

## Unintended Consequences in Mundane Service Settings

### Short Abstract:

Improving customer well-being through service has been highlighted as a research priority in recent years, but research to date has neglected mundane service experiences in favor of more explicitly transformative contexts. The present study's focus on commuting responds to calls to extend TSR to a wider range of service settings and to explore the unintended consequences that customers experience. Based on in-depth interviews and survey data, this mixed method study adopts the perspective of the customer journey to explore how service experience touchpoints affect customer well-being. Critically, the findings indicate that negative well-being may be an unintended consequence of otherwise satisfactory service experiences.

**Keywords:** *service experience touchpoints; well-being; mundane service experiences*

## Introduction and Research Aim

The aim of this study is to explore the transformative nature of mundane service experiences in order to identify salient touchpoints and outcomes for well-being.

We address two research questions in line with this aim:

RQ1: to identify the transformative outcomes of service experiences in mundane service settings.

RQ2: to describe how well-being can be affected by touchpoints within and beyond organizational control.

## Background

The idea of service as transformative has emerged as a research priority in recent years (Anderson et al. 2013; Ostrom et al. 2015), yet research in mundane service settings is largely absent despite the potential for impact on day-to-day life. Although interactions or touchpoints between customers and service entities (such as employees, service offerings, or processes) have been conceptualized as important for customer well-being (Anderson et al. 2013), empirical understanding of how and to what extent these affects occur remains limited.

## Methodology

The study employed a sequential exploratory mixed methods design (Creswell 2014). After a qualitative study to gain a broad understanding of the research problem (study 1), the findings informed a second, quantitative study (study 2). In total, 17 semi-structured interviews were conducted with regular commuters to one of the UK's largest cities. Study 1 revealed a range of touchpoints and well-being outcomes associated with public transport commuting. Building on these insights, study 2 quantified the extent to which these touchpoint experiences affect customer well-being.

In total, 800 public transport users from the ten most populous UK cities were recruited for the survey. Structural equation modelling (SEM) was used to test the measurement model and structural model, following the two-stage approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

## Results, Discussion and Contributions

The findings support the idea of well-being as a multi-faceted concept (Anderson et al. 2013). Brand/partner-owned touchpoints exhibited a positive and significant relationship with hedonic, physical and eudaimonic well-being, but not social well-being. The results also support a relationship between customer-owned touchpoints and physical and psychological well-being, but not social well-being. The study found support for significant relationships between social touchpoints and social well-being, physical well-being, and hedonic well-being, but not eudaimonic. The data also support the hypotheses linking journey touchpoints and customer satisfaction. Interestingly, the results offer no support for a relationship between satisfaction and any elements of well-being.

The strong relationships among physical, hedonic, and eudaimonic aspects of well-being in the case of brand/partner-owned and customer-owned touchpoints (Yao et al. 2015) confirm the relevance of well-being in mundane service settings. Although the hypothesized relationships between brand/partner- and customer-owned touchpoints and social well-being were rejected, there is evidence that social touchpoints within the journey are associated with hedonic, social, and physical well-being. This suggests that, for some customers, the opportunity to interact while commuting may be perceived as positive (Ettema et al. 2012), although potentially detrimental to physical well-being in negative commuting experiences (Cheng 2010; Mohd Mahudin, Cox, and Griffiths 2012; Tirachini, Hensher, and Rose 2013). The strong relationship between brand/partner-owned touchpoints and customer satisfaction is not surprising in itself; the lack of relationship between customer satisfaction and any of our well-being measures is more significant and lends support to criticism of the weak relationship between satisfaction

and other dependent variables (such as loyalty) and the triviality of investing in improved satisfaction (Kumar, Pozza, and Ganesh, 2013; Keiningham et al. 2014).

### **Implications for Theory and Practice**

Findings suggest that satisfactory service experiences can have negative consequences for customers; although “satisfied,” they may be experiencing physical discomfort, social and emotional deprivation, lack of purpose, and unhappiness. While experiences at different touchpoints throughout the commuting journey were found to influence customer satisfaction, no significant association was observed between customer satisfaction and well-being. These findings not only support the view that customer satisfaction and well-being are distinct (Sirgy, Lee, and Rahtz 2007) but suggest that satisfaction does not always enhance customer well-being. This aligns with efforts to extend current understanding of service experiences beyond customer satisfaction (Bennett and Rundle-Thiele 2004; Dagger and Sweeney 2006), as psychological, physical, and social well-being are identified as crucial outcomes, at least in the context of commuting by public transport.

The study offers a more nuanced understanding of the importance of different touchpoints along the customer journey and how these relate to key aspects of customer well-being. The demonstrable importance of customer-owned touchpoints has some interesting managerial implications. If consumers see themselves as part of the service—for example, in planning and executing the journey—this will impact positively on their sense of purpose, happiness, and physical wellbeing. Finally, our findings point to the important effects, both positive and negative, of fellow passengers on commuter wellbeing, including happiness, physical comfort, and feelings of companionship or isolation. Managers should look for creative ways of mitigating commuters’ negative impact on each other; for example, internal layouts within buses and trains could be reconfigured to accommodate more ergonomic seating and standing arrangements that reduce any such negative impacts.

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