Frontline Employees' Motivation towards Customers' Value Outcomes: A Context of Non-Fuel Retailing

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Abstract
Introduction: The present study aimed to explore the frontline employees in-shop motivation to influence the customers in-shop emotions. The study further proposed the conceptual foundations of the dynamic nature of value outcomes in non-fuel retail stations, where each customer perceives the interaction with frontline employee differently. Therefore, the value outcomes based on the customers' in-shop emotions were dynamic.
Methods: The study had used the content analysis to seek the outcome where the data was collected using open-ended interviews from frontline employees and customers of non-fuel retail outlets in Malaysia. The sample size was 12 using the snowball technique, including 6 frontline employees in phase 1 and 6 customers in phase 2 who had visited the same non-fuel retail outlets used in phase 1 for data collection.
Findings: The results showed interesting findings where it was observed that customers get positive and negative influence emotionally through individual interaction with frontline employees. Furthermore, the positive/negative emotions helped the customers to create or destroy the value individually. These service encounters are subjective and vary from customer-customer affecting their emotions differently are therefore cannot be generalized on the large set of audience.
Originality: Through the lens of S-D logic paradigm, the present study has conceptualized the dynamic nature of emotions which can lead towards value creation/value destruction or value destruction/value creation in different situations and contexts based on the individual service encounters of customers-frontline employees within non-fuel retail shops.
Keywords: Service-Dominant Logic, Front Line Employee in-shop Motivation, Customers in-shop Emotions, Value Creation, Value Destruction.

Introduction

The concept of value co-creation has been important for many academicians and practicians for ages (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The role of firms and customers has been equally important for co-creating and creating value (Hoyer et al., 2010). The rise of service dominant logic (SD-logic) has widely grasped the scholars and practitioners'

interest towards value co-creation (Syam & Pazgal, 2013). The application areas of value co-creation include design and development of new goods and services Bogers et al., (2010), collaboration with users as innovators, efforts of users in customizing products to their needs Xie et al., (2008), presumption, co-production, participatory roles of consumers, communities Etgar, (2008), and crowds, retailing, knowledge, learning and solutions within business networks, multi-firm partnerships, open business models, and service exchange and service systems (Ind et al., 2012).

Previous studies have examined the role of firms and customers separately and collectively. The study conducted by Amin et al., (2021) has conceptually introduced the factors, i.e., professional identity, financial reward, career opportunities and workplace recognition, for FLEs motivation to co-create value. However, the study has neglected the essential outcomes of motivation at the customer end. The role of frontline employees in creating value is vital to create potential value (Grönroos, 2011). Moreover, while creating value among customers, the role of emotions is equally important (Terblanche, 2018). The customer to employee interaction plays a vital role in uplifting the consumers' in-shop emotions both positively and negatively, which has been neglected in the past research. Previous research has evidenced that positive outcome lead towards value creation and negative towards value destruction (Petermans et al., 2013).

Conversely, it has been observed that experiential psychology of value has changed the lens of value outcomes (Ranjan & Read, 2016). The in-shop emotions of customers vary from individual to individual (Triantafillidou et al., 2017). The positive outcome of one customer through frontline employees does not need to create the same outcome for the other customer. Under experiential psychology, customer in-shop emotions are dynamic, opening the avenues for value creation and value destruction. The present study is the first of its kind, which has proposed the dynamic view of experiential value, where positive in-shop emotions can lead to value destruction and negative customer in-shop emotions can lead to value creation for different customers of non-fuel retail.

The traditional fuel retail stations have been observing a tremendous shift for the last few years. The tuck shops have been transforming into non-fuel retail, which is determined to provide value among customers. Previously, the fuel stations did not pay much attention to customers emotions and value outcomes (Kishore & Patel, 2012). However, it has been observed that customers are keenly attached to the non-fuel retail stations because a visit to a non-fuel retail is now a day is a quintessential activity for vehicle owners who visit for fueling at different fuel stations. One of the crucial factors in the non-fuel retail station is the customer to employee interaction (Andreu et al., 2010). This interaction develops customer emotions which play an essential role in creating or destruction of value.

