

**CONCEPTUALISING THE BUSINESS PERFORMANCE OF TOURISM SERVICE INDUSTRIES THROUGH VALUE CREATION – ROLE OF PERSONALITY TRAITS IN ENHANCING THE VALUE CHAIN.**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The present scenario of cut throat competition unfurls the fact that delivering superior value to the customers is not so easy task. And when the focus shifts on the service industry, there is much more need for the service providers to concentrate upon the needs and demands of customers. For an industry with service base, a happy, delighted and satisfied customer is the key to attain customer satisfaction and loyalty because reaching and fulfilling expectations of the customers is good but maintaining consistency to retain those acts as an additional competitive advantage for the service providers.

Tourism industry is one such industry that falls under the arena of service industry where delivering services is more intense and for the satisfaction of the customers, tourism service providers need to put special attention to their customer's value requirements and further develop service value that are unique in nature and meet their customer's expectations.

It is high priority for the managers and academicians to create as well as deliver value to their customers that too in accordance with their wish. Regardless of this, how a customer will be evaluating the value embedded within the services (O'Cass & Sok, 2015; Priem, Li & Carr, 2012; O'Cass & Ngo, 2011; Sparks, Bradley & Jennings, 2011; Lepak, Smith & Taylor, 2007; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006; Bowman & Ambrosini, 2000) has provoked managers and academicians to explore the matter in further details.

Tourism, essentially is a service industry or, perhaps more specifically, a blend of service industries (Ruiz & Castro, 2012) where creating value and delivering it to their customers is vital for tourism service providers because customers (tourists) have become more demanding (Sanchez, Callarisa, Rodriguez & Moliner, 2006) and most of the tourist markets have achieved their saturation (FitzPatrick, Daney, Muller & Davey, 2013; Avci, Madanoglu & Okumus, 2011; Grisseemann & Stokburger – Sawyer, 2012).

As the service marketing literature focused initially on service quality, and recently on service value creation (Martin et. al., 2008) there is an urgent requirement for firms to understand the value expectations of their customers and also managing value creation complexity. The multi - phase concept is still confusing because almost all researches to – date are either conceptual in nature or are in relation to single – phase perspective in isolation (Helkkula, Pihlström & Kelleher, 2012; Sirmon, et. al., 2007; Priem, 2007; Ulaga & Eggert, 2006; Desarbo, Jedidi & Sinha, 2001). Much of the academic debate held for value creation focus heavily on customer's perspective (Siu, Zhang, Dong & Kwan,

2013; Dong & Siu, 2013, Sanchez et. al., 2006; Gallarza & Saura, 2006) which in turn has created an important gap to be filled for the conceptual evolution of 'value creation' set within the multi – phase context (comment by – Bowman & Ambrosini, 2000; Lepak et. al., 2007; Sok & O'Cass, 2011).

This one sided focal for the value creation may create in many respect, disparity between the value proposed by the tourism service providers and the belief they have on what they offered and the value being perceived by the customers.

In the same context, keeping in mind the immediate need and for fulfilling the stated gap, an attempt has been made by O'Cass & Sok (2015) to explore and understand the management of value creation in tourism service undertaking where the multi – party perspective has been taken care of i.e., customers, employees and managers are linked together to understand the process of 'value creation' as a whole.

Henceforth, as proposed by the researchers – O'Cass & Sok (2015), the study for the first time is measuring the multi – phase interaction as studies in isolation may or may not provide better insights to the service providers to compete in the market place.

While keeping the importance of the subject as the major trend in business decision making, this study will make distinct contributions to the literature in the following manner –

First of all, the article will bring together the value creation as the multifaceted theory that includes the involvement of distinct players at independent phases (i.e., managers (firms) at the juncture of proposing value, employees at the stage of delivering value, and at last customers receiving the value).

