

Special Article

## A Conceptual Analysis of Nurses' Customer-Oriented Behavior, Job Satisfaction and Affective Commitment in Malaysia

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Customer-oriented behavior is an important approach by the organization in order to achieve higher quality service. Recently, many companies have started to enhance customer-oriented behavior on their employee especially frontline employees in various industries namely insurance, logistic, banking and healthcare. However, previous literature provides limited discussion on the relationship between customer-oriented behavior (COB) and other variables such as affective commitment and job satisfaction especially in the Malaysian healthcare context.

**Aim:** The aim of this paper is to provide a conceptual analysis of the relationship between job satisfaction, customer-oriented behavior and affective commitment among the nurses in Malaysian context. This paper applies the Affect Theory of Social Exchange and Self Determination Theory to examine the relationship between the study variables.

**Results:** This conceptual analysis proposes that individuals who possess high level of job satisfaction will demonstrate high level of customer-oriented behavior. On the contrary individuals who possess low level of job satisfaction will demonstrate low level of customer-oriented behavior. In addition, those individuals who are strong in affective commitment will have positive outcomes on job satisfaction and exhibiting better customer-oriented behavior.

**Research Implications:** This paper attempts to introduce affective commitment as a moderator on the relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior. The outcome of this study may guide future empirical study in various healthcare centers such as public clinics, community clinics and dental clinics.

**Keywords:** Affective Commitment, Job satisfaction, Customer-Oriented Behavior, Nurses

### Introduction

Efforts in understanding how employees could effectively establish and maintain long term positive relationships with their customers have led researchers to study and understand the term "Customer Orientation". Customer orientation concept was developed from the studies related to market orientation and being a subset of market orientation (Jaworski and Kohli, 1993).

Customer orientation is a concept and belief that always put the customer's interest as first priority and it embraces owners, managers and employees to create a profitable business for long term (Deshpande, Farley and Webster, 1993).

The term customer-oriented behavior refers to particular behaviors exhibited by an individual during the interaction with his or her customers that will lead to customer satisfaction (Farrell,

Souchon and Furden, 2001). According to Chih, Huang, Yang and Hsu (2009) in recent years, many companies had started to invest on the remarkable resources to enhance customer-oriented behavior of their employees. Due to this reason, several researchers have gone into understanding the antecedents of these variables.

Scholarly research in both marketing and organizational psychology suggests that job satisfaction is one of the factors that affect the performance of service personnel (Liao and Chuang, 2004). In other words, organization should put more effort in understanding employees' needs and evaluate the level of the employee job satisfaction.

High job satisfaction will increase the service quality offered by the employee and train them to be customer-oriented. This is echoed by Hartline and Ferrell (1996) in their study stated that satisfied workers provide better service to their customers.

Recently, affective commitment has been regarded as a moderating variable on the relationship of job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior. It is noticed that individuals may start to develop organizational commitment during their initial entry to the organization and subsequently interpret job satisfaction in accordance with their level of commitment (Lund, 2003; Huang and Hsiao, 2007).

In other words, employees who are more committed to the organization will develop higher satisfaction level which is consistent with their commitment to reduce cognitive.

Additionally, literature also reveals that affective commitment in particular, represent a mental state that truly reflect the works association with organization and the capability of an individual in handling extra role behaviors (Gelade and Young, 2005).

Hence, by referring to the above explanation, a study of the role of affective commitment as moderator is needed because it reduce or enhance the direction of the relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior.

## Literature Review

### *Customer-Oriented Behavior in the Healthcare Contexts*

Customer-oriented behavior has been conceptualized from customer orientation literature in the marketing management.

Customer orientation was defined as a group of actions taken by the business provider to support their sales business and service staff based on the prioritization of customer needs and satisfaction (Kohli and Jaworski, 1993). By defining the work behaviour itself, it is the range of actions or response of an individual as well as group to an action, environment, person or stimulus.

Various definitions of customer-oriented behavior have been defined by researchers. Saxe and Weitz (1982) viewed customer-oriented as the practice of marketing concept at individual level and described customer-oriented behavior as behavior of an individual which focus on resolving customer problems, meeting customer needs, ensure customer satisfaction and long term profitability.

In the healthcare context, customer-oriented behavior is defined as the extent in which the nurses' and healthcare personnel understand the needs of the patients. By understanding their needs, nurses and healthcare personnel are able to help the patients and provide solution which is suitable to the patients. This will lead to better nursing care that fulfills the expectation of the patients. (Chien, Chou and Hung, 2008).

