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Consumer Responses to Behaviors of Other Consumers in Service Encounters: A Script Theoretical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study provided a script theoretical perspective of consumer responses to behaviors of other consumers in service encounters and modeled consumer responses to behaviors of other consumers at two levels: Biologically-based spontaneous responses and culturally-patterned symbolic responses. In addition, this study proposed that situational salience of other consumers in a service encounter has a moderating effect on consumer responses. In two service contexts, this study provided strong support for the dual-process model and for the moderating effect of situational salience of other consumers on consumer responses. Implications for the emerging influence-of-other-consumers literature and hospitality service management were also discussed.

KEY WORDS: Consumer response; Other consumers; service encounter

INTRODUCTION

Service consumptions, such as dining in a restaurant or traveling by plane often involve sharing the service environment with other consumers (Grove & Fisk, 1997). Considerable evidence suggests human behavior and judgment are affected by “the actual, imagined, or implied presence of others” (Allport, 1985; p.3). However, existing service encounter research mainly focuses on consumer-provider dyadic interactions (e.g., Gremler & Gwinner, 2000) the influence of “other consumers” receives scant research attention. This research represents one of the early attempts to systematically model consumer responses to behaviors of other consumers in service encounters. First, this study took a novel script-congruence approach to define behaviors of other consumers. Second, this study proposed a multidimensional (temporal, spatial and relational) conceptualization of situational presence of other consumers in service encounters. Finally, this study proposed that consumers’ emotional responses to behaviors of other consumers are a dual-mode process: Biologically-based spontaneous responses and socially-patterned symbolic responses. In two service contexts, this study tested the dual-process model and the moderating effect of situational presence of other consumers on consumer responses.

THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Presence of Other Consumers in Service Encounters

Presence of other consumers in service encounters has long been recognized in service literature. Servicescape literature (e.g., Bitner, 1994) treats the presence of other consumers as “social elements” in service environment; The “audience” perspective portrays other consumers as “audience” (Grove & Fisk, 1983), “participants” (Booms & Bitner, 1981) or “Customer B” of a service encounter (Langeard et al., 1981); Recent theorizing (Aubert-Gamet, 1999) describes people in service environment as “co-builders” or “co-actors”.

Multidimensional Presence of Other Consumers in Service Encounters

Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1981) posits that the impact of other people is a multiplicative function of three “social forces”: immediacy (temporal or spatial closeness of other people), strength (power, importance or intensity of other people) and number (number of other people). According to Latane (1981), the multiplicative

function of the three “social forces” accounts for a great variety of changes in a target’s emotions and behaviors, as a result of presence or actions of other people. Service encounters, like other social encounters, are subject to mechanisms of such social forces. Service encounter is defined as “a period of time in which a customer interacts with a service” (Shostack, 1984; p. 134). Service encounters arguably comprise three basic dimensions: temporal duration (from “brief” to “extended”), spatial proximity (from “intimate” to “distant”), and relational content (from “personal” to “impersonal”) (Price, Anould & Deibler, 1995). Coincidentally, the three dimensions proposed mirror the “social forces” identified by Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1981) - Temporal duration and spatial proximity represent immediacy, while relational content is related to strength. In keeping with Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1981) and three dimensions of service encounters (Price, Anould & Deibler, 1995), this study proposed a multidimensional conceptualization of situational presence of other consumers in service encounters. Specifically, this study defined situational presence of other consumers in a service encounter based on three dimensions: *temporal*, *spatial* and *relational*. The magnitude of social impact, as a result of presence of other consumers, is defined as *situational salience*. It is the multiplicative function of temporal duration, spatial proximity and relational content of other consumers in a service encounter.

Behaviors of Other Consumers in Service Encounters

Service literature offers several schemes to understand behaviors of other consumers. For example, Grove and Fisk (1997) classify behaviors of other consumers into two broad categories: protocol and sociability; Jones (1995) divides consumer-to-consumer interactions into two categories: primary and secondary; Martin (1996) suggests that consumers are most pleased when other consumers demonstrate “gregarious” behaviors, but are generally displeased with “violent” or “grungy” behaviors. As shown above, research in behaviors of other consumers in service encounters appears to be sporadic. However, prior research seems to suggest that behaviors of other consumers in service settings are often judged against some tacitly held situation-specific rules of conduct. To anchor this proposition in a theoretical backdrop, this research offers a script-congruence perspective.

