

How Minority Frontline Employees Shape Solo Customers' Service Experiences

The Khoa Do

Royal Holloway-University of London

Cite as:

Do The Khoa (2026), How Minority Frontline Employees Shape Solo Customers' Service Experiences.
Proceedings of the European Marketing Academy, 55th, (133224)

Paper from the 55th Annual EMAC Conference, Bath, United Kingdom, June 2-5, 2026



How Minority Frontline Employees Shape Solo Customers' Service Experiences

Abstract

Recent years have witnessed a growing number of solo customers (e.g., solo diners, solo travelers), who consume services alone in the marketplace. Despite this, limited attention has been devoted to improving the service experiences of this expanding group. This research investigates whether and how employing minority frontline employees (FLEs) (e.g., ethnic minorities, LGBTQ+, immigrants, disabled), as compared to nonminority FLEs, can enhance the experiences of solo customers. Using a multi-method approach (text mining, Facebook A/B test, eye-tracking, field and controlled experiments) across seven studies, we find that interacting with minority (vs. nonminority) FLEs leads to improved solo service experiences. This effect arises because solo customers feel more psychologically close to minority FLEs, who share the same feeling of marginality and empathize with the nuances of their solo status. This in turn enhances their perception of warmth toward these employees and subsequently facilitates positive service outcomes for solo customers. Moreover, the effect is (a) amplified when solo customers pursue hedonic (vs. utilitarian) consumption goals, but (b) attenuated when the service delivery is personalized, and (c) reversed when minority FLEs are perceived as more advantaged over nonminority counterparts. With the rise in solo consumption across services, this research provides timely and nuanced insights into this growing segment.

Track: Service Marketing & Service Innovation