

THE MODERATING EFFECTS OF GROUP CULTURE ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONALITY TRAITS AND CUSTOMER ORIENTED-BEHAVIOR IN THE HEALTH TOURISM HOSPITALS IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the moderating effect of group culture on the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior in the health tourism hospitals. This study involved 343 nurses in the 13 health tourism hospitals in Malaysia. Administered on-site questionnaire survey was used as the main method of data collection. Hierarchical regression analysis was performed and found statistical significant relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior as well as positive moderating effects of group culture.

Keywords: Customer-oriented behavior, personality traits, group culture, health tourism hospitals.

1. Introduction

Health tourism has been a rapidly-growing industry since the Asian economic crisis in 1998 (Rad, Mat Som & Zainuddin, 2010). Like many other countries, Malaysia has realized the importance of economic diversification and actively involved in developing health tourism since 2005. However, the health tourism industry in Malaysia is beginning to experience mounting expectation as patients are viewing healthcare services from different angles and perspectives. Patients are not focusing only on the technical dimension and outcome of the medical treatment but stressing on the standard of care delivered by the healthcare providers. In light of the increasing expectations, one of the measures to improve standard of care is to transform the healthcare system to a customer-oriented management style targeted on

customer-oriented behavior in the organization. Unfortunately, little information is available to pinpoint specific areas of customer-oriented behavior concerns in the Malaysian health tourism industry. Hence, this paper aims to determine the personality trait dimensions that influence customer-oriented behavior and the moderating effects of group culture on the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypothesis

The term customer-oriented behavior is referring to particular behaviors exhibited by individuals during service encounters and such behaviors will lead to satisfying customers (Farrell, Souchon & Furden, 2001). Scholars have specifically defined customer-oriented behavior as understanding customers' needs, assisting customers to attain their goals and influencing customers by providing information and assistance rather than by imposing pressure. It is also viewed as employee's predisposition or tendency to meet customer needs in a workplace context (Donavan, Brown & Mowen, 2004). In the healthcare context, customer-oriented behavior focuses generally on understanding patients' interests and needs by delivering proper solutions. Daniel and Darby (1997) explained the term customer-oriented behavior as the service behavior and ability of the care providers to adjust their service in order to reflect patients' reality. On the same note, Darby and Daniel (1999) emphasized that the aspects of caring processes need to be accommodated into customer-oriented behavior to fulfill patient needs in terms of intimate and complex service means. Hence, this paper has identified customer-oriented behavior as a primary influence in formulating expectations and controlling patient experiences.

Trait Theory by Allport (1961) posits that a person's behavior will be generated consistent with his or her personality traits. It allows an in-depth understanding of a person's personality and his personality traits could potentially affect his behavior in an organization. There were empirical studies such as Frei and McDaniel (1998), Barrick and Mount (2005), Brown, Mowen, Donovan and Licata (2002), Liu and Chen (2006), Perriatt, Chakrabarty and Lemay (2007), Lanjananda and Patterson (2009) and Mechinda and Patterson (2011) reported that personality traits have a significant relationship with customer-oriented behavior because it represents the innate characteristics of a person. Parallel to the empirical findings, this study used the Big Five personality traits as predictors to customer-oriented behavior. The Big Five personality traits encompassed openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (McCrae & Costa, 1996).

The Social Information Processing Theory addresses how people learn their behavior by studying the informational and social environment within which the behavior occurs and to which it adapts (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). Kiesler (1971) and Salancik (1977) stated that it has been repeatedly found that when individuals are committed to a situation, they tend to develop attitudes consistent with their commitment and their committing behavior. Hence, situational variable such as culture has significant influence on work-related behavior that reflects employee's performance in the organization. This study was motivated by the notion suggested by Schimmack, Radhakrishnan, Oishi, Dzokoto and Ahadi (2002) that culture moderates and interacts with personality in complex ways to affect human behavior. Group

culture was selected as the moderating variable because it emphasizes on broad participation by employees, promote internal communication and emphasis on teamwork and empowerment. Individuals who worked in a group culture accentuate on moral, high cohesion, caring and high commitment. Group culture is essential in enhancing customer-oriented behavior. Based on the above rationale, the research framework (see Figure1) is established with the following hypothesis:

H1: Group culture moderates the relationship between openness to experience and customer-oriented behavior.

