



## A Study on Impact of Gender Differences on Customer Satisfaction, Case of Educational Sphere

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### ABSTRACT

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This research studies the effects of gender difference on customer satisfaction in a service encounter, and by applying this concept it proposes a theoretical framework to investigate the relation of impact gender difference can have with customer satisfaction (i.e. students) during a service encounter (i.e. teacher to student in a classroom) in an educational context. This study also proposes hypothesis to study this relationship deeper in educational sphere.

#### Keywords:

Customer satisfaction, Gender difference,  
Service encounter, Educational sector

### 1. Introduction

Delighting a customer is one of the most important factors for every business in the world. Satisfying a customer in today's competitive business environment is not an easy task when customer's bargaining power is very high due to some substitutes available in the market with different product offers. Customer satisfaction is a key to any business to be successful and even to its survival too. Customer satisfaction is a composite emerging from many factors. It has been studied with different themes like the correlation of customer satisfaction with service recovery and failure, quality of the product or service, and such other themes. In this study, the role gender of customers as well as employees can play in the process of service encounter interactions on the customer satisfaction in the educational sector has been researched.

#### 1.1 Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is an attitude similar to judgment following an act of purchase or a series of customer product interactions (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2005). Customer satisfaction makes customers stay longer with the company (Kotelnikov, 2001); deepen their relationship with the company (Dutta, 2008), also creates positive word of mouth as happy customers tell 4 to 5 others while a dissatisfied customer tells 9 to 12 others about their bad experience hence creates negative image and word of mouth (Shaffer, 2008). Customer satisfaction becomes more complex to achieve when the nature of product offered is intangible which is called 'service'. A service is an act or performance that creates benefits for customers by bringing about the desired change in or on behalf of the recipient (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2005). As services are very complex due to their different characteristics of heterogeneity, perishability, intangibility, and

such other factors, to make customers be satisfied becomes more complex too. Because the service, its standard and quality differ from customer to customer due to their different perceptions based on their attitudes, beliefs, and personalities. The same service is perceived differently by different consumers. For instance, passengers travelling through Emirates Airlines have different satisfaction levels according to, for some passengers this could be rated as a prime airline service while for another passenger it could result in a total failure.

#### 1.2 Service Encounters

Even services become more complex where customers have the chance to meet the organization, i.e. the service encounter; meeting the employees or where the employees themselves are the service providers. A service encounter is a time in which customer interacts directly with the service (Lovelock & Wright, 2005). Complexity in satisfying customers has increased at service encounters because a small mistake or negligence of employees at service encounter can lead to failure of the service. Service encounters refer to the personal interactions between consumers and service providing organization or personnel, and this term has been on the focus of attention in services marketing literature (Guiry, 1992).

Depending upon the intensity of customer contact with the service, organization's elements, i.e. equipment, facilities, service employees, etc., there are three types of customer contacts: i) high contact services; includes services which require high level of communication and interactions with the organization's elements, e.g. nursing care, motel, restaurants, etc., ii) medium contact services; includes services which

involve limited contact with the organization's components by the customer, iii) low contact services: includes services that require either minimum or even no direct contact between customers and service firm, e.g. radio, television, insurance, etc. (Lovelock & Wright, 2005).

The higher level of customer's contact is required with the service provider, the more that service organization needs to focus on its 'service encounter'. Because service is providing firms where customer contact is highly required are the firms in which all business depends upon that service encounter in which personnel and customers interact.

### 1.3 Types of Service Encounters

Service encounters are significant in service delivery, as they can make an organization a loser or a winner. Because customer perceives and rates a service organization through its employees with whom they met during service encounter. Service encounter are of three types, named as i) the remote encounter, (i.e. through brochures, advertisements, etc.) where one does not interact with company, ii) the indirect personal encounter (i.e. through emails, telephones, and iii) the direct personal encounter (i.e. face-to-face interactions) in teaching, retailing, medical advice seeking, and others (Zeithaml, Gremler, Bitner & Pandit, 2008).

