# The Role of Emotions and Collective Satisfaction in the Customer Journey from Service Experience to Customer Engagement

by

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# DISSERTATION

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at

The University of Texas at Arlington

December, 2017

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

**Abstract**

Service providers serving business customers face some unique challenges in assessing and building customer satisfaction. These challenges arise when service providers have to deal with a team or a group of people within the client's organization. Each of these individuals, depending on their role in the service provision, go through a unique customer journey and have a distinctive service experience. Imagine yourself in a situation with several bosses with different expectations and evaluations. Not only is it challenging to meet their expectations, but it is also hard to know if they are truly satisfied with you.

This dissertation explores the above challenges and develops a comprehensive view of customer satisfaction in a business-to-business (B2B) services context. In the first essay, we conduct a meta-analysis on the antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction and investigate the inconsistencies from previous research. There is a need to examine the antecedents of satisfaction as it is difficult to prioritize attributes that drive overall customer satisfaction or know which antecedent(s) has the strongest effect on satisfaction. We also find it necessary to look at the outcomes of satisfaction, which include, attitudinal loyalty and direct and indirect customer engagement (purchase intention and WOM/recommend). This study will examine these relationships in addition to moderating variables that affect the strength of the antecedent-satisfaction-outcomes relationships.

The second essay elaborates on the research shortcomings identified in the first essay. To address them, we develop a conceptual framework for evaluating

collective satisfaction of all client's team members, hereafter called overall firm satisfaction (OFS). We first propose that OFS should be based on a weighted average of the individual satisfactions of all actors in the customer firm with a vested interest in service provision. We then explore how overall firm OFS changes over time due to interpersonal interactions. Furthermore, we dig into the relationships between decision makers and other actors, and propose that they will influence the overall satisfaction of one another over time. Finally, we explore when the OFS framework is applicable and when other approaches provide a satisfactory understanding of customer satisfaction.

The third essay further develops and empirically tests some of the ideas put forth in the conceptual framework. We shed light on the role emotions have in a B2B context, how they exist and what are their consequences. To get a better understanding of how customers experience and evaluate the service, we studied group interactions among clients' team members. We conducted a series of scenario-based role-playing experiments. Our sample included 160 undergrad students who were assigned to three-member teams. Our study showed that group dynamic elements influence group members' emotions and behaviors towards the firm. We contribute to the literature by providing empirical evidence on the importance of a multi-perspective evaluation of a service provider as opposed to the common single informant approach.

# Contents

# Essay 1:

# A Meta-analysis of Antecedents and Consequences of Customer Satisfaction in B2B Services

# Introduction

Focusing on customer satisfaction is an important driver of profit for business-to-customer (B2C) and business-to-business (B2B) firms (Mittal et al, 2017). Unlike B2C firms, B2B measures of satisfaction are more complex due to the nature of B2B firm processes. For example, in a B2B setting, individuals in the company who are using the service may not be the same individuals buying the service. B2B marketers often find it difficult to prioritize attributes that drive overall customer satisfaction (Mittal et al, 2017). In light of this, a comprehensive understanding of satisfaction and the factors that lead to it is needed. Moreover, in the bigger picture of the customers' journey, we need to look at how satisfaction contributes to their attitudes (i.e. attitudinal loyalty) and behaviors, which includes direct and indirect customer engagement (buying, referring, influencing and providing feedback).

Businesses all around the world are incorporating service offerings more than before due to their growing importance in today's markets (Raddats & Easingwood, 2010; Galston, 2015). Services researchers have consistently emphasized the need for additional research on B2B services (Ostrom et al. 2010). Since the process of satisfaction formation and evolution is context dependent (Fournier and Mick 1999), a study that focuses specifically on nature of B2B services can create value for both academia and marketing practice.

The objective of this paper is to integrate the previous research on customer satisfaction in the context of B2B services through a meta-analysis. In this study we will look at antecedents and consequences of satisfaction in the context of B2B

services. Satisfaction is often regarded by both managers and researchers as a key determinant of customer patronage or repurchase, but some research questions this relationship. Though some researchers believe that higher satisfaction leads to higher levels of purchase intention and purchase behaviors (Anderson et al. 1994; Reichheld and Teal 1996), others claim that high satisfaction doesn't ensure repurchase (Mittal and Lassar 1998) and that customer satisfaction doesn't effectively differentiate between stayers and defectors in B2B services (Williams et al. 2011). This study will examine these relationships using a meta-analysis approach and look at moderating variables that can explain the observed discrepancies. A meta-analysis enables us to compare different antecedents of customer satisfaction and address questions such as: which antecedent(s) have the strongest effects on customer satisfaction? What moderating variables affect the strength of the satisfaction antecedents?

Most of the prior meta-analyses focusing at customer satisfaction have taken place in the context of business-to-consumer (Szymanski and Henard 2001; Curtis and Rhoades 2011; Blut et al. 2015). There has been a couple of meta-analytic studies in the context of B2B (Geyskens et al. 1998 and 1999; Rajamma et al. 2011; Pan et al. 2012), but none of them have been specific to the B2B services context. Geyskens et al. (1998) conducted a meta-analysis that included the relationship between satisfaction and trust in marketing channels and in 1999 they did a meta-analysis focused on antecedents and consequences of economic and noneconomic satisfaction in the same context. Satisfaction is one of the relationship outcomes that Rajamma et al. (2011) studied in their meta-analysis of B2B relational exchange. Finally, Pan et al.

(2012) looked at relationship between satisfaction and loyalty in both business and consumer markets. A review of these studies show that no study so far includes a nomological test of antecedents and consequences of customer satisfaction in the context of business services, which differs greatly from a pure goods contexts. Furthermore, the last study that looked at antecedents and consequences of satisfaction goes back to 1999 and since then many papers are published that warrant an integrative review of their results.

The paper will proceed as follows: after discussing the various theoretical perspectives that have studied customer satisfaction, we develop a conceptual model that depicts the nomological network of customer satisfaction. Next, we pose several research questions addressing some gaps in the literature. Finally, we report the research method and discuss the findings.

## Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

A review of customer satisfaction literature brings us to three widely accepted theoretical perspectives: expectation-disconfirmation paradigm (Ilgen 1971; Oliver 1980), social exchange theory (Blau 1964; Chang et al. 2012) and relationship marketing (Crosby and Stephens 1987; Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000). In the first perspective it is believed that customers compare the performance of a product or service with their expectation and the results of this comparison forms the customer satisfaction. On the other hand, the second perspective asserts that customers form their satisfaction by evaluating social and economic outcomes and comparing them to alternatives. Expectation-disconfirmation paradigm by itself suffers from some

limitations. First, it overlooks relational aspects of business service provision and second, it only focuses on affective responses. So, these two perspectives taken together can complement each other (Briggs et al. 2016) and create a more comprehensive understanding of satisfaction formation process. Finally, in order to examine the relationship between satisfaction and trust, which has demonstrated a two-way relationship (Singh and Sirdeshmukh, 2000), we rely on relationship marketing literature. In this study we create our conceptual framework (Figure 1) considering all of these perspectives.

Each of aforementioned perspectives suggests some antecedents to customer satisfaction. Based on expectation-disconfirmation paradigm, customer satisfaction is formed based on the performance of a product or service (Oliver 2010), so the first category of antecedents that we considered is service performance. We also consider service quality under this category, as when customers are evaluating service quality they are ultimately focused on the service performance. In social exchange theory, the concentration is on exchange relationships and the outcomes gained through them. Research in this area suggests that customer satisfaction is influenced by these outcomes which are categorized as social and economic (Emerson 1962; Lambe et al. 2001; Geyskens and Steenkamp 2000). Therefore, we consider "Interaction Quality" which includes interpersonal or social bonding variables as the second category of antecedents. The next category is economic factors which will be represented by customer value. Customer value is a trade-off between gains and sacrifice (i.e. costs and or time) and incorporates economic outcomes in itself. Finally we rely on

relationship marketing framework to incorporate trust as an antecedent for customer satisfaction (Singh and Sirdeshmukh 2000).

Loyalty, commitment, purchase intention, recommend and word of mouth are the most commonly studied outcomes of customer satisfaction in business services context (Caceres and Paparoidamis 2007; Lam et al. 2004). In this study we have categorized them under three main categories, attitudinal loyalty, purchase intention and WOM/Recommend. In our review of previous studies we recognized that commitment is sometimes considered as an antecedent to customer satisfaction (Chenet et al. 2010). This inconsistency is caused by different framings of commitment. Chenet et al. (2010) relied on a framework by Selnes (1998). In this framework commitment is conceptualized as signaled commitment of the seller, but in our study we have looked at commitment of the customer to the service provider as a result of customer's satisfaction. Moreover, a review of previous research on commitment and attitudinal loyalty, brought us to the conclusion that they are operationalized in a similar manner. Therefore, in this study we merged commitment and attitudinal loyalty together.

Purchase intention and WOM/Recommend are components of customer engagement, a construct that is lately receiving attention in literature. Customer engagement is defined as the mechanism of a customer's value addition to the firm, either through direct contribution (purchase) or/and indirect contribution (referrals, influencing, and feedback/suggestions to the firm) (Kumar et al. 2010; Pansari and Kumar 2017). The interest in customer engagement is a result of the shifting business

practice from directly focusing on the bottom-line and the art of selling to the focus of getting more emotionally connected with customers. Customers can emotionally connect with the provider through favorable and meaningful interactions, where the provider places efforts in understanding, personalizing the interaction and delighting their customers. The result is a positive customer engagement of customers willing to purchase, share their experience with others and recommend the firm's services.

*Antecedents of customer satisfaction*

**Service Performance/Quality**

Service quality is defined as the customer's assessment of the overall excellence or superiority of the service (Zeithaml 1988). There has been two different streams of thought regarding the relationship between customer satisfaction and service quality. The first school of thought considers satisfaction as an antecedent to service quality (e.g. Bitner 1990; Bolton and Drew 1991). In these papers satisfaction is measured based on a transaction, while service quality is measured as a general evaluation similar to an overall attitude. The second school of thought follows appraisal-response-coping sequence (Lazarus 1991) or the cognitive-emotive causal order (Oliver 1997), and asserts service quality as an antecedent of customer satisfaction (e.g. Anderson and Fornell 1994; Anderson et al. 1994; Gotlieb et al. 1994). Cronin and Taylor (1992) tried to resolve this disagreement and tested both causal directions. Their study showed that service quality leads to satisfaction and therefore supported Parasuraman et al. (1985)'s proposition. In our conceptual model we follow the Cronin and Taylor (1992) conceptualization, but we will also try to tease

out transactional customer satisfaction from overall customer satisfaction, and treat them differently. We will further discuss this distinction in the moderator section.

**Interaction Quality**

Constructs that capture interaction with contact person or front-line employee such as service encounter quality, communication, social bond and rapport are gathered under the umbrella term of "Interaction Quality". The reason we merged these constructs together is that all of them are facets of social exchange in a relationship. In other words, these constructs help us explore the relationship building efforts of service provider employees. Furthermore, there are not enough studies on each of them to support an empirical analysis.

According to previous research social bonding positively influences equity, communication, friendliness and intimacy, therefore it significantly improves relationship quality (Geiger and Turley 2005). The importance of relationship building is evident to both managers and researchers, as relationships can significantly affect business outcomes such as customer satisfaction (Lages et al. 2005; Lemon et al. 2002).

**Value**

Value is defined as "judgments or evaluations of what the customer perceives as received from the seller in a specific situation of purchase or use" (Flint et al. 2002, p. 103). In other words, the value isn't an intrinsic part of a service, "rather it is experienced by the customers" (Woodruff and Gardial 1996, p. 7). This notion of value is consistently used in both B2C and B2B contexts (Holbrook 1999). Customers'

perception of value entails "what he or she has received in contrast to what he or she has given." Zeithaml (1988, p. 14). Therefore, value is a function of what is received and what is sacrificed (Oliver 1999).

The relationship between value and satisfaction has been established by a variety of product and services studies (Hellier et al. 2003; Cronin et al. 2000). Many studies have showed that value is an antecedent to customer satisfaction (e.g. Fornell et al. 1996; Hellier et al. 2003). Customer's perception of value starts before purchase (Eggert and Ulaga 2002) when a customer starts gathering information about the service and compares benefits and sacrifices associated with a product or service. Sometimes a customer ends up thinking the exchange will not create enough value and the evaluation process ends without a purchase. Unlike perceived value that occurs in different stages of the purchase process, customer satisfaction is a post purchase evaluation (Eggert and Ulaga 2002). This understanding reinforces a causal relationship between satisfaction and perceived value (Fornell et al. 1996; Caruana et al. 2000).

### Trust

Trust is a vital component of business relationships, where outcomes depend on intentions and behaviors of exchange parties (e.g. Hakansson, 1982; Wilson, 1995; Johnson and Cullen, 2002). In an exchange relationship trust forms based on confidence that the relationship collaborator is reliable and has high integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Trust doesn't eliminated vulnerability of the exchange partners,

instead it increases their confidence that others will take their legitimate interests into account (Blois, 1999).

In the context of services, management of trust becomes even more important, since the customer typically must buy a service before experiencing it (Berry and Parasuraman, 1991) and at times with credence services will not be able to evaluate the service. Relationship marketing literature has studied trust extensively (e.g., Wilson, 1995; Dwyer et al., 1987; Geyskens and Steenkamp, 1995) and described it as a fundamental relationship building block (Wilson, 1995) and a critical element of economic exchange (Ring, 1996). In the B2B context, a number of studies show that trust positively influences satisfaction (e.g. Andaleeb, 1996; del Bosque Rodriguez et al., 2006; Yang et al, 2015).

Depending on the context of the study, trust can play different roles. Singh and Sirdeshmukh (2000) discussed how trust can be both an antecedent and an outcome of satisfaction. In this study, we consider trust as an antecedent to satisfaction because most of the papers included overall satisfaction, which is a global evaluation of the firm as opposed to satisfaction with a single attribute. Therefore, in this case trust contributes to the formation of satisfaction over time (Chiou and Droge 2006).

*Consequences of customer satisfaction*

**Attitudinal Loyalty**

Literature shows several definitions for loyalty, however all definitions agree that loyalty includes two components of attitudinal and behavioral (e.g., Chaudhuri and Holbrook 2001; Russell-Bennett et al. 2007). From an attitudinal perspective, customer loyalty is defined as a positive attitudinal disposition or a deep commitment to a product, service, brand, or organization (Gremler and Brown, 1996; Oliver, 1999). Commitment is defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman et al. 1992, p. 316). As shown from the definition of attitudinal loyalty and commitment, we can see how there is an overlap. A review of studies that included commitment and attitudinal loyalty, brought us to the conclusion that commitment and loyalty are operationalized in a very similar manner. Therefore, we decided to merge the two constructs together in our analysis.

**Direct Customer Engagement (Purchase Intention)**

Purchase intention is defined as customer's judgment about re-purchase of a service from the same company (Hellier et al. 2003). Literature shows a mix of empirical evidence regarding the relationship between satisfaction and purchase intention. Although majority of previous research found a significant relationship between the two constructs (e.g. Patterson et al., 1997; Lam et al., 2004), several studies did not find a significant relationship between satisfaction and patronage or purchase intention (e.g. Taylor and Hunter 2003; Stoel et al. 2004; Briggs et al 2007; Barry et al 2009). Other scholars have argued that high satisfaction doesn't ensure

repurchase (Mittal and Lassar, 1998; Dick and Basu, 1994; Williams et al, 2011; Anderson and Mittal, 2000). Therefore, in our study we looked at findings of different studies from an aggregate level to explore the following research question:

**Research Question 1:** What is the overall effect of customer satisfaction on direct customer engagement (purchase intention) in the context of business services?