Secondly, Tajeddini (2010) has viewed that enhanced customer service experience can be obtained through extended employee - customer orientation. Many researches have appraised employee - customer orientation as the key antecedent of service quality (Rafaelli, Ziklik & Doucet, 2008), company performance (Tajeddini, 2010; Day, 1994), customer loyalty and commitment (Dean, 2007), and profitability (Narver & Slater, 1990). But, here the initiative is taken to bring ECO as a moderator for the value creation setting which was undertaken initially by O'Cass and Sok (2015) to support the theory.

Also, ECO is a widely examined individual level construct that is believed to be central to any service organization to market itself (Brown, Mowen, Donovan & Licata, 2002) and gain competitive advantage over others. In addition, Rust, Zahorik and Keininghan (1996) have examined the component of personal interaction in services as the key determinant of customer's overall satisfaction.

Therefore, this study aims at identifying the basic personality traits of employees as the third objective to gain a better understanding of determinants of employee - customer orientation which will help to determine clearly that why some employees are better customer oriented than others and combining with the critical role that ECO plays not only in enhancing the conversion of value proposition into competitive value offering, but also in enhancing the value offering further explicitly to a certain customer's requirements to attain significantly appreciable perceived value – in – use.

### THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

The idea binding the value creation is mushrooming and is adopted largely by the academicians in an attempt to describe how some firms outperform others by creating and offering superior value to customers (O'Cass and Ngo, 2015). Bowman and Ambrosini (2000), propounded a theoretical framework in their paper on value creation that encloses three key components rooted in the value creation phases, and specific actors involved in respective phase. They speculated that service providers propose value to be delivered to the customers in the form of VP which customers receive in the form of VO (which is being delivered to them at the stage of employee – customer interaction) and judge in the form of PVI with their expectations. Value has been classified into two distinct streams by the researchers. Value in its first classification is assessed from the manager's perspective in the form of value proposition in the present context. Sirmon et al., (2007) and O'Cass & Ngo (2011) in the same line of argument, concentrated on value being instituted at the stage of proposing by the firm. This approach inclines on the prospect that the success of a distinct strategy beholds within the fact that how firms explore their customer's expectations about value they seek (DeSarbo et al., 2001) and how they meet those expectations while proposing value for them (O'Cass & Ngo, 2011). The examination of the managerial outlook has reflected two restrictions. First of all, there is a prediction that at many places, value is viewed in the presence of information not related to the product or service itself, and therefore, Ferraro, Bettman, & Chartrand (2009), disputed that - at the time of execution, the ingenuity of value sometimes fail to deliver anticipated results. Secondly, according to Priem (2007), customers are viewed as the ultimate arbiters of the value offered to them, and in this way customers are the one who perceive and view the value being proposed and offered to them at the encounter stage (in the form of VO) where they judge the same with their expectations (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2000; Sok & O'Cass, 2011) which leads to the formation of market reputation of the firm. Therefore, this process results in customer's decision process to either stay or shift to other service provider who can fulfill their expectations (Colgate, Tong, Lee, & Farley, 2007). Authors like DeSarbo et al., (2001); Ulaga & Eggert (2006); Priem (2007); Sandstrom et al., (2008) and Helkkula et al., (2012) projected another stream of the value from the customer's perspective. They focused on how customers perceive value at the encounter stage, use and after use (and in this context, it is called as customers' PVI). This outlook depends on the view that customers judge overall value on their perceptions of what is being promised and what they have experienced (Bowman & Ambrosini, 2000; Sandstrom et al., 2008).

An enquiry of customer's perspective also reflects some constraints. Customers in the present market setting are demanding and expecting value to be delivered that over reach the standards of the firm or is beyond the capacity of firm to deliver in the market. Since, the present frameworks in the literature regarding value creation are focusing either on the firms or on the customers individually, the Service Profit Chain supports the argument for having the prospects for cohesion with value creation frameworks to initiate an inclusive model of value creation phases while agglomerating all the three parties i.e., managers, employees, and customers at one platform. Loveman (1998), has propounded the Service Profit Chain model that anchors the generation of profits of service firms. Heskett et al., (1997), in their study has focused on the potential of a service provider to enact firm's VP in order to promote satisfaction among customers through PVI which leads to enhanced business performance. It illustrates relationships among customer behaviors in the form of satisfaction and loyalty, employee actions, and firm's profit and its growth. The concept is premised on the perspective

that the profit and growth of a service firm is directly related to customers behavior, specifically, loyalty and satisfaction (which can be equated with customers' PVI of the service), the productivity and quality of the work of employees in delivering services to customers (which can be equated with the firm's VO which is outwardly delivered by employees).

