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# The Roles of Customer Expectation and Emotion in Service Experience

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research advanced the development for a theoretical framework of service experience in Service Science discipline. Service experience is composed of a series of complicated services and influenced by many factors. Customer psychological status is the important one to be investigated. Accordingly, we proposed a theoretical framework of service experience based on the perspectives of customer expectation and emotion. Good customer expectation management for service providers will increase the opportunity of customer satisfaction of service experience. In order to ensure that customers can have positive behaviors and responses during service experience delivery, developing an atmospheric service context to generate positive customer emotion is also important. Three hypothetical propositions are provided to illustrate the theoretical framework of service experience. This study evaluated the theoretical framework of service experience by using the multi-method. The analysis results from interviews and questionnaires are the solid evidences to support the theoretical framework of service experience.

## **Keywords**

Service Experience, Customer Expectation, Customer Emotion, Service Science.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Leading customers to have appropriate service experience has been the essential business goal of service providers (Heskett et al., 1994). Service providers change their business position on staging the “experience” rather than only delivering the “service” to increase the competence in the market. Service experience is composed of a series of services within dissimilar service encounters. Edvardsson et al. (2005) “defined a service experience as a service process that creates customers’ cognitive, emotional and behavioral responses.” Satisfactory service experience enables customers to have exciting and wonderful memories in each service encounter. Hence, it is important for service providers to deliver satisfactory service experience for attracting more customers and gaining returns.

In addition, service providers have to carefully consider the related influences embedded in services that can directly affect customer perception and behavior, especially in real-time and changeable service contexts. Although there have been many studies focusing on the design and management of service experience (Berry et al., 2006), to our knowledge, there is no recognized theories or propositions to interpret existing phenomenon in service experience.

Service experience lacks the intellectual rigor of these other business disciplines, such as finance having economy theory as its foundation and also containing diverse theories of the organizational behavior, marketing and psychology aspects (Schmenner and Swink, 1998). Building a substantial theoretical framework can help service providers well design service experience and manage the delivery process by recognizing the key factors and influences in it. This study investigates the issue of building a theoretical framework of service experience and the research results could contribute and respond to aforementioned questions.

Consequently, the purposes of this study are to clarify the relationships among customer expectation, emotion and service experience, to explore and develop a fundamental theoretical framework of service experience, to propose research propositions for evaluating the theoretical framework of service experience.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Service Experience**

Pine and Gillmore (1998) indicated that service providers have to provide customers with appropriate service experience in order to acquire high customer satisfaction in the era of the experience economy. Voss et al. (2004) also noted that experience-centric services are important and continuously developed a series of service encounters and interactive activities

for customers. Consequently, delivering memorable and exciting experiences for customers is a necessary way to fulfill their wants.

When customer perceived service experiences, customer mental states would influence the perception of service experience. One important factor is customer expectation. Recognizing customer expectation is necessary for service providers to offer quality service experience. Besides, Berry et al. (2006) described that customer expectation is an important factor that service providers can access the performance of service experience. Customers' expectations are key determinants of their consumption experiences, satisfaction, and loyalty (Ofir and Simonson, 2007).

The other vital factor is customer emotion. Customer emotion plays an important role which can influence customer perception of services and customer responses (Mattila and Enz, 2002). Consequently, to establish useful and effective instruments to measure customer emotion is necessary for service providers to immediately realize their emotional responses. Customers during service recovery need to be responded to negative emotions and encouraged positive emotions by considerable services (e.g., alternative resolutions, or friendly employee greeting and serving).

Furthermore, service operation is "essentially operations research applied to service settings" (Chase, 1996). Hence, service operation is one vital factor to influence service experiences. According to the above past studies, service operation, customer expectation and customer emotion have significantly effects on what customers perceive during service experience delivery. Consequently, this research utilizes major factors (that is, service operation, customer expectation, and customer emotion) as the fundamental basis for establishing a conceptual theoretical framework for service experiences.

