

ICIE – Marketing & Negotiation Research Seminar

“Intercultural Service Encounters: The Influence of Service Employees’ Origin on Customer Satisfaction”

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Abstract:

Although immigrants represent major groups on the customer as well as the service employee side, research on intercultural service encounters involving immigrants is scarce. This research focuses on the case where immigrants act as service employees and how this affects local customers’ satisfaction with a service encounter. More specifically, it investigates whether country stereotypes of the immigrant service employee’s country of origin are relevant in predicting attributions (i.e. the “psycho-logical construct referring to the cognitive processes through which an individual infers the cause of a [service delivery outcome]” (Calder and Burnkrant, 1977, p. 29)) and – through the latter – customer satisfaction. The study identifies which of the two stereotypes proposed by the stereotype content model (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick & Xu, 2002) – warmth or competence – is more influential for different types of attributions. More specifically, it aims at throwing light on the question whether and how these stereotypes influence that consumers attribute the cause of a service delivery process to the service employee, the service provider, her- or himself or cultural differences (Tam, Sharma & Kim, 2016). In other words, it tries to (a) establish whether the two country stereotype dimensions are both relevant in predicting these attributions and (b) identify which of the two is more influential in the presence of the other for the attributions.

Two experimental studies will be presented which employ a 3 (origin of the service employee: Japan (competent country), Greece (warm country), control group with no country of origin mentioned) x 2 (service delivery outcome: success or failure) scenario-based experiment among consumers in Austria. We investigate two different service contexts which differ in terms of perceived risk, involvement and body distance between service employee and customer. One scenario relates to a financial service and another scenario relates to a medical service.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to the literature by bringing together two parallel research streams and examining the impact of country of origin stereotypes and attributions in the context of intercultural service encounters. As such, it provides evidence on the relative strength of warmth and competence associated with the service employee’s country of origin as drivers of different types of attributions. It thus extends research on intercultural service encounters by introducing a new theoretical lens. In addition, the study contributes by examining the boundary conditions underlying the attribution process (i.e. positive and negative service delivery outcome). In managerial terms, the findings offer important implications on the causes consumers attribute to service delivery out-comes dependent on the service employees belonging to cultures that are perceived as competent and/or warm.

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