Predicting Service-Oriented Citizenship Behaviour among Frontlines with Personal Resources Work Engagement: A Proposed Research Framework

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Steady economic performance in recent years has resulted in rapid expansion of the travel and tourism industry. The fast development brought an extensive pressure to the industry's players in sustaining their market share. In the context of labour intensive business such as hospitality, the competitive position can be enhanced by capitalizing its human resources. Particularly, frontline staffs who display service-oriented organizational citizenship behaviours is crucial in determining customers' perception of service quality. From a review of the literature, this paper proposes the motivational construct of work engagement and personal resources, such as emotional intelligence and self-efficacy, to have a positive influence on service-oriented organizational citizenship behaviours which may be the source of competitive differentiation for the hospitality industry.

1. Introduction

Worldwide, increasing personal incomes and changing trends in leisure time behaviour have fuelled tourism sector growth. The hospitality and tourism industry now accounts for more than one third of the total global services trade (ILO, 2010). Likewise, travel and tourism industry in Malaysia has reported a positive growth of 4.8% in 2015 reaching to market value of $39.4 billion [1]. With this growth, it was forecasted that the Malaysian travel and tourism industry will have a value of $53 billion by 2020 [1]. To keep pace, tourism developments have increased the number of tourist accommodation sites and hotel rooms. The statistical data showed that the number of hotels in Malaysia has substantially increased from 3,094 units in 2013 to 4,799 units in 2015 [2]. For tourists, the growth in hotel accommodation is advantageous. It provides more options for them to source a hotel room that best meets their travel budget and service quality needs. However, for hotel business operators, tourism development has stepped up competition, which means putting in more effort to

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provide better service quality to sustain market share. In this light, frontlines, who make direct contact with customers, play a significance role. Research shows that customers' perceptions of service quality stem from their experience during a service encounter [3, 4]. Not only do frontline staff need to perform their prescribed job roles, but competitive and market share pressures also require them to display behaviours beyond their formal role, behaviours that impress customers. Noted researchers, Bettencourt, Gwinner [5], termed these extra-role behaviours in a service context as service-oriented organizational citizenship behaviour (herein after SO-OCB).

SO-OCBs comprise of three dimensions, namely loyalty OCB, service delivery OCB and participation OCB. Loyalty OCB refers to service employees promoting an organisation's products, services and positive image to customers [5]. Service delivery OCB refers to the behaviours of showing reliable, responsive and courteous service behaviours to customers [5]. Participation OCB relates to service employees providing feedback to their organisation on how to enhance service quality [5]. The display of SO-OCBs among frontlines is crucial given their link between hotels and customers. Frontline staffs are, therefore, in a strategic position to help hotels promote their products, services and present a positive image to customers. In addition, as the key service-delivery representatives of hotels, their willingness and ability to deliver reliable, responsive and courteous service to customers could elevate the perceived service quality of a hotel. Lastly, because frontlines deal with customers on a daily basis, they may hold a deeper understanding of customers' preferences and service quality expectations. This knowledge is a valuable information source for hotel service quality improvement programs.

With the potential for SO-OCB to benefit hotels, investigating how to elicit SO-OCB in frontline staff is a strategic advantage. Employees who are engaged are likely to be more energetic, dedicated, and absorbed in their jobs [6]; they are more likely to display positive behaviour, such as SO-OCB, at their workplace. Empirical support for this notion is found in a study by Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli [7], who reported that focused employees are more likely to perform well in customer service encounters, which, in turn, result in higher customer satisfaction. However, few studies have examined the link between work engagement and SO-OCB. If nurturing SO-OCB among frontlines is fundamental to delivering superior service quality [8], an understanding on the relationship between work engagement and SO-OCB among frontlines is timely. This study also addresses Karatepe and Olugbade [9] call for academicians to fill the void in work engagement research within the hospitality industry.

