



Self-regulation and “other consumers” at service encounters: A sociometer perspective

Li Miao*

School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, Purdue University, Marriott Hall, Room 247, 900 West State Street, West Lafayette, IN 47907-2059 United States



ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 9 May 2013

Received in revised form 6 December 2013

Accepted 28 February 2014

Keywords:

Other consumers

Self-regulation

Service encounters

Sociometer theory

ABSTRACT

Hospitality consumption often involves sharing the physical environment with other consumers. Other consumers can be either acquaintances a focal consumer shares the consumption experience with (co-consumption others) or strangers the focal consumer encounters due to serendipity (Customer Bs). This research used sociometer as a theoretical lens to examine the social dynamics among a focal consumer, co-consumption others and Customer Bs at service encounters and the impact of such social dynamics on consumer self-regulatory behavior. The results of the experimental study showed that when co-consumption others elicit higher level of need for self-monitoring, a focal consumer is more likely to regulate his/her interpersonal goal and emotions in response to the behavior of Customer Bs at service encounters. The results further suggested that while interpersonal goals do not have a significant effect on encounter satisfaction, emotion regulation positively contributes to encounter satisfaction. Theoretical and practical implications of the findings are also discussed.

© 2014 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Hospitality consumption often involves sharing the physical environment with other consumers who are either acquaintances or strangers. Hospitality service encounters such as dinner with friends in a busy restaurant patronized by other diners, a vacation with family members on a cruise shared by other passengers, or a corporate retreat with colleagues in a resort visited by other travelers all involve the presence of two types of other consumers in the consumption experience: *Co-consumption others* (Wei et al., 2012) and “*Customer Bs*” (Langeard et al., 1981). Co-consumption others are acquaintances such as friends, family or colleagues that share the consumption experience with a focal consumer as intended, while Customer Bs are familiar strangers or complete strangers who happen to be in the service environment at the same time due to pure serendipity. The presence of co-consumption others and Customer Bs at service encounters weaves a complex social environment in which hospitality consumption takes place. Prior research in the hospitality literature suggested that the presence of other consumers is one of the social factors in servicescape and other consumers’ behaviors influence a focal consumer’s emo-

tional experience at service encounters (e.g., Ryu and Jang, 2008). For example, Hwang et al. (2012) showed that crowding in a dining setting has a significant effect on consumers’ emotional responses and approach-avoidance responses. Miao et al. (2011) suggested that consumers at hospitality service encounters use mental scripts to make judgments about other consumers’ behavior and react emotionally based on such evaluations. Interactions with other consumers at hospitality service encounters can indirectly and positively influence consumer satisfaction through experiential value (Wu and Liang, 2009). While consumers’ emotional responses to the presence and behaviors of other consumers at service encounters have been well documented in the hospitality literature, existing studies predominantly modeled such emotional responses as *outcomes*, emotional responses to other consumers as *processes* are not well understood (Zhang et al., 2010). In addition, prior research tends to treat other consumers at hospitality service encounters as a collective whole and the effects of co-consumption others and *Customer Bs* on a focal consumer’s emotional experience are not differentiated.

To close the research gap in our understanding of consumer responses to other consumers at hospitality service encounters as *processes* and of potentially different effects of co-consumption others and *Customer Bs* on a focal consumer’s responses, this study used Sociometer theory (Leary and Downs, 1995; Leary, 2003) as a theoretical lens to better understand such processes and

* Tel.: +1 765 494 8031; fax: +1 765 494 0327.

E-mail address: lmiao@purdue.edu

different effects in hospitality service encounters. The basic tenet of sociometer theory is that people possess a sociometer that monitors the interpersonal environment for cues that are relevant to a person's relational value in the eyes of other people (Leary, 2003). Sociometer theory views perceived relational value of oneself as a gauge that, much like fuel gauges and thermostats, has a function in terms of monitoring and maintaining a minimum level of acceptance by other people (Leary and Downs, 1995). This study employed the notion of sociometer as a gauge to explore the underlying processes of consumer responses to other consumers' hospitality service encounters. Furthermore, this research also used sociometer as a theoretical anchor to model consumers' self-regulatory behaviors toward co-consumption others and Customer Bs. A better understanding of consumer self-regulation in response to social dynamics will offer new insights into the social processes in service encounters. The interpersonal aspect of service encounters beyond consumer-provider interactions is particularly relevant in today's business environment in which engaging customers takes precedence over merely maintaining good relationships with customers. Further insights into the interpersonal dynamics at service encounters will help hospitality researchers and practitioners better understand consumers' subjective experience at service encounters and develop more effective mechanisms to engage consumers and facilitate more favorable consumption experiences.

