

Leisure Involvement and Service-oriented Behaviour among Frontline SME Employees

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Abstract

Literature suggest the importance of employee leisure involvement towards their service performance. However, empirical investigation assessing the link between employee leisure involvements in predicting employee service-oriented behavior remains scarce. This study inspects the influence of employees' leisure involvement on their service-oriented behavior. A sample of 451 SME (Small-Medium Enterprise) employees were collected in Bandung, Indonesia. The proposed model was tested using variance-based SEM (PLS). Out of the three dimensions of leisure involvement, only attraction and centrality were found to be a significant predictor for employees' service-oriented behavior. The dimension of self-expression is not significant in predicting service-oriented behavior. These findings are coherent with sociology studies where a type of employees known as "seekers" prioritizes leisure in their work-related decisions. Conceptual and practical significance of the study is also provided. This study reveals that highly leisure-involved frontline employees are inclined to be satisfied with their life, enabling them to deliver a high service performance.

Keywords:

Frontline employee, SME, leisure involvement, service-oriented behavior

1 Introduction

Having professional employees is an important strategy for businesses to be successful in a competitive industry. Particularly, retaining professional employees whose role is dealing with clients is critical (Brien, Anthonisz, & Suhartanto, 2019). In the retail industry, frontline employees have a crucial responsibility in delivering service and representing the business (Suhartanto, Dean, Nansuri, & Triyuni, 2018) For these reasons, frontline employees' performance can easily affect customer outcomes. Studies conducted in various industries suggest that frontline employees' capability in serving customers has substantial influence on customers' view on the services quality, level of satisfaction, and their intention to repurchase and recommend (Suhartanto, Mulyawan, Yahya, & Leo, 2018; Choi & Joung, 2017). Since the role of frontline employees is critical in determining the success of firms, developing and maintaining their performance is imperative (Suhartanto & Brien, 2018).

Job satisfaction is one of the many factors that determine the performance of service employees and has been well documented in past literature (Suhartanto & Brien, 2018). Job satisfaction influences service performance due to the productivity enhancement effect of satisfaction (Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Yu, 2011). This study suggests leisure involvement as one of the drivers of employees' service-oriented behavior. This suggestion is based on several justifications; 1) literature showed that employees' leisure involvement in tourism influences their work outcomes, 2) scholars (Kühnel & Sonntag, 2011) have reported that leisure activities is associated with tourists' quality of life as well as their working life and 3) individuals who enjoys leisure activities tend to gain a feeling of motivation, feel amuse, and are generally more satisfied in all aspects of life (Sirgy, Kruger, Lee, & Yu, 2011; Beatty & Torbert, 2003). These past studies indicate that employees who participate in leisure activities tend to demonstrate higher service performance and excellent work outcomes.

Although studies have reported the interrelationship between leisure and work (Beatty & Torbert, 2003; Guerrier & Adib, 2003), there is still much left to be understood. To the best of the authors' knowledge, no studies have examined the effects of being leisurely active on frontline employees' service performance. This study attempts to address the association between leisure involvement and service-oriented behavior among employees in SMEs. The study aims to provide understanding in managing personnel for retail businesses.

2 Literature Review

2.1 Leisure involvement

Leisure is generally associated with free time available to an individual when his or her job duties have been met. Activities during leisure time are typically aimed to make a person feel relaxed and happy. Leisure should not only be associated with activity and time but can also be related to a person's attitude towards the leisure experiences (Beatty & Torbert, 2003). Leisure activities are often seen as the opposite of work.

Release, freedom, and fun are the terms often associated with leisure; in contrast, routine, compulsion, and restriction are the terms often associated with work (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). Although there are stark differences between leisure and work, these two constructs are not exact opposites. Leisure and work have constantly intertwined and are interdependent of one another. Leisure activities can be employed as a method to achieve employees' goals at work (Beatty & Torbert, 2003). In studies related to work, scholars (Beatty & Torbert, 2003) revealed how employees can acquire many means to integrate the activities of leisure and fun into their working time.

