**Antecedents of Customers' Helping Behaviour toward Other Customers: An Application on the**

**Egyptian Higher Education Industry**

**Mohamed Maher¹**, Mohamed Sobhy Temerak¹, Wael Kortam¹

¹Cairo University, Giza, Egypt

**ABSTRACT**

Customers' citizenship behaviour refers to all extra role behaviors performed by customers that do not affect successful completion of the service (Groth, 2005). Compared to more popular dimensions of citizenship behaviours (e.g. word‐of‐mouth), customers' helping behaviour has received scant research attention by marketing scholars. This research aims at developing an overarching model of antecedents of customers' helping behaviour using mixed research design. A qualitative exploratory phase, that employed two focus groups and nine in‐depth interviews with undergraduate students at number of universities in Egypt, was conducted, to uncover and validate drivers of helping behaviour. A conceptual framework was then developed and tested by the means of questionnaire.

424 valid responses were collected by means quota samples from undergraduate students at five different universities. The data was analyzed by the means of SEM using SmartPLS. The study findings showed that customers' satisfaction was found to have the strongest impact on customers' helping behaviour, followed by customers' tendency to have extraversion personality trait and then, social identification with their university and their engagement in students' activities. In addition, customers' perceptions of justice were found insignificant predictor of customers' helping behaviour.

**Antecedents of Customers’ Helping Behaviour toward Other Customers: An Application on the Egyptian Higher Education Industry**

1. **Introduction**

Service Dominant Logic identifies customers as resource integrators who integrate resources (e.g. information, emotions) made available to them by the service provider and other customers (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). Motivated by a profit motive, companies are expected to facilitate customers' co-creation of value. Unlike the service provider, customers are not required to offer resources and support to other customers. The extended literature documents many instances where customers engage, reactively or proactively, in helping other customers (Parker & Ward, 2000) either online (Chan & Li, 2010; Dholakia, et al., 2010) or offline (Gruen, et al., 2000; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007). Although this literature is comprehensive, it is highly fragmented for a number of reasons. First, prior research on customers' helping behaviour, focused on either factors related to customers' perceptions of the selling firm (e,g. Yi & Gong, 2008b) or factors related to customers' relationship with other customers (e.g. social benefits) (Chan & Li, 2010; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007). Second, the vast majority of prior research studied helping behaviour as a dimension of customers' citizenship behaviours without differentiating between those behaviours intended to benefit the firm (e.g. positive word-of-mouth) and others intended to benefit other customers (i.e. helping behaviour) (Gruen, et al., 2000). This paper aims at developing an overarching model to account for different drivers of customers' helping behaviours. Specifically, three sets of drivers are considered: organizational-related factors (e.g. customer satisfaction), customer-to-customer related factors, and personality-related factors (e.g. extraversion).

1. **Conceptualization of Helping Behaviour**

Helping as an extra-role behaviour has been the concern of many fields of research including psychology, sociology, marketing, and organizational behaviour. In organizational literature, helping behaviour is defined as *“helping others with or preventing the occurrence of, a work related problem”* (Podsakoff, et al., 2000, p. 516). The conceptualization of helping behaviour in services marketing is also derived from prosocial behaviour in social psychology. Schwartz (1977) suggested that helping is one of the dimensions of prosocial behaviour. Helping behaviour simply means assisting another person. In services marketing literature, helping behaviour has been regarded as one of the dimensions of customer citizenship behaviour (CCB). In this paper, helping behaviour refers to the act of helping other customers regarding the use of services correctly (Groth, 2005). This paper focuses on customers' helping behaviour directed at the benefit of other customers.

1. **Antecedents of Customers’ Helping Behaviour**

In light of social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the primary focus of prior research was the company's role (e.g. accomplishing satisfying customers) in encouraging citizenship behaviours. This paper contributes to this growing body of literature by proposing an overarching model that examines not only company's related drivers (e.g. perceived justice and customers' satisfaction) but also, other potential drivers related to customer-to-customer interactions and customers' personality traits. The following details the reasoning of the relationships proposed in the conceptual model.