A Script Perspective of Behaviors of Other Consumers

Many service encounters, such as dining in a restaurant, are repeated frequently throughout a person’s life, resulting in standardized and well-rehearsed scripts (Schank & Abelson, 1977). A script is a set of expectations that a consumer brings to a service encounter (Smith & Houston, 1983). Mounting literature on cognitive schema research suggests that the level of congruity between the stimulus (what people hear or see) and the script (what people expect) will affect individuals’ information processing (e.g., Fiske & Pavelchak, 1986). Information processing in service encounters is largely script-based (Shoemaker, 1995). While script-incongruent stimuli activate a holistic mode of processing, script-incongruent stimuli require a piecemeal mode of processing and get deeper cognitive elaboration (Shoemaker, 1995). Therefore, this study proposed that consumer responses to behaviors of others in service encounters are also likely to be script-based. Behaviors of other consumers (stimuli) can be perceived as either script-congruent or script-incongruent. Furthermore, script-incongruent behaviors can vary in valence (positive vs. negative) and magnitude (low vs. high).

Script-Based Spontaneous and Symbolic Emotional Responses to Behaviors of Other Consumers

Research in consumer responses to behaviors of other consumers is fragmented and there is generally a lack of theory in explaining the process of influence of other consumers in service encounters (Zhang, 2005). Influence of other consumers has been studied under the rubric of crowding (e.g., Hui & Bateson, 1991), queuing behaviors (Zhou & Soman, 2003) and consumer compatibility (Martin & Pranter, 1989). Affect is arguably the most fundamental dimension of interpersonal behaviors (Forgas, 2000). People respond to others, at least in part, at an affective level (Heise & Mckinnon, 1987). According to Buck (1988), emotional response to others in social settings is a dual-mode process: Biologically-based *spontaneous* emotional response (felt emotions) and socially-patterned *symbolic* emotional response (expressed emotions). Hochschild (1983) suggests that spontaneous emotional response is an internal essence to emotions that remains untouched by the contingent interpersonal world, while symbolic emotional responses are governed by display rules. One way behaviors of others may elicit emotional responses is via comparison with a standard (Parkinson, 1995). In service encounters, situational scripts serve as tacit standards. When one compares an instance of behavior to a script: whether the behavior fits the script or violates it, an emotional response is elicited (Oliver, 1989). In service encounters, when other consumers behave in accordance with scripts, a holistic information processing mode shall prevail and minimal cognitive elaboration occurs. In contrast, when behaviors of other consumers are script-incongruent, they are considered as unexpected and can produce valenced emotional responses as a result of greater cognitive elaboration. Therefore, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: The valence of a focal consumer's spontaneous emotional responses is a function of the valence of other consumers' script-incongruent behaviors, such that negative (positive) script-incongruent behaviors elicit negative (positive) spontaneous emotional responses.

According to Fiske and Pavelchak (1986), script-triggered emotional responses are associated with outcome dependency. When the perceiver's outcomes depend on the target person, heightened emotional responses occur. Clearly, the outcome of a focal consumer's service experience is more dependent on other consumers when situational salience of other consumers in a service encounter is high. Based on Fiske and Pavelchak (1986)'s outcome-dependency prediction, a focal consumer in this situation will engage in greater cognitive elaboration and heightened emotional responses may occur. Hence, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Situational salience of other consumers moderates the effect of other consumers' script-incongruent behaviors on a focal consumer's spontaneous emotional responses, such that the effect is more pronounced in the high (than low) salience condition.

