



The Role of Service Provider Embodied Behaviors in Reducing Negative Customer Behavior: An analytical study of a sample of telecommunications company employees in Muthanna Governorate

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Abstract

The current research aims to investigate the role of service provider embodied behaviors (positive emotional expression, emotional control, supportive body language, professional behavior, and courtesy) in reducing negative customer behavior through its dimensions (verbal abuse and refusal to participate) among employees of telecommunications companies in Muthanna Governorate. The research sample consisted of (96) employees. The descriptive analytical approach was used to achieve the research objectives and develop its tools, using statistical programs (AMOS.V.29, SPSS.V.29). The research results indicated that service provider embodied behaviors such as positive emotional expression, emotional control, and the use of body language—represent an effective tool in improving customer interaction and reducing the likelihood of negative customer behavior.

Keywords: Service Provider Embodied Behaviors, Negative Customer Behavior.

Introduction

Service organizations, particularly telecommunications companies, are among the sectors that interact most closely with customers. This makes the nature of the relationship between the service provider and customer a crucial factor in achieving satisfaction and loyalty. In light of escalating competition and rising customer expectations, the importance of service provider behavior has emerged as a strategic tool that can contribute to enhancing service quality on the one hand, and reducing negative customer behavior on the other (Al-Najjar, 2020: 45).

Recent literature in the field of consumer behavior and service management has shown that the "embodied behavior" of a service provider—that is, the way the service provider behaves in terms of verbal and nonverbal expressions, interaction style, courtesy, and apparent emotion—has a direct impact on the customer experience, particularly when the service provider encounters negative or hostile behavior. This type of behavior may manifest itself in sharp complaints, verbal aggression, or belittling the service provider, placing the latter under high pressure and requiring them to possess advanced behavioral skills (Al-Khazraj, 2018: 63).

From this perspective, it has become necessary to study the impact of these embodied behaviors, which can be understood as a form of emotional and behavioral intelligence, on absorbing customer anger and reducing the likelihood of negative escalation. Several studies indicate that a service provider's ability to maintain a calm and balanced demeanor and empathize with customers can lead to a change in customer behavior toward a more positive path (Al-Shammari, 2021: 112) ^[5].

Given the importance of this topic in practical reality, especially in the Iraqi environment where telecommunications companies face significant challenges in terms of customer satisfaction and dealing with daily pressures, this study sheds light on the relationship between service provider behavior and negative customer behavior in Muthanna Governorate, based on an analysis of a sample of employees working in telecommunications companies there. This study aims to provide a scientific insight that can contribute to improving training and employment policies within these companies (Al-Zubaidi, 2019: 79).

Research Methodology

Part One: Research Methodology

First: Research Problem

Service provider embodied behavior is a vital factor in how employees deal with these types of challenges. An employee who is adept at controlling their emotions and adopts a professional communication style is able to reduce stress in difficult situations and absorb negative customer behavior. Studies indicate that this positive behavioral pattern is no less important than technical skills or product knowledge, and may even outperform them in direct customer interaction. However, the Iraqi context, specifically in Muthanna Governorate, lacks sufficient local studies that address this topic from an analytical perspective focusing on the employees themselves in telecommunications companies. This creates a knowledge gap that calls for research and investigation. Does service provider embodied behavior actually contribute to reducing negative customer behavior? Does this relationship vary depending on the nature of the work or the employee's training background? Based on the above, the research problem stems from the need to understand the relationship between the embodied behavior of the service provider and the negative behavior of the customer, and to analyze this relationship in a realistic local environment, by studying a sample of employees in telecommunications companies in Muthanna, to arrive at results that can be used in developing training and behavioral containment policies in the service sector.