Based on the consumer behavior concept of involvement, Havitz and Dimanche (1997) defined leisure involvement as "the excitement, interest and awareness which cannot be observed from an individual's leisure activities, tourist destinations, related leisure facilities and products". Furthermore, they identified five components of leisure involvement; importance, pleasure value, risk possibility, symbolic value, and risk of result. On the other hand, Ragheb (2002) defined leisure involvement as a person's positive emotion about the activity which he or she believe can increase favorable value to his or her life, hence the commitment to get involved in such activities. In a more recent study, researchers (Cheng, Hung, & Chen, 2016) viewed leisure involvement as a psychological involvement on certain activities, environments, and facilities or products related to the leisure. Despite varying definitions by past researchers, there are still similarity in terms of highlighting factors of unnoticeable state of motivation, interest, and arousal during recreational activity.

Leisure researchers tend to agree on the multidimensional construct of leisure involvement (Havitz & Dimanche, 1997; Chang, 2017; Kyle & Mowen, 2005). Kapferer and Laurent (1985) suggested that there are five key elements of leisure involvement, i.e. pleasure, interest, consequence risk, perceived probability, and self-expression. McIntyre and Pigram (1992) explored camping risks and concluded that leisure involvement contains the elements of attraction, self-expression, and centrality. Ragheb (2002) developed a scale to measure leisure and recreation involvement consisting of six elements, i.e. interest, importance, centrality, meaning, pleasure, and intensity. Past studies diverged in terms of identifying the salient elements of leisure involvement; however, most of the studies adopted the McIntyre and Pigram's (1992) elements of attraction, centrality, and self-expression as the dimensions of leisure involvement (Cheng, Hung & Chen, 2016; Chang, 2017).

2.2 Customer-oriented behavior

Customer-oriented behavior has increasingly been the object of attention in the marketing literature (Jung & Zablah, 2017). Customer-oriented behavior is defined as the ability of the service provider to help customers –leading to service quality, customer satisfaction, loyalty, and organizational performance. Customer-oriented behavior also refers to specific behaviors displayed by service providers during interactions with customers. Various terms have been used in marketing literature in order to describe customer-oriented behavior, such as pro-social behavior, extra-role customer service, and organizational citizenship behavior (Choi & Joung, 2017).

The theory of leisure experience (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986) can be used to justify the link between leisure involvement and service performance of frontline employees. This theory postulates that a subjective experience with leisure activity affects a person's life. Rendering to this theory, the experience with leisure activity can fulfill a person's emotional needs which subsequently impacts on both mental and physical health, level of satisfaction with life, and personal growth (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986). Once the psychological needs are satisfied, a person tends to be healthier and more satisfied with his or her life and subsequently, the person will increase his or her self-awareness that arouses a self-guided enhancement on his or her economic, intellectual, and emotional aspect. A person who has high personal growth is well driven to achieve his or her work and enables him or her to perform a high-quality job.

Several studies have tested hypotheses that was developed based on the leisure experience theory. Baldwin and Tinsley (1988) reported that a person who experiences leisure feels more freedom, less time awareness, and lack of self-focus. Their following study examined students and non-students' essays and confirmed the leisure experience theory that intimacy, relaxation, delight, friendship, and aesthetic appreciation are the features of leisure experience. Other scholars (Rodríguez, Budruk, & Phillips, 2011) reported that leisure involvement decreases stress, increases life quality, and improves life satisfaction; the important prerequisites for employees to perform a high service quality (Rodríguez, Budruk, & Phillips, 2011). Thus, it is predicted that leisure involvement dimensions will influence the performance of frontline employees. Based on past literature, the following hypotheses are formulated.

H1: Attraction positively influences service-oriented behavior.

H2: Centrality positively influences service-oriented behavior.

H3: Self-expression positively influences service-oriented behavior.

Referring to the concepts that have been discussed in the previous section, the conceptual model on the associations between leisure involvement dimensions and service-oriented behavior are depicted in Figure 1.

