

The Service Context of Meanings and its Dynamicity: The Case of Japanese Restaurant Market in Bangkok

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Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to better understand the context of service by integrating consumer culture theory and service dominant logic perspectives and exploring the meaning aspects of context.

Design/Methodology/approach – The authors employ critical ethnographic methods to examine empirically firms and customers' processes of (re)forming service context at Japanese restaurants in Bangkok. The authors conduct research methods of participant observation, depth interviews, photographic records and material cultural artifact analysis over the two year period 2016-17.

Findings – Customers' service experience at the Japanese restaurants in Bangkok depends not only on the quality of food and customer service provided by the restaurants, but also by the symbolic meanings in the market. The service context as meanings is not pre-existing or static. It is dynamic—changes are made at the meso and micro levels. At meso level, the participation and perspectives of firms and other actors in co-creating shared norms and collective meanings bring forth the changes in service context as meanings. It is important to note that firms can create meanings only within the understandings of customers. At micro level, customers enact or adapt the meanings existing in the market during the service experience. For instance, customers interpret their own meanings and deviate from the idealized messages firms communicate.

Research limitations/implications – As with any qualitative research, generalizations are difficult due to the problems associated with sampling the Japanese restaurants in Bangkok as research context.

Practical implications – Extending the scope of service context to include the meanings in markets draws attention to managing the meanings, as well as service encounters, servicescapes, and service ecosystems. This point toward the need to consider the competences and skills of firms in the design and development of meanings.

Originality/value – Past research on service context mainly adopted a conceptual approach and lacked empirical research providing evidence of the proposed framework. This paper further extends the understanding of service context by providing empirical investigations of heterogeneous viewpoints among different types of actors (i.e., firms and customers).

Key words – context, consumer culture theory, service dominant logic, value-in-context, experience

Paper type – Research paper

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