

Exploiting Triggers for Customer Behaviour Modification

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While customer's dysfunctional behaviours in service settings are known to create problems for company managers and to have a negative impact on service performance, researchers have paid little attention to modifying this behaviour. This article describes exploratory research that reveals a wide variety of elements and triggers which affect the modification of customer's behaviour.

1. Introduction

Customer's dysfunctional behaviours that have a negative impact on production in service settings are a social problem and a problem for companies in Japan. According to the Association of Japanese Private Railways (comprising 16 major railway companies), 226 acts of violence toward attendants were reported in FY 2015, a 61% increase from 2004. More than two-fifth (44%) occurred after 10:00 pm, 70% of the total at ticket gates and on platforms, and 35% for reasons that are not known to the railway companies. Japan's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport, and Tourism (MLIT) has started a "Improve your manners on the Railways" by displaying posters, messages on electronic direction boards, and announcements at stations in cooperation with public and private railway companies. Teenage customers' Twitter posts about unsuitable behaviours in restaurants or stores (for example, ruining food, breaking equipment, and indecent behaviour) sometimes cause a public backlash.

A number of researchers view customers as "partial" employees because of their participation in the creation of service values (Bowen 1986; Mills *et al.* 1983). For example, smooth boarding on planes may contribute to on-time flights and reduce passengers' frustration, and eating quietly at restaurants may enhance guests' overall satisfaction.

While many companies are trying to improve and modify customer behaviours in service settings, few researchers have investigated the triggers for improvement in and modification of customer behaviour. It has remained a theoretical problem in services marketing.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Characteristics of the Services

This section discussed the factors that influence customer's dysfunctional behaviour and the dysfunctional behaviour itself. First, the characteristic of "service" is likely to cause customers to act badly compared with their interactions with companies selling tangible manufactured goods. Lovelock (1983) identified four classes of service industry (cf. Table 1) by focusing on the direct recipient of the service (people or possessions) and the nature of the service act (tangible or intangible action).

Table 1. Classification of Services (Lovelock 1983)

Nature of the service act	Who or what is the direct recipient of the service?	
	People	Possessions
Tangible actions	Services directed at people's bodies:	Services directed at physical possessions:
	Passenger transportation	Freight transportation
	Health care	Repair and maintenance
	Lodging	Warehousing/storage
	Beauty salons	Janitorial services
	Physical therapy	Retail distribution
	Fitness centers	Laundry and dry cleaning
	Restaurants/bars	Refueling
	Haircutting	Landscaping/lawn care
	Funeral services	Disposal/recycling
Intangible actions	Services directed at people's minds:	Services directed at intangible assets:
	Advertising/PR	Accounting
	Arts and entertainment	Banking
	Broadcasting/cable	Data processing
	Management consulting	Data transmission
	Education	Insurance
	Information services	Legal services
	Music concerts	Programming
	Psychotherapy	Research
	Religion	Securities investment
Voice telephone	Software consulting	

In Lovelock's classification, services directed at people's bodies through tangible actions especially require customer's time, stress, and incur physical costs (Lovelock and Wirtz 2007). For example, we have to sit on small seats for half a day when trav-

elling between Asia and Europe no matter how tired we are and, queue to eat at very popular restaurants no matter how hungry we are. We always experience psychological costs during service consumption.

According to the psychological reactance theory, impeding people's freedom to act can trigger people to do damage to others in society (Brehm 1966; Brehm and Brehm 1981). Reactance can occur when people are pressured to act in a certain way, and they may be resistant to persuasion and adopt the opposite attitude to what was intended (Brehm and Brehm 1981). People are, motivated to re-establish their threatened freedom or make use of other freedoms (Imashiro 2001).