**Customer Expectation**

Previous researchers kept evolving and extending the conceptual model of expectations, putting a lot of effort to pinpoint the critical element within customer expectations. These researchers offered multi-levels of customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1991; Zeithaml et al., 1993). Parasuraman et al. (1991) proposed that customer expectation comprises two levels: desired and adequate. The desired expectation represents the level of a service that a customer hopes to receive. The adequate expectation is the low level of a service that a customer can accept. The section between the desired expectation and the adequate expectation is the zone of tolerance. Zeithaml et al. (1993) proposed a comprehensive framework of service expectations and clarified customer expectations by 11 antecedent factors which could affect the desired service level and the adequate service level (as depicted in Figure 1). In this study, the existing services of service providers are defined in relation to the expectation determinants.

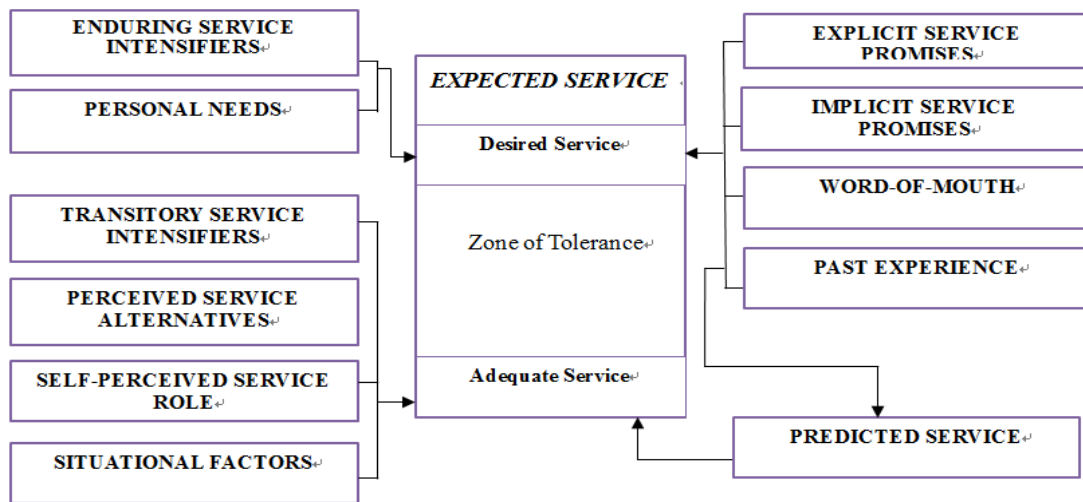


Figure 1. Nature and determinants of customer expectations (Zeithaml et al., 1993)

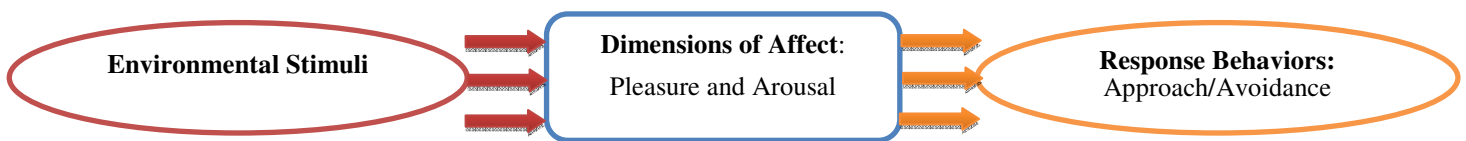


Figure 2. The Mehrabian-Russell model (Mehrabian and Russell, 1973)

**Customer Emotion**

Even customer expectation management is vital and aid service providers to deliver proper services to customers, actual customer behaviors are still hard to grasp and understand. Pullman and Gross (2004) noted that designing service experiences needs to take customer emotion into account. The Mehrabian-Russell model (as shown in Figure 2) shows that external environment stimulus (e.g., crowd, service quality, frontline etc.) influences customer emotional status, such as pleasure, and arousal. According to the appraisal theory of emotions (Roseman, 1991), services providers would suitably prompt customers to have joyful and exciting emotions. Building a positive emotional environment (e.g., pleasant or exciting conditions) for customers is important by considering service operation. In this study, service operation is defined as the key environmental stimulus based on the Mehrabian-Russell model. As a result of the importance of service operation, this study relies on several tactics of service operation (such as an appropriate environment setting, friendly employee service, and advanced technology) to provide an atmospheric service environment where customers easily have positive emotions and behaviors.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH PROPOSITION DEVELOPMENT**