The paper is structured into five main streams. *First*, a brief introduction of the study is discussed. *Secondly*, a comprehensive literature review is drawn to support the conceptual framework of the study. *Thirdly*, a methodology is discussed. *Fourthly*, a qualitative study is conducted to validate the conceptual arguments. *Finally*, a discussion is drawn, and the agenda for future research is reflected to conclude the manuscript.

Frontline employees' in-shop motivation to co-create value

Value co-creation occurs when frontline employees engage in direct service interaction with customers during service encounters (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). This engagement plays an important role as it will help the employees to achieve their perceived value (Abid & Ahmed, 2020; Andreu et al., 2010). This perceived value shall deliver the potential value which is perceived as hedonic value by the customers. This

hedonic value can be translated in the form of emotions which are both positive and negative (Burns & Neisner, 2006). Service industry like non-fuel retail centres where FLEs have direct service interaction with the customers, the service interaction is expected to be more strengthened (Medberg & Grönroos, 2020; Sánchez-Fernández & Iniesta-Bonillo, 2007) when FLEs perceived expectancies (motives) are developed towards interaction. These motives will engage them in certain behavior when they believe that healthy service interaction with the customers will lead to the desired benefits they are seeking to achieve, which can be understood as sought-after value.

By taking the Expectancy Theory in line from employees' standpoint, these motives FLEs expect to derive from their interaction with the customers (Bagozzi & Dholakia, 1999; Amin et al., 2021) So, expectancies work as the stimulus that influences the goals that employees set, how their behavioural intentions are shaped, and the activities (i.e., VCC) they assume to achieve their respective goals (Xie et al., 2008). Thus, by following the expectancy theory, this study posits that when FLEs engage in VCC activities, they may expect specific valued outcomes from their interactive activities. These activities help the employees engage customers positively or negatively, which helps them achieve their desired value outcomes, i.e., value creation/value destruction (Leo & Zainuddin, 2017).

Customers in-shop emotions

Emotions are defined as the feeling of individuals about different events. These feelings can be both positive and negative (Robert & John, 1982). Different factors, including ambience, design, the layout of the in-store, build the in-shop emotions of the consumers (Dawson et al., 1990). However, it has been observed that there is another important factor that plays an essential role in defining the in-shop emotions of customers, which is their interaction with frontline employees (Grönroos, 2017). Consumer behaviour is a social activity that is very much likely to be influenced by staff's motivation and emotions (Ellsworth, 1994). Employees who are motivated shall engage the customers to feel optimistic about the in-store environment. This positive interaction will arise excitement and joy, resulting in the customers' positive in-shop emotion (Burns & Neisner, 2006).

On the other hand, if the customer-frontline employee interaction is not satisfactory, the customers will have negative in-shop emotions (Grönroos, 2017). Terblanche, (2018) have found that customers in-shop emotions directly influence their ability to create or destroy value. Machleit & Mantel, (2001) have evidenced that emotions play an important role in customer satisfaction in the retail atmosphere. Moreover, it has been observed that customer emotions are dynamic (Machleit & Mantel, 2001). They vary from customer to customer. The satisfaction of one customer is merely limited to his emotional gain, which cannot be replicated on the other set of audience.

Value Creation

Value creation is a vital conceptualization for many firms and academicians since the evolution of service-dominant logic (Grönroos, 2011). The concept was first advocated in service logic perspective and later advocated by (Vargo & Lusch, 2014) in service-dominant logic. The concept of value creation comprises two major streams, i.e., service providers are the potential value creators, and customers create the value independently based on the usage of service/product (Grönroos & Voima, 2013). *Secondly*, firms are not only supposed to provide products or services, but they are the active co-creators of value with customers (Grönroos, 2012). These implications have provided a new direction in the service marketing literature (Hussain, Abbasi, et al., 2022;