2.2. Definition of and Motives for Customer's Dysfunctional Behaviour

As discussed above, service settings are likely to cause customer's dysfunctional behaviour. What is dysfunctional behaviour and what motives do customers have for dysfunctional behaviour? Several earlier studies have investigated various customer behaviours that have a negative impact on service production. They are conceptualized as "dysfunctional behaviour" (Harris and Reynolds 2003; Reynolds and Harris 2009; Daunt and Harris 2012; Yi and Gong 2008; Hibbert *et al.* 2012), but also "misbehaviour" (Fullerton and Punj 2004), "antisocial behaviours" (Groth and Grandey 2012), "unruly behaviour" (Cheng-Hua and Hsin-Li 2012), and "deviant behaviour" (Reynolds and Harris 2005; Suquet 2010). While there are many concepts about behaviour that has negative impact on service production, these concepts can be interchangeable (Harris and Daunt 2013). In this study, customer's "dysfunctional behaviour" is defined as behaviour that deliberately or unintentionally disrupts service in a manner that negatively affects the organization or other customers (Lovelock 1994).

Customer's dysfunctional behaviour includes verbal abuse (e.g., Fullerton and Punj 1997), excessive complaint (e.g., Daunt and Harris 2011), physical violence (e.g., McColl-Kennedy *et al.* 2010), deliberate rule breaking (e.g., Fullerton and Punj 2004), and shoplifting (e.g., Moore 1984). Customer's dysfunctional behaviour leads to negative impacts on employees (Rafaeli *et al.* 2012), other customers (Martin and Pranter 1989), and company's property (Cox *et al.* 1990). Thus, customer's suitable behaviour in service settings is a very important issue for creating high-quality service performance.

Daunt and Harris (2012) empirically identified several personality variables about customer's internal motives for their dysfunctional behaviours; financial gain, ego gain, and revenge. Financial gain refers to be motivated by the attainment of assets in either monetary or physical form, ego gain refers to be motivated by an individual's need for self-worth, and revenge refers to an individual customer's desire to attain vengeance over an organization or individual member of organizational personnel (Daunt and Harris 2012).

2.3. Customer Management and its Theoretical Limitations

Managing customer well is an important issue in services marketing (Zeithaml and Bitner 2000; Lovelock 2007), and some studies have investigated strategies to modify customer behaviour. However, it is still unclear whether such strategies are effective. Reynolds and Harris (2006) identified three strategies to modify customer's dysfunctional behaviour; bribing customers, using emotional labour, and exploiting sexual attractiveness in fourteen frontline employee tactics. "bribing customers" involved frontline employees attempt to induce dysfunctional customers through offering free goods or services, "using emotional labour" involved employees feigning an emotional display in order to cope with occurrences of dysfunctional customer behaviour, and "exploiting sexual attractiveness" involved employees acting in a sexually overt or promiscuous manner in order to diffuse acts of customer deviance (Reynolds and Harris 2006). Berry and Seiders (2008) insist on some basic principles to prevent customers becoming dysfunctional: "Manage customers to a standard of behaviour". "Don't penalize fair customers", and "Don't reward misbehaviour".

However, studies have not investigated what particular strategies toward dysfunctional customers are effective, and what kind type of elements in service settings customers perceive as modifying dysfunctional behavior and encouraging suitable behaviour. The potential for many elements affect customer behaviour modification was demonstrated by Fisk *et al.* (2010). They inferred that other customers' dysfunctional behaviours may modify a customer behaviour because such behaviour make others feel "I am not like them". Customer behaviour modification may not be achieved solely by company's direct actions.

2.4. Behaviour Modification and Research Questions

Two theoretical frameworks, behaviour modification and the servuction model are likely to be effective in solving this theoretical issue.

First, behaviour modification theory includes "analyzing". This entails identifying the functional relationship between environmental events and a particular behaviour in order to understand the reasons for the behaviour or to determine why a person behaved as he or she did in a particular circumstance (Miltenburger 2015). Thus, it is helpful to use the concept of behaviour modification to illuminate relationship between the elements in service settings and their role in modifying customer's behaviour from dysfunctional to suitable.

Second, according to the concept of servuction model identifies the elements that affect overall service performance and demonstrates that the service setting and customer's service experience are created through interactions with each of the elements listed below (Langeard *et al.* 1981).