**Proposition 1**

As mentioned earlier, Zeithaml et al. (1993) proposed a comprehensive framework of service expectations and clarified customer expectations by eleven antecedent factors which can affect the desired and adequate expectations. Hence, as shown in Figure 3, service providers can employ the determinants of expectation to influence customer expectations. Service providers expect to implement different expectation management strategies (e.g., to narrow the zone of tolerance by increasing the adequate expectation and decreasing the desired expectation) for their strategic goals (such as increasing the threshold of the market entrance) (Hsieh et al., 2011).

With our extended use of the desired and adequate service levels, service providers can change spontaneously because customers have mental vibrations across different services as well as different service contexts. Accordingly, the zone of tolerance of customer expectation could become wide (expansion), stable (monotony), or narrow (diminution) during service experience delivery. That is, service providers can have the appropriate zone of tolerance of customers by managing adequate and desired customer expectation based on the suitable expectation management strategy. Hence, proposition P1 is to test this expectation and derived as follows:

**P1: The better the level of customer expectation management, the more appropriate the level of the zone of tolerance.**

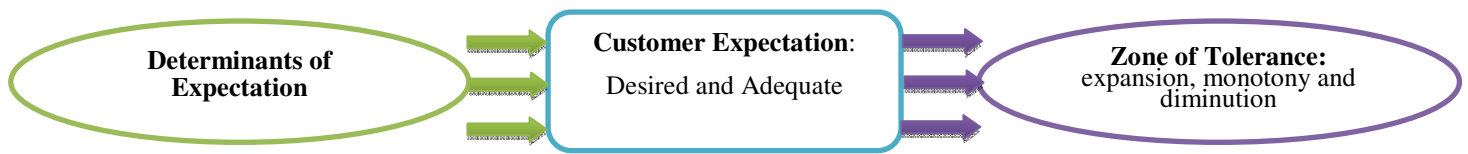


Figure 3. The Expectation Model

**Proposition 2**

Haber (1958) indicated there is a unidirectional relationship between customer expectation and customer emotion. When customers have high expectations and can't perceive the service well, customers easily get negative emotions (Liljander and Strandvik, 1997). On the other hand, when customer perception highly exceeds customer expectation, customers have high satisfaction which results in the positive emotional status. Service providers have to manage customer expectation to closely fulfill customer needs and customers can experience the good perception of services for generating positive emotion. Accordingly, we would like to propose proposition P2 to verify this relevance between customer expectation and emotion.

**P2: Positive customer expectation evaluates the level of customer emotion.**

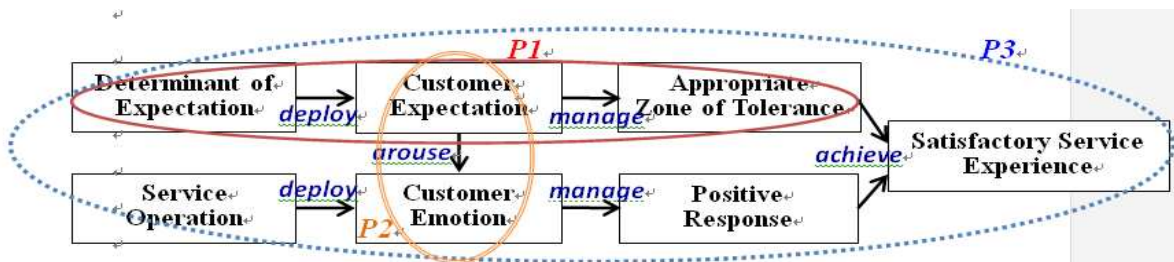


Figure 4. The theoretical framework of service experience

### Proposition 3

As mentioned earlier, even though customer expectation management is a critical way to aid service providers to create the opportunity which customers can easily acquire suitable services, there is no guaranty that customers can actually take on the positive behaviors (e.g., using the service, purchasing the service, or changing the cognitive decision) in service contexts. However, if service providers can manage customer expectation to generate positive customer emotions, customers can have the positive behaviors and achieve high customer satisfaction. Customer emotion can significantly and dynamically influence service experience during service delivery (Chase and Dasu, 2001). When service providers can dynamically manage customer expectation and enable customers to have positive emotions, they can acquire high customer satisfaction. Accordingly, we propose proposition P3 to investigate this argument.