**Indirect Customer Engagement (WOM/Recommend)**

Word of mouth (WOM) is defined as "informal communications directed at other consumers about the ownership, usage, or characteristics of particular goods and services and/or their sellers" (Westbrook 1987, p. 261). There is a lot of support in the previous literature suggesting that customer satisfaction leads to WOM (e.g., Anderson 1998; Swan and Oliver 1989; Westbrook 1987; De Matos and Rossi 2008). However, a study suggests that this relationship is nonlinear and is moderated by several customer involvement dimensions (Wangenheim and Bayón 2007).
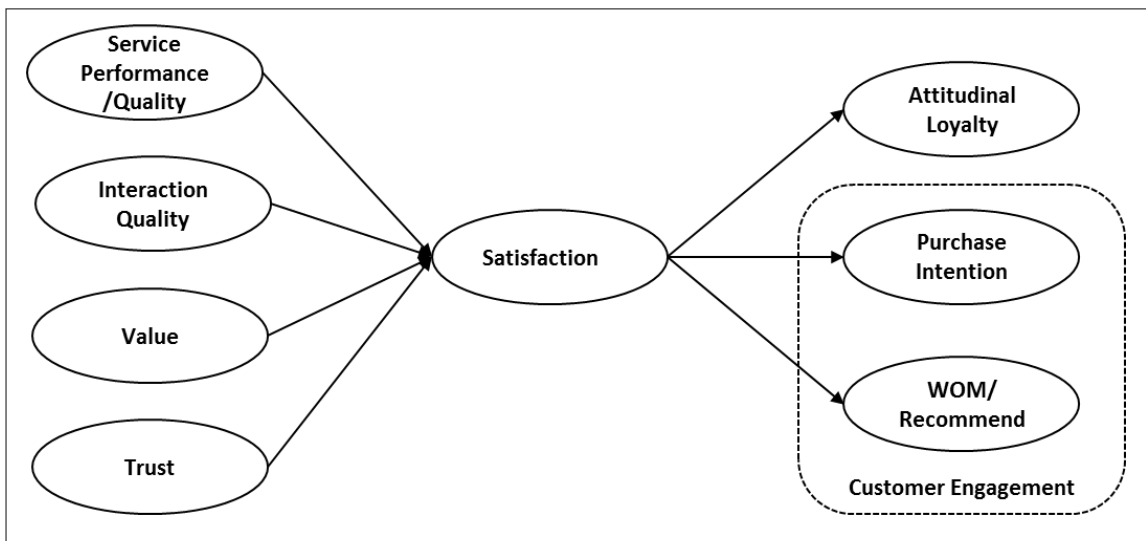


**Figure 1:** The Conceptual Model

**Moderators**

Measurement method, research context, estimation procedure and model specification can create systematic differences across studies (Sultan et al. 1990). In this study we will look for sources of this systematic difference and try to capture their effect.

*Type of satisfaction*

The first category that we will look at is measurement method. Satisfaction is a construct that is widely used in marketing, and a lot of times it is not measured in a consistent way across studies. Based on a review of literature the following types of satisfaction are identifiable in the B2B services context:

- Overall satisfaction: "a customer's global evaluation of the degree to which a service firm is providing an appropriate level of fulfillment for its needs" (Briggs et al. 2016, p. 115).

- Performance/ service satisfaction: "the business customer's assessment of the performance of services delivered by a service provider" (Briggs et al. 2016, p. 116).

- Relational satisfaction: business customer's assessment of its exchange relationship with a service provider (Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis 2007).

Each type of satisfaction has a distinct focus. For example, overall satisfaction focuses on a global evaluation of all aspects of the exchange, performance satisfaction captures the functionality and technical aspects of the service, etc. Considering these

distinctive focuses, one might expect that different antecedents would show varying levels of effects on each type of satisfaction. We are curious as to how the strength of these effects differ among several satisfaction types.

Each type of satisfaction contributes uniquely to the outcomes of a B2B relationship. The different types of satisfaction may be more applicable or important in some situations than others. For example, performance satisfaction may drive customer engagement behaviors, while overall satisfaction might be the driver of customer's attitudinal loyalty.

To examine the moderating effect of "Type of Satisfaction" in the relationship between antecedents-satisfaction and satisfaction-outcomes, we proposed the following research question:

**Research Question 2:** How does the relative strength of satisfaction antecedents differ across types of satisfaction?

**Research Question 3:** What is the moderating effect of "Type of Satisfaction" on the strength of relationship between customer satisfaction and (a) attitudinal loyalty (b) purchase intention, (c) WOM?

*Satisfaction Perspective*

Satisfaction can be conceptualized based on two different perspectives: transaction-specific satisfaction and cumulative satisfaction. Cumulative satisfaction is defined as "an overall evaluation based on the total purchase and consumption experience with a good or service over time" (Anderson et al. 1994, p. 54). Typically

cumulative satisfaction can be build based on a series of interactions with a service provider, while each of those interactions form a transaction-specific satisfaction which is defined as "a post-choice evaluative judgment of a specific purchase occasion" (Anderson et al. 1994, p. 54). Each of these conceptualization serve a different purpose and provide different information. Transaction-specific satisfaction can help us diagnose any problems with service encounter, while cumulative satisfaction is more comprehensive and covers a longer period of time. It can be considered as "a more fundamental indicator of the firm's past, current, and future performance" (Anderson et al. 1994, p. 54). To examine the effect of satisfaction perspective, we pose the following research question:

**Research Question 4:** What is the moderating effect of "Satisfaction Perspective" on the strength of relationship between customer satisfaction and (a) attitudinal loyalty (b) purchase intention, (c) WOM?

Other measurement moderators that we include in this study are number of items used to measure satisfaction (single vs. multiple), number of informants who responded to customer satisfaction survey in each customer's organization, type of data (longitudinal vs. cross-sectional) and finally organizational position or rank of respondents.

*Contextual Moderators*

Ideally we would like to look at effects of following contextual moderators. A lot of times studies report only a few information about the context, therefore depending on how much information is available in studies we may later revise this list:

- The country that the study has been conducted in

- Type of service that is provided to customers

- Whether goods are also exchanged alongside services or not

- Length of business relationship

- Number of customer organizations that took part in each study

- Number of service providers that took part in each study

- Number of industries that represent customers in each study

- Number of industries that represent service providers in each study

- Characteristics of the industry (coded separately for service providers and customers)

- Organizational characteristics such as size (coded separately for service providers and customers)

## Method

*Database Development*

We conducted key word searches in EBSCO Host, Business Source Complete, Science Direct, Google Scholar and Business Abstracts with Full Text. We also searched for papers, dissertations and working papers in the following databases:

ProQuest, JSTOR, SSRN, Emerald, Elsevier. We did several rounds of comprehensive search using keywords such as "satisfaction" and "Business to Business". These searches generated around 200 potential papers. We then studied the reference sections of seminal papers and the papers that provided a summary table of previous studies, this search lead to some additional empirical studies. We went through all papers carefully, and found that 66 papers met our criteria: (1) the study was in B2B services context (i.e. the respondents were corporate clients that evaluated service offerings of a provider), (2) it included the relationship between customer satisfaction and at least one of the constructs in our conceptual model, and (3) it reported correlations coefficients (r) or any other statistics that could be converted to r, such as F-value, t-value.

### *Coding Procedure*

Two researchers coded the effect sizes, sample sizes, and moderators. All discrepancies that were detected in coding were resolved through discussion (Szymanski and Henard 2001). Whenever a study reported statistics from multiple variables that fall under the same category, for example when a paper reports two dimensions of service performance, we calculated an average of the effect sizes in order to prevent inflation of the sample size (Cheung and Chan, 2008; Eatough et. al, 2011).

In some studies, the type of satisfaction is specifically stated by the authors, in some others the authors have used the general term of customer satisfaction while the survey items referred to a specific type of satisfaction such as performance. In our

study we reviewed the items used to measure satisfaction in each study and based on them we coded the type of satisfaction.    This method of reviewing the items of constructs was applied to all constructs that did not have a consistent definition across studies. We used the items to determine how each construct was operationalized and we categorized the effect size accordingly.

*Analysis*

**Main Effects**

In this section we present the meta-analytic results for antecedents and outcomes of customer satisfaction. Table 1 provides an overview of the main effects of antecedents and outcomes of customer satisfaction. This analysis includes 66 studies, 149 effect sizes and 37,783 individual observations.

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Insert Table 1 here

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*Antecedents:*

As shown, the correlation between the various antecedence and satisfaction ranges from .48 to .65.    The 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals around the mean correlation for quality (.47 - .49), interaction quality (.50 - .54), trust (.62 - .67), and value (.60 - .64) indicate the effect size is significant and positive for all antecedents of satisfaction. Rosenthal's Fail-safe $N$ ($N_{FSquality}$ = 3155; $N_{FSinteraction\ quality}$= 4336; $N_{FStrust}$ =4744; $N_{FSvalue}$ =804), suggests that no publication bias exists. Given the heterogeneity present within the dataset [$\chi_{quality}^2$ = 943.12, $p < .001$; $\chi_{interaction\ quality}^2$ =

173.43, $p < .001$; $\chi_{trust}^2 = 146.04$, $p < .001$; $\chi_{value}^2 = 777.26$, $p < .001$], an examination of key moderators to the relationship between different antecedents and satisfaction is warranted.

Based on the main effect analysis, it shows that trust ($r_w = .65$ SE $= .03$) and value ($r_w = .62$ SE $= .05$) have the highest effect on satisfaction followed by interaction quality ($r_w = .52$ SE $= .02$) and quality ($r_w = .48$ SE $= .03$). To examine whether or not these differences are significant, we compared the effect sizes using Fisher's (1921) procedure. Results do not show a significant difference between value and trust, however both of these constructs were significantly higher than quality and interaction quality (see table 2).

The effect of interaction quality on satisfaction was significantly higher than the effect of quality, hence, taking all the comparisons into consideration, the rankings of these effects are as follows: value and trust have the highest effect, followed by interaction quality and finally quality.

For further examination, we looked at each type of satisfaction separately. The results show that for overall satisfaction we found that trust was highest followed by value, then quality and finally interaction quality (see table 2). For performance satisfaction results show that interaction quality was significantly higher than value and both were significantly higher than quality. Trust was also significantly higher than quality, however trust was not significantly different from either interaction

quality or value. Trust had the highest effect on relational satisfaction, but there was no significant difference between value, quality, and interaction quality.

*Outcomes:*

As shown, the correlation between satisfaction and the various outcomes ranges from .60 to .68. The 95% bootstrapped confidence intervals around the mean correlation for attitudinal loyalty (.58 - .62), purchase intention (.63 - .66), WOM (.66 - .70) indicate the effect size is significant and positive for all outcomes of satisfaction. Rosenthal's Fail-safe $N$ ($N_{FSattitudinal\ loyalty}$ = 2633; $N_{FSpurchase\ intention}$ = 2971; $N_{FSWOM}$ =6057), suggests that no publication bias exists. Given the heterogeneity present within the dataset [$\chi_{attitudinal\ loyalty}^2$ = 414.11, $p$ < .001; $\chi_{purchase\ intention}^2$ = 829.96, $p$ < .001; $\chi_{WOM}^2$ = 291.97, $p$ < .001], an examination of key moderators to the relationship between satisfaction and different outcomes is warranted.

Based on the main effect analysis, it shows that satisfaction has the highest effect on WOM ($r_w$ = .68 SE = .05) followed by purchase intention ($r_w$ = .65 SE = .07) and finally attitudinal loyalty ($r_w$ = .60 SE = .03). In our comparison of effect sizes using the same Fisher's (1921) procedure, we found that the differences among the effect sizes are in the same order and statistically significant (see table 3). We observed the same pattern for the effect of overall satisfaction on the outcome variables.

Although attitudinal loyalty ranked lowest in its relationship with overall satisfaction, we found that it ranked the highest in its relationship with performance satisfaction and relational satisfaction followed by WOM and purchase intention.

**Moderator Analysis**

The moderation analysis was performed through meta-regression analysis using the CMA 3.0 software, with correlation as the common effect size metric. We have a total of eight categorical moderators: type of satisfaction (overall, performance, relational, social and economic), satisfaction perspective (cumulative satisfaction vs. transactional satisfaction), satisfaction scale (single item vs. multiple items), goods exchanged (yes vs. no), number of service providers (single vs. multiple), number of service provider industries (single vs. multiple), number of client industries (single vs. multiple), country (USA, non-USA, mixed).

The three types of satisfaction (overall, performance and relational) were measured and reported in the 66 papers that we included in our meta-analysis, therefore the analysis incudes these three types of satisfaction. We created two dummy variables to analyze the types of satisfaction: overall satisfaction (overall vs. other types) and performance satisfaction (performance vs. other types). Only one paper (Spreng et al. (2009) reported their satisfaction perspective, therefore, this moderator was not analyzed. Finally, we created two dummy variables to capture country of the sample: USA (USA vs. others) and Mixed (Mixed vs others).

For each antecedent and outcome variable we ran a meta-regression analysis, so we ran a total of seven meta-regressions. In each meta-regression model all moderator factors were included as independent variables. Type of satisfaction, represented by Overall and Performance factors is significantly moderating the relationship between all constructs with satisfaction, except for interaction quality. Table 4 shows the results for meta-regression per construct.

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Insert Table 4 here
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We performed post-hoc univariate analyses to further illuminate the nature of the impact each moderator had on the relationship between the antecedents and satisfaction as well as between satisfaction and its outcomes. The results of the theoretical and methodological moderators are shown in table 5. Type of satisfaction moderated the relationship between three antecedents (quality, value and trust) and satisfaction. These antecedents had a stronger effect on the overall type of satisfaction than on the other two types of satisfaction, performance and relational.

Type of satisfaction also moderated the relationship between satisfaction and its outcomes. The effect of overall satisfaction on purchase intention and WOM was higher than other two types of satisfaction, performance and relational. However, the effect of performance type of satisfaction on attitudinal loyalty was significantly higher than the effect of the two other types of satisfaction - overall and relational - on attitudinal loyalty.

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Insert Table 5 here

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Goods Exchanged moderated the relationship between three of the antecedents (interaction quality, quality, value) and satisfaction, such that, the relationships were stronger when the provider offered pure services than when the provider offered a mix of service and products. This can be explained by the fact that when the offering includes both products and services, characteristics of products such as product quality influence customer satisfaction.   In the presence of products, other constructs will have a lower effect on satisfaction. However, when the offering is pure service, interaction quality, quality and value receive higher weights in the customer's evaluation.

Goods Exchanged moderated the relationship between satisfaction and purchase intention, such that, the effect of satisfaction on purchase intention was stronger when goods were part of the offering compared to when the offering was pure services.  This could be due to the fact that products provide more tangible cues, which makes evaluating the offering easier and gives customers more confidence in their evaluation than when they are evaluating pure services. Previous research shows confidence in one's evaluation of a brand strengthens intentions to purchase (Howard and Sheth, 1969; Bennett and Harrell, 1975; Laroche et al, 1996). Therefore, the relationship between satisfaction and purchase intention is stronger for offerings that include both products and services compared with offerings that only include services.

**Discussion**

In this meta-analysis we focused on customer satisfaction in a B2B services context by examining several of its antecedents and outcomes. We selected four antecedents based on three theoretical perspectives, expectation-disconfirmation paradigm, social exchange theory and relationship marketing. We demonstrated that all antecedents, which are interaction quality, trust, quality and value, positively influence satisfaction. We found that trust and value have the strongest effects on satisfaction, while quality has the lowest effect. Digging further, we analyzed the strength of each antecedent on different types of satisfaction, as satisfaction is measured in several ways depending on the focus of the study. For the purpose of our study, we looked at three types of satisfaction that were evident in the collection of papers we gathered. The three types are, overall satisfaction, performance satisfaction and relational satisfaction.

For all types of satisfaction, we find that trust stands out as one of the most important contributors to customer satisfaction. Specifically, when we look at overall and relational satisfaction we see that trust is considerably more influential than value. This is an interesting finding as one would expect that in the context of B2B, evaluating a service would be driven by logic and reason such as the value of the service offering a company is receiving. However, we found that in fact trust, which has an affective dimension (Sako, 1994; Johnson and Grayson, 2005), has a stronger effect on satisfaction than value does. We believe this can be because trust evolves slowly over time, "begins with small risks and builds on confirmation" (Luhman, 1995,

p. 129), it goes deeper into one's consciousness (Blois, 1999) than a calculated benefit-sacrifice ratio. Another plausible reason is that in B2B and more specifically services, building relationships is very important for both parties. Trust is a main component in the development and establishment of these relationships between service provider and customer (Coulter and Coulter, 2002).

