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## Mini Review

# Authenticity Displays in the Service Interactions: An Emotional Contagion Perspective

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## Abstract

Emotional contagion has a great influence on service communications. The regulation of emotions helps the front line service employee to meet the demands of the customers successfully and hence, helps the organisations to achieve their goals. An analysis of the significance of emotional contagion in service interactions has been done, which also helps to develop a clear understanding in relation to deep acting as well as surface acting. It was seen that customer satisfaction is the most important as well as the most appropriate indicator or predictor of customer loyalty. Although, surface acting is negatively related to customer satisfaction, deep acting is optimistically related to customer satisfaction. Moreover, regulation of emotions helps the service personnel to display the appropriate emotions in front of the target customers, which in accordance with rules of the organisation. It also helps the service personnel to maintain proper work-life balance. Results also show that motivation also helps individuals to regulate emotions successfully and hence, ensure customer satisfaction.

**Key words:** Emotional contagion, deep acting, surface acting, customer satisfaction, customer loyalty

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## INTRODUCTION

Emotional contagion is all about sharing of emotion among two different individuals. Customer satisfaction is the main objective of the service providing firms and hence, the service personnel are given adequate training for making their interaction with the customers smoother as well as simpler. Prior study suggests emotional contagion plays an important role for the service personnel as they have to convey their emotions more frequently to their customers in order to serve them<sup>1-5</sup>. Moreover, the expressions of the customer changes in accordance with the kind of emotions or facial expressions they receive from the service personnel who provide them the required service<sup>6</sup>. More specifically, mood swing of the employees, both positive and negative has a strong impact on the mood swings of the customers as well and this in turn results in increasing or decreasing the customer gap. Proper management of the emotions is the key strategy of the service providers to achieve their goals successfully. Deep acting also helps to increase the satisfaction level of the customers. It is hence very important for the employees of the service firms to regulate their emotions as per the requirement for their job. A brief analysis has been done in the following write up to find out the relationship between emotional contagion and service interactions as well as customer satisfaction. This can also be stated as the purpose of the write up.

## PROPOSITIONS DEVELOPMENT

**Emotional contagion in service interactions:** Emotional contagion can be broadly defined as the tendency of two persons to converge emotionally<sup>2,7</sup>. Emotions are meant to be shared with other individuals either knowingly or unknowingly and emotional contagion is a way of spreading the respective emotions among other people<sup>5,8-10</sup>. Hence, it can be stated that emotional contagion is the interchange between the feelings or emotions of the service personnel (or the employees of the service providing firms) and the feelings of the customer. In the process of interacting with other people, individuals display a variety of indicators, which proves the existence of emotional contagion. Some people have the tendency to mimic facial expressions, gestures, postures as well as the other qualities of other people whom they are interacting with.

It is essential for the service personnel to possess the quality of empathy, which plays a very important role in order to recover the loss in the service provided<sup>11,12</sup>. Empathy cannot be considered similar to emotional contagion, but it can be

considered to be a means of facilitating the quality of empathy<sup>13</sup>. An individual must have a high degree of self awareness and cognitive ability in order to empathise with other people. If both the above mentioned qualities are absent especially in the service personals then the emotional contagion of negative emotions may result in increasing the stress level of the concerned employee<sup>14</sup>. As a result, it becomes a major reason for lowering the morale of the employees of the service providing firms, which may ultimately result in high rate of turnover. In most of the cases, it has been seen that cognitive ability of an individual either facilitates or inhibits emotional contagion within them.

Furthermore, people of different gender differ in their approach towards emotional contagion. As compared to males, females tend to have greater contagion towards other people<sup>15,16</sup>. This is mostly because, females are considered to be more superior in identifying emotions in facial expressions as well as verbal and nonverbal expressions of other people<sup>17</sup>.