P3: A positive relationship exists between the level of appropriate customer expectation on the basis of good customer emotion and the level of satisfactory service experience.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Multi-method

In order to evaluate the theoretical framework and research propositions of service experience which is a complex and multi-dimensional issue, this study utilizes the quantitative and qualitative methods which is called multi-method (Dubé and Paré, 2003). The multi-method study analyzes a single case study and conduct in-depth interviews, and surveys for deeply evaluation. Accordingly, this study not only used the single case study by conducting deep interviews to scrutinize existing problems of a service experience phenomenon but also employed questionnaire surveys to examine the findings of the single case study.

### Case Introduction

The exhibition service context is a suitable environment to be illustrated the scenario of service experience. Hence, an exhibition service system, which is the Ubiquitous Exhibition Service System (so-called UESS), is applied to an exhibition service context (i.e., Taipei World Trade Center Nangang exhibition hall). The stakeholders in an exhibition are exhibitors (i.e., service providers) and visitors (i.e., customers). We selected Taipei International Sporting Goods Show (i.e., TaiSPO) which was held from 4/29 to 5/2 in 2010. For building an atmospheric service context in accordance with the importance of service operation, exhibitors have to have appropriate service operation design and implementation in the exhibition service context. In order to increase the quality of service experience, a handheld device (so-called Orbi) integrating with the UESS is provided for every visitor in the exhibition who can receive, search and collect all services (such as, recommendation service of exhibitors, reminder service for meetings, or ranking service for popular services) via Orbi.

### Reliability and Validity

We collected the major data by conducting interviews with five international visitors who never used a smart handheld device combining a service system during the journey of the exhibition in their past experiences (see Table 1). Besides, direct observations, and questionnaire results were also employed to infer and conclude our findings. In order to enhance the rigor of this qualitative study, this research followed the quantitative methodological guidelines (Yin, 2003) to ensure the validity and reliability of this study.

Code Name	Gender	If Had Exhibition Experiences	If Ever Used A Handheld Device	Continent
TOP-1001	Male	Yes	No	Asia
TOP-1008	Male	Yes	No	South America
TOP-1014	Female	Yes	No	Asia
TOP-1034	Male	Yes	No	Asia
TOP-1688	Male	Yes	No	Europe

**Table 1. The brief information of interviewees**

## RESULTS ANALYSIS

### Empirical Results of Evaluating the Proposition 1

When service providers can offer suitable services to serve customers, customer expectations could be affected and they could also change their mental cognition to possibly generate unanticipated behaviors. For example, a visitor originally would like to call on specific exhibitors that were planned before attending the exhibition. While this visitor can find other potential exhibitors via the platform of the UESS, the visitor can additionally visit these optional cooperative exhibitors rather than only visiting the scheduled exhibitors. The visitor (TOP-1014) indicated this point as follows:

*In our company, although we had several meetings to discuss and analyze which exhibitors to visit before attending the TAISPO exhibition, Orbi can give us the additional and useful services and information of related exhibitors. This really help us to have many good opportunities to contract and visit unexpected exhibitors for the cooperation in the future.*

Besides, the visitors are the representatives of their companies to find the potential exhibitors and try to contact with them in the exhibition. In the past, the visitors had to make more effort to collect any kinds of commercial information and meeting records by themselves. The visitor (TOP-1001) was convinced that it would be significant to change the visitor behaviors when the services were helpful and useful for visitors to deal with the effort:

*While using Orbi, I do not need to write any notes and bring any kinds of exhibitor advertisements in the TAISPO exhibition. It is really a novel service for visitors and exhibitors and also will influence the visiting way of visitors in the future.*

According to interview results, visitors have set up their business purposes and target exhibitors in enterprises, such as making contracts and visiting new inventions with existing partnerships, before taking part in the exhibition. Visitors have already expected what they should pay attention to and need to do for their enterprises in limited time during the exhibition. However, after serving via Orbi and the UESS, visitor expectation obviously changed. They accepted additional services and information to participate in exhibition service activities to co-create values with potential exhibitors rather than only following the fixed routines. Visitor expectation, therefore, was apparently and dynamically managed that resulted in an appropriate psychological status. Consequently, P1 can be sufficiently supported.