While spontaneous emotional responses are likely to be script-based, symbolic display of such responses may also be script-driven. The concept of display rules holds that "the expression of one's internal feeling state may be controlled and modified in a variety of ways, by presenting an expression that minimizes, exaggerates, or masks the feeling state to suit the particular demands of the social situation" (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991, p.766). Display rules are thought to depend upon shared beliefs about appropriateness of expressions (Ekman, 1973). In a service consumption context, scripts largely define the social appropriateness of emotional displays. The motivational view (Berger et al., 1981) suggests that people suppress the expression of socially undesirable behaviors to avoid social disapproval. The degree of inhibition of emotional expressions depends on the social consequences of the expressions (Friedman & Miller-Herringer, 1991). Other consumers' negative behaviors mirror a situation where responses to such behaviors have potential for causing a person embarrassment or loss of esteem of others. In this case, inhibition of undesirable behaviors is likely to occur. In essence, the proposition is that the very presence of other consumers may change the way consumers display their emotions, especially when such behaviors are negative. Inhibition of emotional expressions is likely to cause a mismatch between the felt emotions and expressed emotions, an emotional state labeled as *emotive dissonance* (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). Hence, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Consumers experience greater emotive dissonance when script-incongruent behaviors of other consumers are negative (than positive).

In consumption situations where situational salience of other consumers is high, presence of other consumers becomes an integral part of the consumption experience. Consequently, the social consequences of expressions of socially undesirable emotions, such as anger towards other consumers, are more severe. Based on Geen's (1985) anxiety and passive avoidance explanation to the social presence-induced inhibition of undesirable behaviors, it can be inferred that, when situational salience of other consumers is high, consumers may suppress expressions of socially undesirable negative emotions, causing greater emotive dissonance between felt emotions and expressed emotions. In contrast, expressions of positive emotions, such as delight and happiness, are generally socially desirable. Therefore, consumers are likely to experience less or no emotive dissonance in response to other consumers' positive behaviors. The hypothesis is summarized as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Situational salience of other consumers moderates the effect of other consumers' script-incongruent behaviors on emotive dissonance, such that the effect is more pronounced in the high (than low) salience condition when script-incongruent behaviors are negative; there is no difference in emotive dissonance when the script-incongruent behaviors are positive.

Impact of Spontaneous Emotional Responses on Encounter Satisfaction

Research suggests that individuals frequently use their affective state as a source of information in evaluative judgments (e.g., Clore, Schwarz, & Conway, 1994). Consumer literature (Westbrook & Oliver, 1991) suggests that emotional responses elicited during the consumption experience are necessarily incorporated into satisfaction response. According to Schwarz (1990), when individuals use their affective states as a source of information for evaluative judgments, the impact of feelings on judgments depends on an affective state's perceived informational value. If individuals perceive their affective states as not relevant to the evaluation of an experience,

the informational value of their affective states for evaluating that experience will be discredited. In addition, the feelings-as-information hypothesis also predicts that the more relevant the emotion-eliciting stimulus is to the judgment, the more pronounced the effect of the affective state on evaluative judgment will be. Both the content of the affective response and the affective response itself contribute to an increased accessibility of affective information in memory. Hence, it is proposed:

Hypothesis 5: Other-consumer-elicited spontaneous emotional responses are positively related to encounter satisfaction.

Impact of Symbolic Emotional Responses on Encounter Satisfaction

A large body of literature exists to support the notion that the manner in which an individual displays feelings has a strong impact on satisfaction (e.g., Grandey, Tam & Braubeger, 2002). It is generally agreed that emotion regulation only modifies its mode of expression but usually leaves the underlying emotional responses untouched. However, even superficial changes in emotional displays can lead to deeper emotional consequences over the course of an encounter, such as encounter satisfaction (Parkinson, 1995). Compelling evidence suggests that inhibition of emotional expressions, either through lack of facial expressiveness or intentional efforts to hide true feelings, is arousing and stressful (for a review, see Pennebaker, 1985). Not surprisingly, inhibition of emotional expressions has affective consequences (Polivy, 1990). According to Izard (1990), regulation of emotional expressions contributes to the subjective experience of emotions. Empirical evidence (e.g., Cupchik & Leventhal, 1974) supports the notion that feedback from self-managed expressive behaviors influences the subjective experience of emotions. Hence, one might expect that individuals who suppress their emotional responses and inhibit emotionally appropriate behaviors will feel worse than those who behave in accordance with their feelings. In the context of this research, affective consequences of inhibition of emotional expressions are expected to be reflected in encounter satisfaction, the global evaluative judgment of a service encounter. Therefore, emotive dissonance, an indicator of inhibition of emotional expressions, is expected to negatively affect encounter satisfaction. The hypothesis is summarized as follows:

Hypothesis 6: Other-consumer-elicited emotive dissonance is negatively related to encounter satisfaction. Figure 1 illustrates the theoretical framework proposed by this research.