There are various factors that influence the union of emotions or emotional convergence within a group. Such factors include the stability of the membership, norms related to mood swings or mood regulations, tasks that involves interdependence as well as social interdependence<sup>18,19</sup>. Apart from these factors, there are certain other personal traits as well that determine emotional contagion in service interactions, which are openness of an individual to transmit and to receive feelings, characteristics related to the demography of the individual and the effect of disposition, which strongly affects the degree of emotional contagion<sup>20</sup>. Moreover, emotional contagion is considered to be conscious and automatic<sup>17</sup>. Martin *et al.*<sup>21</sup> indicate that just like the societies, organisations do have emotional or rather organisational culture which includes values, beliefs, rituals, languages, rules and regulations regarding the feelings of the workforce that is the type of feelings, which they should express and which ones they should not (especially in front of customers). They concluded that organisational culture is even related to the morale of the organisation and is a heterogeneous concept that every organisation has its own unique culture.

Most of the service providing firms of the recent times is giving much importance to provide the desired service to the customers and hence, customer advocacy has become one of the most important objectives of such organisations. As per the views of Urban<sup>22</sup>, there are 8 major factors, which can be considered as the key pillars of the strategy relating to customer advocacy which are as follows: Transparency in communication, the quality of the product or service

provided to the customers by the service personals, the alignment of incentives of the employees of the service providing firms, partners and share holders, the calibre of the supply chain partner which is one of the most important factors and infusing customer advocacy paradigm across all the departments or divisions of the entire organisation or the establishment (service providing firm).

When the service personnel interact with customers who are in a positive mood, they do not have any problem regarding the display of emotions and hence are able to follow the rules of the organisations regarding the display of emotions efficiently. While when the service providers interact with such customers who are in a negative mood, they are expected to behave properly and tolerate their behaviour.

**Instrumental emotion regulation and surface acting of service employees:** Emotions play a major role in the decision making process of an individual<sup>3,23</sup>. As such regulation of emotions is also very crucial in order to reduce the biases related to the emotions in service industries. Emotions of an individual are also guided by the social norms. Emotion regulation mostly is very critical to job related stress, work place behaviour, management of impressions and objective directed behaviour<sup>4,18,24</sup>. Service providing organisations expect their personnel or work force to regulate their emotions in order to meet the expectations of the customers as well as retain their customers by increasing their level of satisfaction. The dual usage of genuine emotions and fake emotions often cause confusion among the service personals, which also increases their stress level.

Self-monitoring can be defined as the ability of individuals to successfully adapt his emotions according to the relevant change in the environment<sup>25,26</sup>. People who can effectively regulate their emotions are able to display their behaviour and attitude according to the demand of the situation. Moreover, people possessing high level of self-monitoring skills are less affected by the external environment as compared to those who possess low level of self-monitoring skills<sup>27</sup>. Prior study indicates that highly self-monitored people are more susceptible to emotional contagion rather than those possessing low self-monitoring skills<sup>28</sup>. Hence, it can be concluded that the affect of mood swings of the customer on the emotions of the employees or the service personnel is more for the employees who are highly self-monitored. Furthermore, employees self-monitoring skills help to minimize the customer gap (the gap between customer's expectations and the perception of the service providing organisations or the service personnel) and hence, increase the satisfaction level of the customers as well.

Gross and Thompson<sup>29</sup> identify 5 strategies, in which will help to regulate emotions instrumentally. The five general strategies can be stated as follows:

- **Selection of situation:** It involves an individual to place himself in such a situation or position, where he can maximise his positive emotions as well as minimise his negative emotions at the same time
- **Modification of situation:** The following strategy involves changing the aspects of a particular situation so as to make the foreseeable situation as much pleasurable as possible
- **Attentional deployment:** This particular strategy demands an individual to focus on the various aspects of the situation or the position that is surrounding him
- **Cognitive change:** Such a strategy mostly involves the selective perspective of the situation or the position (for example, either pessimistic or optimistic) in order to affect the strength or power of the emotion
- **Modulation of response:** This strategy mostly involves an individual to enact a specific behavioural response with respect to an emotion-eliciting situation (one of the examples may include limiting the presentation of emotions)

The initial two strategies mentioned above that is selection of situation and modification of situation mostly influences an individual to engage himself in the activity of invoking emotions. As emotional contagion is considered to take place when the interactions are in progress, hence only the latter 3 strategies are applicable in case of emotional contagion.