According to Lanjananda and Patterson (2009), Johari and Ong (2013) and Ong and Johari (2014) nurses who possess high customer-oriented behaviour will always assist the patients and provide the best interest of nursing care in responding to patients' needs during their stay in the hospital.

They provide useful treatment in term of medical care, which may help the patients to make a better recovery. They also offer great assistance in specific therapy that would help the patients to recover faster.

According most researchers, nursing performance is different from services quality as nursing performance is heavily depend on the nurses' personal attributes to provide care to their patients (Chien, *et al.*, 2008). Nurses-patients relationship plays an important role in fulfilling patients' need and achieving patient satisfaction (Ong and Johari, 2013).

The roles of nurses in the hospital are more critical compared to others personnel, patients and their family members are more concern about the nursing care they receive in the hospital.

Generally, patients are unable to accurately evaluate the technical outcome of the treatment as well as the medical diagnosis performance. However, patients are able to evaluate the nursing care they received by focusing on the interpersonal interaction with the nurses.

Eventually, patient's experiences in the hospital in particular related to nursing care will be used to evaluate whether the care provided has met their expectations (Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Thus, nurses' customer-oriented behavior becomes important element in meeting patients' needs in healthcare industry.

### **Job Satisfaction**

Job satisfaction is the most frequently studied variable in organizational behavior research and also a central variable in both research and theory of organizational phenomena (Al-Hussami, 2008). Job satisfaction is defined as a single globe concept referring to the overall satisfaction level by Lee and Ahmad (2008) or a multiple dimensional concept that refers to the psychological or sociological factors (Kalliath and Beck, 2001; Hulin and Judge, 2003; Ssesanga and Garret, 2005; Rad and Yarmohammadian, 2006; Hashim, 2010).

In general, job satisfaction is explained as psychological measures of a degree to which employee is satisfied and happy with the job (Kalliath and Beck, 2001). However, in the healthcare context, job satisfaction of nurses is represented by nurses' attitudes towards providing nursing care to the patients in meeting their expectation (Moradi, Obaid, Idrus, and Moghadam, 2011).

Job satisfaction at the workplace has wide implications on individual and organization.

Various researches reported that overall job satisfaction relates to absenteeism, employee turnover intention, extra-role behaviors, organizational commitment, employee loyalty and job performance (Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Allen and Meyer, 1996; Meyer, Standley, Herscovitch and Topolaytsky, 2002; Moradi *et al.*, 2011; Chew, Ramli, Omar and Ismail, 2013). In addition, scholars have indicated that job satisfaction could affect customer-oriented behavior (Hoffman and Ingram, 1992; Donovan, Brown and Mowen, 2004; Mechinda and Patterson, 2011). Employee' job satisfaction has always been as important issues for healthcare industry with the reasons that satisfied employees tend to be more productive by paying more attention on patients' need, creative in resolving patients' problem and committed to their organization (Al-Hussami, 2008).

In addition, the Affect Theory of Social Exchange shows that the level of nurses' job satisfaction resulted from the outcome of the social exchanges such as support among co-worker, relationship between organization & employees, rewards and recognition. When the social exchange is successful, the nurses will experience positive emotion and show positive effect on customer-oriented behaviour.

Therefore, it is suggested that job satisfaction is a predictor of customer-oriented behavior variable. On this basis, it is proposed that:

**Proposition 1:** Individual who possesses high level of job satisfaction will demonstrate high level of customer-oriented behavior.

### **Affective Commitment**

Across the literature study of organizational commitment, there are different conceptualizations on organizational commitment by different researchers. For example several researchers described organizational commitment as an attitude (Porter, Steers, Mowday and Boulian, 1974; Mowday *et al.*, 1982; Meyer and Allen, 1991; Meyer and Allen, 1997 and O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996) and some researchers include behavior in the definitions of organizational commitment

(Mowday et al, 1982; Mathieu and Zajac, 1990; Brown, 1996).

According to Meyer and Allen (1997), organizational commitment is an individual's feelings about the organization as a whole and is defined as "a psychological state that characterized the employee's relationships with the organization and it has implications for the decision to continue membership in organization".

Additionally, Meyer and Allen (1991) developed the three most important dimensions of organizational commitment namely:

Affective commitment (AC),

Normative commitment (NC) and

Continuance commitment (CC).

