The moderating effects of gender roles on service emotional contagion

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This study attempts to examine how service personnel’s appearances, attitudes, and behaviours affect customers’ emotions and thus their satisfaction and loyalty; it also considers gender roles an important moderator, in that customers with different gender roles may detect and feel differently when they are exposed to personnel’s appearances, attitudes, and behaviours. Empirical data were collected from customers in clothing shops in Taiwan. The results suggest that customers with androgynous role more sensitive to the emotional contagion process. Managerial implications and future research directions are also discussed.

Keywords: customer emotion; emotional contagion; customer satisfaction; customer loyalty; gender role

Introduction

In changing developing economies, economic value progresses from measuring commodities, goods, and services to include experiences as well. In this context, service providers add emotional value to consumer experiences, especially if service personnel’s behaviour serves to induce positive, affective, memorable experiences make remain customers of the service firm (Barlow & Maul, 2000). That is, service personnel can create emotional value through interactions with customers and thus generate customer satisfaction and loyalty.

However, few firms recognise the extent of the importance of emotion in business, so few employees exert the power of positive emotion either within their organisations or during their contacts with customers. According to O’Connell (2006), firms that emphasize customer relationship management usually think only about managing customer data, and ignore the basic humanity of their customers. However, these firms must learn how best to interact with their customers by managing emotion during service provision and creating positive experiences for customers because the emotions these customers associate with the firm can determine its success or failure and influence their levels of satisfaction.
Emotions refer to mental states of readiness that arise from people’s appraisals of events or their own thoughts (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999). When positive emotions emerge during service contacts, customers attempt to reinforce and continue their positive feelings, whereas negative emotions can make customers hate the service providers and refuse to return. Companies therefore should develop employees’ emotional abilities and understand customers’ emotions to establish customer value and strong customer relationships.

However, the influence of service personnel on customers’ emotions differs for different individuals. For example, prior gender studies posit that cognition and responses differ by gender, such that men tend to be assertive, active, and goal oriented, whereas women are expressive, sensitive to visual stimuli, and socially oriented (Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993). Women generally are more empathic and likely to be influenced by other people’s emotions than are men (Timmers, Fischer, & Manstead, 1998), and their traditional conditioning often makes women more sensitive to emotions and feelings (Gilligan, 1982). Therefore, customers’ gender may moderate the effects of employees’ emotions and attitudes on customer perception during service contacts.

However, another stream of research indicates no significant differences in terms of feelings of happiness or sadness across genders (Kring & Gordon, 1998; Wild, Erb, & Bartels, 2001). These studies suggest that though social standards may differentiate the way men and women express emotion, their levels of emotional sensation remain similar. Furthermore, as society has developed, the division of labour has changed, resulting in ambiguous sex roles, as well as the emergence of androgynous roles (Collins, 1981; Hull, 1997). In other words, as sex roles diversify, physiological gender no longer suffices to explain differences in customer emotions and responses, whereas gender roles, such as masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated (Bem, 1974), may be more suitable for explicating the different emotional responses of different customers.