***3.1 Organizational- Related Antecedents***

***3.1.1. Customer Satisfaction***

Customer satisfaction can be defined as *“a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under- or overfulfilment”* (Oliver, 1997, p. 13). According to social exchange theory, if an organization fulfils its promises toward its employees, they become satisfied and thus are more likely to engage in citizenship behaviours. Furthermore, it has been argued that employees who enjoy positive experiences are more likely to adopt citizenship behaviours (Smith, et al., 1983; Williams & Anderson, 1991). Substantial evidence supports the impact of customers' satisfaction with the firm on customers' citizenship behaviour intended to benefit the firm and other customers (i.e. customers' helping behaviour) (Groth, 2005). Consistent findings by Dholakia, et al. (2010) and Chan and Li (2010) were found to support the impact of customers' perceived value derived from the firm on customers' helping behaviour aimed at the benefit of other customers.

***H1*: Customers' satisfaction with the firm is positively related to customers' helping behaviour.**

***3.1.2 Customer Justice Perception***

The growing body of services literature has studied justice perception in the contexts of service recovery, service failure, and post-complaint processes (Yi & Gong, 2008a). Scant empirical attention was paid to justice perception during service delivery. Customer justice perception during service delivery can be defined as the customer’s evaluation of an organization that has promised to deliver specific benefits in addition to the core service (Bowen, et al., 2000). According to norm of reciprocity theory (Gouldner, 1960) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), it is expected that customers' perceptions of justice would positively impact their helping behaviour toward other customers. Empirically, Yi & Gong (2006, 2008a) illustrated that customers' justice perception is positively related to their citizenship behaviours. These results were supported by Di et al.’s (2010) empirical study.

***H2*: Customers’ perception of justice is positively related to customers' helping behaviour.**

* + 1. ***Customer Social Identification with the Organization***

Social identification can be defined as one's perceived belongingness with an organization (Bhattacharya, et al., 1995). Social identity theory states that customers who are emotionally attached to a social group tend to act in the best interest of the organization and other customers by exhibiting favourable behaviour toward other customers (Bhattacharya & Sen, 2003). Customers can influence one another either in an indirect way, just by being members of the same environment, or directly through interpersonal interactions (Huang, et al., 2010). Bartikowski and Walsh (2011) demonstrated that customers' perceptions of the firm reputation directly influence their intentions to help one another. This may reflect customers' pride in being part of a reputable organization and in turn, this impacts their helping behaviour. Dholakia, et al. (2009) showed how customers' perceptions of social identity impact their tendency to help other members of an online community. The relationship between social identity and helping behaviour has emerged from the exploratory in-depth interviews conducted as part of this study.

***H3*: Customers who are high on their identification with their organizations are more likely to engage in helping behaviour directed toward other customers.**

* 1. ***Customer-to-Customer- Related Antecedents*** 
     1. ***Customers' Engagement in Students Activities***

Customers' engagement in students' activities has emerged as one of drivers of customers' helping behaviour, in qualitative phase of this study. It refers to students' level of emotional and behavioural participation in the student activities. In light of social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor, 1973), student activities are likely to enhance customers' interactions with one another and facilitate social conversations and friendship among them. According to Dholkia et al. (2009), social benefits shared among online community members, in B-2-C and B-2-B contexts, are likely to enhance customers' helping behaviour. The prior discussion concludes the following hypothesis.

***H4*: Customers who are highly engaged in students' activities, are more likely to engage in helping behaviour directed toward other customers.**

* 1. ***Customer Personality Traits***

In organizational literature, personality predictors of citizenship behaviours have been reviewed by Organ and Ryan (1995) in their meta-analytic study. Furthermore, Podsakoff, et al. (2000) concluded, based on empirical results, that agreeableness is positively related to citizenship behaviours. Extraversion refers to *" tendency to like people, prefer being in large groups, and desire excitement and stimulation; likely to be assertive, active, talkative",* (Major, et al., 2006, p. 928) whereas agreeableness refers to the *"tendency to be altruistic, cooperative, and trusting"* (Major, et al., 2006, p. 928). Similar to organizational citizenship behaviours, Patterson, et al. (2003) argued that agreeableness is positively associated with customers' citizenship behaviours. Handful empirical studies in organizational literature have been conducted to test the associations between customers’ personality traits and citizenship behaviours (Chiaburu, et al., 2011; Organ & Ryan 1995). Chan and Li (2010) argued that extraversion personalities may motivate customers' to engage and interact with other customers in online forums. These relationships require further empirical investigation.

