

**Summaries of Selected Sessions from the  
2008 AMA Winter Educators' Conference  
(Austin, TX)**

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#### 4.7 Services Marketing and Management (Special Session)

##### **A Deeper Look at the Traits of Service Employees: New Insights and Research Approaches**

###### Chair:

*Clay M Voorhees, Michigan State University*

###### Participants:

The Ideals of Doctors

*Neeli Bendapudi, The Ohio State University*

*Janet T Parish, Texas A&M University*

*Leonard L. Berry, Texas A&M University*

Consumers' Evaluations of Competence and Warmth of Service Providers

*Shashi M Matta, The Ohio State University*

*Clay M Voorhees, Michigan State University*

*Michael K Brady, Florida State University*

On the Use of Humor in Service Encounters

*Michael K Brady, Florida State University*

*Michelle Roehm, Wake Forest University*

Service Customization Efforts of Boundary-Spanning Service Personnel: Antecedents and Consequences

*Kevin P. Gwinner, Kansas State University*

*Mary Jo Bitner, Arizona State University*

*Stephen W. Brown, Arizona State University*

**Session Summary Writer:** Rand Wergin, Oklahoma State University

This session is intended to discuss consumers' reactions to service employees. The four papers presented in this session bring attention to the traits customers look for in service providers.

The session began with a presentation from Neeli Bendapudi. She and her co-authors look at the relationships patients have with physicians. She introduced the paper by posing a question, "Why study healthcare?" The answer is that being a patient is the least amount of fun you can have as a customer. The relationship between a patient and a physician is important because it impacts the patient's emotional responses and behavior (such as compliance to a treatment) and it impacts the patient's medical outcomes.

The results of this paper suggest that

- The trait of personability is more important for male physicians, and the trait of confidence is more important for female physicians.
- Older physician's personability has a greater effect on patient commitment than younger physicians.
- Younger patients are more likely to commit to a treatment from a personable physician; older patients are more likely to commit to a treatment from a confident physician.
- Educated patients are more likely to commit to a treatment from a personable physician, less educated patients are more likely to commit confident physician.

Shashi Matta presented a paper discussing two traits of service providers, competence and warmth. Prior research has noted that the relationship between warmth and competence is inconsistent. When a person is presented a clue that a person is competent, the receiver may perceive the target person to be less warm. Sometimes the results are inconsistent, and may vary according to the context of the comparison. The findings of this paper suggest that in situations where competence and warmth are equally important (as with a personal loan officer), and when warmth is more important than competence (as with a grief counselor), high competence clues are more likely to elicit high warmth cues, and high warmth cues are more likely to elicit high competence cues. In situations where competency is more important than warmth (as with technical support personnel) high competence cues

are more likely to elicit low warmth cues, and high warmth cues are more likely to elicit low competency cues.

Michelle Roehm and Michael Brady presented the third paper discussing humor in service encounters. They note that despite the widespread study of humor in other disciplines including advertising, in the field of marketing, a study on the effect of humor on customer perceptions has been basically ignored. This paper seeks to determine if a service provider can use humor and be perceived as knowledgeable at the same time. The authors also seek to understand when humor enhances or detracts from service interaction quality.

Humor depends on three factors: consumer characteristics, situation characteristics, and humor relevance. The authors find that high need for cognition (NFC) customers are less concerned with the situation and more interested in the relevance of the humor. Low NFC consumers are driven by situation, particularly in terms of whether the humor was delivered in the appropriate context.

The final paper, from Gwinner, Bitner and Brown, addresses service customization. They ask whether service providers adapt their behavior to meet the needs of the service encounter. The authors note that despite its intuitive nature, this question has not been empirically tested. They suggest that the key employee-level antecedents of adaptive behavior are customer knowledge, the predisposition to act in the situation, and the motivation to act. Three sources are cited for a service provider's willingness to adapt. They are the ability to monitor and adapt one's behavior, the ability to find ambiguous situations non-threatening, and a predisposition toward service. Expectancy theory is used to support the position the predisposition to act; where one believes that their actions will result in a desired expected outcome.