Although many studies consider the effects of emotions on customers (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; Dimberg & Thunberg, 1998; Friedman, Prince, Riggio, & DiMatteo, 1980; Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002) and some even discuss differences in emotional across gender roles (Broderick & Korteland, 2002; Campbell, Steffen, & Langmeyer, 1981; Grossman & Wood, 1993), they generally lack a comprehensive investigation of the effects of service personnel’s emotional expressiveness on customer emotions, satisfaction, and loyalty. Therefore, this study uses service personnel’s emotional expressiveness as an independent variable, customer emotions and customer satisfaction as mediating variables, and customer loyalty as the dependent variable. In addition to customer emotion and satisfaction as mediating variables, this study considers gender roles as a potential moderator between service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customer emotions. The proposed hypotheses are tested by empirical data, and the empirical results offer some guidance for managers who need to develop strategies to enhance customers’ experiential value.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Emotional expressiveness entails the use of facial expressions, voices, gestures, and body movements to transmit emotions (Friedman et al., 1980). When service personnel employs emotional expressiveness, it cues emotions (Niedenthal, Brauer, Halberstadt, & Innes-Ker, 2001) and leads to emotional contagion, or the automatic mimicry of others’ actions, facial expressions, gestures,
and voices, which reflects emotional consistency (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1994; Hsee, Hatfield, Carlson, & Chemtob, 1990). In other words, emotional contagion means mimicking others’ behaviours and feeding them back into one’s own emotions (Bagozzi et al., 1999; Söderlund & Rosengren, 2004). In the context of service industries, emotional transmitters are those frontline service personnel who influence customers through emotional expressions. Customers mimic the behaviours of these transmitters – or at least recognise the emotional states of the transmitters after receiving messages. To achieve emotional congruency with the transmitters, customers feed back the specific emotion (Lemmink & Mattsson, 2002; Pugh, 2001).

Prior studies of store environment suggest that a salesperson’s professional knowledge, nice appearance, and friendly attitude aid the customer shopping experience, because they provide solutions to customers’ problems, promote positive emotions, and enhance perceived value and purchase intentions (Baker, Parasuraman, Grewal, & Voss, 2002; Yoo & MacInnis, 1998). Sherman, Mathur, and Smith (1997) also find that service personnel’s friendly behaviours and polite attitudes have positive effects on customers’ emotions. Thus, we propose:

**H1:** Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness, which includes their (a) appearance, (b) behaviour, and (c) attitude, relates positively to customers’ emotions.

Bagozzi et al. (1999) suggest that emotion is a psychological state triggered by people’s evaluations and thoughts about a specific event, and Ruth, Brunel, and Ottenes (2002) propose that emotion is both subjective and personalised. Therefore, people express emotions related to their behavioural intentions through physical expressions. In summarising these previous explanations, we define emotion in this study as internal physiological states activated by specific consumption events that influence future behavioural intentions.

An affect infusion model, which comprises both affect priming and affect as information (Forgas, 1995), might explain the effects of emotions on satisfaction. The affect-priming aspect suggests that affect influences a person’s entire judgment process, including attention, encoding, retrieval, associations, and interpretations, whereas the affect-as-information suggests that when people lack the time or detailed information needed for substantive processing, they use affect to simplify their judgments. Therefore, customers’ emotions influence their sense of satisfaction, especially during brief service contacts. Customer emotion thus serves as a heuristic principle to judge satisfaction; positive emotions usually generate higher degrees of satisfaction, whereas negative emotions generate dissatisfaction and complaints.

Some empirical studies also suggest that performance by and the emotional expressiveness of service providers influences customers’ emotions, which may enhance customer satisfaction (Price, Arnould, & Tierney, 1995; Söderlund & Rosengren, 2004). Thus, we posit:

**H2:** As customers’ emotions become more positive, they are more satisfied.

Mehrabian and Russell (1974) use the concept of M–R environmental psychology to suggest that environmental stimuli, such as store atmosphere and service personnel’s attitudes and behaviours, trigger specific emotions in consumers, and that emotion influences behavioural intentions, such as purchase intentions, recommendation intentions, satisfaction, repurchase, duration of stay, and purchase amount (Babin & Darden, 1995; Donovan & Rossiter, 1982). Other studies support this claim: Kotler (1973) argues that external stimuli influence consumer behaviours in retail environments through emotions; and Söderlund and Rosengren (2004)
confirm that employee behaviours can influence customers’ emotions and thus their degree of satisfaction. The contacts between service personnel and customers represent external stimuli and therefore may influence customers’ emotions, which in turn further influence customers’ satisfaction evaluations. That is, 

\[ H3: \text{Customers’ emotions mediate the relationship between service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customer satisfaction.} \]

Traditionally, researchers have measured customer loyalty as the possibility the customer will repurchase the same products or brands, but it can also be measured by consumers’ brand preferences, commitment, and purchase intentions (Lee & Feick, 2001). Therefore, measures that use both attitude and behaviour in defining loyalty can entail greater predictive power (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Pritchard & Howard, 1997). Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol (2002), for example, suggest that customer loyalty involves a higher share of the category wallet to the specific service provider, positive word of mouth, and repeat purchases. Summarising from the previous studies, we define customer loyalty as a positive attitude, reflected in both attitudinal and behavioural loyalty.