### Empirical Results of Evaluating the Proposition 2

As mentioned earlier, appropriate service operation management can build an atmospheric service environment where customers easily have positive emotions. Hence, P2 should be evaluated cautiously. According to the interviewees' feedback, visitors had positive emotional status when they were obviously brought the different experiential feeling. The visitor (TOP-1001) thought that Orbi helped him to deal with the common bothers and problems in the exhibition and enable him to have a positive emotional status:

*When I strolled in the exhibition in the past, I always felt very uneasy. Since there were a lot of booths in the exhibition, I did not easily find the exhibitor location that I wanted to visit and also was afraid that I could not gather enough information of exhibitors... Hence, Orbi can help me deal with these problems and make me feel more relieved within the exhibition.*

The visitor (TOP-1688) did not have the experience of using an intelligent device in the exhibition. He obviously expressed his ebullience of the experience and also indicated that utilizing the Orbi device and services can make him feel easy to complete his jobs:

*I have learned that the technology (Orbi) is really useful for practice rather than only reading in the paper or books...After using Orbi, I also feel comfortable and then exciting that I can quickly get the useful information...*

We aggregate some feeling terminologies from interviewees including relieved, comfortable and exciting. These terminologies are closed to customer emotional status which means customers perceived uncommon services by using Orbi to result in these positive emotions. Furthermore, visitors may not clearly express what emotions they have after using Orbi. We still can analyze their key words, tones and body language to understand their emotions. The visitor (TOP-1014) used the pleasure tone to describe what helpful services she used:

*Orbi provides us with many helpful services, for example, collection, my location and product/exhibitor search service. It is very convenient for me to have a totally different exhibition experience compared with my past experiences. I think this device may enable C visitors to have more not bad and fresh feelings in the exhibition.*

The visitor (TOP-1008) is a professional visitor who has taken part in TAISPO exhibition several times and he considered that applying the UESS is an important innovation to make progress in the exhibition. He happily praised the implementation of the UESS:

*It is very convenient for me to quickly to search the exhibitors. I can also search the information of exhibitors, product and some activities. I had taken part in the TAISPO exhibition in 2004 and this time I feel more changeable especially using the Orbi device.*

All interviewees emphasized that “convenience” is the major feeling while employing the UESS. Besides, the visitor (TOP-1008) had the “changeable” feeling to describe his using experience. However, even though the terminologies of convenient and changeable can’t belong to the emotion, these terminologies are to express that the delivered services from Orbi are suitable and good to them. They were sure that staying a positive emotional status in the exhibition while being served by the Orbi device and services.

The visitors’ feedback shows that they stayed in a comfortable and pleasure exhibition environment with positive emotions when they interacted and were served by the UESS and Orbi with exhibitors. The delivered services not only fulfilled their needs but also brought visitors memorable and joyful feelings. Accordingly, satisfactory customer expectation management can be an efficacious stimulus to lead customers to have the positive emotional status. Hence, P2 survives empirical testing.

### **Empirical Results of Evaluating the Proposition 3**

Customer behaviors are the key clue to the understanding of customer satisfaction while perceiving service experience. According to Pullman and Gross (2004), customer recommendation is a word-of-mouth behavior when customers are satisfied with perceived services. Besides, service quality is a critical measurement for customer satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The delivered services from service providers should fulfill customer expectation and solve customers’ problems. An additional key to understand customer satisfaction is commitment (Yi and La, 2004). After customers have high satisfaction of perceived services, trust of the services can be accumulated for customers whose behaviors will be directly altered. Hence, this study analyzed the positive visitor behaviors including willing to recommend, past shortcoming improving and actual behavior changing by summarizing experienced impressions of interviewees to test P3. Besides, in order to gather more evidences for testing P3, we also conducted a questionnaire survey to ask visitors.

