Antecedents and Boundary Conditions of Negatively Valenced Customer Engagement

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Purpose – Customer's negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviours targeted toward the organization and its employees have for long been a subject of interest for marketing researchers due to the serious economic and social costs that they can induce on the organization and its employees (Surachartkumtonkun et al. 2013, 2015). This study defines negatively valenced customer engagement (NVCE) as the customer's negative cognitive appraisal, negative emotions and detrimental behaviours targeted at the organization or its employees. While some scholars suggest that NVCE might occur even if a service failure has not taken place (Grove et al. 2012), the extant research thus far has focused on service failure as the main trigger of the NVCE. Occurrence of NVCE when a service failure has not occurred can be more complicated for organizations as understanding its causes and boundary conditions is more challenging (Grove et al., 2012). Therefore, this study aims to investigate the antecedents and boundary conditions of NVCE under circumstances that a service failure has not taken place.

Design/Methodology/approach – Following a qualitative approach, this study has conducted 44 interviews with patients (12 interviews), family members (16 interviews), and hospital staff (16 interviews) of two private hospitals in a Middle Eastern country.

Findings – Customer's perception of organizational climate (CPOC) for service shapes the patients' and family members' appraisal of the interaction with the organization. CPCO is the meaning that customers assign to the service delivery practices, procedures and policies of the organization (Schneider et al. 2000). C*ustomer's perception of employees' knowledge and skills for superior service delivery* (e.g. employees' lack of knowledge about the importance of emotional support); *the efforts made by the organization's staff* (e.g. customer's perception of employees' unwillingness for going the extra mile for customers); the *recognition that the staff receive from their organization,* (e.g. customer's perception of the unfulfilled needs and aspirations of the staff); *service leadership* (e.g. discrimination among different groups of customers); and *effectiveness of organization's communication with customer and employees* (e.g. customer's perception of ineffective communication between the organization's managerial team and employees) emerged from the interviews' data as influential concepts in shaping customer's judgement of their interaction with the organization.
Moreover, the interview data revealed that *organization's provision of emotional support* and *customer's fear of retaliation by the organization* act as boundary conditions in the emergence of behavioural NVCE.

Originality/value – This study contributes to the customer engagement literature by investigating the organization-level antecedents and boundary conditions of NVCE when a service failure has not occurred. Moreover, this study helps service practitioners to understand why customers become outraged and behave negatively and what strategies firms can employ to reduce the emergence of NVCE.

Key words Negative customer engagement – customer engagement – customer perceived service climate

Paper type –Research paper

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