As per the views of Pizarro<sup>30</sup>, emotions cannot be considered as passive experiences as such they do not necessarily destabilize moral decision making. While, Talmi and Frith<sup>31</sup> state that adults can flexibly regulate their emotions by making effective use of cognitive strategies, although they depend on personal goals or objectives and social context.

Each and every individual's behaviour has its own consequences and hence, emotions must be controlled in order to reach the desired consequences. The major aim of acting is to engage as well as attract the imagination as well as the interest of the customers in accordance with the objectives of the service providing firms<sup>32</sup>. Surface acting is positively correlated with the inner drives and motives of an individual<sup>18</sup>. Moreover, motives which mostly relates to the category of prevention are negatively correlated with the automatic regulations of emotions. The motives of the pleasure category are optimistically related to the deep acting.

Mostly, the strategies related to the surface acting of the employees with an extremely rude customer may often lead to more negative outcomes related to the job of the concerned service personnel<sup>33</sup>. This mostly results because of the violation of process fairness and reciprocity. Moreover, the intense human emotions which includes dissatisfaction, anger and frustration often drives or forces the employees to speak up. Hence, the service personnel are expected to suppress such emotions so as live up to the expectations of the service organisation as expression of such feelings may decrease the satisfaction level of the customers<sup>34</sup>.

Customer perceptions may play an important role when the service personnel decide, whether he should engage himself into surface acting or not<sup>35</sup>. All the employees do not have the same capability of emotion regulation in an organisation in particular. Moreover, interactional as well as personal variables have a major impact on the emotion regulation strategies<sup>36</sup>.

According to the views of Kanfer and Kantrowitz<sup>37</sup>, in most of the service providing organisations, the employees have the tendency to regulate their emotions according to the demands of their respective jobs so as to achieve the organisational goals as well as individual goals successfully. It is very important for service personnel to create positive emotions within the customers with the help of emotional contagion as it is considered to be one of the essential means of meeting the requirements of the job. Therefore, the display of positive emotions by the service personnel towards the customers can result in fruitful results on the work front as well. Good performance of the service personnel may result in monetary benefits as well as positive performance evaluations. All this may ultimately provide job satisfaction to the employees of the service providing organisations.

Prior study indicates that service personnel makes use of various levels of emotion regulations, which depends on the perceived relative supremacy of the target consumers<sup>4,24</sup>. This is mostly defined by the relative authority, which the target customers has over the service personnel. Furthermore, the employees of the service organisations must display more positive emotions towards the individuals possessing high power as compared to the individuals possessing low power<sup>38</sup>. This should be done because the approvals of the people who possess high power are mostly considered to be professionally more beneficial to the concerned employee. In comparison with the colleagues or rather co-workers, the target customers or the consumers are considered to have or rather are perceived to possess relatively more power. This is because

the interactions of the employees or the service personnel with the customers have a great impact on the performance evaluation, which results in having a wide influence on the outcomes related to work. The influence of the target power or the target customers on regulation of emotions of the employees has been found to be mixed. Customers are often considered to be high power targets by the researchers. As such, the negative response of customers in relation to surface acting can hamper the relationship between the concerned organisation and the customers or the consumers<sup>4</sup>. Out of this discussion the following proposition emerges:

**Proposition 1:** Instrumental emotion regulation is positively related to surface acting of frontline service employees.

#### **Pleasure emotion regulation and deep acting of service employees:**

Deep acting is said to take place when an individual incorporates such feelings within himself, which are actually felt by him<sup>1,14</sup>. Such feelings are not forced but are as per the will of the individual and hence, do not hamper the satisfaction level of the employees. Sometimes interacting with hostile customers becomes a big challenge for the employees of the service providing firms. Even the polite behaviour of service personnel does not have a pleasing influence on the attitude of the customer. However, in most cases, customers do respond positively to the polite behaviour of the service personnel<sup>13</sup>.