#### *Willing to Recommend*

An important clue to catch customer satisfaction is to check if customers are willing to recommend the experiential services to others. When customers strongly encourage that Orbi must be continuously utilized in the exhibition, it means that they do trust and are satisfied with the Orbi device and services. For example, the visitor (TOP-1008) who is high-tech device user highly advocated implementing the UESS to the exhibition:

*In this exhibition, I have learned that the technology (Orbi) is real useful for practice rather than only reading in the paper or books... I scored 10 for the Orbi service, and I recommend to continuously applying this service into the exhibitions.*

Furthermore, the visitor (TOP-1001) had good experiences in using Orbi and also suggested that the UESS should be well applied in the exhibition:

*For the overall service performances, I give 7. It is very worthy applying this service system into the exhibition. I strongly recommend continuously promoting and using in the future.*

The visitor (TOP-1034) is a professional visitor more than 10 years. Although he has some negative viewpoints of using Orbi in the exhibition, he still agreed with the application of this system:

*...Of course, there are still many software system and device problems and visitors may encounter unsatisfactory situations... It goes without saying that Orbi will be valuable and useful for visitors and exhibitors...*

#### *Past Shortcomings Improving*

The objective of the UESS is to enable stakeholders to have values by fulfill their requests during service experience delivery. Hence, the UESS is needed to deal with customers’ pain points. We would like to examine the levels of past shortcomings improving to understand if customers are satisfied with the Orbi services. The visitor (TOP-1688) thought that the Orbi services can improve the problem of finding booths and guide him to the correct and suggestive exhibitors, so he not only saved a lot of time but also visited other non-scheduled exhibitors for further cooperation:

*The advantages of Orbi are “efficiency” and “time saving” because it can help me find out the product and exhibitors. That is real using the technology in the exhibition and not only in the book... I say 8, if 10 that need to deal with the efficiency of the software/device.*

The visitor (TOP-1014) also considered that time for the visitors is very precious. If visitors reduce the searching time of exhibitor and product via the UESS, it is valuable for both exhibitors and visitors to create the business relations:

Orbi accurately not only gave me the latest information of exhibitors and product but also aided me to effectively record the evaluation of exhibitors or product...It really reduced the time cost and increased the opportunities to meet with potential exhibitors...The overall score is 7.

The visitor (TOP-1688) emphasized that visitors easily get lost in the exhibition and it is usually difficult for international visitors to be familiar with the exhibition location. He appreciated the Orbi services that can cope with above issues:

*...The map function is good for me to find out where I am and the location of exhibitors that I would like to visit...*

#### *Actual Behavior Changing*

The UESS recommends suitable services to the visitors according to their personal preferred information. If visitors are willing to accept and experience these services, the visitor behaviors can be considered as positive responses. The visitor (TOP-1001) expressed his passion to use and try all services of the UESS:

*...I am used to the intelligent handheld, so I would like to use the Orbi device in the exhibition...I had a high intention to try all delivered services from Orbi...*

The visitor (TOP-1008) spent a lot of time in trying and using the Orbi device and services in the exhibition. He had high appreciation of Orbi to not only help him gather important and valuable information but also experience the high technology and intelligent services:

*...I can search the information of exhibitors, product and some exhibition activities by myself via the Orbi...*

The findings indicate that visitors have high satisfaction of perceiving service experience during the exhibition after serving via Orbi and the UESS. The important experienced expressions (including willing to recommend, past shortcoming improving and actual behavior changing) were collected and synthesized in depth to measure if visitors have satisfactory service experience as solid facts. Hence, these evidences are to significantly support P3.

#### **Questionnaire Survey**

In order to increase the rigor of the single case study, the questionnaire survey is also an important approach to understand what and how visitors felt and thought after using the UESS. Although we have interviewed five interviewees to share their experiences in the exhibition, we still proposed a questionnaire to ask them to fill out several questions which are related to the satisfaction issue. The scale of this questionnaire is from 1 to 5. Accordingly, the survey results are the critical data for our reference to support the proposition P3. The questions are as shown in Table 2.