Drawing on the job demands-resources (JD-R) model [10], work engagement can be enhanced by two types of resources, namely job resources and personal resources. The former refers to the physical, social, or organizational aspects of the job that are instrumental in reducing job demands, promoting personal growth, learning, and development [11]. The later refers to self-derived resources that facilitate the achievement of work goals, reduce job demands and their associated physiological and psychological cost, stimulate individual growth, learning and development [12]. Hospitality is a highly labour intensive industry [13], which suggests that personal resources play a more salient role in fostering work engagement. This is borne out in a study by Chiang and Jang [14], of 289 employees from 56 midscale US hotels, that reported intrinsic factors were much stronger in predicting employee behaviour, such as OCBs, than extrinsic factors. In addition, scholars acknowledge that personal resources are malleable [7] and can be nurtured through specific managerial interventions [15]. Building on the existing research, this article proposes two forms of personal resources, emotional intelligence and self-efficacy, elicit work engagement, which in turn leads to the display of SO-OCB.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Work Engagement and SO-OCB

Work engagement has been broadly defined by researchers, but the most cited construct is based on Schaufeli and Bakker's [6] definition: "positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption" [p. 295 6]. They proposed that energetic employees display high levels of mental resilience at work, are more willing to make an effort in their work, and persist in the face of difficulties. In addition, engaged employees are also dedicated, enthusiastic, inspired and proud, and remain focused and happily engrossed at work [6].

If engaged employees display these characteristics, then it follows that energetic frontlines would be more likely to initiate promotion of a hotel's products and services to customers, a behaviour known as loyalty OCB. Likewise, enthusiastic frontlines would be motivated to participate in activities that could improve hotel service quality, which is known as participating OCB. Support for this notion is found in a study by Salanova and Schaufeli [16], which consists of two independent samples in Spain (386 technology employees) and Netherlands (338 telecom managers), that found engaged employees to be more proactive at work. Furthermore, dedicated frontlines are more likely to take pride in their job. They are also more likely to adapt their service delivery to meet the needs of and satisfy customers, which is known as service delivery OCB. This argument is supported by Karatepe [17], who reported that engaged employees are more likely to exhibit extra role customer service behaviours. Hence, it is postulated that:

Proposition 1: Work engagement among frontlines positively predicts SO-OCB.

2.2 Work Engagement Mediates the Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and SO-OCB

In the context of a service firm, maintaining a positive customer relationship requires service-delivery employees to fulfil customer requests and needs [18]. In the hotel sector, customers' requests commonly fall outside the prescribed duties of the service personnel, such as requesting early check-in or late check-out, recommendation of tourist activities, or requests to buy souvenirs. These additional tasks challenge frontlines; they face a decision making dilemma as either addressing or ignoring the requests may negatively impact the customer or their employer. Given that compliance decisions can profoundly affect customers, organizations, and frontline staff, for every request, frontlines need to carefully evaluate whether the request is within the service parameters, their autonomy as well as the hotel service policy [19].

When these decision making challenges are repeated daily, it can be emotional demanding and demotivating for frontlines. However, frontlines that possess advanced emotional intelligence (EI) and decision making skills find these tasks less demanding. Not only can staff equipped with emotional intelligence skills detect others' feelings, they can also understand others' needs [20]. Their emotional management ability helps frontlines make decision appropriate to the situation, which in turn lightens the emotional demands of the job and motivates them to be happier at work. According to Bulik [21], increasing workers' EI skills help them more effectively manage their feelings, decrease job stress and indirectly protect their health. As a result, happy, engrossed frontlines are more likely to assume extra roles, such as promoting hotel products and services to customers, participating in quality improvement activities and delivering dedicated services to customers, all of which are termed SO-OCB.

Hotels attract customers from diverse nationalities and cultures. This requires frontlines to deal with various customer emotions and behaviours, which may include verbal aggression and

condescending remarks [22]. In other words, the frontline position carries inherent strains and emotions, which may lead to stress. Such work conditions also suggest that frontlines need advanced emotional intelligence skills, such as the ability to self-regulate their emotions. This skill helps them remain emphatic and calm, even in tense circumstances [23]. Therefore, it can be expected that frontlines with higher emotional intelligence skills are less likely to feel drained in executing their duties. On the contrary, they are likely to remain energetic and engrossed at work, which in turn motivates them to perform SO-OCB.