Value in this study is representing the early studies related to it and has been defined beyond the simple economic belief. As defined by Holbrook (1994), value is viewed as an experience, the study conceptually defines value as an – *“interactive, relativistic preference experience’, meaning that value is an experience based on interaction between a subject and an object”*. This view identifies three aspects of value as comparative, personal assessment and situational. Here, the comparative view reflects how customers differentiate among varied products and services. The personal assessment signifies the value which one customer put to a product or service may not match with the other customers’ value requirements. And, situational assessment speaks for the context in which the service or product is being delivered. Thus, the value of an object is dependent on the personal comparative context in which judgment of it occurs (O’Cass and Ngo, 2015). And, VP represents the competitive position any service provider chooses to compete on in meeting customer value requirements.

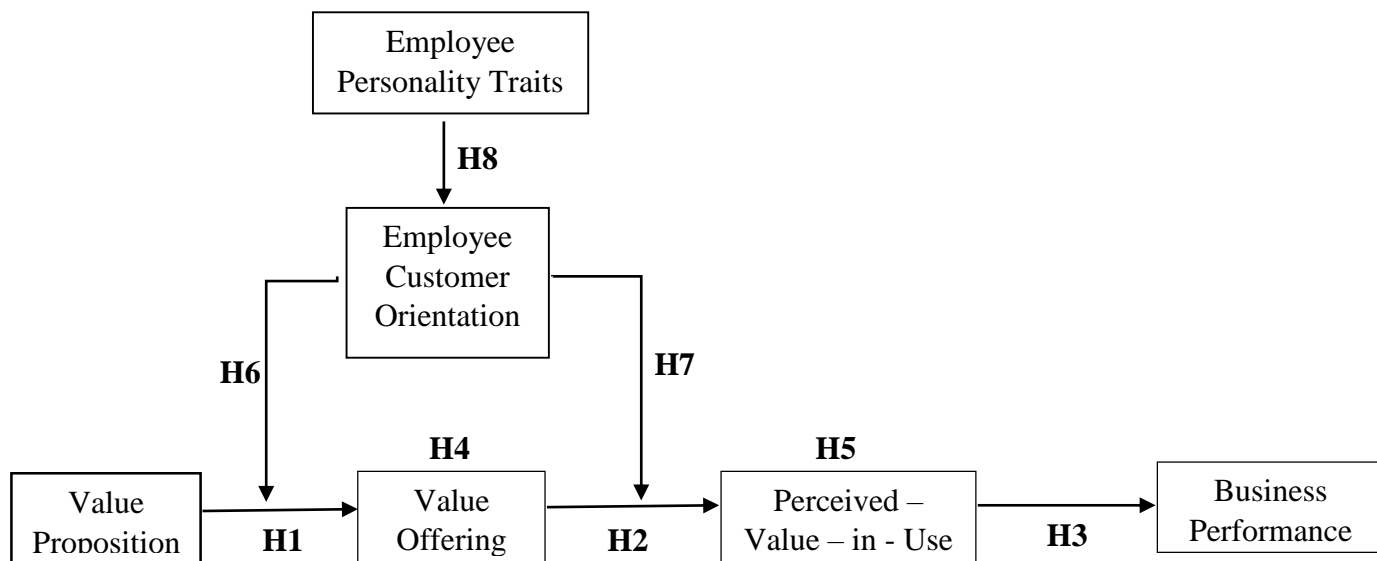


Figure 1 – Proposed Research Model

This study is service-centric and relational in nature and defends that value has two essential components as service performance value and relationship value. Based on the above discussion value thus in this context includes 4 dimensions as – Service Performance Value, Service Support Value, Personal Interaction Value, and Relationship Value.