Item	Questions
Q1	I can effectively achieve what I want through using Orbi services
Q2	The Orbi services are overall satisfactory
Q3	I am served better service in the exhibition through using Orbi services
Q4	The Orbi services are overall innovative to me
Q5	I would like to use Orbi again
Q6	Using the Orbi services is overall interesting to me

**Table 2. The questions to visitors**



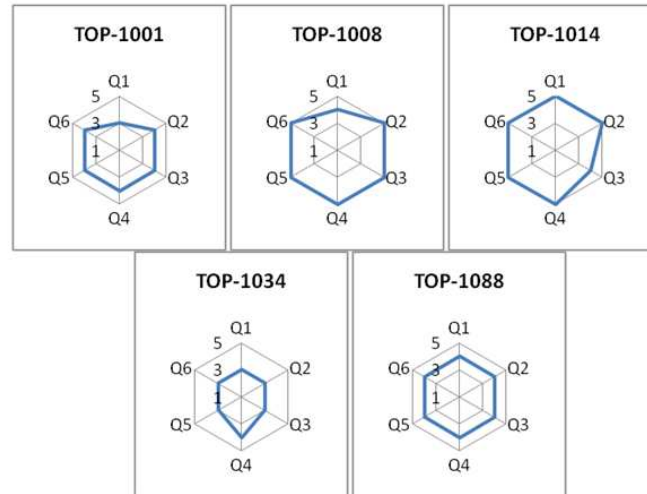


Figure 5. The questionnaire survey results of interviewees

Figure 5 clearly shows the score of each question for five interviewees in details. Although the visitor (TOP-1034) gave the lowest score for each question, each score is still equal or over than 3. The other four interviewees were satisfied with the Orbi device and services, so they almost gave the higher ranking. Consequently, this simple questionnaire survey also gave us the vigorous evidence to support P3.

## CONCLUSIONS

This research advanced the development for a theoretical framework of service experience in Service Science discipline. Service experience is composed of a series of complicated services and influenced by many factors. Customer psychological status is the important one to further be investigated. Accordingly, we proposed a theoretical framework of service experience based on the perspectives of customer expectation and emotion. Good customer expectation management for service providers will increase the opportunity of customer satisfaction of service experience. In order to ensure that customers can have positive behaviors and responses during service experience delivery, developing an atmospheric service context to generate positive customer emotion is an essential approach to service experience. Three hypothetical propositions are also provided to illustrate the theoretical framework of service experience. This study evaluated the theoretical framework of service experience by using the multi-method. The analysis results from interviews and questionnaires are the solid evidences to support the theoretical framework of service experience.

Consequently, the contribution of this paper is threefold. First, this study proposed a novel theoretical framework of service experience as a research grounding to service scientists and researchers because Service Science is an emerging discipline with few solid and fundamental theories. Second, we stood for the importance of customer psychological status by integrating customer expectation and emotion, which in the past have largely been examined in isolation, to support the satisfactory design and delivery of service experience rather than only taking the service provider's perspective (such as service cost or providers' productivities) into account. Third, most previous research has only employed either the qualitative method or the quantitative method to build theories. In order to enhance the rigor of this study, this study used the multi-method (including qualitative and quantitative approaches) to evaluate the theoretical framework of service experience.

The proposed theoretical framework of service experience and the propositions emerging from it imply a rich agenda for further research. First, although the authors used a real exhibition case to gather field data for the evaluation of the theoretical framework of service experience, there is a need and an opportunity for researchers to continuously conduct empirical studies to collect much more data. Meanwhile, researchers can further develop theoretical hypotheses based on the research propositions to increase the rigor of the proposed theoretical framework. Second, as mentioned earlier, it is difficult to accurately understand and measure customer expectation and emotion because they are psychological statuses of human beings that are not directly observed from their features, especially for the social science and Service Science researchers. Applying the human factors engineering and emotional computing to measure the psychological statuses will be a feasible research direction to collect precise customer data for evaluating the proposed theoretical framework and the propositions of service experience.

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