The closer the customer gets to the service organization through the service encounter type, the more effects it will have on customers. Service encounters are critical to the success and execution of the service at the both ends are performed by humans, whose psychology works differently for a given same situation. Like in service encounters whatever the service is, the direct personal service encounter will involve human beings as personnel delivering services, and at the receiving end as well human beings act as customers. It becomes more critical when a person himself is marked as the service like doctors, dentists, coaches, beauticians, etc. As at the both ends human psychology is involved which differs in every way of taking things in and also changes delivering the side of the service.

### 1.4 Gender Difference at Service Encounter

When service encounter is based upon human interactions at both ends, which behaves differently, what happens if the gender of the customer and service employees' is different or the same? Does the difference in gender have any substantial impact on the way interactions at service encounters take place?

If it is analyzed closely, it can be seen that some professions have become more gender specific and if another gender plays that role, it is thought as an odd thing. For instance, why are nurses mostly females? Why are soldiers mostly males? Why are nannies females? Why are air hostesses females and are more in number than stewards? Why are barbers males most of the time? Why are workers at petrol pumps or garages males? And so on. As some professions are gender dominant and in some societies due to cultural impacts, some genders are considered to be more suitable for specific roles, it can be perceived that gender could be an important factor in investigating different correlations among different concepts. Because if gender dominance in some sectors prevails, it means it is so because it has some different effects that are why this difference prevails.

Gender difference at service encounter may lead to different customer service outcomes. As the male-to-male interaction and male-to-female interactions differ because people behave differently when they interact with the same gender and with the opposite gender, in a given particular situation.

### 1.5 Service Encounters in Educational Sector

Specifically, this difference becomes very important to be analyzed and understood when it prevails in one of the most important and influential service sectors that is "Educational Sector". As in educational sector, both service providers and service gainers are humans, and they need to interact face to face for each class session. In a class there is one teacher and students may be 10 to 50 or more. Teacher delivers the same lecture to each student, but each student receives the same lecture differently because of his or her personality traits, IQ levels and different quantitative and reasoning ability, hence results in different scores.

An educational sector is a place where customer and service employees not only meet to transact the service, but it also causes to impact the customer's (i.e. students) personality and traits, and influence its development. In educational sector service employees that are teachers, not only work for the transactional purpose of the service, but their deep involvement becomes a must as they work as a mentor, guide and leaders of the students.

Due to such an important service sector, where not only service itself matters but the relationship and moral aspects between the service employees and customers as well matter a lot, this paper focuses on studying the effects of gender differences on service encounter (i.e. teachers) on customer satisfaction (i.e. students) in the educational sector.

## 2. Research Objectives

Research objectives of this study were as follows:

- I. To explore 'Gender difference effects on service encounters through previous researches.
- II. To discover the possible set of important characteristics in the educational sector to analyze employees' and customers' gender impacts on service encounter.
- III. To develop and propose a theoretical framework for gender difference at service encounter, i.e. teachers and customer satisfaction, i.e. students in the education sector.

### 2.1 Background

Service encounter interactions create impacts and consequences on both sides of the interactions that are on employees and customers, and this becomes more complex when gender difference plays its role in this process.

As this study is exploratory in nature, the following review of the literature has been arranged according to a symmetrical theme which includes broad overview of each study on the variables including; research focus, research questions, research methodology (including research design, technique, sample size, sampling technique, instruments and analysis technique), findings, and future research directions by the previous researchers.

In literature, the effect of gender difference has been studied from different angles. For instance, the effects of gender difference have been studied on the job satisfaction and customer satisfaction from the employee's point of view during a service encounter. Whereas the studies also present effects of gender differences on customer satisfaction, from the customer's point of view during a service encounter.

