Toward a Consumer-Based Framework of Frontline Service Behaviors

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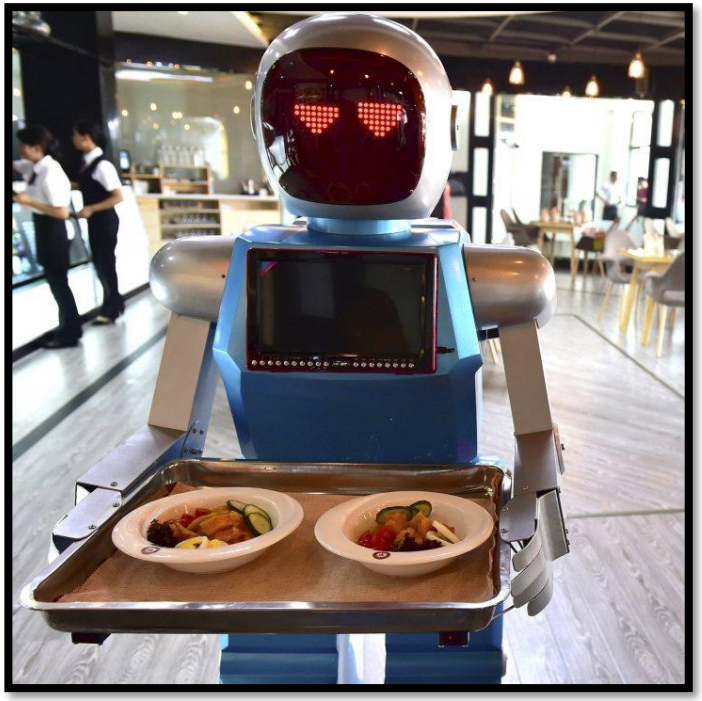
KNOWLEDGE IN ACTION

Introduction



Theoretical background

- The role of technology in the service context is rising
  - Prediction: by 2020, 85% of the interactions between customers and service organizations will be handled without a human employee (Gartner 2011)
  - Technological advances are marking a new age of automation – referred to as the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' (Manyika et al. 2017)

- This increasing role of technology is mainly due to the rising possibilities of technology

- Although the automation of service interactions can be technically and economically feasible (e.g., lower costs), it should also be feasible from **a customer perspective**

Theoretical background

- Prior studies provide preliminary insights into the impact of replacing touch by tech on the customer experience:

Meuter et al. (2005) and Scherer et al. (2015)	technologies can **enhance** the customer experience by providing benefits (e.g. more control).
Caic et al. (2018)	**contrasting results** regarding the potential roles for service robots in value networks of elderly care (i.e. value creation versus value destruction).
Mende et al. (2017)	customers report an **inferior** customer experience when their food is served by a robot versus a human waiter.
Reinders et al. (2008)	completely replacing all human service employees by technologies has a **negative** effect on the customer experience.
Giebelhausen et al. (2014)	customers' reactions to technology-induced service interactions **depend** on the presence of employee rapport.

Theoretical background

- This prior research provides initial insights into the impact of replacing touch by tech on customer experiences and shows that automation can be positively as well as negatively perceived by customers
- However, research examining the **specific frontline service behaviors** that can and cannot be automated is scarce
  - Do restaurant customers prefer to be welcomed by a human or by a robot?
  - Do they like ordering their meals via a tablet or do they prefer ordering via a human waiter?
- Furthermore, several scholars (e.g. Scherer et al. 2015, Larivière et al. 2017) call for research on **balancing touch and tech** in service design
  - For instance, maybe customers prefer that welcoming should be touch but ordering tech

Theoretical background

- To date, several studies have investigated different types of frontline employee behaviors. For instance:

Bowen (2016)	four employee roles: innovator, differentiator, enabler, and coordinator.
Schepers et al. (2012)	in-role behaviors (IRBs) versus extra-role behaviors (ERBs).
Gremler and Gwinner (2008)	five categories of rapport-building behaviors in a retail context: uncommonly attentive behavior, common grounding behavior, courteous behavior, connecting behavior, and information sharing behavior.
Winsted (1997)	seven behaviors of service delivery personnel that are critical when customers evaluate service encounters: civility, personalization, remembering, conversation, congeniality, delivery, and authenticity.

Research gap

- Although frontline service behaviors and service provider roles are existing concepts in service research,
  - overlap between different conceptualizations exist (e.g. ERB and congeniality behaviors),
  - studies are focusing on a specific outcome of behavior (e.g. rapport-building),
  - or are formulated in a rather abstract way (e.g. roles).

