low repeat purchase likelihood, low satisfaction, and low chances of recommending the company to friends and others. This was bereft of the negative experience encountered by the customer. However the lack of exact description-mistreatment or discrimination limits the type of conclusions that can be drawn.

**Frequency customer dissatisfaction in negative customer incidents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service failure</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Universal mistreatment</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>50.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fleeting bias</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>29.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor product performance</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

**DISCUSSION**

The market is the ultimate arbiter for level of service demanded and delivered in a particular product category. Routinely providing fleeting service complaints are ineffective marketing strategies in a competitive market. Customers may not revisit service centres and so there stands loss of potential revenue. Existence of fleeting bias forces marketers waking up to the need for measures improving negative attitudes of customers and attendant behaviour. Most companies try to improve mistreatment which may not be the dominant motive for dissatisfaction. Though
it may appear marginal, fleeting bias actually may be relevant managerially. Service personnel are so expected to better perform their duties recognizing the types of fleeting bias that may crop in. They require training for attitudes and beliefs recovery. Role plays, retail management workshops, mystery shoppers deliberately trying to evoke fleeting bias tendencies should be the tenets of such training activities. Fleeting bias represents a starting point. Afterwards, marketers must take it forward through an on-going cycle of reciprocation that becomes a norm for self-reinforcement. That can lead to a dynamic equilibrium between service provider and the receiver. Focus must be on discreet, specific actions timed properly that can beget trust and commitment.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The basic limitation is the student and so younger sample. They lack sufficient money sometimes to purchase sophisticated product categories making themselves the target of ire and negative responses showered by companies. Older customers may be more demanding and so invite negative repercussions described above. One additional factor that could have been included is ‘looks’ or personal appearance; make-up and accessories. This cannot be changed overnight by an individual. It can be termed as a hygiene factor that impacts perceptions either in a positive or negative manner (Johnson et al 2010). Gender and ethnic issues may too come in for nonconforming buyers in which case our homogeneous sample will not serve the true purpose of bringing diversity. Additional study is required that can make service supplier motives salient and the effect this has on the beneficiary. Little is known about the relationship between fleeting bias and satisfaction.

Scope of this study lies in the opportunity space of improving and enhancing customer relationships. Fleeting bias may be looked into detail case wise and diagnoses obtained.
Along with negative sources of fleeting bias, some positives may be brought in like high frequency customers (restaurants, auto repairs, high credence services like medical consultations etc.). Further studies on customers and frontline staff services may throw up typical source of bias prevailing in an industry opening the gate for further investigation.

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