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A Typology of Consumer Territorial Rudeness

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Service settings encouraging consumers to linger and mingle are growing in popularity and functionality in the marketplace. However, as opposed to socializing, consumers often behave territorially over the space they occupy in these public settings. Judging another's territorial actions, some consumers perceive these behaviors as rude. This study explores consumer territorial rudeness as a growing aspect of consumer-to-consumer interaction in service environments. Qualitative techniques are employed to develop a typology of territorial rudeness and to suggest possible antecedents and consequences of these manifested behaviors.

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EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Commercial and services settings are evolving in functional provisions for customers, serving as a place to conduct business, study, hangout, cyber connection, reading room, mental rejuvenation space, etc. The expectation is that consumers will linger and mingle and have a positive interactional experience. However, although the invitation to socialize with unknown others is encouraged by the myriad of offerings, layout, physical features and ambience, consumers often do not socialize. In fact, as a norm in the setting, social interaction seems frowned upon and may be even considered against proper etiquette in these settings (McGrath 2006). Instead of socializing, some consumers in these settings behave territorially over the space they occupy. Some consumers who have had territorial encounters with another customer within these linger and mingle places become morally outraged, as they perceive another's territorial actions as being rude. What is unclear is what aspects of territoriality do consumers perceive to be rude?

Researchers have empirically shown that consumer–to-consumer interaction frequently do occur in service environments with great frequency, and can impact evaluation of the overall experience, satisfaction, repatronage and loyalty (Bitner et al., 1990; McGrath and Otnes 1995). However the concept of territorial rudeness as a component of consumer-to-consumer interaction in service environments has been less explored. To categorize a person's behavior as rude is to make definitive judgments that the person's communicative actions are intentional displays of contempt and lack of respect (Tracy and Tracy 1998). Along this line rudeness can be considered as discourteous behavior, which is in opposition of normal, rational practice of social life; polite, face-attentive interaction (Goffman 1955). According to Thomas (1965) "rude behavior is the kind of behavior which hurts people's feelings and causes them offence…it must give offence or be intended to offend, or be generally judged offensive" (p. 403). Rudeness therefore can be defined as "insensitive or disrespectful behavior enacted by a person that displays a lack of regard for others" (Porath and Erez 2007, p. 1181). We employ qualitative methods to develop a typology of consumer territorial rudeness.

Understanding Territoriality

Territorial behavior is defined as "a self/other boundary-regulation mechanism that involves personalization of or marking of a place or object and communication that it is 'owned' by a person or group. Personalization and ownership are designed to regulate social interaction and to help satisfy various social and physical motives. Defense responses may sometimes occur when territorial boundaries are violated" (Altman 1975, p. 107). Thus, territoriality involves three distinct behavioral dimensions; marking, encroachment and defense.

Marking: Territorial markers serve as a mechanism to dissuade or delay others from invading space already spoken for (Shaffer and Sadowski 1975; Sommer and Becker 1969). Markers also serve preventative and regulatory functions (Altman 1975). They regulate the level of social interaction, and offer individuals or group the choice to not engage others or allow them into claimed space.

Encroachment: When these self-relevant spaces are invaded, the response is likely to be commensurate in intensity with the loss of control. Lyman and Scott (1967) distinguished three forms of territorial encroachment: *violation*, *invasion*, and *contamination*. The term *intrusion* which refers to someone who uses and claims the space of another group or person was introduced by Goffman (1971) to encapsulate both violation and invasion.

Defense: The most common defensive behaviors are verbal responses like arguments and discussions. Other defensive behaviors can include gestures, facial expressions and body posture changes (Altman 1975). Knapp (1978) identified two types of territorial defenses: *prevention defenses* and *reaction defenses*.

Methods

Since the existing literature revealed little in terms of research on consumer territorial rudeness, qualitative methods of depth interviews and a territoriality thematic apperception test were chosen to allow for full exploration, clarification and development of the concept of territorial rudeness (see Strauss and Corbin 1998; Murstein 1963; Morgan 2002). Data were analyzed using the thematic analytic technique (Brun and Clark 2006; Boyatzis 1998).

Findings

We determined territorial rudeness is context, situational and individual characteristic dependent. With this in mind, we define *territorial rudeness* as territorial actions (including ignoring a person and language) and demeanor (including personality characteristics and attitude) that is interpreted by others in the setting as ill-mannered or discourteous to customers, the place or the owners. The results indicate that consumers perceive lingering, disregard for others in the usage of space, and intrusion to be rude.

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