Customers as partial employees: the influences of satisfaction and commitment on customer citizenship behavior in fitness centers

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Abstract:

Customer citizenship behavior is a kind of customers' spontaneous behaviors that are not necessary for successful delivery of services, but nonetheless assists the services of the organization. Organizations may, therefore, benefit from different kinds of customer citizenship behaviors (i.e., feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance) during the service delivery process. To understand customer citizenship behavior in the context of the fitness center, the purpose of this study was to examine the influences of satisfaction and commitment on customer citizenship behavior. The results revealed that customer satisfaction positively led to customer citizenship behaviors of feedback, advocacy, helping but showed insignificant influence on tolerance. Moreover, customer commitment also had a positive influence on all customer citizenship behaviors. Lastly, customer satisfaction was positively related to customer commitment. The findings of the current study contribute to the field's understanding of customer's role during the service process in fitness centers and provide insightful implications for fitness center managers.

Key words: Customer citizenship behavior, customer satisfaction, customer commitment, fitness center

Introduction

With the proliferation of fitness centers in many countries over the last decade, increasing competition can be observed in fitness service industry (Chiu, Cho, & Won, 2014). Fitness service industry is distinctively different from other service industries. According to Bitner (1995), customers of fitness centers have a higher frequency of contacting with employees who deliver service as compared to other service industries because customers vigorously participate in various exercise activities during the service process. For example, customers are usually and highly interact with the frontline employees such as physical trainers or instructors. Therefore, customers in fitness centers may play a critical role in service delivery and even contribute to service quality.

The concept of the customers as contributors in service context has merely drawn sporadic attention before the 21st century (Bettencourt, 1997; Lengnick-Hall, 1996). However, recent researchers have conceptualized customers as "partial employees" and human resources of the organization and identified the customer behaviors that contribute to service quality. Groth (2005) initially proposed the concept of customer citizenship behavior (CCB) and defined CCB as "voluntary and discretionary behaviors that are not required for the successful production and/or delivery of the service but that, in the aggregate, help the service organization overall" (p. 11). These actions constitute extra-role behavior, consisting of positive, voluntary, helpful, and constructive behaviors toward other customers and the firm (Bove, Pervan, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009). Consequently, it may lead to a more friendly service environment and better service quality because a customer exhibiting citizenship behavior may encourage other clients to display citizenship behaviors, starting a chain of voluntary actions.

Although the critical role of customer behavior has been dressed in the service context, there have only a few attempts to clearly identify the role of CCB in the context of fitness services. Furthermore, it is also essential to understand how to encourage customers to exhibit citizenship behaviors. Accordingly, the purposes of this study were to explore CCB in fitness centers and examine the extent to which customer's satisfaction and commitment shape CCB.

Customer Citizenship Behavior

CCB is an extending concept of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) beyond the limited focus of employees. It proposes that customers may engage in a variety of citizenship behaviors, like organizational employees, directed toward a particular organization (Groth, 2005). It has been argued that the process of service delivery is the locus of where customers are often physically present with service providers (Bowen, 1986). Therefore, customers can be regarded as part of the human resource, and contribute to the overall success of the service organization (Bettencourt, 1997; Groth, 2005). Therefore, the concept of organizational citizenship

behavior can be also applied to the customer domain. In the literature of human resource management, OCB is defined as employee's behavior that is discretionary, not explicitly or directly recognized by the formal reward system, and that in the aggregate facilitates the efficient performing of the organization (Organ, 1998). In a similar vein, CCB refers to the voluntary, discretionary and constructive behaviors that are not obligatory for the successful delivery of the service but that contribute to the service organization overall (Groth, 2005). It is the voluntary (extra-role) behaviors that go beyond the expectations of customers during the process of service delivery.