METHODOLOGY

Subjects, Design, Procedure, and Experimental Conditions

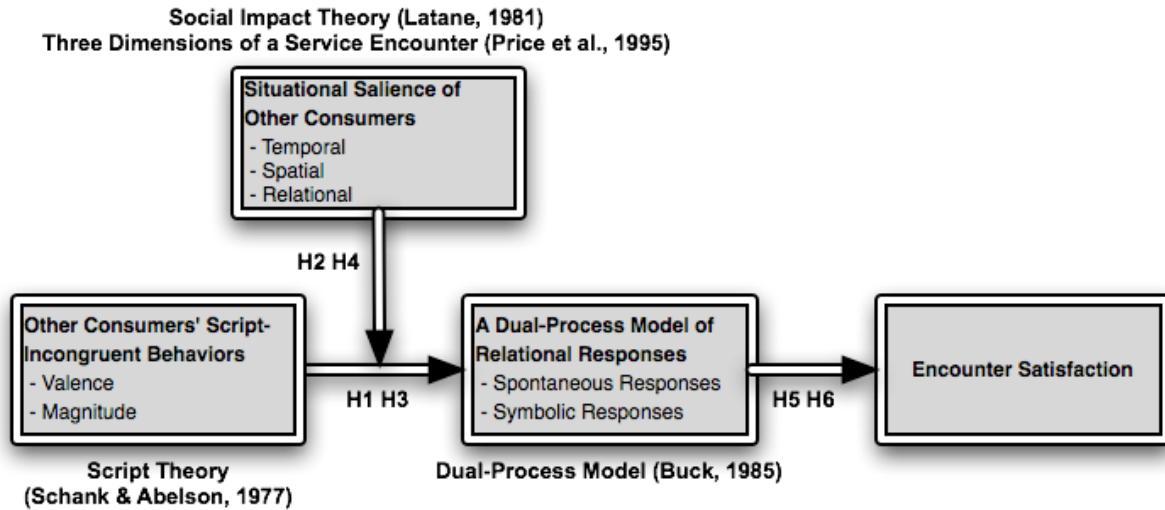
Three hundred and twenty-eight undergraduate students participated in this study. Of these, one hundred and seventy participants were female (52%). The participants were between the ages of 18 and 45 ($M = 20.6$). This experiment employed a replicated 2 x 2 between-subjects full factorial design, manipulating script-incongruent behaviors (negative vs. positive) and situational salience of other consumers (low vs. high). The experiment was replicated across two service contexts: restaurant and airline service. Two control groups (one for each service context) were included to provide baseline measures for the dependent variables. Participants were randomly assigned to the ten experimental conditions. Participants were exposed to a hypothetical consumption episode. This episode involved a customer using a service in presence of other customers. Participants were instructed to read the scenario and imagine themselves in the service encounter described. The scenario was followed by a set of dependent variable measures and manipulation checks.

Independent Variables

Manipulation of Situational Salience of Other Consumers in the Service Encounter. Situational salience of other consumers was manipulated by the two dimensions of a service encounter: temporal duration and spatial proximity. The third dimension, relational content, was measured. For example, in the restaurant context, low salience condition was induced by a brief (e.g., 15 minutes) and distant (e.g., the other side of the restaurant) encounter with other consumers. Conversely, high salience condition was represented by an extended (e.g., the entire evening) and intimate (e.g., the table right next to you) encounter with other consumers.

Manipulation of Script-Incongruent Behaviors. Script-incongruent behaviors (negative vs. positive) were manipulated by describing other consumers' specific behaviors in the service encounter scenarios. In the positive behavior condition, children in the service encounter are courteous and their parents make sure that the children are on their best behavior. Conversely, in the negative behavior condition, children are disruptive and their parents make no effort to keep the children under control.

Figure 1
A Script Perspective of Consumer Responses to Behaviors of Others



Dependent Variables

Spontaneous Emotional Responses. To assess spontaneous emotional responses, participants completed an alphabetized seven-item emotion scale, based largely on Richins's (1997) work, with relevant items added from Sedikides and Gaertner (2001) and Oliver (2000). These items consisted of discrete emotions that involve attribution of causal agents to other people, such as "delighted", "angry", and "irritated". All responses were on a seven-point scale anchored at 1=not at all, and 7=very much.