- Inanimate environment
- Contact personnel or service provider

- Customer B (other customers)

Earlier research has shown that interactions with the inanimate environment and other customers affect customer behaviour in service settings. For example, high spatial density in retail settings has a negative impact on customers' purchase intentions and patronage intentions (Rompay *et al.* 2008) and, negative customer-to-customer interactions have a significant relationship with low satisfaction and diminished loyalty to the firm (Moore *et al.* 2005).

Two research questions could be derived from the discussion above. First, the elements that affect customer behaviour modification can include employees, the company's communication tools, or other customers in the service setting. Thus, the following research question is asked:

RQ1: What types of elements influence customer behaviour modification in service settings?

Second, while many companies and institutions seek to modify customer's dysfunctional behaviour, it is still unclear what actions are effective in practice. From the customer's perspective, interactions between customers and elements in service settings can trigger customer's behaviour modification. These elements may include employee's persuasion, in-store announcements, notices on walls or in papers, or other customers' complaints. However, the triggers that modify dysfunctional customer behaviour are not well explored. Thus, the following research question is asked:

RQ2: What types of factors modify customer's dysfunctional behaviour in service settings?

3. Exploratory Research

3.1. Qualitative Research and its validity for the research questions

I employed qualitative research to investigate the two research questions. According to Richards and Morse (2007), qualitative research is appropriate if the research field is unknown or insufficient, the situation is complex, data has multiple sources, and understanding the phenomenon in detail is required.

The modification of customer behaviour in service settings is not well studied in the services marketing literature and, the triggers for customer behaviour modification

and the situations in which that may occur are likely to be complex and varied; therefore, it is appropriate to adopt qualitative research to understand actual customer behaviour modification.

We selected an online survey for data collection. We asked research participants to answer two multiple choice questions – about where their behaviour was dysfunctional and what modified their dysfunctional behaviour. (cf. Table. 2). I asked research participants to recall the situation and process of their behaviour modification. We then asked participants to recall when and where their behaviour was dysfunctional and, what triggered any modification of their behaviour. This was asked as an open-ended question.

Table 2: Examples of Service Settings

· Convenience store	· Clothes shop	· Karaoke	· Plane
· Supermarket	· Bank	· Bowling	· Ferry
· Shopping centre	· Theme park	· Sport gym	· Hospital
· Department store	· Aquarium	· Baseball stadium	· Public office
· Hair salon	· Movie theatre	· Football stadium	· Art museum
· Electronic store	· Hotel	· Public bath	· Museum
· Restaurant	· Japanese inn	· Railway	· Library
· Service station	· Golf course	· Bus	· Other facilities

3.2. Data collection and Analysis

Data collection was carried out by the research and consulting company “And D. co., Ltd” in Tokyo, Japan. The company has many research monitors nationwide aged in their 20’s to 60’s. It has undertaken many academic studies, and employs wide variety of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies. Therefore, it has high validity to undertake this research.

Research participants were Japanese males and females aged between 20 and 69 who were conscious of modifying their dysfunctional behaviour in the last three months. Equal numbers were recruited from each generation, from 20 to those in their 60s. An online survey operated in June 2016. We collected and analyzed 44 valid responses after we had eliminated non-valid, unclear responses. Of the respondents, about 70% were male, 68% were younger than 40 years old. All descriptions were translated from Japanese to English by a Japanese adept translator.

I interpreted the descriptive open-ended answers through the qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000). The qualitative content analysis consists of open coding, category exploration, and focus coding (Ezzy 2002; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006).

4. Research Findings

4.1. Elements affecting Customer Behaviour Modification

Our analyses of 44 responses to the survey identified, other customers and employees as the two major elements affecting customer behaviour modification in service settings. I classified “other customers” to sub-groups: unknown customer and customer’s companion, and we divided “employee” into front-line employee and manager (cf. Table 3.).