The following finding also capitalizes on the importance of relationships between the service provider and customer. We found that interaction quality has a stronger effect on performance satisfaction than quality had on performance satisfaction. In fact, interaction quality and trust had the highest ranks of effect strength when compared with the remaining antecedents, value and quality. This is a notable finding especially since performance satisfaction is shown to be "based on a technical assessment of how a service performs compared to the established criteria of the business customer" (Briggs et al., 2016, p. 116). This result might be due to the fact that B2B customers need to interact frequently with the service provider in order to co-create solutions that match their specific needs, therefore the quality of interactions plays a critical role in the success of the co-creation process (Mentzer et al., 2001; Briggs et al., 2016).

In terms of satisfaction outcomes, we found that overall satisfaction has a stronger effect on WOM followed by purchase intention then finally attitudinal loyalty. These effect level do not follow for performance satisfaction, as performance satisfaction has the strongest influence on attitudinal loyalty followed by WOM and finally purchase intention. We examined the effect of relational satisfaction on

attitudinal loyalty and WOM and found that attitudinal loyalty was affected more than WOM. In our analysis, we realized that overall satisfaction is a better indicator of a customer's behavioral intentions. This is due to the effect overall satisfaction had on both WOM and purchase intention in comparison to other types of satisfaction.

TABLE **1**

**Main Effect Results for Antecedents and Outcomes of Satisfaction**

| | **Number of samples (k)** | **Number of observations (N)** | **Weighted correlation ($r_w$)** | **Standard Error** | **95% Confidence Interval ($CI_{BS}$)** | **Unaccounted variance ($\chi^2$)** | **Fail-safe sample size ($N_{fsR}$)** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Antecedents** | | | | | | | |
| Quality | 37 | 12,652 | 0.48* | 0.03 | [.47, .49] | 943.12 | 3,155 |
| Interaction quality | 18 | 4,176 | 0.52* | 0.02 | [.5, .54] | 173.43 | 4,336 |
| Value | 25 | 6,125 | 0.62* | 0.05 | [.6, .64] | 777.26 | 804 |
| Trust | 13 | 2,411 | 0.65* | 0.03 | [.62, .67] | 146.04 | 4,744 |
| **Outcomes** | | | | | | | |
| Attitudinal Loyalty | 22 | 4,845 | 0.60* | 0.03 | [.58, .62] | 414.11 | 2,633 |
| Purchase Intention | 20 | 4,806 | 0.65* | 0.07 | [.63, .66] | 829.96 | 2,971 |
| WOM | 14 | 2,768 | 0.68* | 0.05 | [.66, .7] | 291.97 | 6,057 |

*p< .001

**TABLE 2**

**Comparing Strength of Different Antecedents**

| Comparing Effects of Antecedents on Satisfaction | All Types of Sat. Together | | Overall Sat. | | Performance Sat. | | Relational Sat. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Z | P-value | Z | P-value | Z | P-value | Z | P-value |
| Value vs. Quality | 13.08 | 0.00 | 5.19 | 0.00 | 10.92 | 0.00 | 0.34 | 0.73 |
| Value vs. Interaction Quality | 7.42 | 0.00 | 9.05 | 0.00 | -2.47 | 0.01 | 1.41 | 0.16 |
| Value vs. Trust | -1.95 | 0.05 | -3.40 | 0.00 | -1.47 | 0.14 | -2.47 | 0.01 |
| Quality vs. Interaction Quality | -3.07 | 0.00 | 5.01 | 0.00 | -10.14 | 0.00 | 1.26 | 0.21 |
| Quality vs. Trust | -11.27 | 0.00 | -6.27 | 0.00 | -11.53 | 0.00 | -3.09 | 0.00 |
| Interaction Quality vs. Trust | -7.65 | 0.00 | -8.73 | 0.00 | 1.22 | 0.22 | -3.52 | 0.00 |

**TABLE 3**

**Comparing Effects of Satisfaction on Different Outcomes**

| Comparing Effects of Satisfaction on Its Outcomes | All Types of Sat. Together | | Overall Sat. | | Performance Sat. | | Relational Sat. | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Z | P-value | Z | P-value | Z | P-value | Z | P-value |
| WOM vs. Attitudinal Loyalty | 5.67 | 0.00 | 11.50 | 0.00 | -4.42 | 0.00 | -2.59 | 0.01 |
| WOM vs. Purchase Intention | 2.38 | 0.02 | 5.46 | 0.00 | 2.33 | 0.02 | -- | |
| Attitudinal Loyalty vs. Purchase Intention | -3.84 | 0.00 | -7.93 | 0.00 | 7.83 | 0.00 | -- | |

**TABLE 4**

**Moderator Estimates in the Meta-Regression**

| Factor | Interaction Quality | Quality | Value | Trust | Att. Loyalty | Purchase Intention | WOM |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Overall** | -0.08 | 0.20* | 0.45* | 0.34* | 0.05 | 0.25* | 0.82* |
| **Performance** | 0.00 | -0.09* | 0.33* | 0.15* | 0.25* | -- | -0.06 |
| **Goods Exchanged** | -0.16* | -0.14* | -0.20* | -0.52* | -0.06 | 0.37* | 1.45* |
| **Satisfaction Scale** | 0.15* | 0.01 | 0.25* | -0.23* | -0.42* | -0.01 | -0.18* |
| **Number of SPs** | -0.13* | 0.02 | -0.23* | -0.14* | 0.30* | -0.20* | 0.38* |
| **Number of SP Industries** | 0.38* | -0.04 | -0.48* | -0.40* | -0.39* | 0.35* | 1.36* |
| **Number of Client Industries** | -0.14* | 0.05 | 0.00 | 0.04 | -0.25* | -0.28* | -- |
| **USA** | -0.07 | -0.02 | 0.16* | 0.11 | -0.11* | -0.26* | 0.51* |
| **Mixed** | -- | -0.07 | 0.19* | 0.46* | -0.20* | 0.15* | -0.68* |

*p<.05

**TABLE 5**

**Weighted Univariate Results for Moderators**

| Relationship | Moderator | Levels | No. of Studies | No. of Observ. | Point Estimate | P-value | Tau Squared | Std Error | Q-value | Prob |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Quality -Sat | Overall_Sat | 0 | 16 | 6436 | 0.36 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.04 | 276.18 | |
| | | 1 | 21 | 6216 | 0.59 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.03 | | 0.00 |
| Value-Sat | Overall_Sat | 0 | 9 | 2000 | 0.55 | 0.00 | 0.02 | 0.02 | 34.96 | |
| | | 1 | 16 | 4125 | 0.65 | 0.00 | 0.19 | 0.09 | | 0.00 |
| Trust-Sat | Overall_Sat | 0 | 8 | 1604 | 0.61 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.05 | 21.94 | |
| | | 1 | 5 | 807 | 0.72 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.01 | | 0.00 |
| Sat-Purchase intention | Overall_Sat | 0 | 4 | 910 | 0.42 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 113.13 | |
| | | 1 | 16 | 3896 | 0.69 | 0.00 | 0.17 | 0.08 | | 0.00 |
| Sat-WOM | Overall_Sat | 0 | 6 | 1120 | 0.51 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.01 | 123.56 | |
| | | 1 | 8 | 1648 | 0.76 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.07 | | 0.00 |
| Quality -Sat | Performance_Sat | 0 | 28 | 7849 | 0.56 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 268.15 | |
| | | 1 | 9 | 4803 | 0.32 | 0.00 | 0.08 | 0.06 | | 0.00 |
| Value-Sat | Performance_Sat | 0 | 20 | 5021 | 0.62 | 0.00 | 0.16 | 0.07 | 0.79 | |
| | | 1 | 5 | 1104 | 0.61 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.01 | | 0.37 |
| Trust-Sat | Performance_Sat | 0 | 9 | 1573 | 0.65 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.03 | 0.02 | |
| | | 1 | 4 | 838 | 0.65 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.10 | | 0.89 |
| Sat-Att. Loyalty | Performance_Sat | 0 | 18 | 3936 | 0.58 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.03 | 17.51 | |
| | | 1 | 4 | 909 | 0.67 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.09 | | 0.00 |
| Int.Quality- Sat | Goods_Exchanged | 0 | 11 | 1986 | 0.58 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.03 | 25.95 | |
| | | 1 | 7 | 2190 | 0.46 | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.02 | | 0.00 |
| Quality -Sat | Goods_Exchanged | 0 | 23 | 5134 | 0.58 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 177.19 | |
| | | 1 | 14 | 7518 | 0.40 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.04 | | 0.00 |
| Value-Sat | Goods_Exchanged | 0 | 19 | 3721 | 0.65 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.04 | 18.51 | |
| | | 1 | 6 | 2404 | 0.58 | 0.00 | 0.19 | 0.14 | | 0.00 |
| Trust-Sat | Goods_Exchanged | 0 | 9 | 1663 | 0.66 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.03 | 0.88 | 0.35 |

| Relationship | Moderator | Levels | No. of Studies | No. of Observ. | Point Estimate | P-value | Tau Squared | Std Error | Q-value | Prob |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | 1 | 4 | 748 | 0.63 | 0.00 | 0.10 | 0.09 | | |
| Sat-Purchase intention | Goods_Exchanged | 0 | 17 | 3718 | 0.62 | 0.00 | 0.16 | 0.07 | 32.81 | |
| | | 1 | 3 | 1088 | 0.73 | 0.00 | 0.47 | 0.54 | | 0.00 |
| Sat-WOM | Goods_Exchanged | 0 | 10 | 1964 | 0.68 | 0.00 | 0.12 | 0.07 | 0.02 | |
| | | 1 | 4 | 804 | 0.68 | 0.00 | 0.13 | 0.11 | | 0.89 |
| Int.Quality-Sat | Sat Scale | 0 | 15 | 3524 | 0.49 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 30.90 | 0.00 |
| | | 1 | 3 | 652 | 0.65 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.01 | | |
| Value-Sat | Sat Scale | 0 | 21 | 4791 | 0.62 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.04 | 1.71 | 0.19 |
| | | 1 | 4 | 1334 | 0.64 | 0.00 | 0.29 | 0.25 | | |
| Trust-Sat | Sat Scale | 0 | 11 | 1875 | 0.67 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 10.38 | 0.00 |
| | | 1 | 2 | 536 | 0.57 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.06 | | |
| Sat-Att. Loyalty | Sat Scale | 0 | 19 | 4003 | 0.63 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.02 | 76.86 | 0.00 |
| | | 1 | 3 | 842 | 0.39 | 0.00 | 0.16 | 0.16 | | |
| Sat-Purchase intention | Sat Scale | 0 | 4 | 910 | 0.42 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.12 | 113.13 | 0.00 |
| | | 1 | 16 | 3896 | 0.69 | 0.00 | 0.17 | 0.08 | | |
| Sat-WOM | Sat Scale | 0 | 10 | 1723 | 0.62 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 39.57 | 0.00 |
| | | 1 | 4 | 1045 | 0.75 | 0.00 | 0.18 | 0.16 | | |
| Int.Quality-Sat | No. of SP | 0 | 14 | 3054 | 0.54 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.02 | 11.35 | |
| | | 1 | 4 | 1122 | 0.46 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.04 | | 0.00 |
| Value-Sat | No. of SP | 0 | 17 | 3570 | 0.70 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.05 | 146.14 | |
| | | 1 | 8 | 2555 | 0.49 | 0.00 | 0.12 | 0.07 | | 0.00 |
| Sat -Trust | No. of SP | 0 | 8 | 1214 | 0.71 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.04 | 30.15 | |
| | | 1 | 5 | 1197 | 0.58 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.05 | | 0.00 |
| Sat – Att. Loyalty | No. of SP | 0 | 18 | 3720 | 0.57 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.04 | 26.84 | |
| | | 1 | 4 | 1125 | 0.68 | 0.00 | 0.01 | 0.01 | | 0.00 |
| Sat - Purchase intention | No. of SP | 0 | 10 | 1757 | 0.67 | 0.00 | 0.26 | 0.14 | 6.21 | |
| | | 1 | 10 | 3049 | 0.63 | 0.00 | 0.16 | 0.09 | | 0.01 |

| Relationship | Moderator | Levels | No. of Studies | No. of Observ. | Point Estimate | P-value | Tau Squared | Std Error | Q-value | Prob |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Sat - WOM | No. of SP | 0 | 11 | 1920 | 0.70 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.07 | 9.99 | |
| | | 1 | 3 | 848 | 0.63 | 0.00 | 0.05 | 0.06 | | 0.00 |
| Int.Quality- Sat | Single SP Industry | 0 | 1 | 249 | 0.28 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 21.41 | |
| | | 1 | 17 | 3927 | 0.53 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.02 | | 0.00 |
| Value -Sat | Single SP Industry | 0 | 2 | 550 | 0.75 | 0.00 | 0.10 | 0.15 | 38.42 | |
| | | 1 | 23 | 5575 | 0.60 | 0.00 | 0.13 | 0.05 | | 0.00 |
| Trust - Sat | Single SP Industry | 0 | 1 | 92 | 0.76 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 4.60 | |
| | | 1 | 12 | 2319 | 0.64 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.03 | | 0.03 |
| Sat – Att. Loyalty | Single SP Industry | 0 | 1 | 177 | 0.72 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 8.78 | |
| | | 1 | 21 | 4668 | 0.59 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.03 | | 0.00 |
| Sat - Purchase intention | Single SP Industry | 0 | 1 | 92 | 0.76 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 4.60 | |
| | | 1 | 19 | 4714 | 0.64 | 0.00 | 0.19 | 0.08 | | 0.03 |
| Sat - WOM | Single SP Industry | 0 | 3 | 570 | 0.72 | 0.00 | 0.18 | 0.19 | 4.39 | |
| | | 1 | 11 | 2198 | 0.67 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.06 | | 0.04 |
| Int.Quality- Sat | Single Client Industry | 0 | 13 | 3454 | 0.54 | 0.00 | 0.04 | 0.02 | 18.29 | |
| | | 1 | 5 | 722 | 0.41 | 0.00 | 0.03 | 0.03 | | 0.00 |
| Sat – Att. Loyalty | Single Client Industry | 0 | 20 | 4533 | 0.61 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.03 | 29.20 | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 312 | 0.37 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.01 | | 0.00 |
| Sat - Purchase intention | Single Client Industry | 0 | 17 | 3918 | 0.69 | 0.00 | 0.18 | 0.08 | 145.44 | |
| | | 1 | 3 | 888 | 0.38 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.08 | | 0.00 |
| Value -Sat | USA | 0 | 18 | 4929 | 0.60 | 0.00 | 0.11 | 0.05 | 40.12 | |
| | | 1 | 7 | 1196 | 0.71 | 0.00 | 0.21 | 0.14 | | 0.00 |
| Sat – Att. Loyalty | USA | 0 | 13 | 3392 | 0.60 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.04 | 0.30 | |
| | | 1 | 9 | 1453 | 0.59 | 0.00 | 0.10 | 0.06 | | 0.59 |
| Sat - Purchase intention | USA | 0 | 15 | 3498 | 0.69 | 0.00 | 0.13 | 0.06 | 79.90 | |
| | | 1 | 5 | 1308 | 0.50 | 0.00 | 0.34 | 0.24 | | 0.00 |
| Sat - WOM | USA | 0 | 8 | 1761 | 0.66 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.04 | 6.41 | |
| | | 1 | 6 | 1007 | 0.71 | 0.00 | 0.23 | 0.17 | | 0.01 |

| Relationship | Moderator | Levels | No. of Studies | No. of Observ. | Point Estimate | P-value | Tau Squared | Std Error | Q-value | Prob |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Value -Sat | Mixed | 0 | 21 | 4645 | 0.62 | 0.00 | 0.14 | 0.06 | 1.27 | |
| | | 1 | 4 | 1480 | 0.64 | 0.00 | 0.15 | 0.13 | | 0.26 |
| Trust - Sat | Mixed | 0 | 11 | 1965 | 0.63 | 0.00 | 0.07 | 0.04 | 9.15 | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 446 | 0.72 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.01 | | 0.00 |
| Sat – Att. Loyalty | Mixed | 0 | 20 | 4399 | 0.60 | 0.00 | 0.09 | 0.03 | 2.29 | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 446 | 0.55 | 0.00 | 0.06 | 0.08 | | 0.13 |
| Sat - Purchase intention | Mixed | 0 | 18 | 4444 | 0.63 | 0.00 | 0.19 | 0.08 | 20.58 | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 362 | 0.76 | 0.00 | 0.16 | 0.24 | | 0.00 |
| Sat - WOM | Mixed | 0 | 12 | 2300 | 0.70 | 0.00 | 0.13 | 0.06 | 25.27 | |
| | | 1 | 2 | 468 | 0.55 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.01 | | 0.00 |

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*  *Papers included in the meta-analysis.*

# Essay 2:

# Conceptualizing Overall Firm Satisfaction in a Business Services Context

**Abstract**

This paper develops a conceptual framework for overall firm satisfaction in a business services context based on network theory. We first offer a critical review of the business satisfaction literature and then three key propositions. Though the vast majority of satisfaction studies are conducted by identifying a one or two key informants, we first propose that true overall firm satisfaction should be based on a weighted average of the individual satisfactions of all actors in the customer firm with a vested interest in service provision. We then propose that changes to overall firm satisfaction can be partly attributed to the manner in which interpersonal influences change individuals' satisfaction assessment over time. Finally, we define two dimensions of overall firm satisfaction, formal firm satisfaction and informal firm satisfaction, and propose that they will influence one another over time. We discuss the implications of each proposition on service managers.