Furthermore, we argue that customer satisfaction has a positive effect on and is an important antecedent of customer loyalty (McCarville, 2000). Many empirical studies verify this relationship (Gerpott, Rams, & Schindler, 2001; Tsaur, Chiu, & Huang, 2002). Customer satisfaction thus offers a precondition for maintaining long-term relationships with customers. Therefore, we propose that

\[ H4: \text{When customers are more satisfied, they are more loyal to a store.} \]

Finally, we address the effects of gender roles as a moderating variable. Whereas gender represents physical differences and classifies humans as male or female, gender roles focus on psychological and social differences and are influenced by social norms, which dictate certain behaviours, attitudes, and activities (Schaefer & Lamm, 1995). These roles also result from interactions of social factors within cultural, subcultural, and specific gender relationships (Ashmore, 1990).

From a physiological viewpoint, the seat of emotion in female brains is scattered across many areas and close to other functional areas. That is, emotions influence many other functions in female brains. In contrast, the emotional function of male brains centres in right portion, so it does not influence, nor is it influenced by, other brain functions (Cahill, 2005; Moir & Jessel, 1999). According to physiological brain research, women are more likely to be influenced by emotion than are men. Other studies also verify differences in emotional sensitivity across genders, such that women are more likely to recognise emotional cues (Timmers et al., 1998) and have similar feelings when watching pictures with positive or negative emotions than are men (Greenwald, Cook, & Lang, 1989).

According to many gender theorists, women are warmer, more capable of expressing emotion, and more focused on interpersonal relationships (Gilligan, 1982; Iacobucci & Ostrom, 1993), whereas men tend to have better technical abilities, are more goal-oriented (Deaux, 1984), and are less influenced by emotions. Therefore, women traditionally play emotional provider and moderator roles both at work and in the home (Gilligan, 1982). In turn, women usually indicate higher needs to interact with others, greater sensitivity to emotions
(Grossman & Wood, 1993), and an increased likelihood of being influenced by others’ emotions (Hatfield et al., 1994).

However, other studies suggest that no significant difference exists in men’s and women’s emotional feelings (Lundqvist & Dimberg, 1995; Wild et al., 2001). This research indicates that though social standards may influence their emotional expressions, internal feelings are similar in both genders (Kring & Gordon, 1998). Moreover, the changes of traditional gender roles in modern society may obscure other differences across genders (Collins, 1981; Hull, 1997). Whereas clearly physical gender alone cannot predict individual characteristics, gender roles may be more suitable, so we combine both physiology and social psychology to examine the effects of gender roles on customer attitudes and behaviour during service contacts.

In this sense, we note that people with feminine gender roles generally have deeper emotional experiences and are empathic and helpful to others (Broderick & Korteland, 2002; Eisenberg, Zhou, & Koller, 2001). Androgy nous persons maintain good adaptability and interpersonal relationships (Campbell et al., 1981; Kelly, O’Brien, & Hosford, 1981) and are more susceptible to the emotions of others. Therefore, both feminine and androgy nous persons tend to be sensitive to emotions (Gianakos, 2002) and have better relationship with others than masculine persons. Androgy nous persons also can cope well with interpersonal stress through their affective adjustments.