- Hence, a **clear and inclusive framework of frontline service behaviors** - i.e. behaviors performed by a service provider (human or technology) during direct interactions with customers - is lacking which hampers our understanding of the balance between touch and tech from a customer perspective.

Research objective

- This study aims to develop **a consumer-based framework of frontline service behaviors**
  - which contributes to our understanding of the touch-tech balance of service design
  - by starting from consumer insights,
  - combining them with existing theoretical concepts from service research,
  - and developing an overview of frontline service behaviors.

Research approach

- The following key service principles are taken into account:

Process-based approach

- Necessary to view the service experience as a series of discrete events characterized by specific behaviors
- In line with the notion of the customer journey

Types of frontline service behaviors

- Core service behaviors
- Social behaviors
- Information sharing behaviors

Customer characteristics

- Technology anxiety
- Need for interaction
- Previous experience

Service characteristics

- SEC-framework

Methodology

- Service design approach (Patricio et al. 2018)
  - This is a human-centered, holistic, and creative approach which offers a mind-set for envisioning service experiences, through an iterative process of exploring, visualizing, and reflecting.
  - "Customers are experts in the activities the service is intended to support and, as such, an in-depth understanding of this experience is crucial for successful service design and innovation" (Patricio et al. 2018, p. 9).

- Two empirical studies and multiple methods were used:
  - Study 1:
    - Diary study (Study 1a)
    - Follow-up interviews (Study 1b)
  - Study 2:
    - Storyboarding
    - Context disruption interview protocol

Study 1 Diary study & follow-up interviews

- Aim
  - Explore various service experiences to understand customers and their contexts
- 28 respondents
- Research Method
  - Online or written diary for three weeks + follow-up interviews
  - Event-based diary design
  - Service categories:

Search	Experience	Credence	X
Bank	Beauty treatments	Bank	Supermarkets
Clothing	Entertainment	Consultancy	
Furniture store	Food & drinks	Healthcare service	
	Hotel		

Study 1 Diary study & follow-up interviews

- Study 1a. Diary: Open-ended questions
  - When?
  - Where?
  - Why?
  - Which service/ products used/bought?
  - Describe chronologically service visit
  - Experience own performed activities?
  - Experience interactions with the employees and / or technology?
  - Activities or interactions in advance concerning this visit?

- Based on diaries service blueprints were developed

Study 1 Diary study & follow-up interviews

- Study 1b. Follow-up interviews
  - semi-structured
  - based on the content of diary as well as the developed blueprints
  - Sequential Incidents Technique (SIT) (Stauss and Weinlich 1997)
  - opinion about automation of certain behaviors or activities

- Data Analysis
  - Nvivo
  - Gioia methodology

Preliminary results Study 1

- Example blueprint FSBs

Pre-core SE	Core SE	Post-core SE
• Recommend a service visit • Book reservation	**Entering** •Greet •Register customer **Search** •Answer questions •Show assortment **Evaluation** •Give advice •Listen to concerns **Preparation receiving products/service** •Take order •Confirm customer made a good choice **Receiving products/service** •Deliver order •Small talk **After-care** •Warn about use product •Give further instructions **Payment** •Scan purchases •Coordination payment **Follow-up** •Make new appointment **Leaving** •Say goodbye •Thank customer	• Delivery • Update concerning results

Preliminary results Study 1

- Quotes

"A salesperson can assess if something doesn't suit you and decide not to force you to buy it and give better advice while such a robot, that is preprogrammed. I will always have a feeling of come on what you are saying is preprogrammed to let met buy as much as possible."

"Yes I would even find it (placing order by using a tablet) better. It goes much faster, there is no miscommunication about your order and you see perfectly what you ordered so the error margin is much smaller if you do it like that."

"Yes, I would regret it, because you are actually going to the butcher for his small talk."

"In small business, I think it maybe would be weird but in larger chains or somewhere where it should go fast I think (complete automation) will work."