As indicated in Fig. – 1, and elaborating the Service Profit Chain theory initiated by Heskett, et. al.(1997), the focus here is on the value creation phases where it is summarized that value proposition must be developed by the service managers in accordance with the customers’ requirements. Herein,

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managers are the value proposers and the value being proposed by them is then carried forward to the employees to be delivered in the form of value offering. Beside, managers assist their employees in implementing firm's VP who deliver the same (in the form of VO) to customers which is believed to be received by the customers in the form of PVI. O'Cass and Ngo (2015) has debated that – *“the employee's view of what value is offered to customers is, in fact, a critical link between what value managers propose in the VP and what value the customers perceive they have received”*. Henceforth, it is maintained that employees are the important elements of the chain who are responsible for transferring the value proposed to customers through value offering (DeSarbo et al., 2001). Besides this, customers are equally responsible in assessing and evaluating the services based on their experience with the services, which make them the final arbiter of value (Priem, 2007). The value creation effort is perceived to be significantly positive when the service meets the customers' needs through PVI. All the players' efforts devoted in the value creation phases will support or detract the perceptions of services as value laden carrying over to the customers' assessment of the service they receive through employees (see also Franke & Schreier, 2010). This result in achieving enhanced business performance and competitive advantage by the service firm when customers evaluate higher PVI. Significantly, perceptions of the customers for the value they experience will also influence the firm's VP. Therefore, it is hypothesized as:

**H1:** The value proposition of service provider is a significant driver of value offering.

**H2:** The value offering of service provider is a significant driver of customer's perceived value – in – use.

**H3:** The perceived value – in – use of Customer is a significant driver of service provider's business performance.

To gain the super performance in a service based industry, firm's own actions are needed to be capitalized with the resources available in the industry (Ngo & O'Cass, 2012; Ketchen, Hult and Slater, 2007). Therefore, Value proposition is a very important factor that has the potential to influence the perceived value – in – use. When employee – customer interaction takes place, the success of creating and delivering services to the customers lies with the employees of the firm (Melton & Hartline, 2010). When service providers implement the value proposition (VO), they deliver the value offering (VO) to the customers. After the customers experience the value offered by the service providers, they make judgments regarding their expectations and the value received from the service and exhibit the same in the form of perceived value – in – use (PVI). Therefore, value offering (VO) intervenes in the value chain (i.e., the value creation phases) by acting as a mediator between company's value proposition (VP) and perceived value – in – use (PVI) of customers. Henceforth, it can be hypothesized:

**H4:** The Value offering of service provider's mediates the relationship between its value proposition and customers' perceived-value-in-use.

In the same context, it is not every time necessary that the value delivered by the employees to the customers will lead to enhanced business performance. This is in line with O'Cass & Sok (2013); Hult & Ketchen (2001); and Day & Wensley (1988) theory of positional advantage which explains the fact that for achieving appropriate business outcome, delivering outstanding value to their

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customers can be fulfilled through the achievement of a positional advantage. The value offered by the service provider may differ from what a customer expects and perceives.

According to Hansen et. al., (2008) and Kumaret. al., (1994), customers do not search for the alternative services if the levels of PVI are increased significantly. In addition to this, O'Cass and Sok (2013) stated that firms will fancy enhanced business performance and competitive advantages when the customer's expectations are in line with the value offered by the service provider in the form of VO. Therefore, PVI, especially for a service industry is a positional advantage and it intervenes between the value offering of the service provider's which acts as the root cause of advantage and business performance. Henceforth, it can be hypothesized that:

**H5:** The perceived value – in – use of customer mediates the relationship between value offering and business performance.