3 Methodology

3.1 Methods and Equipment

This study used data gathered from 451 SMEs frontline retail staffs in Bandung, Indonesia. The respondents were randomly selected and requested to voluntarily respond to a questionnaire, with assurances of anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. The measurement items were adapted from past literature. Leisure involvement was gauged with three dimensions, each consists of four items adopted from the work of Kyle and Mowen (2005). To be coherent with previous studies on service-oriented behavior, this variable was gauged with three items. This study used the five-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. To ensure that the questions were clear and well understood prior data collection, the

questionnaire was pretested on 20 frontline employees. This process resulted in a small adjustment on the wording of the questionnaire. Preliminary data analysis suggests that the data were not normally distributed. This research used a variance-based structural equation modelling PLS. The usage of PLS is appropriate with the aims of this study, to assess the association between the variables and foresee the validity and reliability of the construct (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).

4 Findings

The sample of this study consists of 451 responses collected from SME frontline staffs. Table 1 represents the respondents' characteristics and Table 2 illustrates the store characteristics.

Table 1: Respondents' demographic characteristics

Variable		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	244	54
	Female	207	56
Age	17 – 25 years	217	48
	25 – 35 years	187	42
	36 – 45 years	31	7
	Over 45 years	15	3
Education	<High school	151	34
	High school	235	52
	Bachelor	60	13
	Post Graduate	3	7

Table 2: Store characteristics

Variable		Frequency	%
Number of employees	<5	155	34
	6-10	215	48
	>10	80	17
Average transaction/day	<50	112	25
	51-100	234	52
	>100	104	23

4.1 Measurement Model

To evaluate the validity of the constructs, the average variance extracted and factor loadings were investigated. As illustrated in Table 3 the values of the standardized loading are more than the threshold of 0.5 with significance level of $p < 0.01$. The values

of the average variance extracted (AVE) of all of the construct variables are more than the suggested cut-off value of 0.5 and the values of composite reliability (CR) are more than the suggested value of 0.7 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).

4.2 Structural Model

Hair, et al. (2017) suggested a bootstrapping with 500 repetitions to evaluate the path coefficients and the significance of the indicator weights. It is recommended to employ the corrected R^2 of all constructs to evaluate the model fit when using PLS. The criteria for assessing the outcomes of the goodness of fit are large, 0.36; medium, 0.25; small, 0.02 (Chin, Peterson, & Brown, 2008). Using this guidance, the indent value of 0.086 (8.6%) suggests that the relation model of leisure involvement-service oriented behavior is between small and medium. To check approximate fit indices, standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) and normal fit index (NFI) were applied. The result shows that SRMR has a value of 0.101 (higher than the recommended value of 0.8) and NFI has a value of 0.418 (smaller than the recommended cut-off level of 0.9) demonstrating the relatively fitness of the model (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017). In addition, Table 4 illustrates that the Q^2 value is 0.036 for service-oriented behavior. These results specify that the independent variables predictive relevance is satisfactory (Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2017).

Table 3: Reliability and validity check

Construct/Item	Loading*	CR	AVE
Attraction		0.713	0.566
- Leisure is very important to me.	0.573		
- Leisure makes me relax when pressure builds up.	0.896		
- For me, involving in leisure is satisfying.	0.495		
Centrality		0.827	0.617
- My life is organized around leisure.	0.875		
- Leisure is a central part in my life.	0.787		
- I like to discuss about leisure.	0.683		
Self-expression		0.821	0.61
- In leisure activity, I can be myself.	0.915		
- I can be myself when taking a leisure.	0.64		
- When participating in a leisure, people see me the way they want to see me.	0.763		
Customer-Oriented Behavior		0.79	0.558
- I always find suitable product for customers.	0.813		
- I do everything to satisfy customers.	0.771		
- I pay attention on what customers say.	0.648		