CCB has been investigated in the service marketing literature under various names, including customer discretionary behavior (Ford, 1995), customer extra-role behaviors (Ahearne, Bhattacharya, & Gruen, 2005; Tat Keh & Wei Teo, 2001), customer voluntary performance (Bettencourt, 1997; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007), and organization citizenship behavior of clients (Lengnick-Hall, Claycomb, & Inks, 2000). The service marketing literature identified several forms of customer citizenship behavior. Yi (2014) reviewed the relevant literature of CCB and identified four dimensions of customer citizenship behavior: feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance. Feedback is that customers provide guidance and suggestions to organizations in order for helping them improve the service creation process. Advocacy is the positive word-of-mouth that refers to recommendations of the business, including the organization or the employee, to others such as friends or family. Helping is the customer behavior that assists other customers in need of help. Lastly, tolerance represents customer willingness to be patient when the service delivery does not meet the client's expectations of adequate service, as in the case of delays or equipment shortages. In sum, these four dimensions of behavior are the common features of CCB.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction has been one of the most widely examined concepts in the service marketing literature. Oliver (2010) defined satisfaction as "pleasurable fulfillment" of a need, desire, or goal after consuming a product or service, with overall satisfaction having a strong affective orientation concerning customers' overall experience with a service (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) suggested that persons will target their efforts to reciprocate toward the source of the benefits received. An exchange begins with one party giving an advantage to another. If the recipient reciprocates, and consequently a bundle of beneficial exchanges occurs, feelings of mutual obligation between the parties are created (Blau, 1964). When customers are satisfied with a service received, they are more likely to reciprocate by engaging in citizenship behavior obligingly (Bettencourt, 1997). The linkage between customer satisfaction and CCB has been established empirically (Groth, 2005; Yi & Gong, 2008). Thus, in the context of fitness center, we hypothesized that:

Hypothesis1: Customer satisfaction will have a positive influence on CCB of (a) feedback, (b) advocacy, (c) helping, and (d) tolerance.

Customer Commitment

Customer commitment is defined as an emotional attachment that exists between the customer and the firm, and is reflected in the relative strength of a customer's psychological identification and involvement with the firm (Mowday, Steers, & Porter, 1979). It also reflects an individual's constant desire to maintain the valued relationship with the firm (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpande, 1992). Because commitment implies a higher level of dedication to establishing a successful relationship and to make it mutually satisfying and beneficial, customers may enduringly engage in a variety of prosocial behaviors to support the firm and maintain the relationship with firm. Therefore, CCB may be an outcome of a self-serving motive that is that individual wants to continue this relationship so he/she will act helpfully toward his/her firm and its service provider. The social exchange theory posits that highly committed customers have an emotional attachment to and identification with an organization's goals and values (Blau, 1964). Thus, they are interested in the welfare of the organization and are willing to reciprocate efforts (i.e., citizenship behaviors) with respect to past benefits received (Bettencourt, 1997). Empirical evidence of previous research also supported that commitment leads to CCB (Bartikowski & Walsh, 2011; Bettencourt, 1997; Bove et al., 2009; Curth, Urich, & Benkenstein, 2014; Gruen, Summers, & Acito, 2000; Yi & Gong, 2008). Accordingly, we proposed the following hypotheses to examine the relationships between customer commitment and the four dimensions of CCB.

Hypothesis2: Customer commitment will have a positive influence on CCB of (a) feedback, (b) advocacy, (c) helping, and (d) tolerance.

Moreover, it is also necessary to differentiate the concepts of satisfaction and commitment. Satisfaction is a "backward-looking" attitude whereas the commitment is a more "forward-looking" one (Gustafsson, Johnson, & Roos, 2005). As aforementioned, Satisfaction is the evaluation of experience, whereas commitment captures the strength of the relationship. Therefore, an individual's cumulative evaluation of his satisfactory consumption experiences in the past may results in a more committed relationship in the future (Bettencourt,

1997; Brown, Barry, Dacin, & Gunst, 2005). The reason is that “a high level of satisfaction provides the customer with repeated positive reinforcement, thus creating commitment-inducing emotional bonds.” (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, & Gremler, 2002, p. 237). Fullerton (2011) proposed that satisfaction is significantly and positively related to customer commitment in the service industries of banking, hairstyling, and auto-repair. Thus, we proposed the third hypothesis:

Hypotheses 3: Customer satisfaction will have a positive influence on customer commitment.

Methods

Participation and Procedure

The researchers collected data from customers of three World Gym fitness centers in the region of Greater Taipei by convenience sampling. World Gym is a well-known fitness chain club worldwide and the largest fitness center in Taiwan with 36 clubs by 2014. A total of 300 questionnaires were distributed, and 278 available questionnaires were collected after eliminating 22 respondents with missing information. The final sample was dominated by male respondents (61.2%, $n = 170$) between the age of 21-30 (54.3%, $n = 151$). Also, most of them attend the fitness center 1-2 time (s) per week (36.9%, $n = 110$). The detailed sample characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Sample demographic characteristics

Characteristics	n	%
Gender		
Male	170	61.2
Female	108	38.8
Age		
Less than 20	19	6.8
21-30	151	54.3
31-40	85	30.6
More than 41	23	8.3
Frequency (per week)		
Less than once	23	8.3
1-2 time(s)	110	39.6
3-4 times	103	37.1
More than 4 times	42	15.1