Mazhar et al., 2022), where retail outlets have to rethink their existing strategies to satisfy their potential customers. Previously it was evidenced that customer satisfaction is the core aim of the firm to deliver through their offerings (Grönroos, 1984). However, nowadays, it has been observed that customers prefer the product/service they refer but the value they seek out of the offerings (Grönroos, 2017). This phenomenon has changed the lens of marketing paradigms to conceive an organization-wide attitude towards customers transforming the realm of customer management (Ranjan & Read, 2016). Value creation is defined as the customer potential to use the product/service (Ellway & Dean, 2016). Therefore, value is only created when it is utilized by the customers individually (Hussain, Ting, et al., 2022). This individual usage is subjective, which is different for different customers based on their individual cognitive and hedonic abilities. Thus, making this concept dynamic.

Moreover, the role of firms in this process is equally important, especially in the retail context. Firms are the potential value co-creators that helps the customers to engage in the retail store activities (Gummerus, 2013). Different factors, including in-store atmosphere, music, aroma, lighting and physical products, contribute to delivering the value. One of the important considerations is the frontline employees, which are the direct representative of the firms in the retail store (Blocker & Barrios, 2015). The interaction of customers and employees helps to uplift their emotions if results in positive terms lead to value creation (Jan et al., 2021). Therefore, the role of frontline employees is significant because it will direct the customers to either create or destroy the value individually.

Value Destruction

In contrast to value creation, value destructions the tendency of the individual to destroy value (Graham et al., 2006). The perception of value to be continuously created positive is slowly being challenged, giving rise to value destruction after usage (Leo & Zainuddin, 2017). Different customers have different priorities when it comes to purchasing decision. Therefore, it results in different types of output for different customers. Customers in-shop emotions are dynamic, where some are satisfied with the purchase and end up positively.

On the other hand, sometimes the customer is not satisfied with their time spent in retail outlets, resulting in negative output. This conceptualization has raised another critical consideration where previously, it was considered that positive emotions would lead towards value creation and negative emotions will lead towards value destruction (Blocker & Barrios, 2015). It is based on the individual usage of the customers and their experience within the retail outlets (Graham et al., 2006). This experience also relies on the multiple factors within the retail store outlets where customers get influenced or declined their emotional stance towards a particular retail outlet. Increasingly, it can be observed that customer-frontline interaction contributes to creating or destroying the value at the customer end. Firms are nowadays keenly focusing on motivating their frontline employees, which help engage their customers and co-create value at the customer end. It is evidenced from the literature that those employees who are no motivated tend to dissatisfy their customers, which results in negative in-shop emotions. These negative feelings of the customers may lead towards value destruction (Laud et al., 2019). Moreover, another interesting consideration that is getting attention is the dynamic nature of value. Every customer creates or destroys value based on the individual usage of the product/service. Therefore, this experience is dynamic, which is not replicated on the other customers (Petermans et al., 2009). It can be possible that one customer's value destruction may lead to value creation for another customer and vice versa.
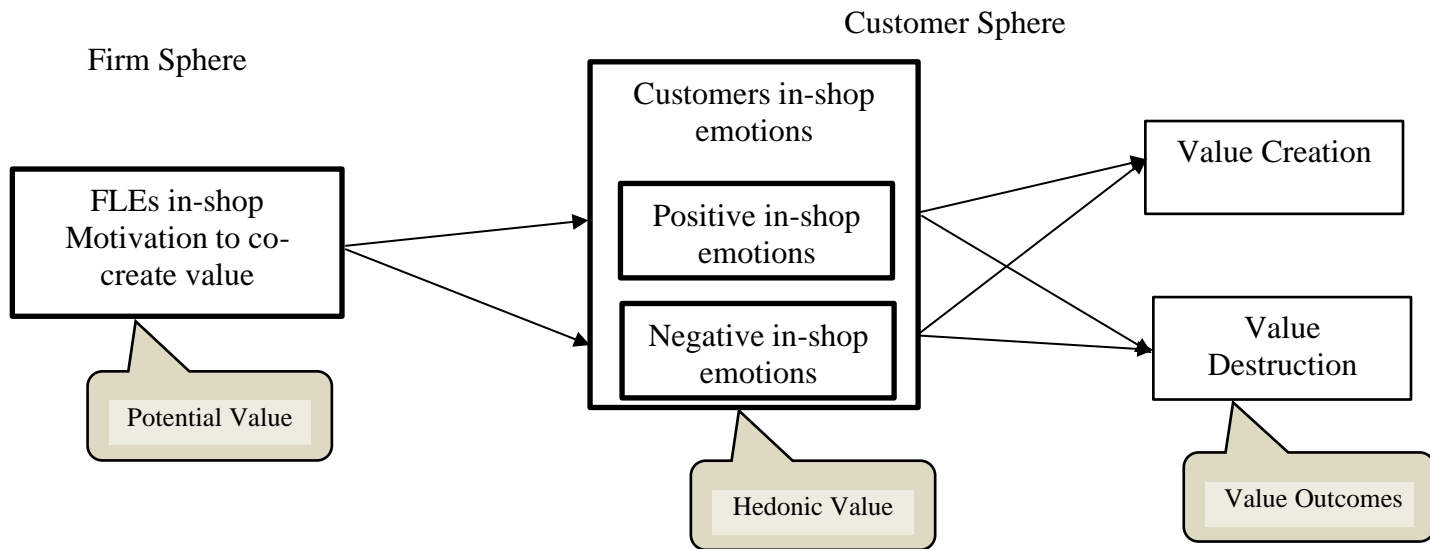
Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