Because androgy nous persons emphasize interpersonal relationships and are easily affected by others’ emotions (Hatfield et al., 1994), during conflicts, they actively work to solve the problem with humour and willingly accept the opinions of others (Ornachea, Hillman, & Sawilowsky, 2004). Whereas feminine persons may have some similar characteristics, masculine and undifferentiated persons do not. Therefore, different gender roles alter people’s susceptibility to emotions, emphasis on interpersonal relationships, and level of emotional contagion. In turn,

\[ H5: \text{Customers’ gender roles moderate the relationship between service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customers’ emotions.} \]

We depict our overall research structure in Figure 1.

**Research design**

**Measures**

All of the items were measured by the participants. To measure customers’ emotions, we use semantic differential scales; for the other items, we use seven-point Likert scales, on which 1
represents strongly disagree and 7 represents strongly agree. Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness involves the appearances, attitudes, and behaviours of service personnel, so we summarise previous studies of service personnel’s external expressions (Baker et al., 2002; Rafaeli, 1989; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990), and adapt the items to our situation and subjects. The 20 overall items measure appearance on the basis of clothing and cleanliness; behaviours according to smiling, eye contact, helpfulness, problem solving, and suggestions offered to customers; and attitudes on the basis of the energy, friendliness, and patience of the personnel.

Our measures of customers’ emotions are summarised from previous studies (Brebner, 2003; Johnson & Zinkhan, 1991; Price et al., 1995; Richins, 1997; Wild et al., 2001) and use semantic differential scales pertaining to six items: happy/unhappy, warm/not warm, excited/unexcited, relaxing/not relaxing, pleasing/displeasing, and not angry/angry.

We use five items to measure customer satisfaction, such as ‘The performance of the service personnel was beyond my expectation’ and ‘Shopping at this store is the right choice’ (Dolen, Ruyter, & Lemmink, 2004; Fornell, 1992; Oliver, 1997). Customer loyalty, measured by six items, includes repurchase intention and recommendation intention (Gronholdt, Martensen, & Kristensen, 2000; Selnes, 1993).

The Bem (1981) Sex Role Inventory offers good validity and has been verified through applications in various studies (Hoffman & Borders, 2001; Katsurada & Sugihara, 1999), so we use it as a basis for our measures of gender roles. The 11 masculinity items include leadership abilities, assertiveness, independence, and aggressiveness. The 10 femininity constructs refer to such attributes as being affectionate, sensitive to other’s needs, warm, and compassionate. This study employs a median-split method to classify subjects as masculine, feminine, androgynous, and undifferentiated; specifically, subjects are masculine (feminine) when their masculine scores are above (below) the median and their feminine scores are below (above) the median. In contrast, subjects are androgynous (undifferentiated) if both masculine and feminine scores are above (below) the median.

Sampling
In clothing shops, customers and service personnel interact frequently as customers try on clothes, search for the appropriate size, and often request help from service personnel; therefore, this setting is appropriate for our study. Whereas private clothing stores often include significant variations in design, styles, and operating methods, clothing sectors in department stores tend to vary less, so we use this latter context and control better for bias due to environmental effects.

Of the 378 survey responses we gathered from respondents in Taiwan during April 2006, 350 were valid, for an effective response rate of 92.59%. Seventy-one percent of the respondents are female, and 73% are between the ages of 20 and 30 years, similar to the consumer profiles of department stores, according to E-ICP (Eastern Integrated Consumer Profile, a marketing research agency in Taiwan).

Reliability and validity
In support of the good measurement reliability, all the Cronbach’s αs are greater than 0.84. Because we base all the measures on previous scales and adjust them according to the specific conditions, good content validity is likely. In addition, in support of strong convergent validity, the factor loadings on each construct are greater than 0.5 (0.56–0.93) and converge to one dimension (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).
Results

Regression models serve to analyse the relationships among variables. Because the variance inflation factors are less than 10, collinearity is not a concern, and because the Durbin–Watson values are between 1.5 and 2.5, the independent variables are not highly auto-correlated. Finally, all $F$-values are significant, and the adjusted $R^2$ are greater than 0.18.