Instrument

The tool for this study consisted of demographics, frequency of usage and individual measures of all three constructs discussed in this paper: customer citizenship behavior, value, and satisfaction. The scale of customer citizenship behavior developed by Yi and Gong (2013) consists of four dimensions: feedback (3 items), advocacy (3 items), helping (4 items), and tolerance (3 items). The three-item scale of customer satisfaction was used to measure how respondents satisfy the service in the fitness center. The three-item scale of customer commitment was to evaluate customers' psychological attachment to the fitness center. Both of customer satisfaction and customer commitment scales were adopted from (Bettencourt, 1997). Next, back-translation method was conducted to reduce the discrepancy between Chinese version and English version questionnaires. All scale items were evaluated with a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1) *strongly disagree* to (5) *strongly agree*.

Data Analysis

Prior to the hypotheses testing, we conducted a preliminary test using SPSS 20.0. Descriptive statistics was carried out to scrutinize the data for normality assumption. In addition, we measured the reliability and validity of the observed variables and latent variables in order to estimate the obvious levels of the variables by means of a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Finally, a structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis was used to test the hypotheses in the proposed conceptual model. With the structural model analysis, this study utilizes the standard factor loading and t-value of the path coefficient to determine the path strengths and significance levels of the latent variables.

Results

Scale Reliability and Validity

The measurement model of CCB, customer satisfaction and customer commitment revealed an inadequate model fit proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999), $\chi^2(137) = 437.03$, $\chi^2/df = 3.19$, CFI = .928, TLI = .891,

RMSEA = .091. The ratio of the model's chi-square and its degree of freedom, TLI, and RMSEA fell out of the recommended cut-off value. According to modification indices (MI) information, one of the indicators for *Helping*, "I give advice to other customers," was associated with multiple significant MIs. In addition, the factor loading is lower than the suggested value (.50). Thus, it was determined that dropping this item would improve the model without compromising the theoretical meaningfulness of the measure (Bentler & Chou, 1987; Byrne, 2001). The deletion of the item resulted in a better fit of measurement model, $\chi^2(120) = 237.59$, $\chi^2/df = 1.98$, CFI = .949, TLI = .935, RMSEA = .059 (See Table 2).

Next, we also assessed the reliability of measures by calculating Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability (CR). As reported in Table 2, the results show that the scale possesses adequate reliability, as the values of Cronbach's alpha were all over .70, which exceeded the recommended level proposed by Nunnally (1978), and the values of CR ranged from .76 to .88, which fulfilled the criterion (.70) suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The validity of the CCB was also examined using convergent validity and discriminant validity. Convergent validity was investigated by factor loading and the average variance extracted (AVE). The factor loadings of the construct indicators ranged from .59 to .90, which were all higher the suggested value (.50). The values of AVE were all greater than .05, ranging from .51 to .71 (Hair, Black, Babin, & Anderson, 2010). Moreover, discriminant validity is established when the AVEs estimate for each construct exceeds the squared correlations between the respective constructs (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). It indicated that the AVE values were considerably greater than any squared correlations between the dimensions. Thus, discriminant validity was established.

Table 2 Reliability and validity of measures

Customer citizenship behavior	Factor loading
<i>Feedback</i> ($\alpha = .76$; CR = .85, AVE = .66)	
If I have a useful idea on how to improve service of the fitness center, I let the employee know.	.69
When I receive good service from employees of the fitness center, I comment about it.	.75
When I experience a problem in the fitness center, I let the employee know about it.	.71
<i>Advocacy</i> ($\alpha = .88$; CR = .76, AVE = .51)	
I said positive things about XYZ and the employee to others.	.90
I recommended the fitness center and the employee to others.	.90
I encouraged friends and relatives to use the fitness center.	.71
<i>Helping</i> ($\alpha = .83$; CR = .88, AVE = .71)	
I assist other customers in the fitness center if they need my help.	.83
I help other customers if they seem to have problems.	.93
I teach other customers in the fitness center to use the service correctly.	.64
I give advice to other customers.*	-
<i>Tolerance</i> ($\alpha = .78$; CR = .79, AVE = .57)	
If service of the fitness center is not delivered as expected, I would be willing to put up with it.	.59
If employees of the fitness center makes a mistake during service delivery, I would be willing to be patient.	.79
If I have to wait longer than I normally expected to receive the service in the fitness center, I would be willing to adapt.	.84
<i>Customer commitment</i> ($\alpha = .82$; CR = .82, AVE = .60)	
I am very committed to this fitness center.	.77
I intend to continue exercising at this fitness center.	.81
I would expend effort on behalf of this fitness center to help it succeed.	.74
<i>Customer satisfaction</i> ($\alpha = .85$; CR = .85, AVE = .66)	
Compared to other fitness centers, I am very satisfied with this fitness center.	.79
Based on all my experience with this fitness center, I am very satisfied.	.85
My exercise experiences at this fitness center have always been pleasant.	.79

Note. α = Cronbach's alpha, CR = composite reliability, AVE = average variance extracted.