The present study has proposed a conceptual foundation following a service-dominant logic paradigm where firms are value facilitators through frontline employees. This motivation of frontline employees helps to influence the customers in-shop emotions both positively and negatively. Previously, it was observed that positive outcome would lead to value creation, and adverse outcomes will lead to value destruction. However, under experiential psychology of value, different customers have different sets of hedonic abilities, which helps them perceive the situation differently. Therefore, a positive outcome of value for one customer does not need to influence the other customer. For example, it is possible that customer-A might have a positive interaction with the retail outlet staff and ends up with positive in-shop emotions.

On the contrary, the customer-B might get the physical product or desired service from the outlet but unfortunately results in a negative impression with the frontline employee. Thus, resulting in value destruction. Therefore, the study is the first of its kind to propose a conceptual framework defining the role of frontline employees in driving the customers in-shop emotions towards dynamic value outputs, i.e., value creation and value destruction.

Therefore, following propositions can be conceptualized based on the above developed arguments:

Proposition 1: Frontline employee in-shop motivation to co-create value potentially drive the customers in-shop emotions (positive vs negative customers in-shop emotions) differently based on the individual service encounters in different situations.

Proposition 2: Customers in-shop emotions (positive vs negative) are an individual trait which vary from customer-customer based on the individual frontline employee service encounters in the specific situations.

Proposition 3: Positive in-shop emotions during the good service encounter with FLEs may lead to value creation for one customer and at the same time it may lead to value destruction for the other customer based on the bad individual service encounter with frontline employee of the non-fuel retail.

Proposition 4: Negative in-shop emotions during the bad service encounter with FLEs may lead to value destruction for one customer but at the same time it can lead towards value creation for other customer based on the good individual service encounter with the frontline employee of the non-fuel retail.

Methods

Research Approach

The inductive approach was employed to justify the initial research question as inductive approach allows more flexibility and generation of new ideas. The data was analysed using content analysis of different responses (statements of both customers and frontline employees of the non-fuel retail of Malaysia). The presence of certain recurring words and themes were realized using colour marker technique within the qualitative data. Content analysis is best for making inferences by objectively and systematically identifying specified characteristics of messages. Prior studies have employed and suggested this method to summarize and verify results through objective and systematic classification of qualitative data (Siddique et al., 2021) for instance, documents and customer comments (Abid et al., 2022; Shamim et al., 2023).