Table 3: Number of each elements affecting behaviour modification

Other customers		Employees	
Unknown customer	18	Front-line employee	8
Customer’s companion	13	Manager	5

Results show that other customers modify customers’ behaviour more than employees in service settings (31 vs. 13). Interactions with unknown other customers particularly may have a strong impact on behaviour modification. No one reported that non face-to-face communication in service settings (notices, announcements, etc.) influenced them to modify their behaviour.

4.2. Triggers for Behaviour Modification

4.2.1. Overview of Triggers

Next, the answers to RQ2 were analyzed. After excluding minor (less than 3) items, I identified seven major triggers that occur between customers and elements in service settings: other customers’ dysfunctional behaviours, other customers’ appropriate behaviours, negative reactions of other customers, advice from other customers, employee concession, employee warning, and employee fatigue. All triggers are summarized as Table 4.

4.2.2. Other Customers’ Dysfunctional Behaviours

This trigger occurred primarily through interaction with unknown customers. Customers recognized their inappropriate behaviour through observing other customers’ dysfunctional behaviour that was similar to their own past behaviour in a service setting, and this modified their behaviour. A 50-year-old male passenger who had yelled a railway employee at the station stated:

“I happened to see exactly the same scene as I caused before at the subway station. It annoyed me so much that it made me

think I would never do such a thing ever again. I feel very shamed.”

Respondents use terms such as “extremely ashamed”, “idiotic”, and “very ashamed” to express their repentance. This trigger is likely to have a strong impact on the intention to modify behaviour.

4.2.3. Other Customers’ Appropriate Behaviours

Although few respondents reported this, customers modify their dysfunctional behaviour in service settings by learning other customers’ appropriate behaviour. This phenomenon was identified in interactions with unknown customers and with their companions. A 25-year-old male shopper who expressed his negative attitude when waiting in line at the supermarket cashier stated:

“I saw other customers waiting in line without any complaint. Then I realized my behaviour was very childish at my age. Even children were waiting in line patiently without looking annoyed at all...”

The results show that customers tend to learn from the general public and from specific customers whom the customer can respect.

4.2.4. Negative Reactions of Other Customers

Customer’s dysfunctional behaviours generates negative reactions from other customers, because they are confused or embarrassed. Such negative reactions to dysfunctional behaviour can be effective for modification. A 34-year-old male theme park guest who made an excessive amount of noise stated,

“I found other people around me looking annoyed, and I was frowned upon. So I stopped making a scene, based on a common sense that goes “Don’t do what you don't want others do to you.” From now on, I will to be more careful that my actions do not cause any annoyance for others.”

Other customers’ negative reactions such as being confused or embarrassed may generate a sense of guilt. Such negative emotions in customers may result in positive service performance.

4.2.5. Advice from Other Customers

Customers give advices about suitable behaviours to other customers. In turn, customers manage other customers’ behaviour as “partial employees”. A 27-year-old female shopper who scolded a shop assistant severely at the convenience store stated:

“My friend accompanying with me persuaded me not to say such a thing. I was told to think carefully about my wording and how I expressed my concern even though they were wrong, otherwise my words will not be useful for them to make their service better. Then I thought that was right, and I agreed with my friend.”

This trigger accounts for a significant proportion of the interaction between a customer and his/her companion. Results show that the companion who gives advice to the customer is his/her family, friend, boyfriend/girlfriend, or superior.

4.2.6. Employee Concession

The next three triggers are generated by customer-to-employee interactions. First, employee's concessions to customers can modify their dysfunctional behaviour. A 21-year-old male shopper who was full of irritation and used abusive language to a shop assistant stated:

“A shop assistant's immediate apology calmed me down and I also apologized for him for saying too much. I immediately felt sorry for myself being such a hot-headed person. Then, I realized that, since I deal with customers in my work too, I had to be more careful about what types of speech and behaviour would further enrage customers and what types wouldn't.”

The highest proportion of respondents report that the trigger for behaviour modification occur in customer-to-employee interaction. A concession from an employee, such as an apology and consideration that increases the customer's free will in service settings can be effective.