Symbolic Emotional Responses. Symbolic emotional responses were operationalized as emotive dissonance and was measured via a two-item scale (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). The two items measured on a seven-point scale were "If I were in the situation described in the scenario, I would show the same feelings that I feel inside" and "If I were in the situation described in the scenario, the emotions I show would match what I truly feel".

Encounter Satisfaction. Encounter satisfaction was measured using a six-item satisfaction scale (Oliver & Swan, 1989). The scale includes items such as "pleased me to displeased me", "contented with to disgusted with" and "very satisfied with to very dissatisfied with". For the purpose of this study, an anchor point of zero was added to the 7-point scale to capture a neutral state of satisfaction (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). Specifically, the satisfaction scale was anchored at -7 = very dissatisfied, 0 = neither, and 7 = very satisfied.

Control Variables

Two individual difference variables, *public self-consciousness* (Fenigstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975) and *self-monitoring* (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986) were included as control variables for the statistical analyses. *Product category involvement* (Zaichkowsky, 1985) was also included as a control variable.

RESULTS

Manipulation Checks

As expected, participants in the negative behavior conditions rated the behaviors more negatively than participants in the positive behavior conditions ($M_{negative} = -1.76$ vs. $M_{positive} = 2.35$; $t(276) = -30.92$, $p < 0.001$) and both were significantly different from the midpoint ($t(139) = -20.18$ and $t(138) = 23.38$, p 's < 0.001). Also, as expected, participants in the high salience conditions perceived salience of other consumers¹ in the service encounter much higher than those in low salience conditions ($M_{high} = 98.14$ vs. $M_{low} = 29.60$; $t(275) = -12.15$, $p <$

¹ In keeping with Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1981), salience of other consumers was calculated as a multiplicative function of ratings on temporal duration, spatial proximity and relational content.

0.001). Taken together, the manipulation of script-incongruent behaviors and salience of other consumers was successful.

A series of ANCOVA tests were performed on each of the dependent variables, with salience of other consumers, script-incongruent behaviors and service context as between-subjects factors. Table 1 and 2 present the means and standard errors of the dependent measures in restaurant and airline context respectively.

Table 1
Adjusted Means and Standard Errors of Dependent Measures (Restaurant)

Dependent measures	Negative-script incongruence		Positive-script incongruence		Control group
	Low salience	High salience	Low salience	High salience	
Spontaneous emotional responses	-2.21 (.30)	-3.96** (.33)	3.71 (.32)	3.71 (.31)	4.60 (.37)
Symbolic emotional responses	3.85* (.22)	3.89* (.23)	3.32* (.23)	3.74* (.22)	2.84 (.28)
Encounter satisfaction	-1.15 (.27)	-3.40** (.30)	4.84 (.30)	5.26 (.28)	4.12 (.41)

Notes: *Significant at $p < 0.05$ **Significant at $p < 0.001$

Table 2
Adjusted Means and Standard Errors of Dependent Measures (Airline)

Dependent measures	Negative-script incongruence		Positive-script incongruence		Control group
	Low salience	High salience	Low salience	High salience	
Spontaneous emotional responses	-3.63 (.26)	-4.61** (.26)	4.57* (.26)	4.64* (.28)	2.52 (.28)
Symbolic emotional responses	4.71* (.23)	3.75 (.23)	3.33 (.23)	3.04* (.25)	4.09 (.27)
Encounter satisfaction	-1.25 (.29)	-4.05** (.29)	5.25* (.29)	5.33* (.31)	2.80 (.41)

Notes: *Significant at $p < 0.10$ **Significant at $p < 0.001$

Spontaneous Emotional Response

The seven-item spontaneous emotional response scale was used to derive an index for positive and negative emotional responses (three positive items, $\alpha = 0.96$, four negative items, $\alpha = 0.97$). A positivity index was constructed by averaging the positive and negative emotional responses separately and then subtracting the average of negative emotional responses from the average of the positive emotional responses for each participant (Labroo & Ramanathan, 2007).