Study design and data collection procedure

Discovery-oriented research objectives demand to use phenomenological interviewing where the purpose is to explore what actor (FLEs) wants to get out from service interactions with the customers and what are the factors that influence the in-shop emotions of customers during their interactions with frontline employees for the value outcomes. The study has adapted an exploratory approach to ensure the validity of the conceptual proposition. Drawing from the insights of (Awan et al., 2021) themes were generated following the recurring codes and transcription process and further relationship between various factors were established to support the conceptual propositions. We have adapted the (Abid et al., 2022) methodology where the data was collected in two phases using the dyadic approach to ensure the consistency of the research study. The study was conducted on non-fuel retail stations of Malaysia, including different frontline employees of non-fuel retail stations. Six different interviews were conducted from the frontline employees. Moreover, those customers who have visited and interacted with the same employee of non-fuel retail were asked to be part of the sample for the research study. In phase 1 of the study, to ensure diversity 6 potential frontline employees of different cities, including Seri Iskandar, Kuala Lumpur, Penang, Lumut, Kampar and Selangor, were selected sample size.

In phase 2 of the study, only those customers who have visited the same non-fuel stations and interacted with the interviewed employees in study phase 1 were selected and asked for their valuable opinions to support the arguments of the research study. Respondents were given an initial introduction of the study and ensured of their anonymity for this study. Interviews last for 35-45 minutes with each respondent. Once the data was collected, the coding process was performed multiple times independently by each researcher. A team of researchers were then called to minimize the conflicts and identifying the recurring patterns within the data set. Finally, transcription process was performed by carefully going through each recorded interview line. Following the suggestion of Gibbs, (2007), careful consideration was taken to ensure zero change in the meaning of the allotted code of the transcribed data. A team of experts from the academic background was called to review the outcome of interviews and justify the factors that contribute to customers' influence in-shop emotions and their value outcomes. Finally, two major categories were proposed which were frontline employee motivation to co-create value and customers' in-shop emotions (positive vs negative). The respondents' opinions were recorded to strengthen the conceptual formulation for this study which are discussed under subsequent section.

The following table shows the information of employees of non-fuel retail who were selected for data collection

Table 1. Demographics profile of FLEs of non-fuel retail

Demographics		Frequencies
Gender	Male	3
	Female	3
Nationality	Malaysians	6
	Others	0
Race	Malay	2
	Chinese	2
	Indian	2
	Others	0
Working Experience	5 – 7 years	1
	8 – 10 years	3
	above 10 years	2

Note: Out of six respondents, three were male and three were females having Malaysian nationalities. Out of six Malay, two were Chinese, and the remaining two were Tamil Indians with working experience ranging from 5 years-10 years.

The following table shows customers who have visited the non-fuel retail stations and interacted with the same employees who were part of the study sample in phase 1.

Table 2. Demographics profile of the non-fuel retail customers

Demographics		Frequencies
Gender	Male	2
	Female	4
Nationality	Malaysians	6
	Others	0
Race	Malay	1
	Chinese	4
	Indian	1
	Others	0

Note: Out of the given demographics, 4 were females, and 2 were males who voluntarily participated in the study. The respondents had Malaysian's nationalities with 1 who belong to the Malay race, 4 were Chinese, and 1 was Tamil Indian.

Results

FLEs in-shop motivation and customers in-shop emotions Firms play an essential role in delivering potential value for their customers (Fedorenko & Berthon, 2017). They have re-design their business models for retail outlets to initiate value offerings (Åkesson & Skålén, 2011) . When it comes to non-fuel retail, the number of factors reflect the image of firms. However, out of them, the role of frontline employees is vital as they are the direct source of interaction with customers who visit the retail outlets (Prentice & King, 2011). Customer-frontline employee interaction helps to influence the customers in-shop emotions both positively and negatively. *"Firms spent a lot of consideration during training programs to interact with customers humbly and smiley face because it will create positive impression"* (Employee--06).