The primary strategies that the employees of the service organisations utilise in order to regulate their emotions effectively, includes surface acting and deep acting. As the surface acting involves the faking of emotions by keeping the internal feelings intact, the customers mostly have a tendency to avoid such emotions and even tend to get infuriated with such emotions. In addition, deep acting helps to increase the satisfaction level of the customers as the customers consider such acting as genuine. Deep acting is mostly considered to be an effortful process, which an employee incorporates in order to meet the demands of the customer and the organisation as well<sup>14,39</sup>. Deep acting also helps an employee or an individual in general to produce genuine and natural emotional display in front of the target customers or the other people in general<sup>40</sup>. Employees have certain motives, which influences them to regulate their emotions successfully. Such individuals are motivated by short term goals in order to reduce their negative emotions and to increase or to maintain the pleasing emotions. Although, some researchers argue that such short term pleasure goals are not sufficient to regulate emotions successfully<sup>3</sup>.

According to Gross and Thompson<sup>29</sup>, it is very essential to abandon the short term pleasure or instant pleasure in order to ensure long term utility. Self control or emotion control relates to the denial of impulses by an individual and rather forcing oneself to display something, which is contrary to the natural tendencies. In order to ensure pleasant outcomes for themselves in the work place, the employees mostly tend to regulate their emotions as per the expectation of the organisation. Mostly, motivated employees tend to increase the pleasure of the customers by providing the desired services to them. In addition, motivation also helps to generate the feeling of positive emotion more naturally and as such, it even helps to suppress the negative emotions effectively.

Hulsheger and Schewe<sup>41</sup> state that only authentic as well as genuine emotions provides the relevant cues, which helps to initiate contagion effect on the partner with whom an individual is interacting with. Such genuine emotions also help the employees or the service personals to meet the social obligations successfully. As a result, the employees are able to maintain a healthy work-life balance, which ultimately helps an individual to increase his level of performance as well. Deliberately influencing the feelings of other people can be termed as interpersonal emotion regulation. Service personnel possessing the quality of interpersonal emotion regulation can easily modify the feelings as well as the emotions of the customers effectively and efficiently. Deep acting can be considered to be means of achieving the quality of interpersonal regulation of emotions and as a result, it helps to ensure the delight of the customers as well<sup>6</sup>.

Emotion regulation of others and self (EROS) is mostly used as a measure of interpersonal emotion regulation and it even helps to worsen or to improve one's own emotions and others emotions as well. The process of 'EROS' consists of two subscales, which is known as intrinsic subscale and extrinsic subscale. The former makes use of ten items in order to measure emotion self-regulation successfully, whereas, the latter uses nine items<sup>6</sup>.

Emotion regulation is all about flexibly adapting one's own emotions with the positive and negative emotions of the other people. It is also referred to as a process of increasing, decreasing as well as maintaining the emotional intensity of an individual over a certain period of time. Suppression of the genuine emotions can lower the performance level of the employees and even have a harmful effect on their health as well<sup>17</sup>.

It has been seen in research studies that higher the level of emotion regulation, higher becomes the level of social competence. Emotion deregulation may lead to difficulties in

the work life. There are certain situations when the regulation emotions become a difficult task; for example, when the uncertainties or difficulties are large, situation is novel, etc. If the discrepancies are predictable or expected, the employees are required to prepare themselves in order to handle such discrepancies successfully. It has been also seen that deep acting is positively related to prevention motives. Moreover, deep acting and genuine emotions also influences the conflict solving capabilities in the service interactions of the employees with the target customers<sup>24</sup>.