### 2.2 Research Focus

Mathies & Burford (2010) directed their research on employee's side by focusing on male and female forefront service employees' different beliefs concerning the determinants of good customer service. They

studied the understanding of customer service by frontline employees whereas the customer service varies from company to company as contextual perspectives range from marketing logistics necessary to accept, process, deliver and build customer orders through the friendliness of the staff in the service encounter (Christopher, Payne, & Ballantyne, 1999). On the customer's side, the gender effects on customer service expectations of the customers of commercial banks have been carried out in Zimbabwe (Albert, Njanike & Mukucha, 2010).

As service changes according to the context or the service setting, and focus of this study is on an educational sector which involves teachers and students who are very important as key role players in the society, so much work is available in this particular field of education which revolves around the students and teachers. A meta-analysis regarding person-centred education (PCE), to explore theories, quantitative methodologies, and practical applications was performed (Jeffrey et al., 2009).

In 2010, Mathies and Burford studied the understanding of customer service by service delivering employees through exploring these two research questions; a) what do frontline service employees consider to be important in providing good customer service? b) are there any variances in the customer service models of men and women? (Mathies and Burford, 2010). The educational sector is a very important area related to every field places much importance on different research orientation in this field. Research questions of person-centred teacher behaviour's study were: what is the relationship between person-centred teacher behaviours about positive student outcomes? What variables modify this relationship? (Jeffrey et al., 2009).

### 2.3 Research Methodology Employed

As the selection of research methodology, design and analytical approach depend upon the intuitive judgments of the researcher, it can be observed that different studies in the same domains have been approached differently. As in this study sample size was 876; data were collected through the online panel from those frontline service employees who spend at least 40% of their working time cooperating with customers and were working in 20 different service industries in Australia. They used automated text analysis using Leximancer (Smith & Humphreys, 2006) to inspect the basic themes (Mathies & Burford, 2010). In another study, the sample size was 200 of commercial bank customers in Bindura, Zimbabwe, and the customer satisfaction was measured by using the SERVQUAL model which uses five dimensions named as responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles and reliability (Zeithamlet. Al., 1988). The questionnaire was equally distributed between male and female customers. Judgment sampling technique was used to select respondents (Albert, Njanike & Mukucha, 2010).

Jeffrey et al. (2009) reviewed almost 1000 articles to synthesize 119 studies from the year 1948 to 2004 with 1,450 findings and 355,325 students, 14,851 teachers and 536 schools through guidelines of Mavkay et al. (2003), comprehensive search by PsycINFO, ERIC, dissertation abstract, bibliographies, experts' opinions. They accumulated multiple independent, dependent, and moderator variables which make a teacher-student because of the learning experience.

### 2.4 Findings

As this field of service marketing is a kind of 'art' and related to human beings as being the part of the product, sometimes being a product themselves in service terms, the researches and responses or findings by the studies in the same domain can produce different results, some studies can conform while the others can be opposite significantly. So the results

of these studies change as the characteristics given more weight are different per selection choice of the researcher.

In one study, results found that analysis of good customer service is induced by the gender of the frontline service employees, as the service models for male and female staff show noticeable differences. Female service employees took interaction's quality and service processes' quality at the core of good customer service, while male service encounter employees were more outcome-oriented and considered customer service as mainly an efficient problem solving (Mathies & Burford, 2010).

Aligning these findings with the results of another study, that female customers had higher expectations in assurance regarding staff that was having knowledge and courtesy, while men had higher expectations regarding staff that were professional and there was no difference in trustworthiness and staff being competent. On the whole female customers had higher expectations of banks and staff that were courteous, gave personal attention, gave accurate information, were helpful and had clean facilities. While male customers had higher expectations on bank and staff that was professional, respectful, gave realistic information and had extended working hours and modern technology. However, in this study overall correlation of satisfaction with gender did not show significance (Albert, Njanike & Mukucha, 2010).