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## Introduction

Satisfaction studies in marketing have traditionally focused on individuals as the unit of analysis. However, the study of business customers heightens the need for understanding satisfaction better at an organizational unit of analysis. Rudimentary approaches have primarily been implemented to assess satisfaction at the organizational level, and there has been a call for more research concerning customer satisfaction formation in organizations (Schellhase, Hardock and Ohlwein 2000; Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis 2004). Existing research approaches have heretofore failed to consider how interactions among individuals within a company influence the formation of organizational satisfaction. In response to this issue, this paper develops a conceptualization of the satisfaction formation process in organizations based on principles from network theory (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011).

The framework developed in this paper is especially applicable to the business services context. Whereas products may be delivered and exchanged almost instantaneously, the time period covered by the process of service delivery may be substantial, as with consulting services. Also, many business services are delivered on an ongoing basis over time (Briggs et al. 2007). In either case, person-to-person interactions in the midst of the service process have the opportunity to shape organizational satisfaction in a meaningful way at any point during the process.

## Critical Literature Review

Despite general consensus that the measurement of organizational characteristics necessitates research methods different from those used to measure the characteristics of individuals (Lazarsfeld and Menzel 1969; Seidler 1974; Phillips 1981), most organizational satisfaction studies rely on methodological approaches designed for studying individual consumers. Most often researchers identify a single individual or informant per organization and assume that the response provided by this individual is a reliable and valid indicator of the organizational properties of interest. However, previous research has shown that informant reports often fail to serve as highly valid indicators (Phillips 1981).

Multiple individuals from a customer organization, aside from the key informant, are likely to have a stake in a providers' offering. They may directly use the offered service or merely make decisions regarding starting or maintaining a business relationship with the service provider (Homburg et al. 1997). All these individuals actually inform organizational satisfaction. These individuals may have access to and rely on differing information or incidents to form their individual satisfaction judgments, or they may attribute different weights to available pieces of information (Seidler 1974; Phillips 1981). For example, respondents from functional areas of purchasing and management pay more attention to commercial aspects, while those from engineering, maintenance, and production emphasize on product-related information as drivers of their satisfaction judgments (Chakraborty, Srivastava,

and Marshall 2007). Therefore, we cannot assume that a single key informant will accurately represent the organization.

Few business satisfaction studies have gathered data from multiple informants within an organization. The authors conducted an electronic search for such papers, and were only able to identify five published studies over the past 20 years (see table 1 on page 4). A closer analysis of these papers uncovers some potential limitations. A couple of the studies aggregated the data gathered from different informants without analyzing the possible systematic variations in the data (Schellhase et al. 2000; Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis 2004). A couple others utilized single item satisfaction measures (Qualls and Rosa 1995; Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis 2004). While considered an acceptable approach to measuring overall satisfaction by some researchers, a single item measure does not provide any insight into the satisfaction formation process, as it "ignores the existence of different phases of satisfaction in a relationship according to the complexity of the service or product offering" (Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis 2004 p. 245). For example, Qualls and Rosa (1995) gathered data on overall satisfaction from informants representing different functional areas such as engineering and marketing using a single item. The authors were unable to observe any variation in overall satisfaction across these areas, though the importance of different quality dimensions influencing overall satisfaction markedly varied across them.

Since most B2B satisfaction research has used the single-informant approach, it has not considered the underlying interpersonal processes and individual influences that form and change satisfaction (Flint, Woodruff and Gardial 1997; Tikkanen, Alajoutsijärvi, and Tähtinen 2000). Even the satisfaction studies that use multiple informants only target those who participate in purchase or retention decisions, so it is not known how other individuals contribute to the satisfaction formation process. Rossomme (2003, p. 180) recommends implementing "a composite of the satisfaction evaluations of all relevant client organization members." The question that arises is how we should construct this composite to more accurately reflect the satisfaction of the business customer. Even when all relevant informants are considered, taking an "average" of satisfaction ratings across all these individual members may miss the mark since the inherent assumption is that all the informants have similar levels of influence on organizational decisions concerning the service provider.

**Table 1:** Selected Business Satisfaction Studies that have Surveyed Multiple Informants

| Citation | Respondents | Scale | Analysis | Differences Across Informants |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Schellhase et al. (2000) | Purchasers, sales managers (National, Branch offices, supermarket managers) and logistics specialists | 38 items | Aggregated | N/A |
| Chumpitaz and Paparoidamis (2004) | All members of buying center | Single item | Aggregated | N/A |
| Qualls and Rosa (1995) | Members of engineering, purchasing, manufacturing, corporate management functional groups | Single item | Compared the mean satisfaction rating for different functional groups | Significantly different satisfaction ratings for the most and the least preferred suppliers throughout the organization |
| Homburg and Rudolph (2001) | Purchasing managers, engineering personnel and manufacturing respondents | 29 items to measure different dimensions of satisfaction | Multiple-group analysis | Significant differences in satisfaction ratings of respondents from different functional groups within a customer company |
| Wiertz et al. (2004) | Managers, customer service coordinators, receptionists and workshop employees | 5 items | Compared satisfaction level of different respondents | The general managers were less satisfied than the respondents from other positions. |

# Conceptual Framework - Network Theory

In this section, we apply a network perspective to develop a deeper understanding of the satisfaction formation process of business customers. This approach contributes and extends existing business satisfaction literature by explicitly accounting for the interactions and information exchange between individuals from different functional groups or departments within a firm. The conceptual model is formulated specifically with a business services context in mind.

### Service Provider-Firm Interactions

A network may be described as, "a set of actors or nodes along with a set of ties of a specific type that link them (Borgatti and Halgin, 2011)." The nature of the nodes and ties may differ according to the research context. In the present conceptualization, the individuals employed by the customer firm are the "actors". The nodes that tie the actors together within the company would be information flows pertaining to a particular service provider. Additionally, the service provider is connected to particular actors in the customer firm through one or more bridging ties. These bridging ties are the entry points whereby information from the service provider that is not generally disseminated enters the organization and flows to one or more actors in the organizational network, and then get dispersed accordingly. Figure 1 (page 7) shows some of the different ways that the service provider might be tied to the customer organization.
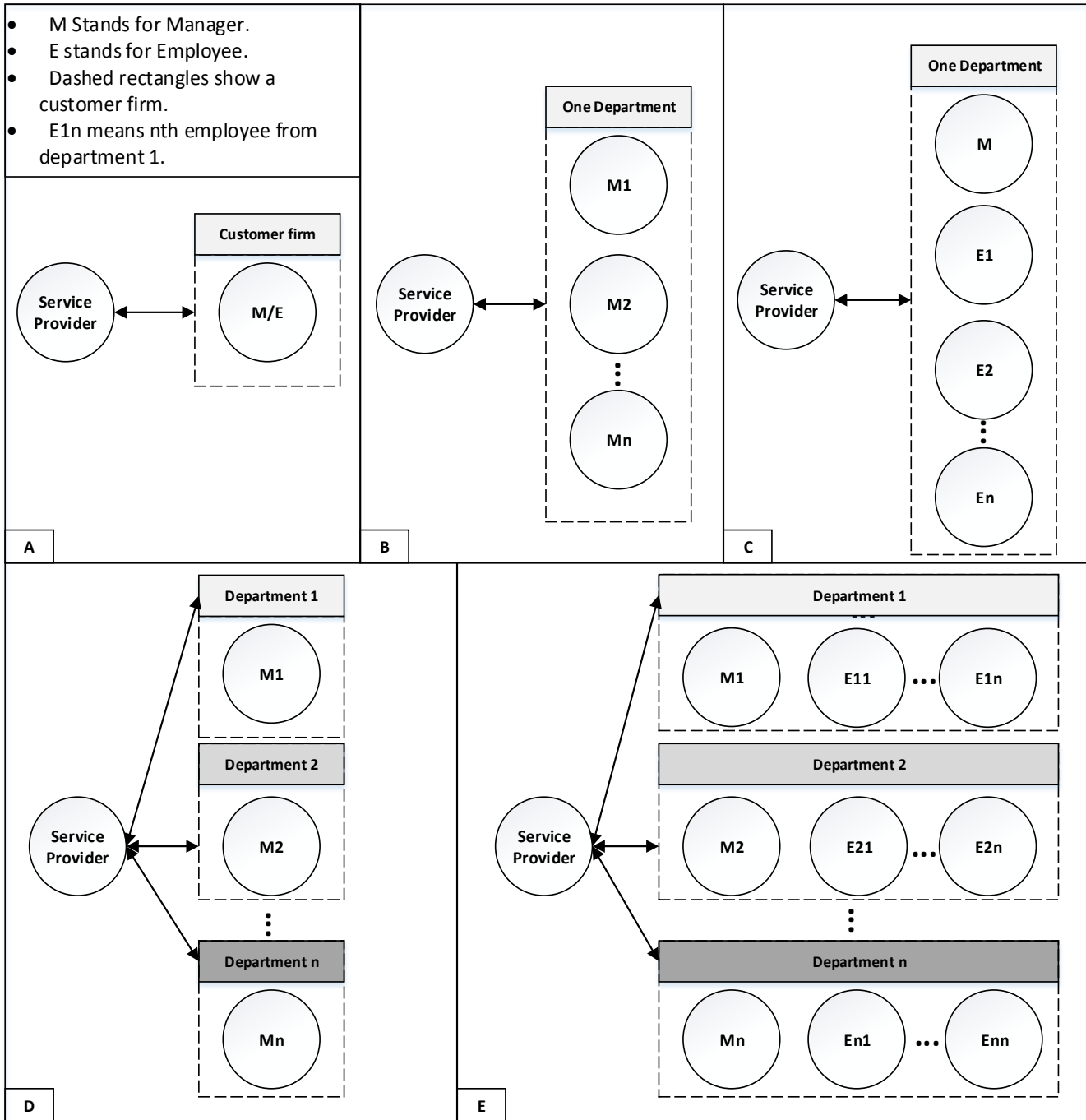
In the simplest scenario service provision involves only one contact person from the customer firm, who is either a manager or an employee (panel A). In this case, the service provider needs to meet the criteria of only one actor who is not influenced by anyone else from customer firm. In panel B, the service provider communicates with several managers at the customer firm that are all from the same department. These managers most likely use different judgment criteria or expectations when they evaluate the service. In addition, some of them might have power over other managers due to their organizational position or other reasons. Therefore, the more powerful managers can influence satisfaction evaluations of the others.

In panel D, several managers from different departments are involved in service provision. This setting is different from section B, because judgment criteria vary more when managers are from different functional areas/department than when they are from one department. In addition, the pattern of communication and influence can differ in these two cases. Managers from one department might have more interactions with each other than managers from different departments and because of more interactions there are more opportunities to influence judgments of one another. In other words, network ties within a department are stronger and denser.

In panel C, in addition to manager, employees of a department get involved in the service provision process. In this case, employees to a great extent are influenced by the evaluation criteria defined by managers. Since employees are accountable to

their manager they try to pursue these criteria. However, at the same time due to their organizational position they may consider other criteria. For example, the manager might emphasize the economic outcomes of a service, while employees may pay more attention to the service provision process. Finally, in the most complicated scenario, the service provider deals with several departments. In each department, one or several managers and employees are involved (panel E).

**Figure 1:** Different Ways a Service Provider can be Tied to a Customer Firm



- M Stands for Manager.
- E stands for Employee.
- Dashed rectangles show a customer firm.
- E1n means nth employee from department 1.

**Panel A — Customer firm:** Service Provider ↔ M/E

**Panel B — One Department:** Service Provider ↔ M1, M2, ⋮, Mn

**Panel C — One Department:** Service Provider ↔ M, E1, E2, ⋮, En

**Panel D:** Service Provider → Department 1 (M1), Department 2 (M2), ⋮, Department n (Mn)

**Panel E:** Service Provider → Department 1 (M1, E11, ..., E1n), Department 2 (M2, E21, ..., E2n), ⋮, Department n (Mn, En1, ..., Enn)

*Within-Firm Information Flows*

If we look closer within the customer organization, we can see that information from the service provider may disseminate across the organization in different ways. In Figure 2 (page 9) three departments are involved in service delivery. In Department 1 the service provider directly communicates with both managers and some employees; other employees are involved in service provision but they don't have direct contact with the service provider. In Department 2 most of the direct interactions take place between customer contact employees, and the department manager will be informed about the service provision through these employees. In the last provided example, only managers of Department "n" directly communicate with the service provider, and employees are indirectly involved.

These figures demonstrate that satisfaction information may be disseminated in differing ways. This implies that the process of satisfaction formation will differ based on how the service provider is tied to the customer firm, and how service provider information is dispersed within the company. Our conceptualization will focus on the cases where a service provider interacts with several actors in customer's organization that belong to either one or several departments or functional areas. Network theory is more applicable to scenarios that involve more than one actor, since only then would interactions among actors come into play. Further, when we have several actors, it is important to consider the relative influence or power of the actors. There are different bases of power in an organization, and actors vary in the

amount of power that they possess. In the next section we discuss some different types of power and how they can be assessed.