The positive interaction of customer-frontline employees will develop a positive customer in-shop emotion (Mattila & Enz, 2002). In addition, these Emotions shall help the customers to develop a sense of attachment with the particular non-fuel retail outlets.

"Most of the customers come only for fuelling but due to good and healthy interaction they tend to spend time with in the non-fuel retail outlet to purchase the desired product" (Employee--03). *"Most of the time customers ask for our help in choosing any customized offerings and we help them to choose the right product at non-fuel retail"* (Employee--01).

It has been observed that negative interaction with frontline employees may result in negative in-shop emotions and consumers despite getting the desired product or service (McColl-Kennedy & Smith, 2006). The ultimate value outcome will result in value destruction (Grönroos, 2017). *"I was once treated badly by the frontline employee of reputed non-fuel retail outlet. I was badly hurt and feelings turned negative. The outlet has maximum number of service facilities but I have decided not to visit that outlet again in future"* (Consumer--02).

Firms should design their reward system to keep their frontline employee motivated (Pera et al., 2016). In previous times, the firms aimed to deliver product or services (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). However, the pace of competition has changed the thinking level of many firms as they are keen to provide value through the offerings (Gummerus, 2013). Therefore, employee motivation is one of the important factors for the firms apart from other retail outlets. *"If I am not getting any motivation in terms of monetary benefits from my organization. It will affect the one-one interaction with customers. Sometimes we are not in a good mood, which will hurt our customers' feelings"* (Employee--05). Customers in-shop emotions, value creation and value destruction

Emotions are the feelings of an individual towards a specific place or any physical product. They can be both positive or negative. The retail stores' in-store environment plays an important role in developing or changing the customer mood or emotions (Sugathan et al., 2017). These feelings are dynamic which vary from customer to customer (Mustak et al., 2013). Customers in-shop emotions help to either create or destroy the value within the retail outlet (Sugathan et al., 2017). Previously, positive in-shop emotions will lead to value creation and negative in-shop emotions towards value destruction. *"I used to recommend the non-fuel retail outlet I find with good in-store environment and friendly staff to my friends"* (Consumer--04). *"I always avoid to visit the non-fuel retail station which is not recommended by my friends and family"* (Consumer--01).

However, it has been observed that customer experiences are dynamic. The positive value outcome, which is value creation, will not necessarily create the same result for the other customers. It can be possible that it might result in a negative outcome which is value destruction. *"I was once receiving a recommendation from my friend to visit the non-fuel retail station as he is having a very good staff. But I had a very different experience because I was treated badly from the lady at the counter and my feelings were hurt"* (Consumer--02).

Different customers have different preferences to develop an emotional understanding with that particular retail outlet (Petermans et al., 2013). This satisfaction level helps the customers either create or destroy the value outcomes individually which makes them dynamic (Ranjan & Read, 2016). *"For me if I am getting the level of respect from the staff with in non-fuel retail. I am satisfied and value is created at the end"* (Consumer--03). *"If I am getting good environment in the non-fuel retail, I am getting value otherwise I will be dissatisfied"* (Consumer--06).

Most of the customers rely on feedback, which is acceptable to some extent, but in reality, they can face different experiential outcomes when they visit that particular outlet

personally (Leo & Zainuddin, 2017). *"In my personal opinion every person has different capability to understand and develop an understanding with particular outlets. Therefore, we must not always accept or reject the outlets based solely on the experience of other customers"* (Consumer--03). *"We should always develop an opinion after visit at the particular store. I know a non-fuel retail station where it is said that they do not have good fuel quality but when I visit their non-fuel retail station their coffee was amazing"* (Consumer--05).