Second: Importance of the Research

The importance of this research stems from its addressing a vital topic in the field of service management. Understanding the embodied behavior of service providers and their role in reducing negative customer behavior is a fundamental issue in improving the quality of interaction within the service work environment, particularly in sectors with direct and intensive contact with customers, such as telecommunications companies. The research gains an

Fourth: Hypothetical plan and development of hypotheses

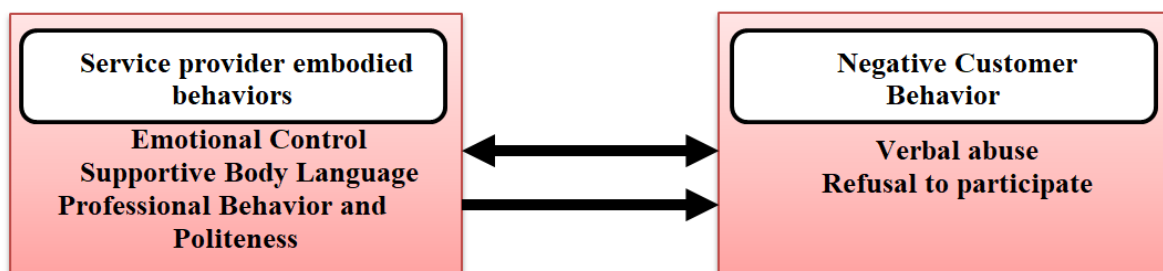


Fig 1: Hypothetical Research Plan

The first main hypothesis

There is a statistically significant correlation between the embodied behaviors of the service provider and the negative behavior of the customer.

The second main hypothesis

There is a significant effect of the embodied behaviors of the service provider on the negative behavior of the customer.

Fifth: The research sample

The research sample consisted of employees of

important applied dimension through its focus on a local environment (Muthanna Governorate), which has not yet received sufficient study regarding customer-service provider relationships in the telecommunications sector. Furthermore, the nature of this environment—including its social and economic pressures—makes it suitable for understanding how employees interact with negative customer behavior, which may contribute to the development of applicable scientific and administrative insights. Furthermore, the results of this research will contribute to enriching scientific knowledge about service provider behaviors and providing a reliable scientific database for developing training and qualification programs. It will also be used by senior management to develop customer relationship management strategies, positively impacting the work environment and job performance indicators.

Third: Research Objectives

1. Diagnose the level of adoption of embodied behaviors by employees in telecommunications companies, such as empathy, active listening, and positive communication with customers.
2. Analyze the nature of negative customer behavior and its most prominent manifestations in the telecommunications company environment (such as aggression, repeated complaints, or provocative practices).
3. Test the impact of service provider embodied behaviors on reducing the severity of negative customer behavior and transforming it into more positive interactions.
4. Uncover the role of embodied behaviors as a mechanism for mitigating conflicts between service providers and customers and improving the quality of the relationship between the two parties.
5. Identify differences in the adoption of embodied behaviors and their impact according to employee demographic characteristics (such as age, experience, and education level).

telecommunications companies (Asiacell and Zain), with the size of the selected sample amounting to (96) employees.

Part Two: The Theoretical Side

First: Concept of Service Provider Embodied Behaviors

Embodied behavior is a contemporary concept in the field of management and organizational behavior. It refers to how a service provider visibly and tangibly displays their feelings and emotions during their interaction with the customer, whether through their body language, tone of voice, or verbal and nonverbal communication (Grandey, 2015: 562)^[9]. This

concept is at the heart of service processes, as customers often evaluate a service not only based on the final outcome, but also based on their interactive experience with the service provider (Ismail, 2020: 55) ^[12]. The concept of embodied behavior developed from the theory of "emotional labor" introduced by Arlie Hochschild in the 1980s, which emphasized that employees in jobs that require direct interaction with the public are often required to express certain emotions, even if these do not align with their actual feelings. In this context, employees are required to maintain a constant smile, empathy, and control anger and agitation, which forces them to exhibit "embodied" behavior that reflects what is expected of them rather than what they feel (Al-Ani, 2019: 33). Moreover, embodied behavior is not limited to the emotional dimension, but also includes the ability to communicate clearly (Rafaeli & Sutton, 2013: 26) ^[13], maintain a good appearance, and present body language that is consistent with the content of the message. Multiple studies show that embodied behavior represents an intangible tool that has an effective impact in building trust and reducing tension within the service work environment (Hamid, 2021: 76) ^[10].

