

Thinking about a service encounter boosts talking about it

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Purpose - This study examines the impact of thinking about an event as an antecedent to subsequent talk about this event with others (i.e., word-of-mouth). Here, the thinking–talking association is examined in the context of service encounters. The specific purpose is to examine if there is a thinking–talking relationship (H1) and if it is mediated by memorability and rehearsal (H2).

Design/Methodology/approach - A critical incident approach (Bitner et al., 1990; Gremler, 2004) generated data about customers' thinking and talking behaviors after specific service encounters.

Findings - Thinking about a service encounter – after it has been completed – had a positive influence on subsequent talk to others about the encounter (H1). The association was mediated by the memorability of the service encounter and the extent to which what had happened had been subject to rehearsal with the purpose of telling others about it (H2).

Research limitations/implications - We examined the intensity of thinking about service encounters, not the specific content of such thoughts. An impact of thinking on talking did not materialize when recommendation intentions was used as an alternative talk indicator, which calls on researchers to be mindful about why this particular indicator (rather than talk behavior) is in frequent use.

Practical implications (if applicable) - Firms desiring more word-of-mouth activity and engagement should design their offers so that they encourage thinking. Incongruent elements in the service encounter may foster thinking (and talking). Therefore, managers need to develop such elements.

Originality/value - Thinking has been a neglected variable in word-of-mouth research (and in consumer-related research in general), despite the fact that several conceptual arguments indicate that thinking is likely to enhance talking.

Key words Service encounters, word-of-mouth, thinking, talking, customer satisfaction

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