* $p < 0.01$

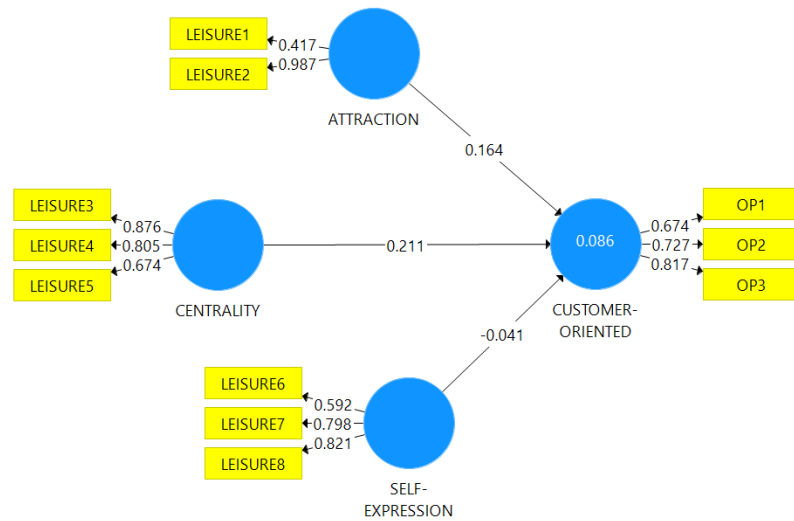


Figure 1: The result of testing the proposed model

The path coefficients, as shown in Figure 1, specify that amongst the leisure involvement dimensions, the attraction and self-expression dimensions have a significant effect on service-oriented behavior (the coefficients are 0.164 and 0.211 respectively, and both significant at $p < 0.01$). In contrast, the effect of centrality dimension on service-oriented behavior is insignificant ($p > 0.05$). Thus, hypothesis H1 and H2 are supported, while hypothesis H3 is rejected.

5 Conclusion

5.1 Discussion and implication

The link between leisure and the aspect of life, including in work, has been well scrutinized in past literature (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). However, studies on the influence of employee leisure involvement on employee service-oriented behavior has been scarce. This study presents that the model of the association between leisure involvement and employee service-oriented performance is robust, highlighting the importance of employee leisure involvement on their service-oriented behavior. Occasionally, leisure and work have been perceived as exact opposites (Guerrier & Adib, 2003). This study provides an empirical evidence on the association between leisure and work. This study also extends the existing body of knowledge by disclosing the effects of leisure involvement on service-oriented behavior of frontline employees. The result of this study suggests that the employees' leisure experience can satisfy their emotional needs which in turn affect their physical and mental health, satisfy their job, and finally encourage them to perform their service better (Tinsley & Tinsley, 1986). Furthermore, the important role of leisure involvement on employee service performance highlights the idea that by engaging in leisure, employees can reenergize from their work and cope with their work stress (Sonnentag, 2003).

This study reveals that only attraction and centrality are the significant factors affecting employee service-oriented behavior. The importance of the attraction and centrality dimensions in affecting employee service-oriented behavior is in line with sociological study of a type of worker called “seekers”. The seekers are employees who prioritize leisure in their work decision. These employees’ life and goal are formed by their leisure involvement. Their central interest on leisure gives them a culture of leisure-motivated work.

From a theoretical perspective, there are two important contributions that this study offers. First, the results of this study suggest that leisure experience theory proposed by Tinsley and Tinsley (1986) offers a useful guide to assess the link between leisure involvement (more specifically attraction and self-expression) and service-oriented behavior. The results of this study exhibit that highly leisure-involved frontline employees are inclined to be emotionally satisfied, resulting in mental and physical health, and satisfied with their lives, enabling them to deliver a high service performance. From a managerial perspective, retail managers should embrace a leisure program in their retail policy to increase employees’ awareness towards leisure and participation in leisure programs. The benefits of employees’ involvement in leisure activities need to be disseminated through staff meetings as well as employee broadcasting media. Additionally, the manager of retail could also manage a frequent leisure program agenda that involves all retail employees.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study uses self-reported measurement items to gauge employee service-oriented behavior. Future study can measure the employee service-oriented behavior using a multi-measurement scale, not only from employees themselves but also from their supervisors and their customers. The second limitation is related to the sample used, the frontline SME employees in Bandung. This sample bears drawback in terms of the generalize ability of the finding. Future research can test the relationships between the variables by using other employees, industries, and nationalities. In addition, future study can include employees’ commitment and citizenship to improve our perspective on the influence of employees’ involvement on service performance. The cross-sectional approach used for collecting the data for this study is the last limitation of this study. This approach cannot capture the dynamic association between attitude (employee leisure involvement and job satisfaction) and behavior (employee service-oriented behavior).

6 About the author

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