Second: Importance of embodied behaviors for service providers

The importance of embodied behavior for service providers lies in its being an essential element in the success of the service delivery process and building strong relationships with customers. Its importance can be summarized as follows:

1. Calming tension and reducing clashes: Often, negative customer behavior is a reaction to the service provider's behavior. Therefore, calm and balanced embodied behavior helps absorb customer emotions and reduce tension within the service situation (Al-Shammari, 2020: 91) ^[5].
2. Enhancing a positive impression of the organization: Customers evaluate not only the quality of the product or service, but also the quality of their interactions with employees. Positive embodied behavior enhances the organization's image and strengthens its reputation in the market (Al-Ansari, 2021: 70) ^[2].
3. Increasing job satisfaction for service providers: Employees who possess advanced behavioral skills are often better able to control work situations and less prone to stress, which is reflected in their job satisfaction (Hamid, 2021: 79) ^[10].
4. Reducing customer behavioral escalation: When negative behavior is met with a polite and professional response, the likelihood of the situation escalating into a conflict or formal complaint is reduced, which is a win-win for both the employee and the organization (Harris & Reynolds, 2003: 146) ^[14].

Third: Dimensions of Service Provider Embodied Behaviors
Embodied behavior has several behavioral and emotional dimensions that can be summarized as follows:

1. Positive Emotional Expression: This dimension is manifested in the service provider's display of enthusiasm, interest, friendliness, and empathy during interactions with customers. It is considered one of the most important indicators of the quality of the service relationship, as customers feel valued and cared for. Researchers confirm that this type of expression

contributes to calming customers and reducing negative behavior (Rashid, 2022: 64) ^[15].

2. Emotional Control: This refers to the service provider's ability to restrain feelings of anger or frustration, especially in difficult situations or when dealing with hostile customers. This dimension requires special training because it reflects the employee's degree of maturity and self-management skills (Hamid, 2021: 78) ^[10].
3. Supportive Body Language: This includes facial expressions, eye contact, body posture, and the way one stands or sits. Research indicates that positive body language can enhance a positive impression and help absorb negative customer feelings (Ismail, 2020: 58) ^[12].
4. Professional behavior and courtesy: This dimension includes speaking in a calm and clear voice, using polite language, treating others with kindness, and providing service in a consistent and disciplined manner. This reflects respect for the customer, even in the event of a dispute or complaint (Rashid, 2022: 64) ^[15].

Fourth: Concept of Negative Customer Behavior

Negative customer behavior represents behavioral actions by customers that violate accepted norms of conduct regarding the organizational services provided by the service provider. Therefore, understanding negative customer behavior is essential to highlight the need to manage this type of behavior to minimize its impact on the organization, the performance of the service provider, and other customers interacting with the organization (Al-Janabi, 2020: 41) ^[4].

The basis that leads to negative customer behavior is due to systematic violations of customer rights, which in turn affects the strength and reputation of the organization (Hassan, 2021: 55) ^[11]. Negative customer behavior represents the unruly and dark side of the customer, which leads to loss or psychological harm to customers (Chi & Grandey, 2019: 958) ^[7]. Therefore, interaction with other customers has a negative impact on customer satisfaction with the service provider. Customer behavior that violates the accepted code of conduct in the organization and creates a negative perception of the organization's adopted orientations, and behaviors that affect the moral, financial, and social status of the organization, the service provider, and other customers, represent direct and indirect negative behaviors aimed at increasing pressure and workload on the service provider by the customer as a result of the organization not providing sufficient time to serve customers (Al-Azzawi, 2022: 69) ^[3].