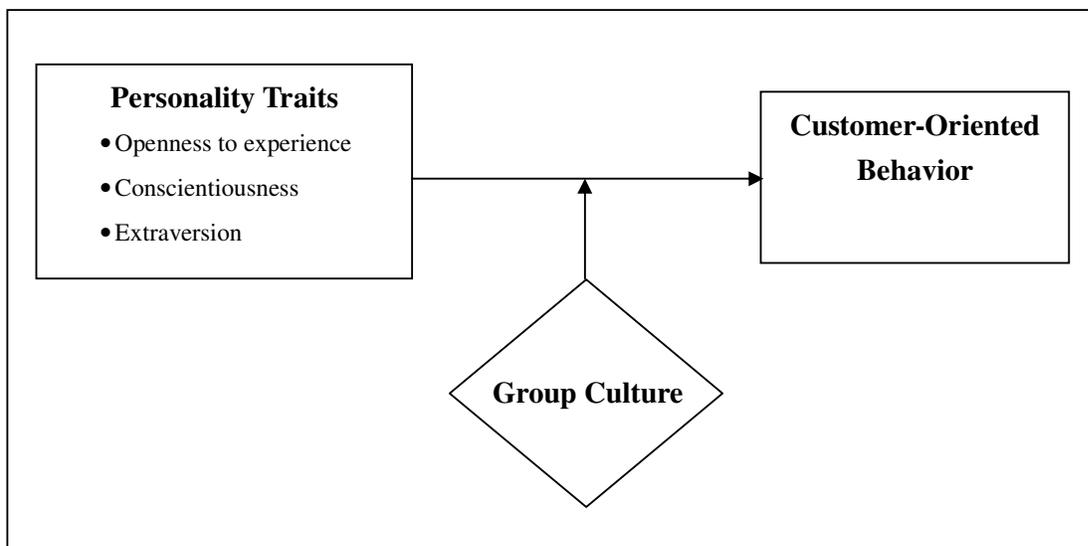
H2: Group culture moderates the relationship between conscientiousness and customer-oriented behavior.

H3: Group culture moderates the relationship between extraversion and customer-oriented behavior.

H4: Group culture moderates the relationship between agreeableness and customer-oriented behavior.

H5: Group culture moderates the relationship between neuroticism and customer-oriented behavior.

Figure 1: Research Framework



3. Methodology

3.1. Measurements

The Selling Orientation Customer Orientation (SOCO) scale by Saxe and Weitz (1982) was adapted for measuring customer-oriented behavior in this study. It contains 12 items of positively phrased

customer-orientation items. Measures of the personality traits were based on the Big Five Inventory (BFI) by John and Srivastava (1999). There are a total of 44 items adapted from the BFI. The group culture measures used in this study were developed by Shortell, O'Brien, Carman, Foster, Hughes, Boerstler and O'Connor (1995). It contains 5 items of the questionnaire. The questionnaire employs a five-point Likert scale with anchors ranging from 'strong disagree' to 'strongly agree'. The units of analysis for this study are individual nurses employed in the health tourism hospitals for a minimum of 1 year. Administered on-site questionnaire survey was used as the main method of data collection. Through this method, a total of 343 usable questionnaires were obtained out of 349 questionnaires collected.

3.2. Validity and Reliability

All the constructs in the research framework were validated through factor analysis. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) with varimax rotation extracted four factors for personality traits (i.e. openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism) and a single factor for both customer-oriented behavior and group culture. The number of items extracted for each constructs were shown in Table 1. The reliability test results indicated that the value of Cronbach's Alpha for all the constructs in this study wereranged from 0.716 to 0.898. These figures as presented in Table 1 exceeded the cut-off of 0.70 as suggested by Nunnally (1978), Robinson, Shaver and Wrightsman (1991) and DeVellis (2003). Hence, the measuring items of all constructs were deemed reliable.