As predicted, the main effect of script-incongruent behaviors was highly significant ($F(1, 270) = 1390.76, p < 0.001$). Robust across two service contexts, results revealed that valence of spontaneous emotional response was a function of the valence of script-incongruent behaviors of other consumers (Table 1 & 2). Hypothesis 1 was supported. The two-way interaction between script-incongruent behaviors and salience of other consumers was also highly significant ($F(1, 270) = 11.24, p < 0.001$). As predicted, in both contexts, the negative emotional responses in the high salience groups were significantly greater than that in the low salience groups (Table 1 & 2). When the script-incongruent behaviors were positive, no difference in spontaneous emotional responses was observed. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 predicting the moderating effect of salience on spontaneous emotional response was partially supported.

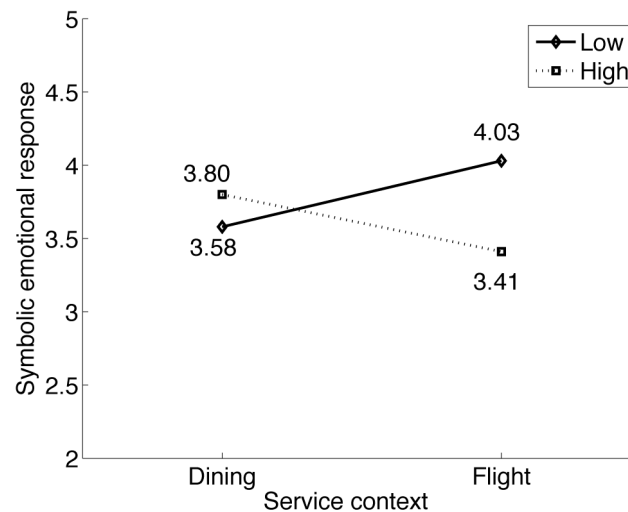
Symbolic Emotional Responses

The Pearson correlation between the two emotive dissonance items was 0.73. Scores were recoded so that greater scores represent greater levels of emotive dissonance. ANCOVA results revealed a significant main effect of script-incongruent behaviors ($F(1, 270) = 17.13, p < 0.001$). The significant main effect was further qualified by a two-way interaction between script-incongruent behaviors and service context ($F(1, 270) = 4.32, p < 0.05$). The planned contrasts revealed that in the restaurant context, there was no significant difference in emotive dissonance between the two script-incongruent conditions ($t(139) = 1.47, p = 0.14$). However, in the airline context, emotive dissonance in the two script-incongruent conditions was significantly different ($t(135) = 4.19, p < 0.001$).

Specifically, participants in negative script-incongruent conditions reported greater emotive dissonance than their counterparts in positive script-incongruent conditions ($M_{negative} = 4.23$ vs. $M_{positive} = 3.20$; $t(135) = 4.19$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was supported in the airline context.

The two-way interaction between salience of other consumers and service context was also significant ($F(1, 270) = 4.44$, $p < 0.05$). The planned contrasts revealed that in the restaurant context, there was no significant difference in emotive dissonance between the two salience conditions ($t(139) = -.28$, $p = 0.77$). However, in the airline context, emotive dissonance in the two salience groups were significantly different ($t(135) = 2.29$, $p < 0.05$). Specifically, participants in the low salience conditions reported greater emotive dissonance than their counterparts in the high salience conditions ($M_{low} = 4.21$ vs. $M_{high} = 3.23$; $t(135) = 2.29$, $p < 0.05$). This interaction effect is visualized in Figure 2. Taken together, the moderating effect of situational salience proposed in Hypothesis 4 was supported in airline context.