According to the empirical results, service personnel’s appearances, attitudes, and behaviours correlate positively with customers’ emotions (Table 1), in support of $H1$. That is, service personnel affect customers’ emotions through their appearances, attitudes, and behaviours, in accordance with the argument that service personnel’s emotional expressiveness influences customers’ emotions (Hatfield et al., 1994; Pugh, 2001).

In addition, customers’ emotions correlate positively with satisfaction (Table 1), in support of $H2$. To make customers more satisfied, service providers should clearly try to enhance customers’ positive emotions and reduce their negative emotions. This finding also confirms the results of previous studies indicating that customers’ emotions influence their evaluations and judgments of their satisfaction (Forgas, 1995; Morse, 2006).

We test for mediation using the three conditions specified by Baron and Kenny (1986): first, the independent variable must affect the mediator; second, the independent variable must affect the dependent variable; and third, when regressing the dependent variable on both the independent variable and the mediator, the mediator must affect the dependent variable, and the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable must be less than that in the second step. Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness correlates positively with customers’ emotions, in confirmation with the first condition ($H1$). In terms of the second condition, service personnel’s emotional expressiveness correlates positively with customer satisfaction (Table 2). When service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customers’ emotions simultaneously function as independent variables and customer satisfaction is the dependent variable, the regression model suggests that only customers’ emotions correlate positively with satisfaction (Table 2). Thus, customer emotion mediates the relationship between service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customer satisfaction, in support of $H3$. That is, in clothing shops, service personnel’s positive emotional expressiveness improves customer satisfaction through customers’ internal emotions.

Customer satisfaction correlates positively with loyalty (Table 1), in support of $H4$. In other words, when customers are more satisfied, they are more loyal to the service providers. These results match those of Bitner (1990) and Anderson and Sullivan (1993).

Table 1. Regression analysis of $H1$, $H2$, and $H4$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>$\beta$ Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardised error</th>
<th>$F$-value</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service personnel’s</td>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>189.72*</td>
<td>0.62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>emotional expressiveness</td>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Behaviour</td>
<td>0.42*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.75*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>451.82*</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>0.80*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>609.94*</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.01.
We also test the possible mediating effect of satisfaction between emotions and loyalty. The results are listed in Table 3 and suggest that customers’ emotions not only positively correlate with satisfaction, but also directly affect customer loyalty. Thus, customer satisfaction is not the mediating variable between emotions and loyalty. Customers’ emotions and satisfaction both directly influence loyalty. Although customer satisfaction is often seen as an important index of customer retention, it is not the only factor that influences loyalty. During the service communication process, creating positive emotions for customers can also directly affect customers’ repurchase intention and enhance loyalty.

Finally, to examine the moderating effect of gender roles on the relationship between service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customers’ emotions, we conduct a two-way ANOVA, in which we convert the continuous scale of service personnel’s emotional expressiveness into a mean-split categorical scale (high versus low). We also examine the moderating effect of physiological gender through this test. As we show in Table 4, the interaction effect of gender and service personnel’s emotional expressiveness on emotions is not significant, which suggests that physiological gender does not moderate the relationship between service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customers’ emotions. However, the interaction effect with gender roles is significant; that is, gender roles moderate the relationship between service personnel’s emotional expressiveness and customers’ emotions, in support of $H_5$.

Whereas we find that androgynous customers emphasize interpersonal relationships and are easily affected by others’ emotions (Figure 2), undifferentiated customers are not sensitive to emotions and thus are not easily affected by service personnel.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>$\beta$ Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardised error</th>
<th>$F$-value</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.59*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>181.92*</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>225.27*</td>
<td>0.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.76*</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.01.

Table 3. Mediating effect of satisfaction: regression analysis of $H_5$.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>$\beta$ coefficients</th>
<th>Standardised error</th>
<th>$F$-value</th>
<th>Adjusted $R^2$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>0.66*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>275.31*</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>0.80*</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>609.94*</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>Loyalty</td>
<td>0.15*</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>317.15*</td>
<td>0.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.69*</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.01.
Discussion

Conclusions and implications

Although the interaction between service personnel and customers is temporary, it can create experiential values that meet customers’ emotional needs and thus become memories. Customers also might use their emotional feelings, which form during social interactions and serve as a means for people to communicate, as a means to evaluate a service. In this case, we may judge the feelings of service personnel and customers according to their emotional cues and use customers’ feelings to predict their purchase decisions.