***H5*: Customers who are high on extraversion are more likely to engage in helping behaviour.**

1. **Research Context**

Educational institutions (e.g. universities) can be regarded as service organizations (Joseph & Joseph 1997; Zammuto, et al., 1996). Hennig-Thurau, et al. (2001) argued that students “co-produce” the educational service being provided to them. Since students participate actively in the delivery of education, they can be regarded as “partial employees”. Educational context can be considered as a good service setting, because it requires a high degree of interaction with service providers (instructors and administrators) as well as with other customers (students). Students can also interact with one another by providing help, assistance and giving advice to one another (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2003).

1. **Qualitative Phase**

Two focus groups were conducted with seven undergraduate students. A series of open-ended questions has been used to uncover different motives of students' helping behaviour. Thematic analysis of the focus groups illustrated that students are likely to engage in helping behaviour toward others. All participants clearly mentioned that organization-related factors, represent very strong predictors for students’ tendency to engage in helping one another. Thus, the responses support the principles of social exchange theory, where students feel they are required to engage in helping as a result of the rewards they have received (i.e. satisfaction, quality of service). It is also worth mentioning that social identification has been strongly emphasized by all interviewees to be an antecedent of helping, though there was not enough literature explaining these relations. The following quotes are extracted from the responses of the students in the focus groups:

* *“Belongingness will make you do the best for your faculty.”* (Male, Junior)
* *“If we are fairly treated, we will exert plenty of effort to do our best. This effort can be translated into helping others who face similar difficulties.”*(Female, Junior)
* *“I can proudly identify myself as a student in my own faculty. Otherwise, why would I have chosen it at the first place?”* (Female, Sophomore)

The quotes suggest that social identification of students to their universities represent a potential predictor to customers' helping behaviour. This proposed relation needs further testing.

1. **Quantitative Phase**

The data was collected by the means of the survey. Measurement scales for the study variables were adapted from prior research. In specific, customer satisfaction (3 items), customer perceived justice (15 items), extraversion (5 items) and helping behavior (5 items), adapted from Bettencourt (1997), Blodgett et al., (1997), John et al. (1991) and Groth (2005) respectively. A seven-point scale was deployed in this study. Pre-testing of the questionnaire resulted in slight amendments to the wording of some questions. A quota sample was employed in this study to represent three different types of universities: public, private and international universities in Egypt. Data was self-administrated by respondents (i.e. students) in the last 15 minutes of lectures. Out of 600 distributed surveys, 450 responses (75% response rate) were collected and out of which, 424 responses were found valid for data analysis.

1. **Data Analysis**

All the study variables were factor analyzed (KMO = 0.886, Bartlett's test =4176, *P*< 000) and then entered in confirmatory factor analysis using SMARTPLS. Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values ranged from 0.67 to 0.868. AVE values for all variables were higher than cut-off value of 0.5. The structural model is reported in table (1).

1. **Discussion**

This study aims at developing an overarching model of the drivers of helping behaviour that integrates firm-related factors (e.g. customers' satisfaction), customer-to-customer related factors (i.e. customers' engagement in students' activities) and personality traits factors (e.g. extraversion). In terms of the magnitude of effects, the study results showed that customers' satisfaction has the strongest impact on customers' helping behaviour (*B* = 0.224 , *P* < *000)*, followed by tendency of customers to have extraversion personality (*B* = 0.118 , *P* < *000)*, social identification with the selling firm (*B* = 0.151 , *P* < *000)* and customers' engagement in student activities (*B* = 0.137 , *P* < *000).* These findings are in line with prior research (e.g. Groth, 2005; Dholakia et al., 2009). The study's results underscore the role of universities or service providers in facilitating customers' engagement or customer-to-customer interactions either online or offline, which enhance customers' helping behaviour. This is likely to reduce pressure on customer service (e.g. instructors are required to respond to students' questions via email, phone or in office), which constitutes a large portion of cost of serving current customers.

Although it is well established in the prior research that customers' perceptions of justice is a key driver of citizenship behaviours (Yi & Gong, 2008a, 2008b), it was found unrelated to customers' helping behaviour, which is one of dimensions of citizenship behaviours. These findings may indicate that citizenship behaviours may have different drivers. For example, customers' satisfaction may stimulate one form of citizenship behaviours such as word-of-mouth but it may not necessarily stimulate other forms of citizenship behaviours such as helping behaviour.