As per the views of Zapf<sup>42</sup>, sincere positive emotions help the service personnel to build a strong relationship with the customers as even the customers values such emotions. Mostly customers consider their relationships with the employee's valuable, if their expectations of authentic and sincere interpersonal relationships are met successfully. Totterdell and Holman<sup>43</sup> points that, the probability of the employees using deep acting in pleasurable communications or interactions is more. Furthermore, if motivation amplifies the pleasure factor, then the employees or the service personnel are expected to feel the positive emotions rather than faking them. Hence, one can conclude that if the employees are motivated by the pleasure emotions, they are more likely to use deep acting in order to actually feel the desired emotions. Out of this discussion the following proposition emerges:

**Proposition 2:** Pleasure emotion regulation is positively related to deep acting of frontline service employees.

**Surface acting and customer satisfaction:** According to Spencer and Rupp<sup>44</sup>, in most of the service organisations, certain rules known as the display rules have been set which are meant to be displayed in front of the customers by the service personnel. In general, the service providers are expected to show positive emotions to the customers as well as to suppress the negative emotions in front of the customers in order to ensure customer contentment.

Surface acting can be broadly defined as a particular kind of regulation of emotions, which involves faking of emotions such as cheerful or smiling expression without having any change in the actual inner drive of emotion. In reality, it can be considered as an inauthentic response towards a delicate emotional situation<sup>35</sup>. Goldberg and Grandey<sup>45</sup> states that surface acting increases the job related stress of the employees of the service providing firms. As such, the morale of the employees also decreases and they do not feel proud about their work. Such situation leads to health problems as well and hence has a deteriorating effect on the performance

level of the customers as well. As a result, the level of satisfaction of the customers also decreases and hence, the customers cease to remain loyal towards the concerned service provider. Moreover, lower satisfaction level of employees increases the rate of turnover of the firm. Surface acting mostly causes exhaustion of emotions.

As per the study reports, fake positive emotions of the customers does not have any impact on the satisfaction level of the customers. Besides that the suppression of the negative emotions by the service personnel after incorporating the contextual factors helps to predict the satisfaction level of the customers. Customers who are well aware of the behaviour of the service personals are found to be less affected by the negative results of the negative emotions that were suppressed, whereas, the customers who are involved in personalised interactions with the service personnel are affected more by the negative results of the suppression of such emotions, which are negative<sup>46</sup>.

In most of the cases, genuine polite behaviour of the service personnel strongly influences the satisfaction level of the customers positively. There are significant amount of such customers who can efficiently differentiate between genuine emotions and fake display of emotions. For such customers, only the genuine concern of the service employees towards them proves to be a satisfaction enhancer. Sometimes surface acting is even considered to be deceptive by the customers<sup>47</sup>. It has been clearly proved that surface acting is not only negatively related to the satisfaction level of customers but is also negatively related to the satisfaction level of the employees. The following proposition then emerges:

**Proposition 3:** Surface acting is negatively related to customers' satisfaction during service encounter.

**Deep acting and customer satisfaction:** According to Ashforth and Tomiuk<sup>48</sup>, the service personnel mostly tend to act in order to produce their desired emotions in front of the customers in order to impress them. It has been found that deep acting has been unconstructively associated to emotional exhaustion. Deep acting as well as genuine acting leads to favourable consequences for both, the service providers and the customers. Emotional exhaustion refers to that extreme state when an individual's emotions are overextended.

Deep acting is all about regulating the emotions in such a way that an individual actually tends to incorporate or rather feel that particular emotion, which is apt as per the demand of the situation. It is very helpful especially in case of service personnel, as such feelings often appear to be genuine to the

customers. As a result, such acting increases the satisfaction level of the customers. Manipulation of emotions in case of deep acting helps the service personals to influence the mood swings of the customers as well. As a result, the service personnel can easily persuade the customers in accordance with their will<sup>46</sup>.