According to our empirical results, service personnel’s appearances, attitudes, and behaviours relate positively to customers’ emotions, which affect customers’ satisfaction. Moreover, customers’ emotions mediate the influence of service personnel’s emotional expressiveness on customer satisfaction. Because emotion represents part of a service transaction (Barlow & Maul, 2000), when customers feel positive emotions during a service encounter, they also feel satisfied and likely will repurchase in the future. If, however, they experience negative emotions, their unsatisfied feelings may hinder their repurchase intentions.

Prior studies regarding the effects of gender on emotions offer no consensus opinion (Lundqvist & Dimberg, 1995; Wild et al., 2001); whereas some argue that physiological gender influences emotional sensitivity (Moir & Jessel, 1999; Cahill, 2005), many gender

Table 4. The moderating effects of gender and gender roles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent variable</th>
<th>Dependent variable</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>p-value</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness</td>
<td>111.30**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender × Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender role</td>
<td>Emotions</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness</td>
<td>107.93**</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender role × Service personnel’s emotional expressiveness</td>
<td>3.24*</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*p < 0.05.
**p < 0.01.

Figure 2. The moderating effects of gender roles.
theorists suggest that gender roles, which reflect psychological tendencies, better predict individual differences, especially in contemporary societies that obscure gender divisions (Hull, 1997). Our examination of the moderating effects of both physiological gender and gender roles verifies this latter perspective: whereas physiological gender has no significant effect, gender roles moderate the effects of service personnel’s emotional expressiveness on customers’ emotions.

Marketers’ consistent goal is to understand their target customers’ characteristics, produce those products or services that meet customers’ needs, and thus build long-term relationships with customers. We demonstrate that attempting to predict customers’ needs according to their physiological gender simply is not suitable in modern society. However, considering the heterogeneous emotional experiences customers have because of their divergent gender roles may help businesses manage their long-term customer relationships. Specifically, we find that androgynous customers adapt better to the impacts and pressures of transitioning gender roles in modern society. Equipped with both masculinity and femininity, they can deal successfully the conflicts that arise in interpersonal relationships. Thus, they sense emotional changes in service personnel better than other customers. At the opposite end of the spectrum, undifferentiated customers tend to be careless about emotional interpersonal communications and insensitive about the impacts of emotions.

Therefore, emotional contagion is crucial for delivering good service experiences and maintaining customer satisfaction. If service providers want to create positive emotional experiences for their customers, they should start by managing employees’ emotions. For example, firms could test applicants’ personalities and emotional management abilities during recruitment stages as well as enhance their emotional management abilities through training. Managers should create healthy working environments by building a supportive business culture and designing appropriate incentives to motivate employees.

**Directions for further research**

Because we verify our hypotheses in the clothing industry, additional research should examine these relationships in different industries (Barlow & Maul, 2000). In addition, we delivered questionnaires to customers in department stores and discussed their responses in real purchase situations, thus customers’ original emotions are not controlled. Besides, factors other than service personnel’s emotional expressiveness, such as environmental elements or friends who shop together, may alter customers’ emotions, and other forms of stimuli, such as images (Doherty, 1998; Hsee et al., 1990), voices, pictures (Surakka & Hietanen, 1998), and technical interfaces, might affect emotional contagion processes. Therefore, further research should use experimental designs to control for the possible influences of these other factors. In addition, though we discuss the moderating effects of gender roles; other factors, such as personalities, may provide fruitful extensions to our findings. Finally, additional research could address the potential relationships between gender roles and other variables, such as lifestyles, brand trust, and brand affects to clarify customers’ real preferences and needs.

**References**