*The item was eliminated because of multiple significant MIs and low factor loading.

Finally, the results of Pearson correlations among constructs are shown in Table 3. As reported, all the values were under 0.8, supporting that these constructs were not highly correlated, and the collinearity of constructs did not exist in the measurement

Table 3 Mean, SD, and Correlation matrix between constructs

	Mean	SD	Feedback	Advocacy	Helping	Tolerance	Commitment
Feedback	3.78	.64	-				
Advocacy	3.74	.74	.49**	-			
Helping	3.46	.80	.34**	.32**	-		
Tolerance	3.23	.75	.13*	.25**	.32**	-	
Commitment	3.34	.86	.32**	.32**	.25**	.10	-
Satisfaction	3.88	.61	.29**	.46**	.23**	.16**	.26**

Hypotheses Testing

To investigate the influence of CCB on customer's perceived value and satisfaction, SEM analysis was conducted. The results indicated that the conceptual model demonstrated an adequate fit with $\chi^2(126) = 308.09$, $\chi^2/df = 2.45$, CFI = .922, TLI = .905, and RMSEA = .072 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). As reported in Table 4, the results provided support for Hypotheses 1a, 1b, and 1c. Customer satisfaction significantly and positively leads to feedback ($\beta = .31$, $t = 4.04$), advocacy ($\beta = .44$, $t = 6.60$), helping ($\beta = .24$, $t = 3.44$), and tolerance ($\beta = .13$, $t = 3.44$), whereas no significant relationship was found between customer satisfaction and tolerance ($\beta = .22$, $t = 2.90$), rejecting Hypothesis 1d. Moreover, the results also supported Hypotheses 2a, 2b, 2c, and 2d. Customer commitment had a significantly positive influence on feedback ($\beta = .35$, $t = 4.44$), advocacy ($\beta = .26$, $t = 3.91$), helping ($\beta = .22$, $t = 3.05$), and tolerance ($\beta = .22$, $t = 2.90$). Lastly, customer satisfaction had a positive influence on customer commitment ($\beta = .31$, $t = 4.33$).

Fig. 1. Conceptual model path coefficients ($p^{**} < .01$; $p^{***} < .001$)**Discussion**

CCB is not a new concept in the service industry. However, the customer behaviors can differ across service industries and as such, it is necessary to examine CCB in different service industries. Especially, the nature of sport service is unique and distinct from other service industries as customers are particularly involved in the process of service delivery.

This study examines the relationships between customer satisfaction, commitment, and different types of citizenship behaviors (i.e., feedback, advocacy, helping, and tolerance). The findings reveal that customer satisfaction positively leads to CCBs of feedback, advocacy, helping but shows insignificant influence on tolerance. Moreover, customer commitment also positively affects all customer citizenship behaviors. Lastly, customer satisfaction is positively related to customer commitment.

Although the direct influence of satisfaction on tolerance is not found, satisfaction indirectly affects tolerance through commitment. In this study, it indicates that both satisfaction and commitment are significant antecedents of CCBs.

This concurs with the findings of earlier studies that the customers' evaluation of experience and psychological attachment to an organization are critical factors enhancing CCBs. However, it shows that tolerance has the lowest mean value among CCBs, indicating customers are reluctant to exhibit such citizenship behavior as compared to other citizenship behaviors (i.e., feedback, advocacy, and helping).

Moreover, even the satisfied customers are not willing to be patient when the service delivery does not meet the customer's expectations. On the other hand, commitment leads to all CCBs, indicating that the psychological loyalty plays a more important role in building CCBs than customers' satisfaction. That is, satisfying customers is not enough. This finding suggests a successful customer-organization relationship is the primary facilitator of CCBs beyond meeting customers' expectation.

Limitations and future research

However, this study is not without limitations. First, the results may be limited to respondents who participated in this study. Only customers of private fitness centers (i.e., World Gym) located in the region of Great Taipei were included, and, therefore, the generalizability to the fitness centers of different areas. The future study should collect data from different areas to include a more comprehensive demographic profile. Moreover, the present study focused on the effects of two primary variables (satisfaction and commitment) on CCBS only, and potential antecedent variables were not investigated. For a more comprehensive view of CCBS, variables such as customer support and customer perceived justice should be taken into consideration for future research.

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