

New research: How employee emotions' impact on customer experience

The latest Ask Afrika Orange Index provides customer service trends, insights and thought leadership based on 13 years of data, across 32 industries and 155 companies, with representative companies as well as the government sector.

A research survey called the Behaviour Sciences Package was included in the Index, designed specifically to measure emotional encounters between employees and customers so they can best advise companies that order research reports on how they can improve their service delivery in terms of creating the correct emotional connection with consumers. These in-depth, tailor-made reports speak not only about the client's performance, but also compares this to other companies in their industry sector and then places client performance within the broader cross-industry framework.

What customers want

Service delivery is central to the success of a business and what customers want from the experience has shifted over time. Transactional efficiency is no longer sufficient to satisfy customers, empathy and emotional connection have become an important part of the equation and the focus is now on the relationship.

Marketers have made this shift and are connecting with consumers on an emotional level, but this needs to carry over into the service encounter. Customers used to be viewed as respondents, but the power has shifted, the playing field has become increasingly consumer-centric, genuine interaction and emotional connection is required. Service delivery needs to take the entire customer experience journey into account to satisfy customers.

The measurement of customer satisfaction has become stuck in evaluating statistical methods that deal with multicollinearity and using the optimal number of scales points. The human element has been neglected. This approach can look good in reports, but in reality, it has lost sight of the consumer and should rather be focusing on developing new methods that are more sensitive to how the customer feels. Future development of customer satisfaction levels will use visual representations of different emotions.



Trend spotting widens the window of opportunity. Being mindful of trends enables businesses to understand current and emerging shifts and identify factors that will have a direct impact on their customers, product portfolio and overall strategies.

This enables companies to take a long-term view of how customers' expectations and perceptions regarding service and the extent to which they have managed to delight customers along this journey.

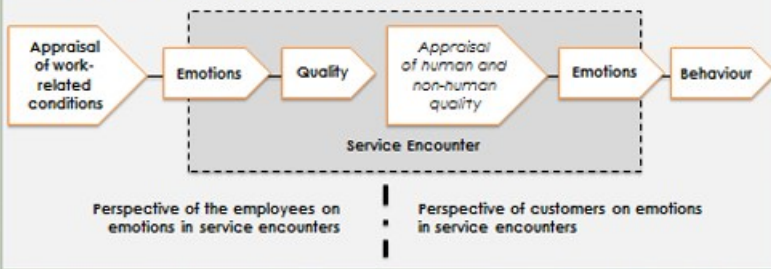
Emotions at the heart of humanness

Through years of research and insight into current trends, Ask Afrika has designed a service model, which talks strongly to humanness. The emotions that people feel in daily life and those that evoke in others are at the heart of humanness. Organisations influence consumer emotions in a very real way. It seems inconceivable that organisations do not place how consumers feel about them at the heart of their research and strategies.

Understand emotion in service encounters

The diagram below shows:

- How employees appraisals of their work environment produces a specific emotion which results in a certain level of service quality.
- The customer then appraises this interaction which produces an emotion which leads to some sort of action e.g. word of mouth, loyal support etc.



Traditionally, exclusively cognitive measures have been used to explain customer satisfaction. Given the rising importance of emotions in research, it now seems obvious that emotions play an important role in explaining customer satisfaction. There is growing evidence that including emotional measurement in service models results in a better explanation of customer satisfaction (Smith & Bolton, 2002). In their 2002 paper Smith and Bolton conclude, "Our study yields some interesting findings related to the role of emotion and shows that failure to consider and/or measure customers' emotional responses could result in misleading predictions about satisfaction and/or incomplete understanding of customers' evaluations."

Asplund (2007) reports that only emotionally satisfied customers had high levels of brand affinity and their spending patterns were different from those that were merely cognitively satisfied. Yu and Dean (2001) find that emotional satisfaction is a better predictor of loyalty than cognitive satisfaction. Despite these early findings, very little measurement of emotional response to service experience is happening.

Consumers expect more

"The Ask Afrika Orange Index leader board has gone through transformation over the decade with fewer of today's top ten brands having led the industry in terms of customer service excellence. Consumer expectations, in terms of both the public and private sectors, continue to evolve. It is those businesses that keep their finger on the pulse of changing consumer expectations that meet or exceed service expectations," says Sarina de Beer, MD of Ask Afrika.

Excellence is achieved by consistently exceeding customer expectations, as opposed to focusing on service within a specified or limited period. Businesses recognise the challenge of delighting customers and winners of the Ask Afrika Orange Index often acknowledge this.

The Ask Afrika Orange Index not only measures service within industries, but across industries, and it identifies landscape changes to provide insights into the mass consumer trends, informing service improvement strategies. Full research reports can be purchased, providing specific insights into a company's performance, contextualising this into the industry context, and into the general service delivery landscape, both locally and globally.

For more information, go to www.askafrika.co.za.