Fifth: The Importance of Studying Negative Customer Behavior

Service provider dissatisfaction with the organization leads to negative behavior during service delivery, which in turn leads to customer dissatisfaction with the organization in general. Consequently, the organization seeks to identify the service provider's shortcomings and satisfy their needs and desires. This motivates the service provider to address negative customer behavior. This, in turn, contributes to gaining customer satisfaction (Gremler & Gwinner, 2016: 86) ^[8].

Identifying Customer Dissatisfaction: Customer complaints against the service provider in particular and the organization in general indicate customer dissatisfaction. This, in turn, exacerbates customer complaints against the organization and increases work environment pressure on the service provider, as they represent the face of the organization. This motivates the organization to address these complaints by

responding to customer requirements and working to satisfy them as much as possible (Al-Janabi, 2020: 41)^[4].

Sixth: Dimensions of Negative Customer Behavior

1. Verbal Abuse

Verbal abuse refers to customer disdain for the services provided and repeated, impacting the organization, customer tastes, and society as a whole. Customers who verbally abuse are in fact influenced by social and economic factors, lifestyles, and physical characteristics, which can increase the customer's verbal abuse toward the service provider (Al-Tamimi, 2020: 82)^[6].

2. Refusal to Participate

The rate of refusal to participate among customers is accompanied by customer concerns that the service provided by the organization will not meet the customer's desired desires, external influences, emotional pressures, and a lack of trust. All of these factors lead to customer reluctance to participate, as refusal to participate represents a reluctance to provide information or something that would help the organization understand its requirements. The customer's behavior in order to meet it is negative and affects the

organization in a way that limits the contributions of the customer's service encounter, indicating the occurrence of unacceptable behaviors as a result of providing services that do not meet the customer's desire (Hassan, 2021: 56)^[11].

Part Three: The Practical Aspect

1. Describing and Diagnosing the Service Provider's Embodied Behavior Variable

Table (1) shows the descriptive statistics for the items of the service provider's embodied behavior variable, as the dimension (supportive body language) obtained the highest weighted arithmetic mean value of (4.88) with a standard deviation of (0.805) and a coefficient of variation of (16.49%), which indicates the importance of this item for the research sample in the telecommunications company. In contrast, the dimension (professional behavior and courtesy) obtained the lowest weighted arithmetic mean value of (2.68) with a standard deviation of (0.702) and a coefficient of variation of (22.19). As for the service provider's embodied behavior variable, the weighted arithmetic mean value reached (3.605) with a standard deviation of (0.567) and a coefficient of variation of (18.95%) at the level of the research sample's answers.

Table 1: Description and diagnosis of the service provider's embodied behavior variable

Dimensions	Mean	SD	CV
Positive Emotional Expression	2.98	0.861	28.89
Emotional Control	3.88	0.774	19.94
Supportive Body Language	4.88	0.805	16.49
Professional Behavior and Politeness	2.68	0.702	26.19
Service Provider Behavior	3.605	0.567	18.95

2. Description and diagnosis of the negative customer behavior variable

Table (2) shows the descriptive statistics for the negative customer behavior variable items: The "verbal abuse" dimension had the highest weighted mean, reaching (2.97), with a standard deviation of (0.711), and a coefficient of variation of (23.93). This indicates the importance of this dimension for the research sample at the telecommunications company. In contrast, the "refusal to participate" dimension had the lowest weighted mean, reaching (2.62), with a standard deviation of (1.100), and a coefficient of variation of (41.97). As for the negative customer behavior variable, the weighted mean value reached (2.79), with a standard deviation of (0.853), and a coefficient of variation of (27.71), across the research sample's responses.

Table 2: Description and diagnosis of the customer's negative behavior variable

Dimensions	Mean	S.D	C.V
Verbal abuse	2.97	0.711	23.93
Refusal to participate	2.62	1.100	41.97
Negative customer behavior	2.79	0.853	27.71

3. Testing Research Hypotheses

The correlation relationship explores the nature and level of the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable, which is defined as (there is a statistically significant correlation between the embodied behavior of the service provider and the negative behavior of the customer).