### **MEDIATED – MODERATION EFFECTS OF EMPLOYEE PERSONALITY TRAITS COMBINED WITH EMPLOYEE CUSTOMER ORIENTATION**

For any organization to achieve superior performance than its competitors, customer orientation is vital which is the key to positive association for the firm's profitability (Narver & Slater, 1990) and its long term success (Deshpande et. al., 1993) especially for those firms which are into service sector (Donavan et al., 2004). The ultimate aim of any service dominated institution is to achieve success in the market through employee – customers encounter (Melton & Hartline, 2010; Homburg, Wieseke, & Bornemann, 2009; Donovan et al., 2004). Tajeddini (2010) and Dong & Siu (2013), have defended the fact that managers and employees of such firms who assist as an utmost means of communication with their customers, have a notable impact in molding an inclusive assessment of the services by their customers (tourists). Further, the employee customer oriented behavior can impact on customer's perceptions, and henceforth Tajeddini (2010), has contended the fact that the strength of ECO is reviewed as interpretive gearing for service provider's business performance. It is researched that customer orientation in a business setting like services has been explored as an arrangement of two dimensions. According to Saxe and Weitz (1982), "*The needs dimension represents employees' beliefs about their ability to satisfy customer needs*". Another dimension as - enjoyment dimension represents – "*the degree to which interacting with and serving customers is inherently enjoyable for an employee*". It has been deduced that the two dimensions are essential to comprehend completely the aptness of a service provider and their determination to serve customers by meeting their requirements.

Despite the evident significance of ECO (employees' customer orientation) in the enactment of service and marketing conception in the firms that are service based, exploration on the study construct is found to be minimal. Initially Saxe and Weitz (1982), were the one to introduce the direct measurement of customer orientation at individual level. Their investigation suggested that customer orientation is associated to the sales performance but in spite of the fact, Saxe & Weitz (1982) and the researchers like - Michaels and Day (1985) and Tadepalli (1995) have not followed up the review about the potential determinants of customer orientation.

Spivey et. al., (1979), have mentioned that for the success of sales in retail, personality traits have been determined as the prime predictors. Hogan et. al., (1984) has defined service orientation as – "*a*



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combination of three basic personality traits i.e., adjustment, sociability, and agreeableness” and also mentioned that these traits denote superior service performance. Furthermore, it has been explored by Hurley (1998a) that extroversion and agreeableness are positively related with service provider’s performance. Also, Frei and McDaniel (1998), in a meta-analysis of literature related to personality traits, explored that the personality traits like agreeableness, emotional stability, and conscientiousness are predictive of supervisory job performances.

ECO is also denoted as the surface traits by some of the prominent researchers. Mowen and Spears (1999), have defined a surface trait as –“an enduring disposition to behave within a specific situational context”. They have reported that employees do behave in some certain ways when some pressures of the situation like role demands are imposed on them. For instance, a restaurant server is abide to follow some prescribed behavior while serving the customers.

Allport (1961), used the term “surface trait” for the first time to precise the surface behaviors. The proximity of such traits (surface traits commonly called as employee - customer orientation) towards the certain behaviors can be easily located in the personality hierarchy which is an essential element to reach high business performance. Therefore, it can be hypothesized –

**H6:** The employee’s employee - customer orientation significantly moderates the relationship between value proposition and value offering.

**H7:** The employee’s – employee - customer orientation significantly moderates the relationship between value offering and perceived value – in – use.

**H8:** The tourism service employee’s personality traits significantly shapes its employee customer orientation.

### **MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS**

The study focuses on building the relationship of value creation phases all together with the combined effects of personality traits of the employees together with their customer orientation. The study has specific implication for the managers of service settings in the current market situation. The profile of the value creation being combined in this paper as service quality, service support, personal interaction and relationship value will help managers to understand the concept of value in depth and will also help to determine how the value is assessed.

Secondly, the managers will get an in depth insight on the fact that the value cannot be viewed as imperceptible in customer’s actual service experience of the service offering and in many respects this is the point where both i.e., employee and customer interact. If the value as promised cannot be delivered, it can result in customer frustration further resulting into negative word of mouth which will lead to declined customer support and diminished loyalty.

Thirdly, although all employees get similar training, not all prospective employees may have similar traits and also the service performance.

Finally, the paper has focused on the theoretical embedding of value creation phases in any service setting which will help the managers to propose and offer the value being demanded and perceived

by the customers on the competitive environment to gain competitive advantage over others in the market place.

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