**Table 1: Structural model**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | | **Hypotheses**  **Testing** |
|  | **Beta** | **t-test** |  |
| **Satisfaction → Helping** | 0.224\*\* | 3.337 | H1 Accepted  H2 Rejected  H3 Accepted |
| **Justice→ Helping** | 0.061 | 1.011 |
| **Social Identity → Helping** | 0.151\*\* | 2.931 |
| **Extraversion → Helping** | 0.188\*\* | 3.719 | H5 Accepted |
| **Customer Engagement in Student activities → Helping** | 0.137\*\* | 3.470 | H4 Accepted |
| **R2** | **27.4%** | |  |

***Critical t-value = 1.645***

1. **Limitation & Future Research Directions**

Cross sectional research design set many limitations on the generalisation of the current findings. Future research need to re-test the proposed conceptual framework in other service contexts (e.g. health clubs). There are some concerns regarding the use of student samples in making inferences about general population, which need to be carefully considered by future research. Some dimensions of citizenship behaviour received a great deal of research attention (e.g. word-of-mouth), while other dimensions (e.g. customers' suggestions to the firm) received only scant research attention by prior research. This needs to be reconsidered by future research.

**References**

Altman, I. & Taylor, D. (1973). Social Penetration: The development of Interpersonal Relationships. New York: Holt.

Bartikowski, B. & Walsh, G., (2011). Investigating Mediators between Corporate Reputation and Customer Citizenship Behaviors.*Journal of Business Research*, 64(1), 39-44.

Bettencourt, L. A., 1997. Customer Voluntary Performance: Customers as Partners inService Delivery. *Journal of Retailing,* 73(3), pp. 383-406.

Bhattacharya, C. B. & Sen, S., (2003). Consumer-Company Identification: A Framework for Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Companies. *Journal of Marketing,* 67(2), 76-88.

Bhattacharya, C. B., Hayagreeva, R. & Glynn, M. A., (1995). Understanding the Bond of Identification: An Investigation of its Correlates among Art Museum Members. *Journal of Marketing,* 59(4), 46-57.

Blau, P. M., (1964). *Exchange and Power in Social Life.* New York: John Wiley and Sons.

Blodgett, J. G., Hill, D. J. & Tax, S. S., (1997). The Effects of Distributive, Procedural, and Interactional Justice on Postcomplaint Behavior. *Journal of Retailing,* 73(2), pp. 185-210.

Bove, L. L., Pervan, S. J., Beatty, S. E. & Shiu, E. (2009). Service Worker Role in Encouraging Customer Organizational Citizenship Behaviors. *Journal of Business Research*, 62(7), 698-705.

Bowen, D. E., Gilliland, S. W. & Folger, R., (2000). HRM and Service Fairness: How Being Fair with Employees Spills Over to Customers. *Organizational Dynamics,* 27(3), 7-23.

Chan, K. W. & Li, S. Y. (2010).Understanding Consumer-to-Consumer Interactions in Virtual Communities: The Salience of Reciprocity. *Journal of Business Research*, 63(9), 1033-1040.

Chiaburu, D. S., Oh, I., Berry, C. M., Li, N. & Gardner, R. G., (2011). The Five-Factor Model of Personality Traits and Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: A Meta-Analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 96(6), 1140-1166.

Dholakia, U., Blazevic, V., Wiertz, C. and Algesheimer, R. (2009). Communal Service Delivery: How Customers Benefit from Participation in Firm-Hosted Virtual P3 Communities. *Journal of Service Research*, 12(2), 208-226.

Di, E., Huang, C.-J., Chen, I.-H. & Yu, T.-C., (2010). Organisational Justice and Customer Citizenship Behaviour of Retail Industries. *The Service Industries Journal,* 30(11), 1919-1934.

Gouldner, (1960). The Norm of Reciprocity: A Preliminary Statement. *American Sociological Review,,* 25(2), 161-178.

Groth, M., (2005). Customers as Good Soldiers: Examining Citizenship Behaviors in Internet Service Deliveries. *Journal of Management,* 31(7), 7-27.

Gruen, T., Osmonbekov, T. and Czaplewski, A. (2006). Customer-to-Customer Exchange: Its MOA Antecedents and its Impact on Value Creation and Loyalty. *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, 35(4), 537-549.