**Figure 2:** Different Contact Persons and Flows of Information within Departments
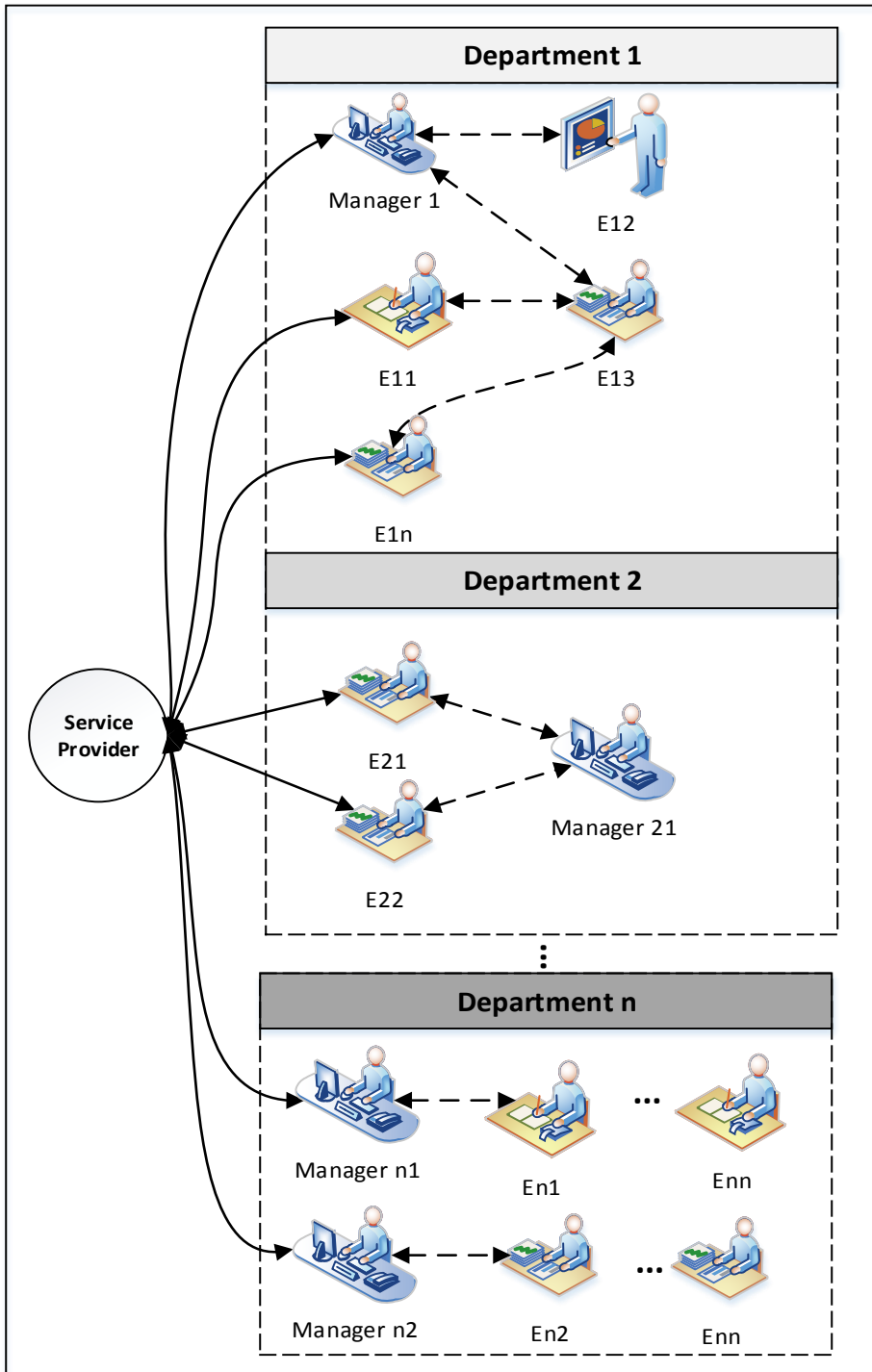
## The Role of Power

Power is defined from various perspectives. Two streams of thoughts from sociology and network theory have defined and discussed power. Sociology researchers have looked at social power or interpersonal influence based on 5 types of social influence: referent power, expert power, reward power, coercive power, and legitimate power (French and Raven 1959), while network researchers have looked at centrality and network position. However, we apply Burt's (1977) definition of power, since his conceptualizations are used by both sociologist and network scientists. Burt (1977, p. 4) provides what he calls a "metaphoric" definition of power as "the ability to convert resources into influence within a system of interrelated actors". He moves from this definition into "a formal specification of power" that is based on a system of actors and countless networks of economic/social exchange relations among them. These networks of relationships each are composed of "a single type of relationship between actors, e.g., social, business, professional, advice-seeking" (Burt 1977, p. 5).

Three types of power are recognized by Burt (1977, p. 1): "power as influence", "power as control of valuable resources via possession" and power as control of valuable resources via possession and constraint". The first type deals with influence relationships among decision-makers. With the second type of power, actual possession of resources is the source. With the third type, actors try exert control through their exchange relations.  In the operationalization of first and third types of power Burt (1977) discusses social distance and relative proximity to some key network positions, so it seems that these two types of power are highly

associated with concept of centrality. Based on this we can infer that social power is intertwined with network power. Mardsen (1983, p. 714) believes that the two latter discussed forms of power "arise as a result of position in a network, and more central actors are most likely to have access to them".

### *Network Power*

Social psychological research conducted by Cook et al. (1983) argues that centrality is not the lone source of network power. "A basic principle in centrality phenomena is that being connected to well-connected others implies greater centrality, in power phenomena it can be the other way around: being connected to weak others makes one powerful, and being connected to powerful others makes one weak" (Borgatti and Halgin 2011, p. 1173). Basically, this means in bargaining networks inexcludability creates advantages for actors, while in other networks, connectivity is better source of power.

The condition we are dealing with in this study, i.e. satisfaction formation, resembles a flow model or communication network. When an organization wants to make a purchase decision or renew its contract with a service provider, some negotiation might takes place between decision makers inside an organization in order to reach a consensus. On the other hand, during post-choice consumption, individuals evaluate the service provider and communicate their assessments to each other; no bargaining takes place. In this case, actors are part of a communication network, but not a bargaining network. As a result, network power can be measured

using conventional centrality measures such as those proposed by Freeman (1979): (1) degree or number of contacts, (2) betweenness, and (3) proximity or closeness.

Since social and network power are intertwined, we can assume that overall firm satisfaction is formed through a process whereby both sources of power play some role. Therefore, an index of power that includes both bases of power should be constructed for each actor. Considering our previous discussion, a power index in the present study context might include network centrality (Freeman 1979) and social power (Hinkin, and Schriesheim (1989) which can be derived from French and Raven's (1959) power typology. For example, Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989) developed a scale to evaluate the power of a supervisor, and its items could be adapted to evaluate employees' power. Whatever approach is selected to measure power, it must be consistently applied to all relevant actor.

## Overall Firm Satisfaction

The true overall firm satisfaction should be based on collective individual satisfactions of both managers' and employees'. All actors who have a vested interest in the service provision with some amount of power contribute to the overall satisfaction of the firm. Managers from different departments and their employees may have heterogeneous evaluations of the service provider, so using just one or two informants to represent the satisfaction of an entire organization may be misleading. If all actors have equal power then overall satisfaction would resemble a voting setting that each actor has one vote and all votes are treated equally. However, since

power and influence will typically vary among the relevant actors, their satisfaction inputs should be weighted accordingly. We propose:

**Proposition 1:** Overall firm satisfaction is the weighted average of the relevant actors' satisfaction from within a customer firm, where the weights are based on each actor's relative power within the organizational network.

Based on this proposition, overall firm satisfaction for a firm with N relevant actors would be defined as:

$$Overall\ Firm\ Satisfaction = \sum_{i=1}^{N} Relative\ Power_i * Satisfaction_i$$

Where Relative Power is calculated based on power of each relevant actor to the total power of all relevant actors.

$$Relative\ Power_i = \frac{Power_i}{\sum_{i=1}^{N} Power_i}$$

This proposition implies that service firms attempting to measure satisfaction should move beyond only considering decision makers from the primary department of interest.  Instead these firms should first attempt to identify all actors, across departments at both employee and managerial levels, with a vested interest in the service being provided.  Additionally, the provider should attempt to assess power in some way since the individuals with greater power will have more influence on overall firm satisfaction.  While the easiest approach would be to assign a greater level of power to those with a higher position in the organizational hierarchy, firms should also assess the network power (centrality) and expert power.  This could be done by

simply incorporating some additional questions on a survey, such as, "With whom do you normally share information about the service provider", "From whom do you receive information about the service provider", and "How much do you like sharing information about this service". Using these questions, the service provider can construct the firm network in order to assess the centrality of each relevant actor and identify those with high levels of expertise.

## Changes in Overall Firm Satisfaction

Each direct or indirect interaction that the service provider has with different actors in the firm is evaluated in some way, and an individual impression or understanding is formed for each actor. Nonaka (1994, p. 15) suggests that "although ideas are formed in the minds of individuals, interaction between individuals typically plays a critical role in developing these ideas. That is, 'communities of interaction' contribute to the amplification and development of new knowledge." Information flows throughout an organization network and actors within this system (i.e. employees and managers) use their power to influence views and decisions of the others. In addition to the day to day interactions that shape overall firm satisfaction, decisions and observations related to the service provider are often discussed in groups. In a group setting, the actors in attendance can express aspects of their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with a service provider.

Through these discussions actors can influence group opinion about satisfaction toward a service provider. "A choice shift is said to occur when, after a group's interaction on an issue, the mean final opinion of group members differ from

the members' mean initial opinion" (Friedkin 1999, p. 857). Choice shift is attributed to interpersonal influence (Friedkin 1999), what French (1956) and Harary (1959) call social power. This choice shift is captured through a recursive formula, which is based on influence process in a group of N actors (Friedkin 1998). Basically, the satisfaction of each actor at time t ($SAT^{(t)}$) is a function of his previous levels of satisfaction ($SAT^{(1)}$ to $SAT^{(t-1)}$), susceptibility to interpersonal influence on the issue (represented by A) and interpersonal influences between each two actors (represented by W).

$$SAT^{(t)} = A * W * SAT^{(t-1)} + (I - A)SAT^{(1)}$$

Thus, the individual satisfaction of each actor may change, even if the nature of service provision remains constant as individual actors within the customer firm exert their influence with one another over time. This leads to our second proposition:

**Proposition 2:** Changes in overall firm satisfaction over time can be partly attributed to the degree and manner in which individuals' satisfaction within the customer firm is modified by interpersonal influences.

This proposition highlights the need to measure customer satisfaction at regular intervals, and the importance of distinguishing satisfaction from performance. Interpersonal influence plays a critical role in the satisfaction formation at the individual level, and these changes collectively influence satisfaction at the organizational level. However, it is also important to consider the nature of the

influence, in terms of whether decision makers are primarily influencing others, or *being* influenced by others in the organization.

## Formal and Informal Firm satisfaction

A distinction can be made between the actors in a firm who formally make decisions regarding a service provider and those who are involved in service but don't have decision making power. The first group of actors has the authority to make decisions involving starting, broadening, limiting and ending the relationship with the service provider. The formal position these people have in the organization hierarchy gives them access to and control over resources. Satisfaction studies in marketing typically measure the satisfaction of one or two of these decision makers. If we look at satisfaction level of all decision makers and construct a weighted average of them, we would have an understanding of what a customer organization formally thinks about a service provider. *Formal firm satisfaction* may be defined as the weighted average of the satisfactions of decision makers (i.e., the individuals who have formal input on a service provider's retention decision). The second group of actors doesn't have formal decision making authority but may informally influence organizational decisions. For example, the decision maker group may seek advice from the individuals in the second group and consider their input. We may define *informal firm satisfaction* as a weighted average of the satisfaction of actors in a firm that do not have formal input on service provider's retention decision. Formal and informal firm satisfactions are sub-dimensions of *overall firm satisfaction.*

Decision makers are connected to other actors in an organization's network from their department and other departments. Depending on the service, information about a service provider may flow from decision makers to other actors or vice versa. For example, in the case of strategic management consulting services, decision makers might have the most frequent interactions with the service provider and therefore be the most informed about the why and the how of the service. In this case, decision makers will give direction and transfer information to the rest of organization. On the contrary, when a service provider offers human resource welfare services, other involved actors or users are more informed about many aspects of the service than the decision makers.

The manner in which information flows through an organization can be predicted to some extent based on the network structure and the manner in which the service provider is connected to the business customer. According to Borgatti and Halgin (2011), p. 1172, "certain (central) nodes are positioned in such a way that, on average, they receive the flow sooner than other nodes". Attitudes and perceptions of each actor are influenced by information available to them through their social relationships (Ibarra and Andrews 1993). Thus, when the information flows from non-decision makers to decision makers, the satisfaction of decision makers will be influenced by the satisfaction of the non-decision makers. When the flow of information is from decision makers to other actors, the opposite effect will take place. In accordance with Friedkin (1999), the influence of other actors on decision

makers will be moderated by decision maker's susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Therefore we propose:

**Proposition 3**: Over time formal firm satisfaction and informal firm satisfaction influence one another, such that:

- When the flow of the information regarding a service provider is primarily from non-decision makers to decision makers, informal firm satisfaction influences formal firm satisfaction; when the flow of information is primarily from decision makers to non-decision makers, formal firm satisfaction influences informal firm satisfaction.

- When decision makers are highly susceptible to interpersonal influence, the influence of informal firm satisfaction on formal firm will be stronger.

Though decision makers are generally the most important actors in the customer firm for the service provider to satisfy, this proposition highlights the importance of considering directional flows of information. When information flows from non-decision makers to decision makers, it becomes vital to assess the satisfaction of these non-decision makers, since the satisfaction among this set of actors will ultimately influence more formal firm satisfaction.

## OFS and the Outcome Variables

Despite the fact that usually customer satisfaction has been recognized as a determining factor of customers' various outcome variables such as trust, commitment, loyalty and purchase intention (Caceres and Paparoidamis 2007; Lam et al. 2004), there have been studies that have not found promising outcomes for customer satisfaction (Mittal and Lassar 1998; Chandrashekaran et al. 2007; Williams et al. 2011). Some of these inconsistent results can be attributed to the way satisfaction is assessed. There has been a variety of approaches on conceptualizing satisfaction (Gil et al. 2007; Briggs et al. 2016), and the lack of agreement has created some confusion for researchers when it comes to choosing the most appropriate measurement approach (Giese and Cote 2000). On top of that in the context of B2B, all previous approaches were bound to some limitations that we discussed previously.

Service providers who deal with multiple actors from a client organization during a service provision process might need a more sophisticated approach to understand customer satisfaction. In the first propositions we showed how overall firm satisfaction takes into account the satisfaction of all relevant actors. OFS is created based on a weave of opinions of different actors (i.e. individuals). Whenever we have heterogeneous satisfactions among actors, the satisfaction of a single influential person cannot be an accurate representation of everybody's view, therefore we expect that in these conditions OFS acts as a more accurate measurement approach than the single-informant approach.

Another approach that is sometimes used to measure satisfaction is averaging satisfactions of several chosen actors, we call this the average approach. This approach has a major deficiency in comparison to OFS. It assumes that all actors always have equal influence on their organization and that they are equally representative of it. This assumption is most of the time wrong (Austen et al. 2012), therefore whenever we have heterogeneous levels of influence among actors, OFS will be more accurate than the average approach. Following this line of reasoning we expect that OFS serve as a better predictor of relational outcomes when those outcomes are measured as a composite/average of opinions of all relevant actors. Therefore we propose:

**Proposition 4:** When we have heterogeneous satisfactions and heterogeneous levels of influence among actors, overall firm satisfaction is the most accurate predictor of overall relational outcomes.

In any exchange relationship conflict can arise at any time, basically whenever the two parties don't agree on benefits they have received and sacrifices they have made. Service failures are sometimes inevitable, and they can also create or increase the conflict in a relationship. Any negative deviation from a customer's expectation whether followed by recovery or not can dissatisfy the customer. Actors in a client organization have different expectations and different tolerance zones which is defined as "a range of service performance that a customer considers satisfactory" (Berry and Parasuraman 1991, p. 58). Therefore, a service failure or incident can cause huge dissatisfaction for one actor, while another one's satisfaction might stay the

same. In sum, conflict in a relationship makes people experience uncertainty and as people have different levels of uncertainty avoidance (Reimann et al. 2008) we will observe variance in satisfaction of actors. In the settings that we observe heterogeneous satisfactions a single-informant approach cannot provide a good understanding of organization's satisfaction, therefore we propose:

**Proposition 5:** Relationship conflict moderates the link between satisfaction measurement approach (i.e. single informant satisfaction vs. overall firm satisfaction) and outcome variables, such that:

- When relationship conflict is high, the overall firm satisfaction is a more accurate indicator of the outcomes than single informant satisfaction.

- When relationship conflict is low, single informant satisfaction can be as accurate indicator of outcomes as the overall firm satisfaction.

The relationship between two organization is usually conceptualized as a collection of "historically inter-linked acts and episodes of exchange" (Tikkanen et al. 2000, p. 376). When a relationship is young the two parties have had a few acts and exchange episodes, therefore their understanding of each other is young. This condition can lead to high variance in satisfactions of client's actors. As the relationship gets longer and the two parties know each other more, mutual trust, mutual adaptation, and routinization evolve over time, all of this lead to a more stabilized relationship or "business as usual" state. In a stabilized relationship most actors are on the same page and have consensus on how they assess the exchange

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partner (i.e. the service provider). Following the same argument regarding variance in satisfactions of actors as we had before, we propose that:

**Proposition 6:** Length of relationship moderates the link between satisfaction measurement approach (i.e. single informant satisfaction vs. overall firm satisfaction) and outcome variables, such that:

- For a short relationship, the overall firm satisfaction is a more accurate indicator of the outcomes than single informant satisfaction.