Using sociometer theory (Leary and Downs, 1995; Leary, 2003) as a theoretical anchor, this research examined self-regulatory behavior in the presence of other consumers in hospitality service encounters from an interpersonal perspective. Specifically, the objectives of this study were: (1) to examine a focal consumer's self-regulation of interpersonal goals toward Customer Bs in the presence of co-consumption others; (2) to assess a focal consumer's self-regulation of emotions elicited by Customer Bs in the presence of co-consumption others; and (3) to evaluate the effect of self-regulation on encounter satisfaction. In the sections that follow, this article first provides a review of theoretical and empirical bases that shows the link between self-regulation and social interactions at service encounters. An empirical study is then presented. The article concludes by discussing the findings, theoretical and practical implications of the findings, the limitations and future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Co-consumption others and customer Bs in service encounters

Presence of other consumers in the service environment has long been recognized in consumer and hospitality literature (e.g., Aubert-Gamet and Cova, 1999; Baker, 1986; Bitner et al., 1997; Booms and Bitner, 1981; Grove and Fisk, 1997; Langeard et al., 1981; Lovelock, 1996; Martin and Pranter, 1989). The extant literature largely treats other consumers as a collective homogenous whole. However, both empirical and anecdotal evidence suggest that other consumers in relation to a focal consumer differ considerably; other consumers can be acquaintances such as family members, friends, colleagues or "purchase pals" (Parker and Ward, 2000), familiar strangers or complete strangers (McGrath and Otnes, 1995). Another important distinction between types of other consumers is the level of other consumers' participation in a focal consumer's consumption experience and the particular role other consumers play in shaping a focal consumer's experience. For example, *co-consumption others* are often acquaintances that participate in a focal consumer's consumption experience and share a communal consumption experience with the focal consumer. In contrast, Customer Bs are often strangers who share the

service environment with a focal consumer due to serendipity. Customer Bs are social elements in the service environment that can be seen as atmospheric factors, and encounters with Customer Bs may or may not directly affect a focal consumer's consumption experience.

2.2. Social presence of other consumers and sense of self

Prior research suggests that "people are impacted by the real, implied, or imagined presence or action of a social presence" (Argo et al., 2005; p.207). Prior research shows that the presence of other people (either real or imagined) can elicit thoughts that one is being evaluated (Dahl et al., 2001). An individual's self-concept comprises both personal identity (i.e., related to a person's sense of unique identity differentiated from others) and social identity (i.e., derived from self-evaluation from groups to which an individual seeks to define him/herself in terms of social categories one belongs to) (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Social encounters involve presenting oneself effectively to others (Vohs et al., 2005). While some information about the self is conveyed using well-learned behaviors, other self-presentational efforts may require actively monitoring of behavior to achieve a certain public image (Vohs et al., 2005). The latter form of self-presentation depends heavily on self-regulation, a purposive process in which self-corrective adjustments are taking place as needed to stay on track for the purpose being served (Carver and Scheier, 2011; Vohs et al., 2005).

2.3. A sociometer perspective of self-regulation in service encounters

Conceptualizing the sociometer as a psychological mechanism that monitors people's social environments provides a useful lens to understand how a focal customer reacts to social stimuli in service encounters in the presence of co-consumption others whose real or imagined reactions affects the individual's perceived relational value. As a mechanism for monitoring and responding to other people's responses to the self, the sociometer naturally responds to changes in others' perceived reactions to the individual (Leary and Baumeister, 2000). When people must effortfully alter their behavior to convey the intended image of self, success at self-presentation will depend heavily on effective self-regulation (Vohs et al., 2005). However, success in self-regulation partly depends on self-monitoring (Bandura, 1991). Self-monitoring refers to a motivation linked to concerns for social appropriateness within a specific and immediate context (Snyder, 1987). When co-consumption others elicit a high need for self-monitoring, the sociometer of perceived relational value serves to regulate a focal consumer's reactions to the social stimuli in the service environment. By contrast, when co-consumption others do not activate a focal consumer's need for self-monitoring, the individual focuses less on the self-regulation of behavior in reaction to interpersonal stimuli and more on the extent to which their actions conform with internal values (Snyder and DeBono, 1985).

2.4. Self-regulation and situational interpersonal goals toward other consumers

One of the most well-documented self-regulatory challenges within social relationships is to regulate the content of interpersonal goals (Murray et al., 2006). A burgeoning body of literature examines the role of goal pursuits in relationship contexts (Gable, 2006). This stream of research describes two interpersonal approaches that reflect two distinct self-regulatory systems: appetitive and aversive interpersonal goals. *Appetitive interpersonal goals* reflect the underlying motivation to seek positive social

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1009489>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1009489>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)