Figure 2
Interaction Effect of Symbolic Emotional Responses by Salience of Other Consumers across the Two Service Contexts



Encounter Satisfaction

In the ANCOVA analyses, spontaneous emotional responses, symbolic emotional responses and encounter satisfaction were all modeled as dependent variables. However, literature suggests that consumers' moment-to-moment emotional responses can be integrated to overall judgment such as encounter satisfaction (Baumgartner, Sujan & Padgett, 1997). For the multiple regression procedures to reveal true relationships between emotional responses and encounter satisfaction, the "treatment effects" of experimentally manipulated incongruent behaviors and salience of other consumers on all the variables have to be removed first. Statistically, it means that multiple regression procedures should be applied using the residuals of these scores produced by the ANCOVA procedures. Multiple regression procedures were subsequently performed, regressing the residuals of encounter satisfaction on residuals of spontaneous emotional responses and emotive dissonance. The regression results suggest that the two independent variables altogether explained 27.3% of the variance in encounter satisfaction ($F(2, 274) = 51.44$, $p < 0.001$). As predicted by Hypothesis 5, spontaneous emotional responses were significantly and positively related to encounter satisfaction ($b = .53$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that those who reported more positive spontaneous emotional response were more likely to report greater levels of encounter satisfaction. However, the effect of emotive dissonance on encounter satisfaction failed to achieve conventional levels of statistical significance ($b = -0.04$, $p > 0.55$). Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was not supported.

DISCUSSION

The current research seeks to provide a framework for understanding how consumers respond to behaviors of other consumers in service encounters. In two service contexts, our research demonstrates that consumer responses in service encounters are a dual-mode process: people respond to behaviors of others at both spontaneous and symbolic level. Robust across two service contexts, this study provided empirical evidence for the moderating

effect of situational salience of other consumers on consumer responses, thus lending support for our multidimensional conceptualization of presence of other consumers in service encounters. This research also shows that other-consumer-elicited moment-to-moment emotional responses are integrated to overall judgment of encounter satisfaction.

Drawing from Script Theory (Schank & Abelson, 1977) and Social Impact Theory (Latane, 1981), this research provides a theoretical framework of consumer responses to behaviors of other consumers in service encounters. As one of the early systematic studies in “other consumers” in service encounters, this research provides several important building blocks for future study in this emerging stream of consumer research. Specifically, this research (1) offers an encompassing yet parsimonious script-incongruence approach to behaviors of other consumers in service encounters; (2) proposes a multidimensional (temporal, spatial and relational) conceptualization of situational presence of other consumers in service encounters and provides strong empirical evidence for its moderating effect on consumers’ emotional responses and encounter satisfaction; and (3) develops a dual-process model of emotional responses to other consumers in service encounters, modeling consumer responses at biologically-based spontaneous level and socially-patterned symbolic level.

This research provides several important managerial implications for practitioners in the hospitality industry. The script theoretical perspective allows hospitality practitioners a way to understand consumer responses to behaviors of other consumers in service encounters. A straightforward application of the script approach is that hospitality business can use explicit behavioral scripts to guide consumer-to-consumer interactions at service encounters. The dual-process model of emotional responses provides hospitality managers a framework to understand consumers’ responses to emotional stimuli from other consumers. Service literature has long recognized the importance of symbolic emotional responses of service providers and this concept has been extensively discussed under the rubric of “emotional labor” (e.g., Grandey, Tam & Brauburger, 2002). However, symbolic emotional responses on the part of consumers are not widely recognized. This research suggests that service managers need to be aware that consumers might also engage in “emotional labor” to deal with other-consumer-elicited negative emotions. Hence, service providers need to be vigilant about potential undesirable behaviors and take actions to reduce the chance for consumers to respond to such behaviors emotionally.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several important limitations associated with this study. First, this study may have traded away some internal validity in order to use scenarios as stimulus material. While it would have been preferable to use real consumption situations, the challenges and ethics of manipulating script-incongruent behaviors and the lack of control in field situations prevented the study from doing so. Second, a measurement-related concern is the lack of multiple indicators to measure symbolic emotional responses. In this study, a two-item scale of emotive dissonance was used to measure symbolic emotional responses. Future studies may want to use multiple measures to assess symbolic emotional responses. Third, as is the case for most studies, the use of student samples constitutes a serious limitation. Although there is no reason to believe that the effects observed in this study are unique to the student sample, a more demographically diverse set of subjects would have been preferable. This study offers some interesting avenues for future research. Future studies can further refine the multidimensional conceptualization of presence of other consumers in service encounters. Future studies may extend this work by developing a measurement scale to reliably assess salience of other consumers in service encounters. Another important task for future investigations is to explore the psychological processes underlying the differential emotional responses observed in the restaurant and airline service context.

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² Selected references are listed here due to page limit. A complete list is available upon request.