- For a long relationship, single informant satisfaction can be as accurate indicator of outcomes as the overall firm satisfaction.

### Conclusion

In this paper, we develop a conceptual framework, based in network theory, of overall firm satisfaction that is applicable to business services contexts. The model presented here can help services firms serving business customers assess satisfaction more accurately. We make the case that true overall firm satisfaction should be based on the individual satisfaction of all individuals from the firm with a vested interest in service provision. We also proposed that interpersonal influence will be a source of satisfaction change over time. We also discuss two dimensions of overall firm satisfaction – formal firm satisfaction and informal firm satisfaction. While formal satisfaction has more influence on service provider retention, it is especially important to monitor informal firm satisfaction when information flows

from non-decision makers to decision makers, since informal firm satisfaction will be predictive of formal firm satisfaction in these situations.

OFS requires measuring satisfaction and the influence of multiple informants or actors inside a client's organization. Ideally we would like to know satisfaction of every actor who is using the service or is interacting with the service provider. Gathering this information can be difficult and time consuming for service providers and for researchers, therefore we would like to know when we need to use the OFS approach and when other approaches such as single informant which are easier can be sufficient. Relationship conflict and length of relationship are two contextual factors that can help us choose the right approach.

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**Essay 3:**

**How B2B Customers' Emotions Can Influence Their Intention to Recommend a Service Provider**

## Introduction

In a time of advanced technology and an increasing race to integrate robots into our lives, businesses still remain very human for the most part. The common assumption of a business-to-business (B2B) exchange is its dependence on rational and calculated thinking, leaving no space for personal feelings to get in the way. After all, business individuals are generally concerned with the bottom line, decisions are made with return on investments in mind. However, research has shown a different view on how business decisions are made or what may affect a business individual's decision. Some recent studies indicate that emotions are influential in business-to-business (B2B) customer-salesperson and customer-brand relationships (Bagozzi, 2006; Singh and Venugopal, 2015). Business clients' emotions tend to affect their business interactions, whether or not they are aware of the influence. While these emotional effects might not be as strong as we see them in a business-to-customer (B2C) exchange, they still do exist (Pansari and Kumar, 2017).

According to Harvard Business Review, business individuals experience several emotions during their purchase decisions. Toman et al. (2017, p. 118) claims that "Customers are increasingly overwhelmed and often more paralyzed than empowered". When senior executives at companies around the world were asked to describe their purchase process in one word, "overwhelming," "awful," "painful," and "frustrating," were among their responses (Toman et al., 2017). A recent article by Bloomberg BusinessWeek, describes Amazon's CEO Jeff Bazos' decision to close Quidsi Inc., as being related to a personal feud between him and its former founder

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Marc Lore, stating "it's difficult to miss the element of revenge among his motivations" (Stone and Boyle, 2017, p. 44).

Many B2B studies focus on the buying process which includes what happens during or prior to the exchange (Patterson, 2000; Molinar et al., 2008). The studies that looked at post-purchase behavior mainly discuss effects from the point of a single person or a single customer contact's perspective. However, in most cases, more than one person in the organization uses the service or is benefiting from the service. For example, when an organization hires an IT company to provide a software solution, all departments of the organization benefit and are affected by the quality of the service. Yet, when collecting customer's opinion on the service, surveys are commonly designed with a single customer contact's perspective (single-informant approach) and not all affected people in the organization. For a comprehensive understanding of how customers experience and evaluate the service, it is important to broaden our perspective.

Since most B2B studies have used the single-informant approach, there isn't much understanding of the underlying interpersonal processes and individual influences that take place during service provision (Flint, Woodruff and Gardial 1997; Tikkanen, Alajoutsijärvi, and Tähtinen 2000). Even the handful of studies that use multiple informants only target those who participate in purchase or retention decisions, so it is not known how other individuals such as users of the service influence behavioral outcomes.

To fill the gap in the literature, this paper focuses on interactions that take place within a business organization among decision makers, users and beneficiaries of a service, hereafter called client's group members.  All these individuals have their own unique experiences with the service and take part in the service provision. These individuals may access and rely on differing information to form their individual judgments about the service and the service provider, and weigh available pieces of information differently (Seidler 1974; Phillips 1981). For example, respondents from functional areas of purchasing and management pay more attention to commercial aspects, while those from engineering, maintenance, and production emphasize on product-related information as drivers of their judgments or evaluations (Chakraborty, Srivastava, and Marshall 2007).

We consider these group member interactions, and the emotions that are formed when group members share their service experiences with one another. Within interpersonal and group interactions a variety of emotions can be formed, as "Emotions are generated, reinforced, and transformed in relation to others" (Vince, 2014, p. 412).  We believe understanding emotions and emotional responses can promote a more effective messaging and communicating between businesses. It can also create a foresight that helps businesses prevent problematic relationships, as emotions can have both constructive and detrimental effects on business relationships (Andersen and Kumar, 2006; Tähtinen and Blois, 2011). For instance, one of the few empirical studies that looked at affective responses in a buyer-supplier relationship found that "when a customer dislikes the supplier (negative affect),

behavioral intention to be loyal is lower even if the customer is satisfied with the supplier" (Selnes and Gønhaug, 2000, p. 265).

The paper will proceed as follows: after exploring the theoretical background on group interaction, we develop a conceptual model and derive hypotheses related to the formation of positive and negative emotions and how these emotions may influence WOM behavior. Next, we report the research method and the findings of our empirical analysis. We conclude with discussing the findings and proposing future research opportunities.

## Theoretical background

People's opinions, behaviors, reactions and emotions are formed through a social learning process, which occurs in interactive settings, such as in a family, playground, school, workplace, etc. In all these settings it is common to have groups or sets of individual members that interact, and through these interactions they may influence one another. In a company or an organization, groups are formed in a variety of contexts. People who work in the same team, on the same project, or organize social activities together, etc., are all working together within a group.

When group members interact, ideas, information, norms, resources and strategies are exchanged (Hinsz et al., 1997). Information can be shared between members of a group through different mediums such as, face-to-face, over the phone, via email, etc. In any case the sharing of information, ideas, and cognitive processes involves verbal and non-verbal communication among individuals that come together

as a group (Stasser and Taylor, 1991; Weick and Roberts, 1993). Groups process relevant and available information to perform intellectual/cognitive tasks (e.g., problem solving, judgment, inference, and decision making) (Chalos and Pickard, 1985). In this study we focus on people from an organization who work with the same service provider and come together to discuss and evaluate the provider.

Group effectiveness differs depending on what and how information is shared (Stasser et al., 1989). Hinsz et al. (1997, p.43) describes processing at the groups' level as "the degree to which information, ideas, or cognitive processes are shared, and are being shared, among the group members and how this sharing of information affects both individual- and group-level outcomes".

During information processing an interplay between the group and group members occurs. McGrath (1964) focuses on this area and discusses a "Frame of Reference for Analysis of Groups" (see figure 1). We rely on McGrath's framework to understand what factors affect group interactions and how group interactions influence group members' emotions and behaviors in a B2B setting. In this section we will elaborate on his framework and draw on its relevance to introduce variables in our conceptual model.

Group interaction process is at the heart of McGrath (1964)'s social psychological approach to the study of groups and the interplay between groups and individuals. Group interaction process or group process refers to activities of members and the interactions among them as the group brings together its resources

and performs its task. The group interaction process is shaped by the interplay among three sets of variables: Group Composition (i.e. pattern of characteristics members bring to a group), Group Structure (i.e. pattern of positions and roles), and Group Task (i.e. task properties).

Group process produces three kinds of outcomes or effects: Effects on Members (i.e. changes in abilities, attitudes, etc.), Group Development (i.e. changes in roles, positions) and Task Performance (i.e. quantity, quality, speed of performance). In terms of outcomes, this study only focuses on individual outcomes or the effects of a group on its members.
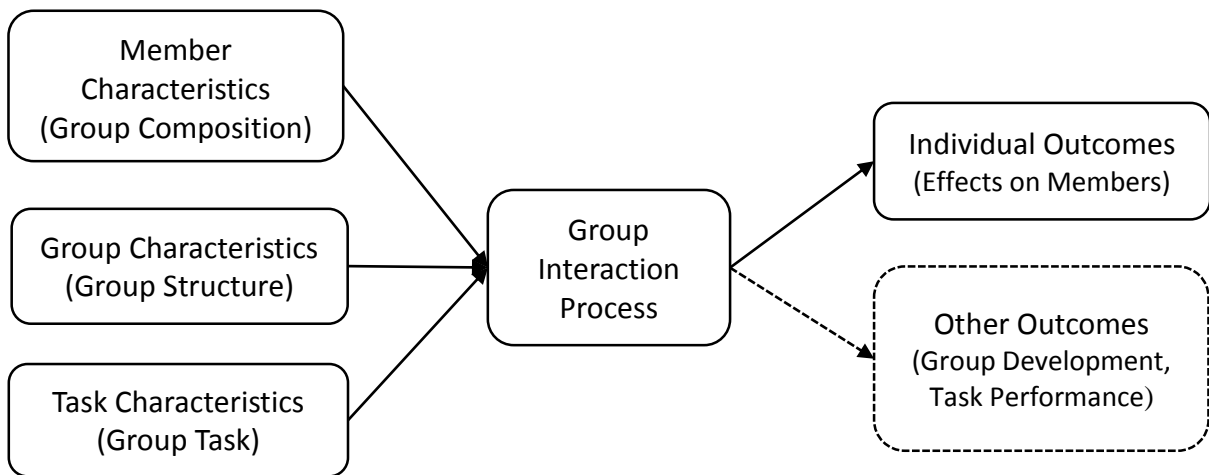
```
┌─────────────────────┐
│      Member         │
│   Characteristics   │──────┐
│ (Group Composition) │       \
└─────────────────────┘        \        ┌──────────────┐        ┌──────────────────────┐
                                \       │    Group      │───────▶│  Individual Outcomes │
┌─────────────────────┐          ▶     │  Interaction  │        │ (Effects on Members) │
│ Group Characteristics│────────▶│   Process    │        └──────────────────────┘
│  (Group Structure)  │          ▶     │               │- - - - ┌┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┐
└─────────────────────┘         /      └──────────────┘        ┊    Other Outcomes    ┊
                               /                                 ┊ (Group Development,  ┊
┌─────────────────────┐       /                                  ┊   Task Performance)  ┊
│  Task Characteristics│──────┘                                  └┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┄┘
│    (Group Task)     │
└─────────────────────┘
```

Figure 1: Frame of Reference for Analysis of Groups. *Note*: The focus of this essay is on individual outcomes (Effects on Members); as is indicated by the broken line box in the figure. Adapted from McGrath (1964).

------- Not discussed
_____ Focus of study

*Group composition*

Group composition encompasses any properties or attributes of group members such as abilities, attitudes, personality characteristics and background characteristics. Group composition looks at these individual properties at a group level or collectively (McGrath, 1964). For example, it tells us the level or the total amount of a property such as knowledge, or experience of all group members combined. Other examples are average of group members' age, their intelligence, their openness to change, etc. Another way of analyzing group composition is through looking at homogeneity or homophily among group members in any given property. For example, in a group that all members are young males that have recently joined the company, there are similarities in terms of age, gender, and tenure.

In the context of our study, our conceptual model draws on McGrath (1964)'s framework by looking at **service experience**, which is a type of background characteristic. It is defined as the previous experience(s) of group members with the service provider. In B2B settings, decision makers or in general client's group members are influenced by their subjective experiences with the service provider (Johnston and Bonoma, 1981; Kohli, 1989). Due to heterogeneous nature of services, consistency in the service provided to clients is not always guaranteed (Knisely, 1979).

Service provider's performance can fluctuates during the service delivery process and during service provider's interaction with each of client's group members. Therefore, service experiences of group members can vary from one member to the other. From the group's perspective, the majority of group members may have either

a positive or a negative service experience with a service provider. Looking at it from the perspective of members, each member's service experience is either similar to or different from people in the group. We call this type of group composition, ***experience-homophily***.

Experience-homophily, homophily in service experience, occurs when a group member's service experience has the same valence with the majority of his/her group members. For example, in a 3-member group, experience-homophily will occur for a group member who had a positive service experience when at least one other member also had a positive service experience. In general, homophily influences group interaction process by lowering friction and improving the communication among members (Fielder et al., 1961). In the hypothesis development section we will elaborate on how service experience and experience-homophily influence group interaction process and consequently, influencing group members' emotions.

### *Group Structure*

Network of connections among members creates the structure of a group (McGrath, 1964). All groups, even those who are recently formed can be described in terms of various aspects of their structure. Groups differ in the kind or form of structure, in our conceptual model we focus on a specific type of group structure, namely, the power structure. There are many forms or bases of power, we will focus on power designated to a position based on a company or organization's formal hierarchy.

In a company or organization, we have positions such as department head, section chief, general manager, supervisor, employee, etc. Any position indicates the existence of certain related positions. For example, the position of manager implies that there are some individuals in the position of employee whose work are overseen or directed by the manager. Any position dictates a certain relationship between the person in that position and persons holding other related positions. In the case of a leader-subordinate relationship, a leader has the right to direct the actions of subordinates. The leader has the final say in terms of how the work should be done and makes the final decisions. In this study we are interested in seeing how power of each group member might have an effect on the interaction of the member with others in the group. In the hypothesis development section we will elaborate on how this effect takes place and how power influences group members' emotions through the group interaction process.

### *Group Task*

According to McGrath (1964) a group has a set of goals or reasons for its existence which are referred to as "Group Task". Tuckman (1965) states that a group comes together to work on a task. Tasks can influence the pattern of communication and impose specific performance requirements on the group. Each member depending on their position contributes towards achieving a common goal by working with other group members. Group tasks can differ in the amount and types of tasks depending on the objectives of creating a group. In this study, a group is formed to co-

create a service with a service provider. We focus on a single task, which is to discuss and evaluate the service through group discussion.

### *Effects on Members*

Group composition, group structure and group task influence how group members interact with one another, they also influence individual experience of each member during the interaction. If we take power for example, power of a member affects their experience during group interaction. Several studies have shown that power or status of a member influences the rate, direction and nature of his interactions with the group. High-power members communicate more than low-power members and more commonly are addressed by other members (Kelley, 1951; Strodtbeck et al., 1957). In addition, high-power or high-status members criticize low-power members more often and have higher influence on them. Low-power members are not critical of high-power members and communicate more task irrelevant messages (McGrath, 1964).