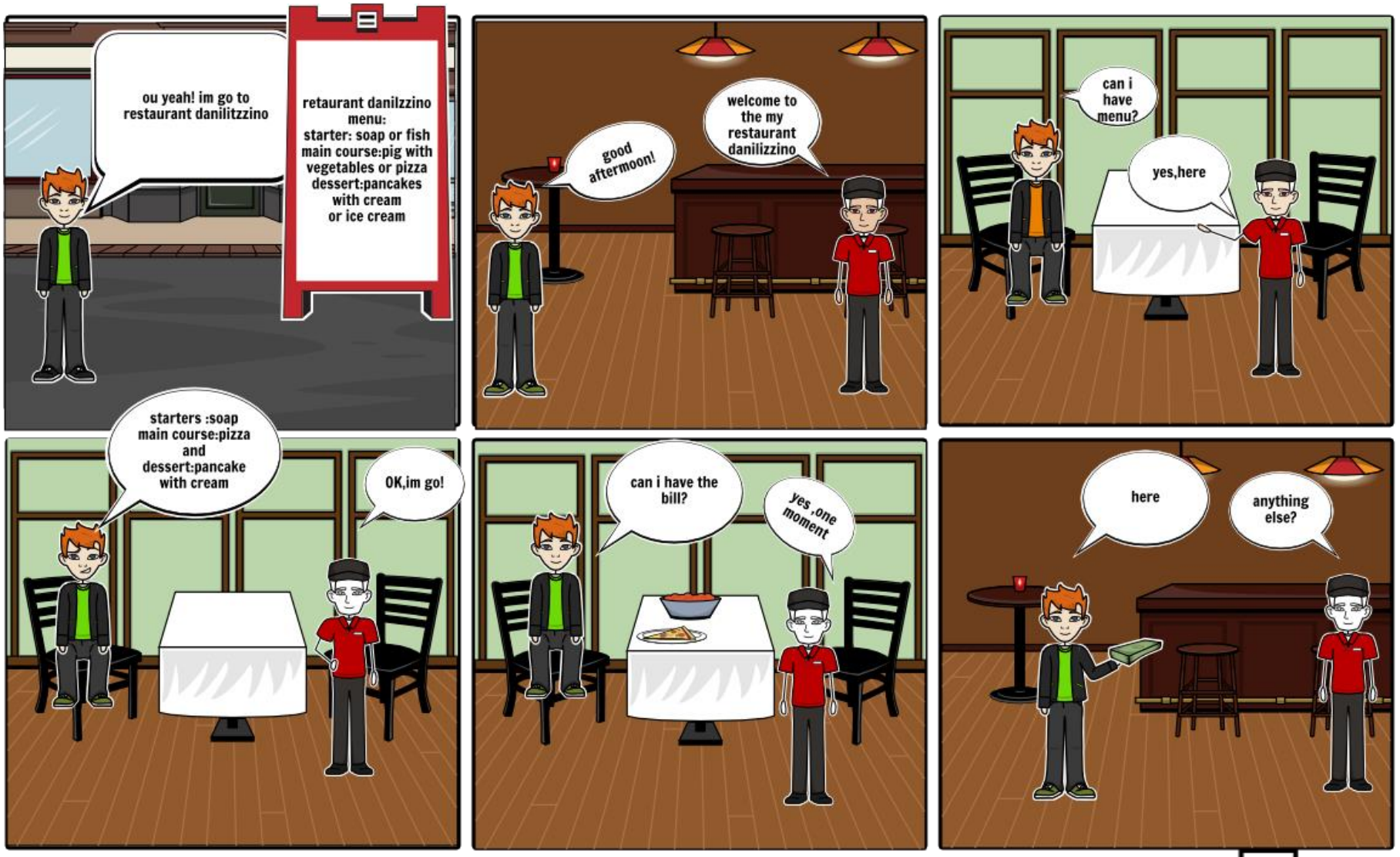
"I think clothes are something personal, you sometimes need some help or someone who says yes that suits you or that's too small or that's too big. And that's something technology can't offer."

Study 2 Storyboarding

- Aim
  - to verify and test the findings of Study 1 by using an alternative method called storyboarding
  - by using multiple storyboards depicting various scenarios, we can include the influence of service context and consumer characteristics in our framework

- Research Method
  - Combination of storyboards with a so-called 'context disruption interview protocol' (Caic et al. 2018)
  - Storyboarding (Goodwin 2009; Teixeira et al. 2016)
    - shows how a service develops over time (visualization of touch points of a service experience)
    - consists of graphical representations such as drawings, images or pictures and can be complemented by a narrative

Study 2 Storyboarding



Conclusion

Theoretical contributions

- bridge theoretical and conceptual studies about the service experience (e.g. Lemon and Verhoef 2016; Voorhees et al. 2017) with empirical studies on specific touch-versus-tech experiments (e.g. Giebelhausen et al. 2014; Mende et al. 2017)
- provides an excellent starting point to organize existing as well as future research on specific touch versus tech questions

Managerial implications

- useful tool for strategic decisions about service design from a customer perspective
- widens the lens through which we view the balance between touch and tech

Questions or suggestions?

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