Discussion

This research highlights the understanding and importance of FLEs motivation towards customers in-shop emotion and their value outcomes. The findings regarding the important role of frontline employee in-shop motivation are also relevant to those who suggest that traditional understanding of operant resources that overlooked motivation is insufficient to describe the customers' emotions and their understanding to develop value outcomes that value creation (Shamim & Ghazali, 2014) and value destruction (Shamim et al., 2023). Previously it was observed that customers in-shop emotions are based on hedonic factors such as ambience, lighting, aroma design (Dawson et al., 1990). However, it is also evidenced that among these factors, one of the important factors which also affects the customer in-shop emotions is the interaction with frontline employees (Szymkowiak et al., 2021). The motivation of the frontline employees helps to engage the customers within the retail outlets both positively and negatively, which helps to seek their desired value outcomes, either value creation or value destruction.

Furthermore, according to this study, value is related to evaluating outcomes and evaluating value before and after co-creation, which is dynamic. The concept of value is important where firms should realize the importance of their role while delivering value for their customers (Salomonson et al., 2012). Among many factors in retail outlets, FLEs motivation is one of the important considerations for many firms based on the FLEs role and engagement with their customers. Human nature is complex where every individual needs and motivation vary according to the different circumstances. For instance, FLEs motivations may vary according to experience, expectations and age. On the other hand, customers also exhibit certain emotional traits which vary from individual to individual. It has been noted that different non-fuel retail stations should pay focused attention to boost their FLEs motivation through different strategies and these strategies help the service firms to retain their engagement during service interaction with different customers.

The fuel retail business has transformed due to the rise in demand for alternate fuel mobilities. The increasing trend of non-fuel retail has changed the traditional paradigms of retail fuel stations. *Previously*, the concept of fuel stations is only meant to deliver fuel for customers. With the ongoing decline in fuel demands and the market's competitive environment, the traditional tuck shops are now evolving to create superior value for their customers within the non-fuel retail outlets. The present study has proposed an interesting insight into the role of frontline employees in developing the customers' in-shop emotions. *Second*, it has highlighted the dynamic nature of value creation and value destruction. The managers should realize the importance of customer-frontline employee interaction as it is an important indicator to decide the customer value creation and destruction. Firms should concentrate on motivating their employees in a way that they will seek a unique customer experience. Instead of going for only positive experience shall limit their level of delivering value. The present study has highlighted the vital insight where emotions

and value outcomes are dynamic. Therefore, firms should re-design their service strategies of non-fuel retail stations to realize that every customer is different regarding emotional standings. Firms should train their frontline employees to analyse the emotional condition of every customer differently. This will help the firms create a unique customer experience and help them create a memorable image in the mind of different customers.

Meanwhilw, the present study, despite proposing an essential conceptual foundation is having certain limitations. *First*, the study is conceptual. However, the present study has supported its conceptual idea through several opinions and thoughts of frontline employees and customers. Future research studies should include the empirical evidence of different non-fuel retail stations to strengthen the conceptual argument. *Secondly*, the present study has highlighted the role of frontline employees in building customers in-shop emotions. Future research directions should explore several other factors through the ideation process, supporting the dynamic nature of value and customers in-shop emotions. *Finally*, the study was conducted on non-fuel retail stations of Malaysia, and future research studies should include other industries to observe the behaviour of this conceptual argument.

Conclusion

The future of fuel stations will be a lot more than just delivering fuel at the service stations. The ongoing shifts in the industry of fuelling will change the dynamics of competition. The concept of non-fuel retailing is gaining importance since the dynamics of customers' perception for creating value has been introduced in this industry. Fuel retailers must develop a comprehensive response that adjusts their products and services, redesigns the layout of their service stations and non-fuel retail outlets, adapts their network, and harnesses new digital tools. In addition, firms must design their strategies to help their frontline employees grasp the customers' in-shop emotions. It has been observed that behaviour of frontline employees directly influences the customers emotionally. On the other hand, customers emotions are studied to be dynamic. Each customer has its own set of personality upon which they develop certain emotions, which becomes a source of value creation/ value destruction. Therefore, it is compulsory for the firms to re-think, re-design and re-construct their business models to deliver the optimal service within the non-fuel retail outlets.

Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest regarding any authors, institutions or organizations regarding the material discussed in the manuscript.

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