Gruen, T., Summers, J. and Acito, F. (2000). Relationship Marketing Activities: Commitment, and Membership Behaviours in Professional Associations. *Journal of Marketing*, 64:34-49.

Hennig-Thurau, T., Langer, M. F. & Hansen, U., (2001). Modeling and Managing Student Loyalty: An Approach Based on the Concept of Relationship Quality. *Journal of Service Research,* 3(4), 331-344.

Huang, W.-H., Lin, Y.-C. & Wen, Y.-C., (2010). Attributions and Outcomes of Customer Misbehavior. *Journal of Business & Psychology,* 25(1), 151-161.

John, O. P., Donahue, E. M., & Kentle, R. L. (1991).The Big Five Inventory--Versions 4a and 54.*Berkeley: University of California, Berkeley, Institute of Personality and Social Research.*

Joseph, M. & Joseph, B., (1997). Employers' Perception of Service Quality in Higher Education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education,* 8(2), 1-13.

Major, D. A., Turner, J. E., & Fletcher, T. D., (2006). Linking Proactive Personality and the Big Five to Motivation to Learn and Development Activity. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91 (4), 927-935.

Nicholls, R. (2010). New Directions for Customer-to-Customer Interaction Research. *Journal of Service Research*, 24(1), 87-97.

Oliver, R. L., (1997). *Satisfaction: A Behavioral Perspective on Consumers.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Organ, D. W. & Ryan, K., (1995). Meta-Analytic Review of Attitudinal and Dispositional Predictors of Organizational Citizenship Behavior. *Personnel Psychology,* 48(4), 775-802.

Organ, D. W., (1988). *Organizational Citizenship Behavior: The Good Soldier Syndrome.* Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.

Parker, C. & Ward, P., (2000). An Analysis of Role Adoptions and Scripts during Customer-to-Customer Encounters. *European Journal of Marketing*, 34(3), 341-359.

Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Paine, J. B. & Bachrach, D. G., (2000). Organizational Citizenship Behaviors: A Critical Review of the Theoretical and Empirical Literature and Suggestions for Future Research. *Journal of Management,* 26(3), 513-563.

Rosenbaum, M. S. & Massiah, C. A., (2007). When Customers Receive Support From Other Customers: Exploring the Influence of Intercustomer Social Support on Customer Voluntary Performance. *Journal of Service Research,* 9(3), 257-270.

Schwartz, S. H., (1977). Normative Influences on Altruism. *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology,* Volume 10, 222-280.

Smith, C. A., Organ, D. W. & Near, J. P., (1983). Organizational Citizenship Behavior: Its Nature and Antecedents. *Journal of Applied Psychology,* 68(4), 653-663.

Vargo, S. & Lusch, R. (2004).Evolving to New Dominant Logic for Marketing. *Journal of Marketing*, 68, 1-27.

Vargo, S. & Lusch, R. (2008). Service-Dominant Logic: Continuing the Evolution. *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 36(1), 1-10.

Vaughan, B. J. & Renn, R. W., (1999). Customer Service Citizenship Behavior: Bridging the Employee-Customer Relationship. *Advances in the Management of Organizational Quality,* 4, 151-186.

Williams, L. J. & Anderson, S. E.,(1991). Job Satisfaction and Organizational Commitment as Predictors of Organizational Citizenship and In-Role Behaviors. *Journal of Management,* 17(3), 601-617.

Yi, Y. & Gong, T., (2006). The Antecedents and Consequences of Service Customer Citizenship and Badness Behavior. *Seoul Journal of Business,* 12(2), 145-176.

Yi, Y. & Gong, T., (2008a). The Effects of Customer Justice Perception and Affect on Customer Citizenship Behavior and Customer Dysfunctional Behavior. *Industrial Marketing Management,* 37(7), 767-783.

Yi, Y. & Gong, T., (2008b). If Employees "Go the Extra Mile", Do Customers Reciprocate with Similar Behavior?. *Psychology & Marketing,* 25(10), 961-986.

Zammuto, R. F., Keaveney, S. M. & O’Connor, E. J., (1996). Rethinking Student Services: Assessing and Improving Service Quality. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education,* 7(1), 45-70.

Zeithaml, V. A. & Bitner, M. J., (2003). *Services Marketing: Integrating Customer Focus Across the Firm,* Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

**Appendix 1: Proposed Conceptual Framework**

***Organization-related Antecedents***

***C-to-C-related Antecedents***