As we have discussed, McGrath's framework demonstrated what variables influence group interaction and how group interaction process influences group members. In our conceptual model (see figure 2) we follow the same sequence in explaining how group interaction process will create positive and negative emotions in group members. We discuss several hypothesis and research questions that demonstrate our thinking. Finally, we look at the effect of the positive and negative emotions generated from the group interaction on word of mouth.
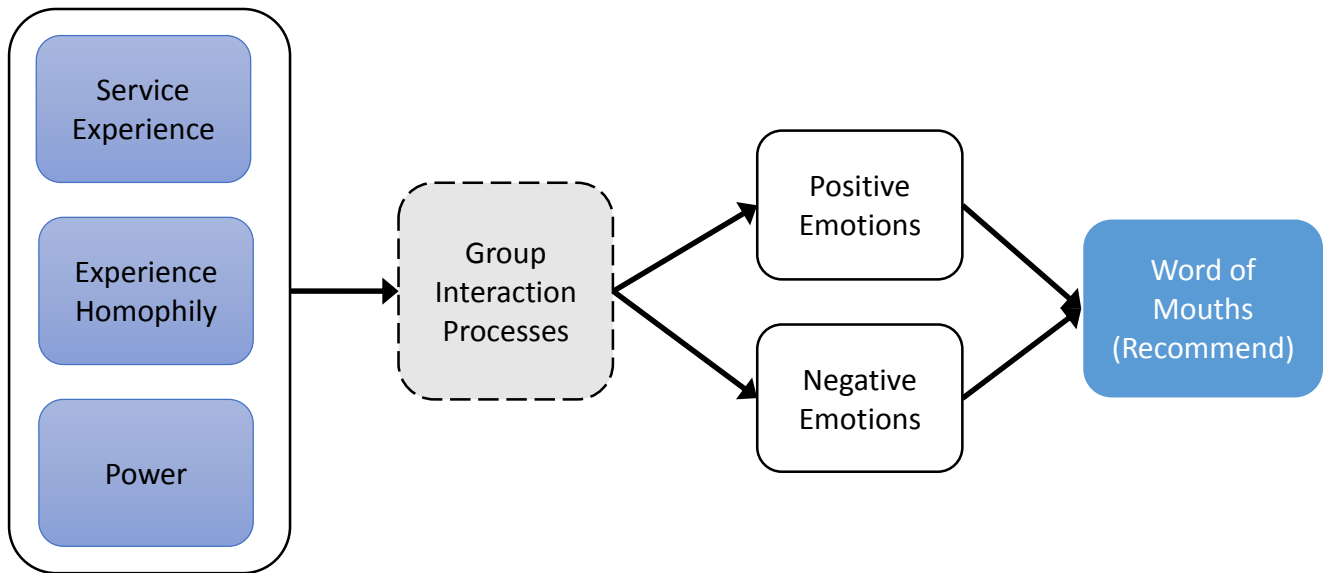
Figure 2: Conceptual Model

## Hypotheses Development

*Service experience and emotions*

According to Weiner, Russell and Lerman (1978) in their locus-stability-controllability matrix, the outcome of an exchange can create specific affects or emotions in customers depending on the end result of the service, whether it was a success or a failure. Moreover, in the customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction literature, it is well established that performance experience cause positive and/or negative emotions (Oliver 1993). These emotions are event specific, which means that depending on the event or experience, the affect will differ (e.g., Scherer and Tannenbaum, 1986). For example, a service failure is likely to generate emotions of anger and disappointment, while a good product performance will generate happy and delightful emotions.

More specifically, literature on services show that various aspects of the service experience such as the environment, front-line-employees and other customers can create emotional responses from the customer (Ali et al., 2014; Bitner, 1992; Ladhari, 2009; Pareigis et al., 2011; Grace and O'Cass, 2004). During a group interaction process, group members share their service experiences and the emotions generated from those experiences will resurface. Some research shows that when customers share their negative experience privately, i.e among other customers, it strengthens their experience (Bearden and Oliver, 1985; Balaji et al., 2015). Moreover, a study by Lambert et al. (2012) demonstrated that sharing a positive experience heightens its impact on positive affect. This leads us to hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 1a:** A group member that has a favorable (unfavorable) service experience, will feel more (less) positive emotions during group interactions.

**Hypothesis 1b:** A group member that has a favorable (unfavorable) service experience, will feel less (more) negative emotions during group interactions.

*Experience-homophily and emotions*

Homophily describes the extent of similarity between two people on certain attributes. Two people can perceive similarity in demographic variables, appearance, attitudes, beliefs, experiences, background and values (Touhey 1974). We define experience-homophily as sharing the same valance of experience, for example in a dyad we have experience-homophily if both people had positive experiences with

something, or both had negative experiences. When we have a group of people (i.e. more than two), then one may or may not experience-homophily with others in the group. For example, if a person had a negative experience with a service provider, while everybody else in the group had a positive experience then this person will not perceive experience-homophily.

Considering heterogeneity in services we can expect to see some people in the group to have a positive service experience, maybe some negative. We believe that homophily will influence interactions among people. The literature suggests that homophily can facilitate communication, because communicators with similarities are likely to share common meanings for their exchanged messages (Rogers, Ratzan, and Payne 2001). In addition, when two people have similar service experiences, they are more likely to listen attentively to one another (Gotlieb and Sarel 1992), so communicating with a similar person can be efficient and accurate. Furthermore since similarity makes people assume they have common needs and goals (McGuire 1968), they will feel more at ease during their conversation and experience positive emotions. In fact, many researchers have shown that homophily creates feelings of trust, liking and respect (Simons, Berkowitz, and Moyer 1970). Prisbell and Andersen (1980) found that when people don't perceive homophily with others, they experience negative emotions. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis 2a:** A group member that has (lacks) *experience-homophily* with her/his group, will feel more (less) positive emotions during group interactions.

**Hypothesis 2b:** A group member that has (lacks) *experience-homophily* with her/his group, will feel less (more) negative emotions during group interactions.

*Power and emotions*

Power is so prevalent and central in social life that one cannot understand social relationships without understating power, as Russell (1938) considers it, power is a basic force in social relationships. Power has been defined in many different ways. Researches have come up with definitions depending on the question under investigation (e.g., "Where is it located?" or "How is it distributed?"), unit of analysis (e.g. societies, organizations, networks, groups, dyads, individuals), and their outcome of interest (e.g. bargaining behavior) (Keltner, Gruenfeld and Anderson, 2003). For the sake of this research, we rely on the definition of power as an individual's relative capacity to modify others' states by providing or withholding resources or administering punishments" (e.g., Keltner et al, 2003; Emerson, 1962).

Resources and punishments can take different tangible and intangible shapes and forms such as food, money, physical pleasure/harm, knowledge, affection, friendship, decision-making opportunities, verbal abuse, and exclusion. In a formal hierarchy such as a company or an organization, particular roles direct the amount and type of resources group members can provide to one another (Hickson et al. 1971; Pfeffer, 1992). For example, a manager has the resources to allocate promotions, increase decision-making authority of a subordinate/employee or punish an employee by preventing any of these resources.

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Based on approach/inhibition theory of power, higher social power increases the experience of positive emotions, and that lower social power increases the experience of negative emotions (Keltner et al, 2003). Most of the empirical studies that have tested these propositions rely on correlational evidence. Berdahl and Martorana (2006) constructed an experimental design, in which they manipulated social power in 61 three-person groups that engaged in a meaningful discussion and found out that high power individuals experienced and expressed more positive emotions and less anger than low power individuals did. Considering these evidence we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 3a:** A group member with greater power will feel more positive emotions during group interactions than one with lower power.

**Hypothesis 3b:** A group member with greater power will experience less negative emotions during group interactions than one with lower power.

### *Interaction between experience-homophily and service experience*

Previously we discussed how perceived homophily improves communication among group members (Gotlieb and Sarel 1992) and that it is positively related to feeling good (Prisbell and Andersen, 1980). Heterophily, on the other hand, is perceived when individuals who interact with one another are different with respect to certain attributes (Rogers and Bhowmik, 1970). Heterophily increases level of uncertainty and decreases perception of safety in group interactions (Prisbell and Andersen, 1980). Group members who had a different service experience than other

members in the group will feel unsafe and uncertain to openly share their opinions with others, unless they have high confidence in what they know (Siemsen et al. 2009). Confidence in one's opinion is affected by the valence of the opinion. Plenty of previous research shows that negative information is generally weighted more heavily than positive information (Taylor, 1991), and that negative information is considered more informative or diagnostic than positive information (Skowronski & Carlston, 1989; Siegrist & Cvetkovich, 2001). Negative information is often clear and unambiguous, whereas positive information is not (White et al., 2003), therefore having a negative opinion creates more confidence in a person than having a positive opinion. In other words, negative information in general creates more certainty (Poortinga and Pidgeon, 2004), therefore the opinion holder does not get impacted by having experience-homophily with other group members or not. Taking the above into consideration we hypothesize that:

**Hypothesis 4**: There will be an interaction between service experience and experience-homophily, such that when the service experience is favorable, experience-homophily increases positive emotions and decreases negative emotions.

### *Interaction between service experience, power and experience-homophily*

Positive information creates less certainty than negative information (Poortinga and Pidgeon, 2004). Therefore, a person with a positive stance can be more vulnerable to negative information than a person with a negative stance would be to positive information. Hence, as we discussed in hypothesis 4, for those who have positive opinions, it is more crucial to have others in the group that back-up their

positive stance. However we question how would powerful people react to such a condition?

Powerful people tend to feel more confident than less powerful people. Power affects one's confidence, which can be evident in how powerful people behave such as, expressing their opinion in public, engaging in more touching and flirting behavior, etc. (e.g., Gonzaga et al., 2001; Guinote et al., 2002). This is why people generally associate power with confidence, as powerful people tend to behave with confidence and certainty (Brinol et. al, 2007). Research shows that power can also affect other psychological states related to confidence such as, optimism and a sense of control over future events (Anderson & Galinsky, 2006; Fast, Gruenfeld, Sivanathan, & Galinsky, 2009).  In the context of a group interaction with the powerful individual representing the minority opinion, which is also a positive opinion, the powerful individual's confidence can be threatened by the negative opinions in the group.   The powerful individual will experience uncertainty, "the subjective experience of uncertainty weakens empowered consumers' confidence in their sense of power" (Mourali and Yang, 2013, p. 539). Therefore we hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 5:** There will be an interaction between power, service experience and experience-homophily, such that: a group member with greater (lower) power that has favorable service experience and dissimilar service experience with her/his group, will experience more (less) negative emotions during group interactions.

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*Emotions and word-of-mouth*

According to evaluation theory, emotions at a single point in time influence processing, judgment, and eventually one's behavior (Schwarz and Clore 1983). Generally, positive emotions leads to a more favorable evaluation than negative emotions, and in turn, a positive evaluation is followed by a proactive behavior such as a purchase (Andrade, 2005), or an increase in customer loyalty (Selnes and Grønhaug 2000). A negative emotion on the other hand, is likely to lead to a less favorable behaviors such as, inhibition of action or a decrease in consumption (Andrade, 2005), or even the spreading of negative WOM (Wang and Huff 2007). Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

- **Hypothesis 6a:** Positive emotions experienced during the group discussion will increase the intention to recommend a service provider.

- **Hypothesis 6b:** Negative emotions experienced during the group discussion will decrease the intention to recommend a service provider.

## Research Design and Methodology

To test the proposed hypothesis and research questions, we used scenario-based role-playing experiments. Scenario-based studies are very common in B2C services context (e.g., Smith et al. 1999; McCollough et al. 2000). Scenarios have some advantages over real observation, as they eliminate difficulties such as ethical considerations, expenses and time involved in observations. In addition, scenarios

facilitate manipulation and allow us more control over different variables (Bitner et al. 1990).

We first did a pilot study with 18 participants to test clarity of our role-play instructions and scenarios. Based on the observations we had during pilot, we slightly revised the scenarios and instructions of the actual study. A total of 160 undergraduate students from a major Southwestern University took part in the study during their class sessions and received extra course credit as incentive. A 2 (power: high, low) X 2 (service experience: favorable, unfavorable) X 2 (experience-homophily: similar, dissimilar) within participant design was used in this study. Whenever time restraint of a class session allowed we asked participants to take part in a two rounds of role playing. 81 participants role-played twice, and each time they were assigned to a different scenario. The total observations for this study was 222.

### Procedure

Using scenarios and group role playing, we created a simulated B2B opinion sharing setting. Role plays involved 3-member groups of participants who each had a different role in the group. Each group consisted of people who are working together for a company and as part of their job they all need to deal with a service provider. Participants were randomly assigned to their group and their role for each round of role playing. In the second round of role play we tried to make sure each participant had a different role from the first time.

Each round of role playing took on average 30 minutes to be completed. In time 1, each participant read the scenario that was assigned to them. The scenario provided information about the company they worked for, the service provider company who helped them on a work project, their role in the project and their service experience with the service provider. After reading his or her scenario each group member would individually answer to 3 manipulation check questions. In time 2, members of each group would come together and discuss their service experience with one another and try to reach a consensus on how they evaluated the service provider as a group. In time 3 all three members individually answered to some questions regarding the service provider and their emotions during the group discussion. Participants were asked "During the process of discussing with your previous team members to reach a consensus on your overall evaluation, how much did you feel each of the following emotions?" They then responded to each emotion on a 10-point Likert scale; zero representing not experiencing an emotion and ten representing having it "very much". To choose an appropriate domain of emotions, we inspected the literature and selected some emotions suggested by Bagozzi and Pieters (1998). Of their suggestions we chose 4 positive (excited, glad, content, self-assured) and 4 negative emotions (angry, ashamed, disappointed, and uncomfortable). We used 3 items from Lam et al. (2004) to measure WOM on a scale from 0 (strongly disagree) to 10 (strongly agree). The items were: "I will say positive things about the service provider to other professional colleagues.", "I will

recommend the service provider to professional colleagues who seek my advice." and "I will encourage other companies to do business with the service provider."

Each group member had a different responsibility and a different perspective into the relationship with the service provider. Each actor was in charge of one of the following responsibilities: budget, quality or time management. We randomly assigned these responsibilities to each actors, regardless of their position or the service experience. In other words we tried to control for the effect of job responsibility, in order to tease it out from the effects of our main variables.

### *Manipulation*

In each scenario power, service experience and experience-homophily of actors were manipulated. We manipulated organizational position as one of the most common demonstrations of power in organizations. Managerial positions such as executive manager, middle manager, and department head entail at least three sources of social power in them: legitimate, reward and coercive. Each group member was assigned to either a manager or an assistant manager position, so in each 3-member group we had one high-power member (manager) with two low-power members (assistant managers).

Service experience was manipulated through providing information about service provider's interaction with the group member. Each member had either a favorable or unfavorable service experience with the provider. Finally, we manipulated experience-homophily by assigning members with different service

experience to each group. We studied two types of groups: (1) groups with two member with favorable service experience and one member with unfavorable service experience; (2) groups with two members with unfavorable service experience and one member with favorable service experience. A member would have experience-homophily with his/her group members, if his service experience was favorable (vs. unfavorable) and at least another person in the group also had a favorable (vs. unfavorable) service experience.

# Results

## *Manipulation Check*

We had 3 open-ended questions, and 1 close-ended satisfaction question to check that participants paid attention to their position in the company, their job responsibility and their service experience with the service provider. All respondents answered 2 to 3 manipulation check questions correctly. Only five respondents missed a manipulation check question, but they answered the two other questions correctly. On a scale from 0 to 10, respondents perceived the favorable service experience as satisfying (M = 8.44; SD = 1.37) and the unfavorable service experience as not-satisfying (M = 2.41; SD = 1.67; F = 865.59, p= .000). Therefore, we conclude that all manipulations were effective.