Deep acting does not have a negative effect on the satisfaction level of the employees or the service personnel and helps to improve their level of performance as well. In case of deep acting, the individuals actually feel the emotions and bring about the required changes so as to affect the outward emotions. Customers are often delighted by such performances and even desire to visit the service provider again and again. Therefore, it also helps to increase the good will of the service providing firm. Moreover, deep acting helps to generate a feeling of joy and accomplishment within the service personnel or the employees as well as the customers<sup>49</sup>. On the basis of the above discussion, the following proposition then emerges:

**Proposition 4:** Deep acting is positively related to customer satisfaction during service encounter.

**Customer satisfaction and loyalty intension:** Turel and Surenko<sup>50</sup> state that customer satisfaction is considered to be the most important as well as the most appropriate predictor or indicator of customer loyalty, mostly in the recent times. It is considered to be the measure of the extent to which a service personal (or the product or service) actually meets or falls short of the expectations of the customer. Customer satisfaction is mostly dependent on an overall evaluation of the consumption experience of the customer, which includes the timeliness of the delivery of the product or service as well as the price of the product. Expectations of the customers can be considered as predictions made by them regarding the future happening of the impending transaction.

Customer satisfaction mostly relates to the psychological state of an individual when his expectations are fulfilled. Moreover, a customer is delighted when he receives something, which is more than his expectations. Such feelings ensure the loyalty of the customers and hence help the service providers to achieve their objectives. Hence such feelings are advocated by the service personnel<sup>49</sup>.

The satisfaction level of customers is often considered to be the measure of loyalty intension of the customer. If the services provided by the service personnel are as per the expectation of the customers, then the satisfaction level of the customers increases and as a result, has a positive impact on the loyalty intention of the customers as well. Due to excessive

competition in the service industry, it has become very difficult for the service providers to retain their customers as well as to ensure customers loyalty<sup>46</sup>.

In contrary to the above statements, certain reports also show that even satisfied customers cease to remain loyal towards the relevant service providers. In addition, it was also found that although satisfied customers mostly tend to be loyal, but it is not necessary that the loyal customers are satisfied as well. Loyalty of the customers is very essential for the service providing organisations because, only loyal customers have more probability to advocate for a service, which they liked and even recommend it to their friends, relatives as well as other potential customers. Furthermore, customer loyalty also helps the firms to deal with the competition effectively and hence, helps the firms to sustain in the market for a considerable period of time<sup>51</sup>.

In a study report, it was found that it was far more profitable for the service providers to retain their old customers than attracting new customers. Moreover, the loyalty of the old customers has a positive impact on the revenue generation and profitability of the service providing company<sup>52</sup>.

Customer loyalty also helps in gaining new customers by communicating about their positive experience regarding the service that was being provided by a certain firm to the other people with whom they come in contact with. As per the views of Eklof<sup>53</sup>, in case of service industries consumption is positively related to the overall satisfaction level of the customers. Mostly, the expectations of the customers, which are related to the prior consumption experiences, word of mouth, advertisements and promotions are positively related to the overall level of satisfaction of the customers, perceived value and perceived quality as well. Hence, it can be concluded that overall satisfaction level of the customer is positively related to the perceived value. On the basis of the above discussion, the following proposition then emerges:

**Proposition 5:** Customer satisfaction is positively related to customer's loyalty intension.

## CONCLUSION

Emotional contagion plays a very important role in the service industries. The service personnel of the organisations must possess the quality of emotion regulation and make appropriate use of the same, while dealing or rather interacting with the customers. The ability to regulate one's own emotions or the feelings or the emotions of other people

(especially the target customers) helps the employees to achieve the desired goals of the organisation. It has been also seen that customer satisfaction is an indicator of loyalty intention of the customer. As such, customer satisfaction is considered to be the main objective of the service providing firms. Service personnel are hence expected to do the same with the help of deep acting or showing genuine concern towards the customers in order to achieve their goals. Moreover, it has been also concluded that surface acting is negatively related to the satisfaction level of the target customers. Surface acting of the service personal often leads to discontent of the customers rather than impressing them. This is because most of the customers are capable of differentiating between genuine emotions and fake emotions successfully. Genuine concern or empathy of the service personnel towards the customers helps to create a feeling of delight among the customers, which ultimately increase the likelihood of customer loyalty. This as a result helps the service providing firms to generate significant amount of revenue, which will ultimately help the firm to survive in the competitive market for a lengthy period of time.

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