Affective commitment (AC) describes an employee's emotional bond with his or her organization. Normative commitment (NC) explains an employee's feelings of obligation, their duty and moral responsibility to remain in the organization. On the other hand, continuance commitment (CC) describes an employees' awareness of the cost of leaving the organization. Affective commitment has been proposed over other types of organizational commitment in the present study because affective commitment relates to person's emotional attachment to their organization and it has strong correlation with desirable outcomes (Caldwell and Burger, 1998). In the healthcare context, organizational commitment is defined as the relationship between member and the hospital and the willingness of the individual to be part of the membership. This suits with the categorization of affective commitment by Meyer and Allen (1991) that personnel with high affective commitment remain in the organization because they wanted to work in the organization.

Affective commitment has been proposed as a moderator of job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior in this study. Two supportive statements have been offered with regard to the nature of the moderating effects. Firstly, strong affective commitment gives employees a sense of positive affect for their work and makes efforts to achieve the organization's goals and enhance customer satisfaction by exhibiting

better customer-oriented behavior (Gelade and Young, 2005; Meyer and Maltin, 2010). Secondly, highly committed individual are found to have positive outcomes related to job satisfaction against those who have low level of affective commitment (Rasool, Arzu, Hasan, Rafi, and Rauf, 2013). Hence, based on the above explanation, the second proposition is:

**Proposition 2:** Affective commitment moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior.

### Underpinning Theory

#### *The Affect Theory of Social Exchange*

The affect theory of social exchange is the expansion of the social exchange theory. Originally, the social exchange theory was introduced by sociologist Homans (1961) and was defined as exchange of activity between two persons regardless whether the activity is tangible or intangible, more or less rewarding. The affect theory of social exchanges expanded the domain of social exchange in two ways, namely outcome of the exchange and quintessential joint activity. Outcome of the exchange is refers to the construct of rewards or the punishments as having emotional effects that vary in form and intensity. Quintessential joint activity however refers to the contingent on the exchange structure or so call shared responsibility. The joint activity can only be completed with at least two actors or two individuals and they are accountable for the outcome of the shared responsibility. Owing to the reasons that the affect theory of social exchange incorporates the emotion elements (in this case job satisfaction) as a core feature of social exchange process and the emotions that an individual engage may result in showing reciprocal behaviours, this theory is very much related to this study. On top of that, this theory has been acknowledged by the researchers such as Sierra and McQuitty (2005) to support one of their hypotheses in their study of service providers and customers: social exchange theory and service loyalty and Chih, *et. al.* (2009) on the study in life insurance company in Taiwan. In addition, this theory suggested that job satisfaction of frontline employees having positive effect on customer-oriented behaviour.

### ***The Self-Determination Theory***

Self-determination theory is one of the conceptual models that have the ability to demonstrated substantial predictive value and influence human behavior. Self-determination theory focuses on the degree to which the behavior of an individual is based on self-motivation and self-determination without any external interference (Ryan and Deci, 2000). According to Deci and Ryan (2000), self-determination theory is a formal theory of motivation that defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation. Intrinsic motivations refer to individuals initiating an activity for its own sake of interest and satisfying themselves without considering the operational consequences.

Comparatively, extrinsic motivation refers to the performance of activities with the pressure or intention from outside of an individual. Individuals will engage in behaviors they are perceived as satisfying, enjoyable and fulfilling when the individuals experience intrinsic motivation.

On the other hand, individuals will engage in behaviors merely when the individuals experience extrinsic motivation in where the tangible rewards or praise was given (Ryan and Deci (2002). Different types of motivation will lead to different outcomes regardless of the strength of motivation (Vansteenkiste, Lens, Witte and Feather, 2005).

This theory is very much related to this study as it applies to nurses' perception in determining the social and environment context which will then influence their intrinsic motivation. The intrinsic motivation that was developed will reflects the satisfaction level of the nurses which is consistent with their affective commitment level and impact the level of customer-oriented behavior.

### **Theoretical Framework**

One of the main approaches to study job satisfaction and to predict their customer-oriented behavior will be The Affect Theory of Social Exchange. The social relationships of the affect theory of social exchange are source of emotions and it attempts to characterize the

distinct emotional effects of different exchange structures. The emotions (job satisfaction) resulting from the social exchanges will affect the social relations (customer-oriented behavior) in where successful service or successful relationship with frontline employee will positively impact customer satisfaction. On top of that, affective commitment was proposed as a moderator of job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior.

Affective commitment represents mental states that truly reflect the work association with organization and the capability of an individual with extra role behavior. Figure 1 illustrated the proposed theoretical framework in order to address the aim of this study. The dependent variable of this study is customer-oriented behavior and the independent variable is job satisfaction. The affective commitment has been selected as the moderating variable where it moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior.