## *Findings*

## *Main effects*

Applying a 2 X 2 X 2 design and MANOVA to analyze the data, we did not find a significant effect of service experience on positive (F (1, 214) = .007, p = .934) and

negative emotions (F (1, 214) = .766, p = .382), failing to support Hypothesis 1 (see table 1). However, we found that experience-homophily had a significant effect on both positive (F (1, 214) = 68.05, p = .00) and negative emotions (F (1, 214) = 25.76, p = .005). In support of Hypothesis 2.a, we saw that group members that had experience-homophily with others experienced more positive emotions (M = 6.12; SE = .20) than those who didn't have experience-homophily (M= 4.86; SE = .25; p = .00) (See figure 3). Group members with experience-homophily also experienced less negative emotions (M = 1.13; SE = .17) than those who didn't have experience-homophily (M= 1.92; SE = .22; p = .00) (supporting Hypothesis 2.b). Power had a significant effect on positive emotions (F (1, 214) = 4.83, p = .029) (see figure 4). As we expected, during the group discussion high power members (managers) experienced more positive emotions (M = 5.84; SE = .25) than low power members (employees) did (M = 5.13; SE = .20). However, effect of power on negative emotions was marginally significant in the opposite direction of what we hypothesized (F (1, 214) = 3.47; p = .064). An overview of all of the hypotheses and findings is provided in table 2.
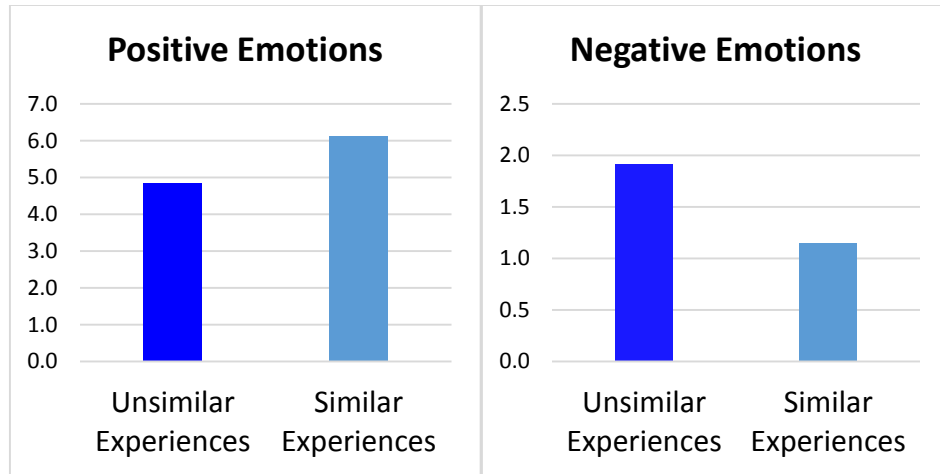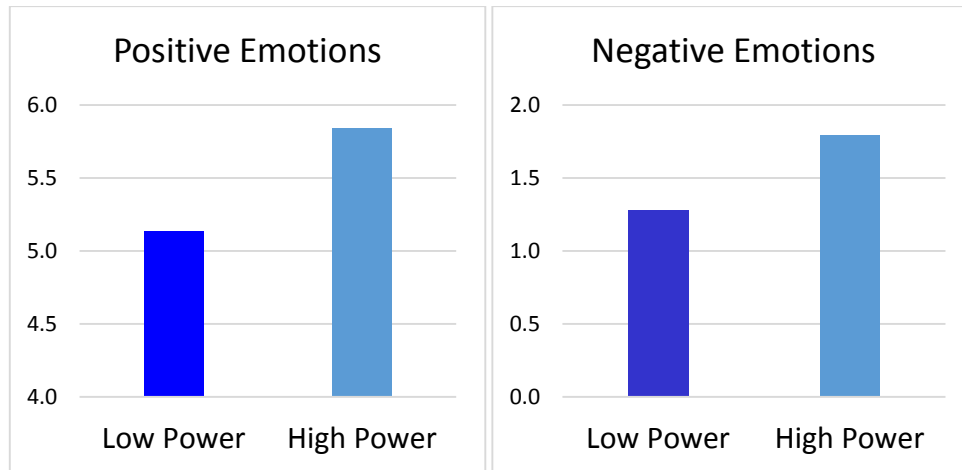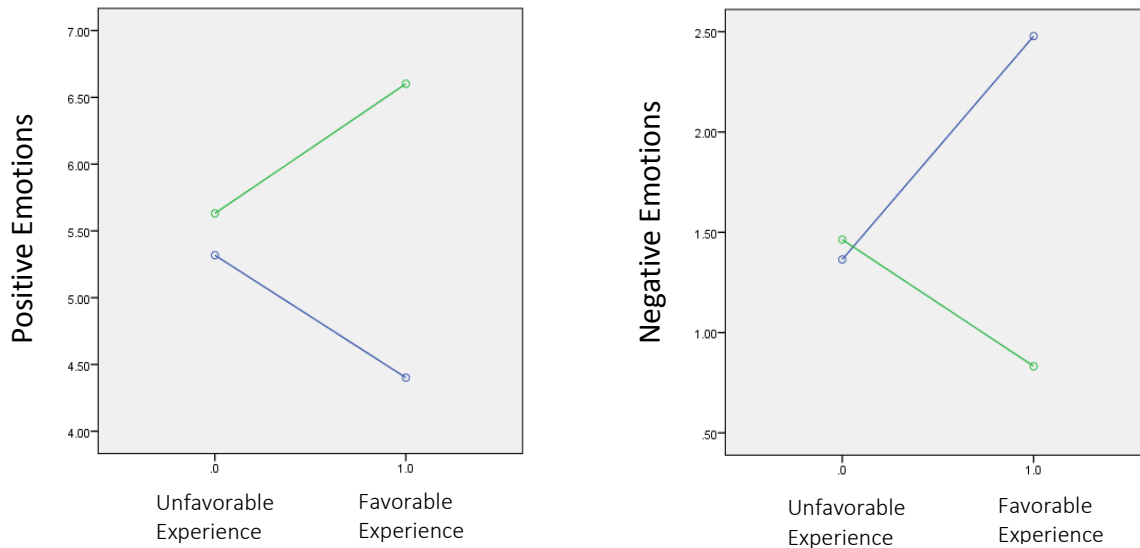
Figure 3: Effect of Experience Homophily on Emotions



Figure 4: Effect of Power on Positive Emotions

*Interactions*

The interaction between service experience and experience-homophily was significant for both positive (F (1, 214) = 8.57, p = .004) and negative emotions (F(1, 214) = 10.03, p = .002), supporting Hypothesis 4 (see figure 5). The group members with favorable service experience had more positive emotions when they also had experience-homophily (M = 6.60; SE = .27) than when they didn't (M = 4.40; SE = .35).

They also had less negative emotions when they also had experience-homophily (M = .83; SE = .23) than when they didn't (M = 2.48; SE = .3). Digging further we observed that, when the service experience of a group member was unfavorable, experience-homophily or the lack of it didn't influence emotions experienced during the group interaction ($F_{PositiveEmotions}$ = .21, p = .64; $F_{NegativeEmotions}$ = .12 , p = .74).



Green line: Similar service experiences

Blue line: Not-similar service experiences

Figure 5: Effect of Interaction between Service Experience and Experience Homophily on Emotions

In support of hypothesis 5, the 3-way interaction between the variables had a significant effect on negative emotions ($F_{(1,214)}$ = 4.92, p= .028). High power group members who had a favorable experience that was dissimilar to others, felt more negative emotions (M = 3.66; SE = .38) than low power members did (M = 1.3; SE = .45) (H5.a) (see figure 6).

Dissimilar Service Experience — Similar Service Experience
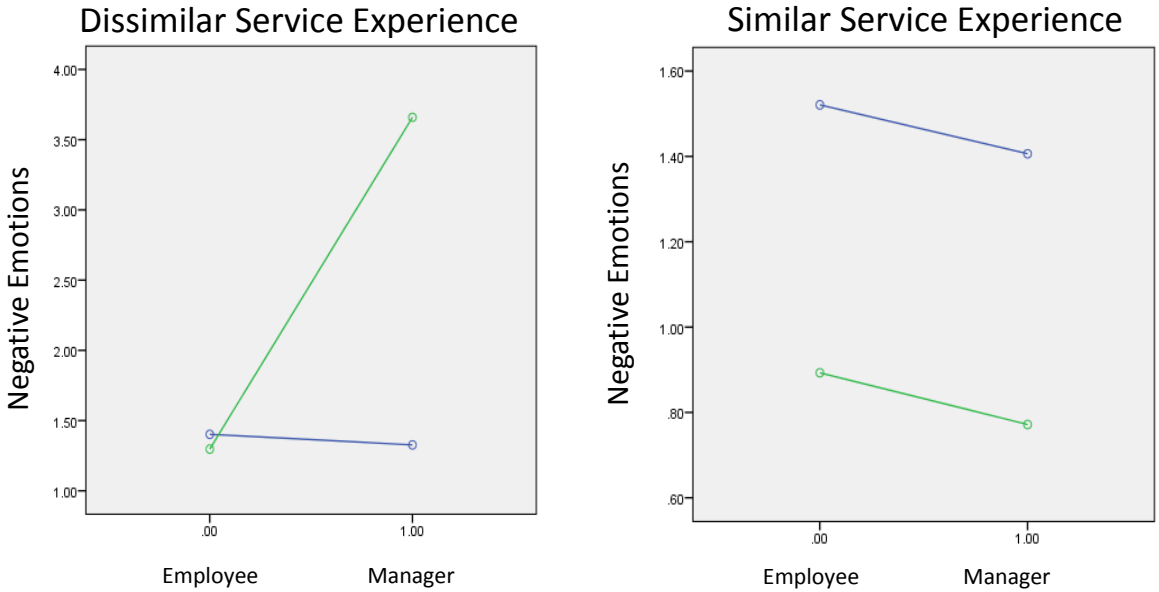
Green line: Favorable service experience
Blue line: Unfavorable service experience

Figure 6: Effect of Interaction between Service Experience, Experience Homophily and Power on Emotions

Finally, we looked at effect of positive and negative emotions on intention to spread positive word of mouth about the service provider. In our linear regression model, we controlled for the effect of service experience. Results of regression analysis showed that positive emotions significantly increased WOM (Beta= .139, p = .022), while negative emotions significantly decreased WOM (Beta = -.149, p = .014) (see table 3).

## Discussion

This study considers how emotions affect business clients' willingness to recommend or spread positive WOM for a B2B service provider. We focus on emotions that arise during daily interactions among clients' team members, i.e. users and or beneficiaries of a business service within an organization. There has been only a handful of studies that looked at emotions in B2B settings. These studies focused on emotions in the context of customer-brand relationships (Lynch and Chernatony, 2004) and customer-salesperson/front-line employee interactions (Kiely 2005; Singh and Venegopal, 2015). Our paper contributes to the B2B literature by examining the interaction between team members in an organization and by looking at emotions formed during these interactions. Furthermore, we confirm the notion that emotions and cognition both influence business decisions and not just logical thinking. Finally, our paper contributes to a greater understanding of the group processes affecting individual emotions, as group dynamics research neglected emotions as an outcome of group interaction.

Our results show that among group dynamics variables, experience-homophily was the most important contributor to positive and negative emotions. We showed that group members that had experience-homophily with others experienced more positive and less negative emotions than those who didn't have experienced homophily. When examining the effect of power on group interactions, we found that powerful group members had experienced more positive emotions than lower power group members.

Service experience on the other hand did not have a direct effect on positive and negative emotions. This could be due to the possible change in feelings from experiencing a service to recalling a service experience (Lawler & Thye, 2007). Another reason might be due to the existence of diverse service experiences in our study, each group had both positive and negative experiences. Perhaps if we looked at groups with homogeneous service experiences, where everybody had favorable or everybody had unfavorable service experiences, then we would observe an effect of service experience on emotions. Future research can address this question by comparing homogeneous group experiences with heterogeneous group experiences.

Our study showed an interaction effect between experience-homophily and service experience on positive and negative emotions. Group members with favorable service experience appreciated when others (majority) had similar experiences to their own. In this case, these group members felt more positive and less negative emotions than those who did not share similar experiences with others. While group members who had unfavorable service experiences were not influenced by how others experienced the service.

There was a significant interaction between all three group dynamic variables (power, service experience and experience-homophily). In this three way interaction we found that group members with high power, a favorable service experience and didn't have experience-homophily, felt more negative emotions during the group interaction. On the other hand, lower power members with a favorable service experience, who didn't have experience-homophily, felt less negative emotions during

the group interactions.   Furthermore, among high power group members with a favorable service experience, those who did not share a similar service experience with others (no experience-homophily) , had more negative emotions than those who had a similar service experience with others (experience-homophily).

Finally, we looked at the effect of emotions (positive and negative) on WOM and found a marginally significant effect. Positive emotions increased the clients' willingness to speak positively about the service provider and recommend them to others, while negative emotions decreased these intentions.

In sum, B2B providers should broaden their relationship perspective beyond the key decision makers of customers' organizations and be inclusive of other beneficiaries. Our results have implications for marketing practitioners. Although the mangers had a good service experience, they got affected by the employees, therefore, marketers shouldn't rely solely on the managers' service experience without taking the employees' service experience into consideration.   Even emotions that are formed during internal interactions among clients' group members have an effect on the relationship between the client and the service provider. To create communities of passionate advocates, providers will need to consider individuals' emotional responses to the service, and how they arise.

Future research can look at the length of the relationship between client and service provider as a moderator that will affect the how members react to the negative service experiences.   Other types of powers can also be studied such as

expert power, centrality and status within the same framework. Moreover, casual office gossip compared with structured group feedback about a service provider can give more insights into the format of interaction between group members.

# Appendix

**TABLE 1**

**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

| Source | Dependent Variable | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected Model | Positive_Emotions | 136.797[a] | 7 | 19.542 | 4.363 | .000 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 134.033[b] | 7 | 19.148 | 5.859 | .000 |
| Intercept | Positive_Emotions | 5190.094 | 1 | 5190.094 | 1158.831 | .000 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 405.802 | 1 | 405.802 | 124.171 | .000 |
| Service_Experience | Positive_Emotions | .031 | 1 | .031 | .007 | .934 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 2.504 | 1 | 2.504 | .766 | .382 |
| Experience_Homophily | Positive_Emotions | 68.048 | 1 | 68.048 | 15.194 | .000 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 25.764 | 1 | 25.764 | 7.884 | .005 |
| Power | Positive_Emotions | 21.647 | 1 | 21.647 | 4.833 | .029 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 11.329 | 1 | 11.329 | 3.467 | .064 |
| Service_Experience * Experience_Homophily | Positive_Emotions | 38.366 | 1 | 38.366 | 8.566 | .004 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 32.782 | 1 | 32.782 | 10.031 | .002 |
| Service_Experience * Power | Positive_Emotions | 1.432 | 1 | 1.432 | .320 | .572 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 15.911 | 1 | 15.911 | 4.869 | .028 |
| Experience_Homophily * Power | Positive_Emotions | 4.457 | 1 | 4.457 | .995 | .320 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 17.134 | 1 | 17.134 | 5.243 | .023 |
| Service_Experience * Experience_Homophily * Power | Positive_Emotions | 2.394 | 1 | 2.394 | .534 | .466 |
| | Negative_Emotions | 16.082 | 1 | 16.082 | 4.921 | .028 |
| Error | Positive_Emotions | 958.449 | 214 | 4.479 | | |
| | Negative_Emotions | 699.371 | 214 | 3.268 | | |
| Total | Positive_Emotions | 7893.500 | 222 | | | |
| | Negative_Emotions | 1312.125 | 222 | | | |
| Corrected Total | Positive_Emotions | 1095.247 | 221 | | | |
| | Negative_Emotions | 833.404 | 221 | | | |

a. R Squared = .125 (Adjusted R Squared = .096)

b. R Squared = .161 (Adjusted R Squared = .133)

**TABLE 2: Summary of Findings**

| Factor | Hypothesis | Supported |
|---|---|---|
| Service experience | 1a: A group member that has a favorable (unfavorable) service experience, will feel more (less) positive emotions during group interactions. | No |
| | 1b: A group member that has a favorable (unfavorable) service experience, will feel less (more) negative emotions during group interactions. | No |
| Experience-homophily | 2a: A group member that has (doesn't have) experience-homophily with her/his group, will feel more (less) positive emotions during group interactions. | Yes |
| | 2b: A group member that has (doesn't have) experience-homophily with her/his group, will feel less (more) negative emotions during group interactions. | Yes |
| Power | 3a: A group members with greater power will experience more positive emotions during group interactions than one with lower power. | Yes |
| | 3b: A group members with greater power will experience less negative emotions during group interactions than one with lower power. | No |
| Experience-homophily * service experience | 4: There will be an interaction between service experience and experience-homophily, such that:<br>    a.  When the service experience is positive, experience-homophily increases positive emotions.<br>    b.  When the service experience is positive, experience-homophily decreases negative emotions. | Yes (both a and b) |
| Service experience * power * experience-homophily | 5: There will be an interaction between power, service experience and experience-homophily, such that: a group member with greater (lower) power that has favorable service experience and dissimilar service experience with her/his group, will experience more (less) negative emotions during group interactions. | Yes |
| Emotions | 6a: Positive emotions experienced during group interactions will increase the intention to recommend a service provider. | Yes |
| | 6b: Negative emotions experienced during group interactions will decrease the intention to recommend a service provider. | No |

**TABLE 3: Regression Analysis for the Relationship between Emotions and WOM**

**Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

| Model | | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| 1 | (Constant) | 1.841 | .529 | | 3.480 | .001 |
| | Service_Experience | 3.056 | .308 | .539 | 9.917 | .000 |
| | Positive_Emotions | .177 | .077 | .139 | 2.307 | .022 |
| | Negative_Emotions | -.217 | .088 | -.149 | -2.476 | .014 |

a. Dependent Variable: WOM

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