Table 1: Reliability Coefficients for Constructs

Constructs	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha
Openness to Experience	7	0.779
Conscientiousness	4	0.727
Extraversion	5	0.725
Neuroticism	5	0.716
Customer-Oriented Behavior	11	0.898
Group Culture	5	0.744

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Respondents Demographic Profiles

The respondents of this study were 86% female and 14% male. The higher number of female respondents shows that the nursing profession is still dominated by the females in this country. Among the respondents, majority of them were in the age between 26 and 35. They constituted 23.3% of the respondents. The

second largest age group was 18-25 (32.9%) followed by those between 36-45 years old (23.3%) and 46-55 years old (5.0%). As for length of service in the hospitals, 40.8% respondents have worked between 3 to 5 years whereas 34.4% respondents have 1 to 2 years of working experience. Respondents who have 6 to 10 years experience constituted 21.3% and the remaining respondents(3.5%) have worked for 11 to 15 years.

4.2. Hierarchical Regression Analysis

Since there were only four factors extracted from personality traits, the hypothesis wererestated as below:

H1: Group culture moderates the relationship between openness to experience and customer-oriented behavior.

H2: Group culture moderates the relationship between conscientiousness and customer-oriented behavior.

H3: Group culture moderates the relationship between extraversion and customer-oriented behavior.

H4: Group culture moderates the relationship between neuroticism and customer-oriented behavior.

Hierarchical regression analysis was employed to test the entire hypothesis. To examine the moderating effect of group culture, the data were mean-centered to avoid the problem of multicollinearity when multiplying group culture with personality traits dimensions. The results of the analysis were shown in Table 2. Table 2 indicates that the R-square value of Model 1 is 0.249. It denotes that 24.9% of the variance in customer-oriented behavior can be explained by the variations in openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion and neuroticism. The F statistic (28.043) was significant at the 0.001 level. The results reveal that openness to experience ($\beta = 0.443$, $p < 0.001$) and conscientiousness ($\beta = 0.110$, $p < 0.05$) were positively related to customer-oriented behavior. It implies that individuals who possess personality traits of openness to experience and conscientiousness are prone to exhibit customer-oriented behavior.

Model 2 and Model 3 indicate the moderating effects of group culture on the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior. Both models are significant at the 0.001 level with F value of 33.065 and 19.486 respectively. The R-square has increased from 0.249 to 0.329 with the inclusion of group culture. Apparently, group culture has added the explanatory power of the model by 8%. Further inclusion of interaction variables in Model 3 reveals that R-square value has increased even higher from 0.329 to 0.345. It reflects that the interaction variables have an influence on the dependent variable. This is evident when interaction term between group culture and extraversion ($\beta = -0.095$, $p < 0.05$) was statistically significant at the 0.05 level whilst other interaction terms were not statistically significant. Hence, hypothesis H3 was supported whereas hypotheses H1, H2 and H4 were rejected.