Meta-analysis results published by Christian *et al*. [24] concluded that workers with high ability to control their thoughts and feelings have strong work engagement. Hence, it is expected that frontlines with higher emotional intelligence (which comprises self-emotion appraisal, others' emotion appraisal, use of emotion, and regulation of emotion) will be more engaged in their work, which in turn motivates them to go beyond their formal work role and to perform SO-OCB. Based on the above discussion, it is posited that

Proposition 2: Work engagement mediates the relationship between emotional intelligence and SO-OCB.

2.3 Work Engagement Mediates the Relationship between Self-Efficacy and SO-OCB

Of all the behavioural traits and characteristics frontlines may possess, self-efficacy is the most important resources. Bandura [25] defined self-efficacy as a person's perception of his or her ability to successfully perform in a variety of different situations. For frontlines, such positive self-perceptions can underpin their ability to multi-task, to deliver quality service as well as to resolve customers' complaints. They also need to perform these tasks in front of customers.

When frontlines perceive they can succeed in performing their duties, they are more motivated and connected with their job—all attributes of work engagement. Concurring with this view is a study by [12], in which they demonstrated that employees with high self-efficacy experience high levels of energy at work. Likewise, other studies reported that individuals with high self-efficacy are more inclined to invest energy, feeling and effort into their work [26-28]. Conversely, workers who doubt in their ability to perform are more likely to feel stressed at work, which ultimately drains their energy, increases feelings of unhappiness in their work. The more energy and enthusiasm employees exhibit, the more likely it is that employees are inspired to go beyond their formal roles and display SO-OCB.

In addition, self-efficacy can help frontlines deal with the high-stress aspects of hospitality jobs [22], such as acting quickly to serve customers [29]. High levels of self-efficacy can help them meet customer expectations because they can perform tasks independently, instead of referring to their peers for advice. It is plausible that self-efficacious individuals are more capable in accomplishing desired work goals. Their positive responses may delight customers, leading to greater work satisfaction and favourable work attitudes such as work engagement. Subsequently, these positive attitudes from frontlines with high self-efficacy are likely to motivate greater perseverance in handling challenging work situations and greater dedication in serving customers, all of which are attributes of SO-OCB. In light of this discussion, it is posited that:

Proposition 3: Work engagement mediates the relationship between self-efficacy and SO-OCB.

3. Proposed Research Model

Based on the research discussed and the job-demands resources theory, the proposed research framework, illustrated in Figure 1, proposed personal resources (emotional intelligence and self-efficacy) predict SO-OCB via the intervening role of work engagement.
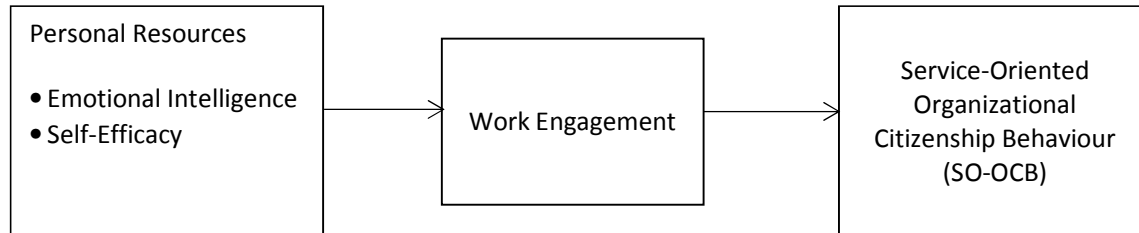

Fig. 1. Proposed research model

4. Conclusion

To remain competitive in the hospitality industry, hotels require their frontline staff to deliver quality customer service to demanding customers from different cultural backgrounds. They are often required to provide extra-role services, termed service-oriented organizational citizenship behaviours. One approach to cultivate SO-OCB is to ensure that frontlines are highly engaged in their work, that is, they exhibit the characteristics of work engagement. Drawing on the job-demands resources model, this paper argues that in labour-intensive industries, such as hospitality, personal resources may be a viable influencer of frontlines' work engagement. Specifically, this paper proposed the personal resources of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy have a positive relationship with work engagement. Furthermore, work engagement has been proposed to mediate the relationship between personal resources (comprising of emotional intelligence, self-efficacy) and SO-OCB. A conceptual research model has been developed from existing literature in this area.

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