### **Research Implications**

#### ***Theoretical Implications***

This paper intends to propose a theoretical framework to examine the moderating variables of affective commitment on the relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior among nurses in Malaysia. Few past studies had focused on the study of moderating variables on the relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behavior namely emotional intelligence (Chih, *et. al.*, 2009) and selling experience (Ramendra and Gopal, 2013). However, the studies did not specifically focus on the moderating effect of affective commitment. Thus, the outcome of this study may add to the literature of affective commitment as a moderator which may guide future empirical research.

In addition, this paper is one of the few studies attempts to examine the relationship between job satisfaction and customer-oriented behaviour in the healthcare context by applying the Affect Theory of Social Exchange and Self Determination Theory.

### Practical Implications

In terms of practical implications, this study provides a research framework which will lead to the understanding of employee's job satisfaction to shape employee customer-oriented behavior (Joo and McLean, 2006). Employees who reported high level of affective commitment are more focused in their work compared to employees who reported low level of affective commitment (Mattila, 2004). As such, nurses who are high on affective commitment may exhibit more customer-oriented behavior. The practice of job satisfaction and affective commitment in the healthcare context will assist the management in generating high level of customer-oriented behavior in the hospitals.

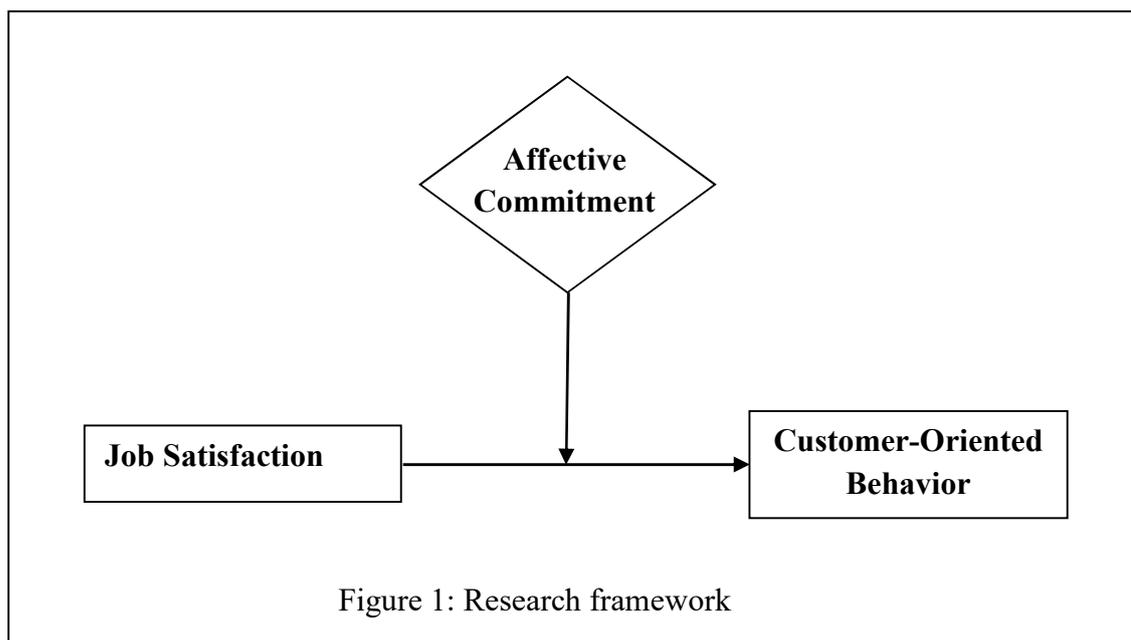
Additionally, it is believed that the findings from this study will be relevant for future research in other healthcare centers that are equally important such as public clinics, community clinics and dental clinics or the frontline

employees of other service industries such as restaurants, insurance, banking, public service department and post office

### Conclusion

To date, the application of Affect Theory of Social Exchange and Self-Determination Theory in the proposed theoretical framework has received little attention. Thus, the proposition of this study may provide information to healthcare managers to incorporate the emotion element of job satisfaction as a core feature of social exchange that may result in exhibiting positive customer-oriented behavior among the nurses.

Additionally, the introduction of affective commitment is expected to explain a kind of engage and affection display by the nurses toward the hospitals. By examining the moderating effect of affective commitment, it may assist the management in enhancing customer-oriented behavior among nurses in the hospitals.



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