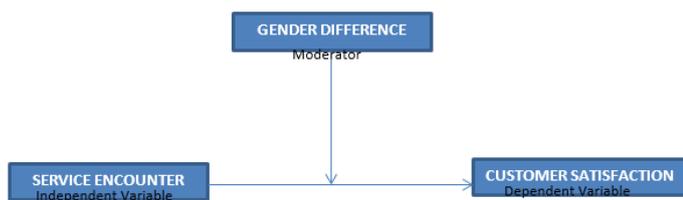
The basic aim in an educational sector is the learning of the students, and all other means or outcomes are the interface of that learning. Factors which are independent on a teacher-student relationship to make them learn or satisfy have been attitudes of empathy, warmth, genuineness (Rogers, 1951) non-directivity, skills and thinking encouragement (Aspy & Roebuck, 1977), positive relationship, honor in student voices, thinking and learning encouragement, adaptation to differences and beliefs (McCombs, 2004). Dependent variables have been calculated regarding the student's outcome, as a 'whole person' learning combines the logical and intuitive, the intellect and the feelings, the concept and the experience, the idea and the meaning, when we learn in this way, we are whole (Rogers, 1983). Different student outcomes termed as positive, cognitive, affective or behavioural student outcomes' correlation with all person-centred teachers variable was analyzed and the results show that the person-centred education PCE improves student outcome an average of 31% (Jeffrey et al., 2009). The outcomes of students as customers are different in an educational setting, it includes their participation, critical thinking, math and verbal achievement, satisfaction, drop out, attendance, motivation, self-efficacy, grades, IQ, social skills and disruptive behavior, these all showed above-average outcomes with PCE (Jeffrey et al., 2009).

### 2.5 Research Gaps

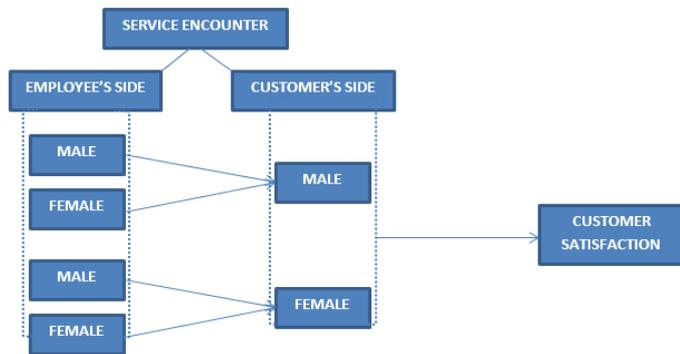
Further research gaps and directions will investigate the effects of other factors on frontline employees' service models, like work experience, industry, length of customer interaction and the extent of emotional labour in the provision of customer service (Mathies & Burford, 2010). Moreover, it studies its impacts on the observed service experience in the banking industry as well as other low involvement and high involvement services (Albert, Njanike & Mukucha, 2010).

### 3. Proposed Theoretical Framework

Based on the previous studies the following theoretical framework has been developed and proposed in this study to research the effects of gender differences on a service encounter on customer satisfaction in the educational setting, i.e. effects of teacher's gender on students' satisfaction in a class room.



**Figure 1:** More Elaborated Theoretical Model



**Figure 2:** Dependent variable

Dependent variable: customer's satisfaction

Independent variable: employee's behaviour and role at service encounter

Moderating variable: gender difference between employee and customer

### 3.1 Proposed Research Hypothesis

The proposed hypothesis would be:

H<sub>0</sub>: There is the significant difference in the effect of service encounter by gender on customer satisfaction.

H<sub>1</sub><sup>→</sup>: There is no difference in the effect of service encounter by gender on customer satisfaction.

### 3.2 Discussion

This study focused to get insights about the effects of differences of gender on customer satisfaction in a service encounter. This exploratory research revealed many comprehensions regarding this phenomenon.

Customer satisfaction is a complex task to achieve for any business organization. To attain customer satisfaction is one of the biggest and major goals of any business in this world. Because a satisfied customer is the one who will remain with the business, and as a result, that business will remain or survive. Customer retention is possible to customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction has been studied through different factors and in different settings.