Table 2: Hierarchical Regression Analysis Results

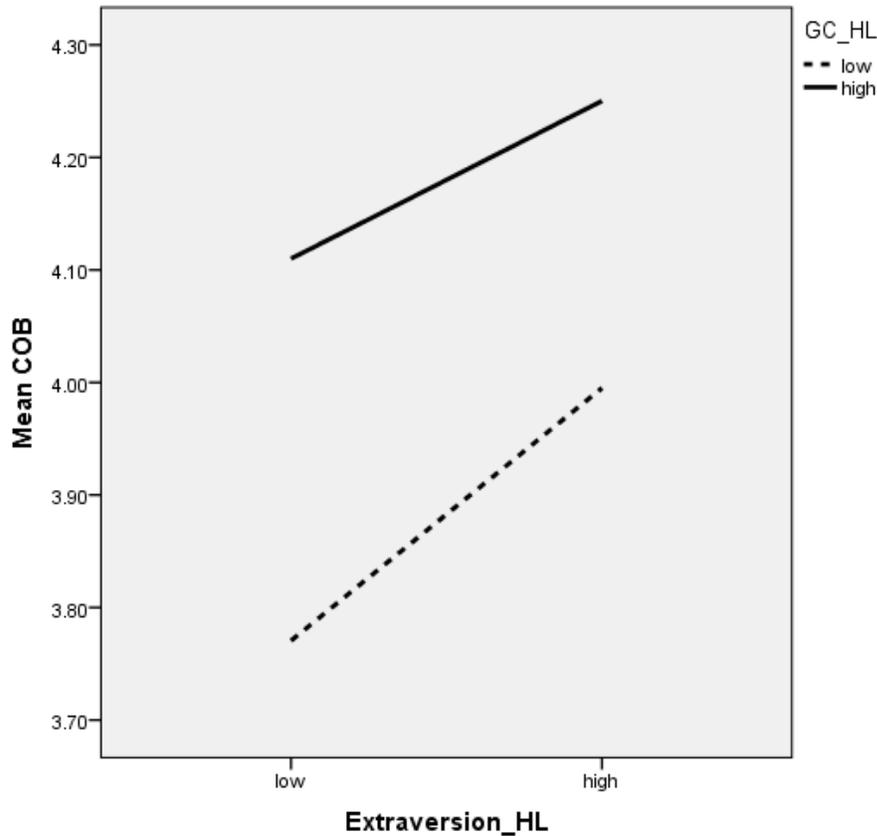
Independent Variables	Dependent Variable
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	Customer-Oriented Behavior		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Independent Variables			
Openness to Experience (O)	0.443***	0.349***	0.340***
Conscientiousness (C)	0.110*	0.090	0.086
Extraversion (E)	-0.001	0.007	0.022
Neuroticism (N)	-0.070	-0.052	-0.035
Moderating Variable			
Group Culture (GC)		0.301***	0.327***
Interaction Variables			
GC_c x O_c			-0.040
GC_c x C_c			-0.015
GC_c x E_c			-0.095*
GC_c x N_c			0.059
F value	28.043***	33.065***	19.486***
R square	0.249	0.329	0.345
Adjusted R square	0.240	.319	0.327
R square change	0.000	0.080	0.016

***significant at the 0.001 level *significant at the 0.05 level

To better understand the moderating effect of group culture, a graphical illustration was used as depicted in Figure 2. Figure 2 shows that individual who worked in a high group culture exhibited higher level of customer-oriented behavior than those who worked in the low group culture. The graph also illustrated that either the individuals worked in a high or low group culture, those who have high extraversion displayed higher level of customer-oriented behavior than those who have low extraversion. In addition, it is also noted that customer-oriented behavior is higher in situations where group culture is high irrespective of extraversion. Hence, group culture is demonstrating the role of a predictor as well as a moderator. It is a quasi moderator.

Figure 2: Interaction of Group Culture and Extraversion in Predicting Customer-Oriented Behavior



5. Conclusion

The results of the hierarchical regression analysis show that the interaction term between group culture and extraversion is significantly related to customer-oriented behavior. This finding is consistent with Tett and Burnett's (2003) trait-based model where it explained the moderating effect of culture on the relationship between personality traits and work behavior. Additionally, it also supports Barrick and Mount's (2005) statement that moderating variables must be accounted in the study in order to adequately explain the influence of personality traits on human behavior. In general, it can be concluded that examining the relationship between personality traits and customer-oriented behavior and group culture as a moderator is firmly grounded in the research framework underpinned by Traits Theory and the Social Information Processing Theory. In terms of practical implication, this study may be of help to healthcare managers to select customer-oriented nurses by identifying their patterns of personality traits. In addition, it also represents the efforts offered to explain the importance of group culture in enhancing customer-oriented behavior. This study is very relevant in the present time because it provides managerial implications for the healthcare providers to offer high standard care and promote health tourism in the country.

6. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations which need to be addressed in future research. Firstly, using nurses as respondents of this study limits the generalizability of this study. Future study may include different

group of respondents such as doctors and administration staffs to provide a better representation of the study. Secondly, the independent variables of this research were limited to personality trait dimensions only. Future research may consider other individual factors such as job satisfaction and organizational commitment to provide a better explanation of customer-oriented behavior among the respondents.

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