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to determine the extent to which the hypothesis was accepted, i.e., to verify the nature of the relationship between the variable (the embodied behavior of the service provider) and the variable (the negative behavior of the customer). Table (3) (the matrix related to the correlation between the two variables) shows that there is a correlation of (*0.762), which is a statistically significant value. This result indicates the acceptance of the hypothesis regarding the relationship between (the embodied behavior of the service provider) and the dependent variable (the negative behavior of the customer). The direction of this relationship is a direct direction, meaning that the emergence of the embodied behavior variable of the service provider necessitates the emergence of negative behavior of the customer. The correlation value is significant according to the (Sig.) index, which was within the significance level of (1%), reaching (0.04), i.e., a level of confidence in the result. (95%), which is less than its significant value of (0.05), and this result explains that the availability of the level of embodied behavior of the service provider in telecommunications companies will inevitably lead to the presence of a good percentage of negative customer behavior, and based on the above, the above results provide support for accepting the realization of the first main hypothesis tested, the content of which is (there is a statistically significant correlation between the embodied behavior of the service provider and the negative behavior of the customer) within the scope of the telecommunications company under study.

Table 3: Correlation matrix between the embodied behavior of the service provider and the negative behavior of the customer

		Service Provider Behavior	Negative customer behavior
Service Provider Behavior	Pearson Correlation	1	.762*
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.04
	N	30	30
Negative customer behavior	Pearson Correlation	.762*	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.04	
	N	96	96

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

Second Main Hypothesis: The meaning of this hypothesis is (there is a significant effect of service provider embodied behavior on negative customer behavior).

The results of Table (4) show that the more employees at the telecommunications company perceive the importance of service provider embodied behavior, the more this leads to a reduction in negative customer behavior. Furthermore, increasing attention to service provider embodied behavior by one standard weight leads to a reduction in negative customer behavior by (0.914) with a standard error of

(0.028). This means that employees at the telecommunications company recognize the importance of the significant effect of service provider embodied behavior in reducing negative customer behavior. Green education strategies also contributed to explaining (0.850) of the variance in negative customer behavior across its dimensions. The remaining value falls outside the study's scope.

Table (4) Outputs of the impact of service provider embodied behavior on negative customer behavior

path		Standard Estimates	Standard error	C.V	R ²	(P)
Service Provider Behavior	----> Negative customer behavior	0.914	0.028	34.769	0.580	0.001

Part Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

First: Conclusions

1. It was found that service providers' embodied behaviors, such as positive emotional expression, controlling emotions, and using body language, represent an effective tool in improving customer interactions and reducing the likelihood of negative customer behavior.
2. The results of previous studies indicated an inverse relationship between high levels of embodied behavior and low levels of negative customer behavior, confirming the preventive role of these skills in the service work environment.
3. It was found that the most prominent manifestations of negative customer behavior in telecommunications companies include verbal aggression, belittling the service provider, and nonverbal aggression, especially during peak times or when delays occur.
4. The data showed that employees with high behavioral skills, particularly in emotional control, were better able to contain negative customer behavior and transform the situation into a positive interaction.
5. There is a lack of systematic training for service providers in the field of embodied behavior and dealing with negative customers, which weakens some of them's ability to effectively manage tense situations.

Second: Recommendations

1. The necessity of including embodied behavior and emotional communication skills within the basic training programs for employees of telecommunications companies, with a focus on behavioral expression and emotional control.
2. Establish periodic training courses in dealing with negative customers, using realistic scenarios and simulation exercises to increase employee preparedness.
3. Incorporate embodied behavior as part of the performance evaluation system, while providing continuous feedback to employees on their behavioral

skills in dealing with customers.

4. Improve the work environment by providing employees with psychological and professional support, and providing tools to help manage the work stress resulting from dealing with negative customers.

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