Customer satisfaction is an attitude like judgment following an act of a purchase or a series of customer product interactions (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2005). Customer satisfaction becomes more complex to achieve when the nature of product offered is intangible that is a 'service', due to very complex nature of the services. Even services become more complex where customers have the chance to meet the organization, i.e. the service encounter; meeting to the employees or where the employees themselves are the service providers. A service encounter is a time in which customer interacts directly with the service (Lovelock & Wright, 2005). Gender difference at service encounter may lead to different customer service outcomes. The effects of gender difference have been studied on the job satisfaction and customer satisfaction from the employee's point of view during a service encounter. Whereas the studies also present effects of

gender differences on customer satisfaction, from the customer's point of view during a service encounter.

Previously research has been focused on either employee's or customer's side; they studied what affects a difference in gender, when going through the same situation in the same context. Customer service has been understood by the frontline employee's perceptions of what a good customer service is (Mathies & Burford, 2010). In another research effects of gender difference on customer service expectation from the customer's point of view have been studied (Albert, Njanike & Mukucha, 2010). However, these studies have focused on only one side of the service encounter players, none of the studies has studied the effects of gender differences at both sides of the interactions as depicted in this study's elaborated model (Figure 2). So studying perceptions and satisfaction level concerns from both of the sides is missing, and the model proposed here can be studied from both sides in an educational setting.

Educational sector has been the focus of the proposed model because as a service changes according to the context, it involves teachers and students in a classroom's context. That is, how can the difference of gender of teacher influence the performance or satisfaction level of the students? Even this model can also be reversed by studying both sides and hence bringing out the different characteristics relevant to a specific gender of either teacher or student to make both sides satisfied. There are certain characteristics which are considered effective or non-effective during a service encounter in creating satisfaction. For instance, female and male staff's service model shows a noticeable difference in creating good customer service (Mathies & Burford, 2010), as females and males took different characteristics to be considered important in their evaluations of good service. When this difference is studied on the customer's side, here again, male and female customer services expectations differ, but this difference in expectations because of gender difference sometimes remains insignificant in making a customer satisfied with the service organization (Albert, Njanike&Mukucha, 2010). Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in these studies by employing questionnaires, reviews, etc.

The basic aim in an educational sector is the learning of the students, and all other means or outcomes are the interface of that learning. In an educational sector where a service encounter takes place in a class setting, one teacher interacts with some students. In a classroom, there are different types of students, with different IQ levels, different knowledge bases, different family backgrounds, different comprehension levels, different abilities of analytics, reason and logics, means very different personality composites; and some human minds work differently. So in a class where there is one teacher, and he or she is delivering the same knowledge with the same style and his or her specific characteristics, this is evident through performances that students receive or gain or absorb different levels of given knowledge. So gender is also one of those characteristics which can and may affect that knowledge gain hence the performance of the students which leads them towards satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

So this study has proposed a framework to be investigated in the educational setting to study whether there are any gender effects present in a teacher-to-student relationship or this effect is insignificant in making students satisfied. This concept, when applied empirically, would have implications for educational sector, because they will come to know if there is any significance of gender effect is present, then they should hire and arrange class room atmosphere accordingly where learning and

higher customer satisfaction (i.e. student satisfaction), can be achieved in a definite manner.

#### 4. Conclusion

Service encounter is a time in which customer interacts directly with the service. As this field of service marketing is a kind of 'art' and related to human beings as being the part of the product of sometimes being a product themselves in service terms, the findings by the studies in the same domain have produced different results. In some studies, gender difference has a significant impact on customer satisfaction, while in some cases it does not have a significant impact. Whereas, it's also observed that in studies where the overall impact was not significant, still there exists a difference in male and female customers or the staff members' perceptions about the satisfaction or expectation levels with the service quality. This concept needs to be applied in different context as the context as well as service type itself also has changed results to produce, so this could be a significant factor to study human mind's perceptions due to the change in gender because male and female psychology differs a lot and reactions for the same thing in the same situation is different for both genders. So this change's study in an educational study must be done as teachers and students are very important players in the society as they shape up the whole society in the longer run and apply what they learnt and developed in educational settings through service encounters.

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