

The Relationship between Service Staff Accents and Customer Participation: An Examination of Mediators

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Abstract

In intercultural service encounters, customers use an employee's accent to infer their ethnicity, which may trigger out-group categorization. However, it is unclear how an employee's accent affects customer behavior. We address this research gap by examining the influence of employee accent on customer participation (CP; the degree to which customers are involved in the service process by contributing tangible and intangible resources). We find that an employee's accent negatively affects CP through reduced intelligibility, while perceptions of cultural distance do not play a mediating role. Rather, it is the valence of a particular accent that comes into play. In particular, consumers' accent-based perceptions of an employee's attractiveness mediate the relationship between accent type and CP. Furthermore, a negatively valenced accent has a negative influence on CP, whereas the effect of a positively valenced accent is non-significant. This leads to important managerial implications.