

Frontline service employees and customer engagement: some further insights

Frontline
service
employees

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to investigate whether frontline retail banking employees' proactive personality helps in ameliorating customer engagement. This study further aims to investigate the mediational role of work engagement and service recovery performance in the employee proactivity – customer engagement relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – This study used a triadic approach for the collection of primary data. Each triad consisted of a customer, a frontline employee and an immediate colleague of the frontline employee. Structured questionnaires were used to solicit data from the respondents. Specifically, customers were asked to report their level of engagement with the bank and the recovery performance of the employee who redressed their grievances. Frontline employees responded to their level of work engagement while their colleagues reported about the proactive disposition of frontline employees at the workplace.

Findings – Empirical findings revealed under service scenario, Indian retail banking employees' proactive disposition nurtures customer engagement. It was further observed that this relationship is sequentially mediated by work engagement and service recovery performance.

Originality/value – The role of frontline employees in enriching customer engagement has to date remained under-researched among marketing scholars. To the best of the authors' knowledge, this study is the maiden attempt to relate frontline employee proactivity with customer engagement. Also, this study is one of the early research to investigate customer engagement under a service recovery context, thereby, opening pathways for further exploration.

Keywords Frontline employee, Proactive personality, Work engagement, Service recovery, Customer engagement

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

In their study of mobile phone users, [Cambra-Fierro et al. \(2014\)](#) highlighted, probably for the first time, the role of frontline service personnel in shoring up customer engagement. They reported that the attitude of frontline employees significantly improves customer satisfaction and engagement. Their results also suggested that the impact of employee attitude on customer satisfaction and engagement is stronger when customers have registered a complaint v/s when no complaint has been registered. Two years later, [Cambra-Fierro et al. \(2016\)](#) found that effective complaint handling ameliorates customer engagement in a sample of customers from the financial services industry. More recently, similar findings were also reported by [Cambra-Fierro and Melero-Polo \(2017\)](#) who found that effective complaint-handling enhances customer engagement.

Despite the recently acknowledged indisputable significance of customer engagement for service organizations and the role of frontline staff in determining customer service perception ([Berry, 1981](#)), it is surprising that these few studies appear to be the only reference

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