4.2.7. Employee Warning

In contrast to the employee concession, an employee's intervention that restricts customer's free will and requests the customers to stop his/her dysfunctional behaviour is effective for behaviour modification. A 54-year-old male hotel guest who talked loudly with a colleague in the room stated:

“When I got a call from the reception about our noise, I realized it was too loud and was heard in other rooms. I felt corrected. And it was also midnight so we went to bed without causing any further troubles for the neighbouring rooms. I realized keeping quiet at that time of the night was part of being a well mannered man.”

Results show that even employee's severe interventions such as warnings could be effective tactics for behaviour modification.

4.2.8. Employee Fatigue

The final trigger affecting customer's dysfunctional behaviour is "employee fatigue". This trigger comes into play when a dysfunctional customer witnesses exhausted or miserable employees. A shopper of 65-year-old female who dropped six or seven bottles of olive oil from a showcase through rough handling at the supermarket stated:

"When I dropped the item, I felt an immediate regret. But when I saw the shop staff's troubled face, I felt even more regret for my carelessness. I felt deeply from the bottom of my heart that I had to be more and more careful in everything I do..."

According to the results, empathy with an employee's expression of negative emotion is a determinant of behaviour modification.

Table 4: Type of Triggers for Customer Behaviour Modification

Type of Triggers	Explanation
Other customers' dysfunctional behaviours	Observing other customers' dysfunctional behaviours as a negative example
Other customers' appropriate behaviours	Learning appropriate behaviour from other customers
Negative reactions of other customers	Observing other customers' confused or embarrassed state
Advice from other customers	Advice about suitable behaviour from other customers
Employee concession	Employee's action that respects the customer's behaviour
Employee warning	Employee's action that requests customer not to behave in a dysfunctional manner
Employee fatigue	Observing employee's exhausted or miserable appearance

5. Conclusion

5.1. Implications

These results have several implications. First, customer's dysfunctional behaviour can be modified in service settings and we have identified various triggers of behaviour modification. Although a wide variety of dysfunctional behaviour and its antece-

dents and consequences have been discussed in earlier studies (e.g., Harris and Reynolds 2003; Daunt and Harris 2012), behaviour modification as one of the consequences of dysfunctional behaviour has not been considered before this research.

Second, the study reveals the positive aspects of the negative phenomenon of dysfunctional behaviour in service settings. Earlier studies have demonstrated the negative reaction of other customers and employees' fatigue has a negative impact on service outcomes (Martin and Pranter 1989; Grandey, Dickter, and Sin 2004). However, such behaviour may have a positive impact on service outcomes in terms of modifying other customers' behaviour. Future research needs to examine the multifaceted consequences of negative phenomena in service settings. This reinforces the suggestion of Fisk *et al.* (2010) about the latent function of dysfunctional behaviour.

Third, these results also demonstrate limited effectiveness of customer management tactics in service settings. Many researchers have insisted on the necessity of customer management as a means to modifying their behaviour (Lovelock 2007; Fisk, Grove, and John 2004; Reynolds and Harris 2006), but effective triggers are generated more often in customer-to-customer interactions than in customer-to-employee interactions. Thus, both researchers and practitioners need to explore indirect customer management tactics, such as encouraging customers to give advice to their companions or other customers.

5.2. Limitation and Future Researches

This research has captured a partial aspect of customer behaviour modification. The respondents to this survey were restricted to those who remember the details of their modification of their behaviour; therefore, there is a possibility that the results are not applicable to all customers who engage in dysfunctional behaviour. Future research is needed to investigate customer's less conscious triggers for modifying their behaviour.

Next, the triggers have limited generality and universality. Even the most frequently mentioned trigger (advice from other customers) was recorded by 15 respondents. Further empirical research or empirical experimentation is necessary to advance customer behaviour modification theories.

Finally, triggers may have culture-specific characteristics. The degree of individualism or power distance in the cultural dimensions (Hofstede 1984) may the effectiveness of the triggers. The results of this research should be tested in other countries or regions to enhance the validity of the triggers.

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