

Chapter 1

Strategies for Frontline Employees to Build Customer Relationships

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ABSTRACT

Despite advanced technologies like AI and Self-service tools, service organizations still need frontline employees to enhance customer satisfaction in developing countries. Brick-and-mortar stores have a significant edge over Internet merchants because their salespeople can connect with customers in person. In retail clothing stores, there is a continual interaction between customers and service employees. The chapter has investigated the role of frontline employees (relationship benefits, perceived adaptive selling behaviour) and WOM through perceived credibility. Research studies suggested that there has been a positive association between adaptive selling behaviour and relationship benefits towards positive Word of Mouth (WOM). The chapter reveals the practical implications for policymakers to focus more on frontline employees' behaviours towards customers because customer perception significantly impacts reviews in the shape of positive Word of Mouth.

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INTRODUCTION

The brick-and-mortar firms rely on salespeople, and although customers are shifting towards digital channels in developing countries, salespersons are still considered the backbone of the economy (Schnure, 2021). The key benefit of this environment is the direct interaction between the customer and the organization, which creates a platform for retailers to promote their integrated marketing communication strategies for identifying customer needs and developing an adaptive selling behaviour (Gilboa, Seger-Guttman, and Mimran, 2019). Furthermore, adaptive selling happens when frontline employees learn customers' needs/preferences and adjust their behaviour to meet their expectations (Hochstein et al., 2019). It is considered a significant driver of salesperson performance (McFarland and Dixon, 2019). Frontline employees' behaviour strongly influences customer purchase decisions and satisfaction (Aburayya et al., 2020). Specifically, the customer's perceived risk in purchasing automobiles, electronic appliances, and clothing need careful dialogue by service employees (Hughes et al., 2019). In compulsive decision-making, a highly adaptive salesperson could implement and understand the prospective customer better than others (Román and Luis Munuera, 2010). The work of Aburayya et al. (2020) concluded that frontline employees' behaviour strongly influences customer purchase decisions and satisfaction. To gain customer retention, frontline employees utilize their skills and capabilities to perform adaptive selling (Chen and Jaramillo, 2014). Prior studies highlighted that adaptive selling behaviour has an impact on customer perception of frontline employee authenticity (Yoo and Arnold, 2019). Through the adaptive selling technique, frontline employees could enjoy their jobs without worrying about the job description and enhance customer loyalty by spreading positive word-of-mouth (WOM) and revisiting intention (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2002).

Customers are increasingly embracing a fast-paced and convenience-driven. According to Dandis et al. (2022), customer loyalty can be shown through the propensity to pay a premium and recommendations/WOM from satisfied customers. Relationship benefits and customer experience are two vital variables that companies should focus on to motivate customers to recommend products. Building commitment and establishing long-lasting business models requires organizations to prioritize keeping and building ties with customers (Dandis et al., 2022).

To build relationships, the customer tends to share positive views with others (Stets and Burke, 2000). Prior studies have concluded that Trust in products/services enhances WOM intentions and motivates customers to revisit (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Ranaweera & Prabhu, 2003). In business organizations, credibility refers to interpersonal credibility (Ganesan and Hess, 1997), endorsed credibility, and peer credibility (Munnukka, Uusital and Toivonen, 2016). While providing services, personal authenticity has also been studied as credibility (Mathews et al., 2020). The

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