

A STUDY OF THE INFLUENCE OF OTHER CUSTOMERS ON CUSTOMERS IN REAL STORES OF JAPANESE TRAVEL AGENCIES

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INTRODUCTION

Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry has indicated that the relationship between companies and their customers must shift from goods-dominant logic to service-dominant logic (S-D logic). As a result, traditional travel agencies in Japan, which have been advocating their "commitment" and "our unique characteristics" to the market, have begun to change their management

plans over the past few years to "pursue added value and propose it to customers" and "improve the value that customers feel". In other words, they are beginning to adopt marketing strategies based on S-D logic. However, companies have not clarified how they co-create value with their customers. In addition, they have not been able to provide a clear direction on how to utilize real stores, which are unique service encounters that online-specialized travel agencies do not possess.

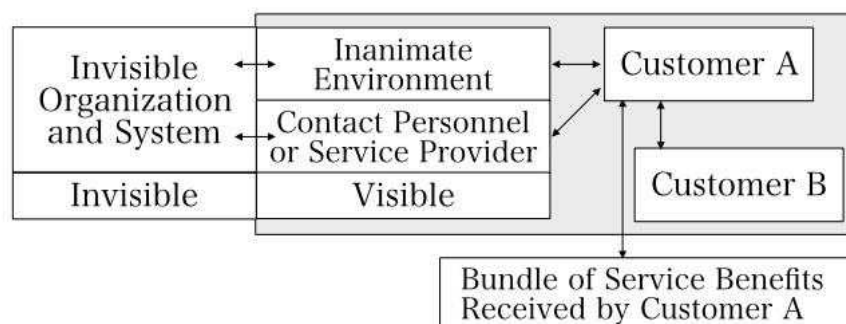


Figure 1. The Servuction Framework

In this study, we refer to the Servuction Framework (Langeard et al., 1981) of service marketing research in the BtoC domain and focus on customer B, which influences customer A shown in Figure 1. Customer A here is the person who receives travel consultation services from a customer contact employee, and Customer B is another customer in a visible location in the store where no direct interaction occurs. We focused on it for two reasons: first, the event of Customer A being in the same space as Customer B is an inherent event in real stores; second, the presence of Customer B and its social impact is often overlooked in research and practice compared to other visible elements (Fisk et al., 2004).

An overview of previous tourism-related studies examining other customers in the same space

reveals that some studies focused on when customers are traveling (e.g., Wu, 2007; Rihova et al., 2018), but none focused on the funnel of travel consultation in real stores. Therefore, this research has novelty and academic significance. In addition, we believe that it can contribute to practice in terms of providing suggestions for new ways to utilize real stores.

Based on the above, what we would like to clarify through our empirical research is whether and to what extent the presence of others with whom there is no interaction influences customers' consumption behavior. We would also like to research the significance of the existence of real stores and the basic concept of how companies co-create value with their customers.

HYPOTHESIS BUILDING BASED ON LITERATURE REVIEW

(1) *Interdependent construal of self*

In cultural psychology, Markus and Kitayama (1991) define the "interdependent construal of self" as a concept in which the self is viewed as part of the components of a social unit, an Eastern cultural view of self. In other words, the definition of self differs depending on the situation and other people present. In the East, where such a view of self is shared, a culturally accepted image of the person is acquired by recognizing oneself as an important part of

meaningful social relationships and being recognized as such by those around one (Kitayama, 1998). They are more concerned with group goals and cooperative behavior, and the maintenance of interpersonal relationships is a primary goal, more important than individual success (Nisbett, 2003). In Japan, associations with an interdependent view of self have been examined in self-presenting and self-assessing behaviors, religion, and parenting stress (Agata & Kugihara, 2008). In addition, Takata (1999) found that the interdependent view of self of Japanese adolescents was higher than that of Australian and Canadian adolescents.

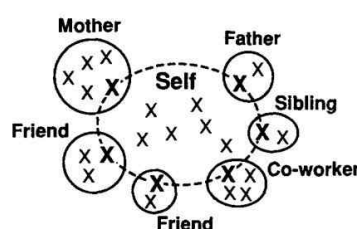


Figure 2. Conceptual representation of "interdependent construal of self"

(Markus & Kitayama, 1991)

(2) *Independent construal of self*

Its counterpart, the "interdependent view of self", is a cultural view of the self unique to the West that sees the self as an entity essentially separate from the people around it (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In other words, it is defined by the subject's attributes such as abilities, personality, and talents. In general, Westerners desire individuality that is different from others and value personal success over interpersonal relationships, with the belief that

interpersonal relationships can also hinder personal success (Nisbett, 2003). Kitayama (1998) argues that in the interdependent view of self, having and expressing independent thoughts and ways of life is a culturally accepted image of the human being. Incidentally, Manalo et al. (2013) found that Japanese people generally tend to lean toward the "interdependent construal of self," although there are people for whom the "independent construal of self" is dominant.

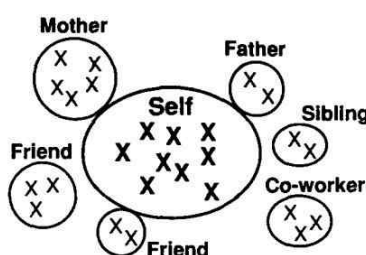


Figure 3. Conceptual representation of "independent construal of self"

(Markus & Kitayama, 1991)

(3) *Relate*

These "culture views of self" have been shown to influence consumer behavior (e.g., Aaker & Lee, 2001; Mandel, 2003). He et al. (2012) found that when customers have an "interdependent construal of self", the presence of others increases customer satisfaction with the services provided by the

company. On the other hand, Schmitt (1999) discusses RELATE in the framework of the "strategic experiential module" as the value felt as a result of relating the self to others in a social and cultural context. Schmitt (1999) discussed marketing methods that provide value to customers by designing the customer's experience when purchasing and using a

company's product, and classified the value perceived by customers into five "strategic experiential modules". RELATE marketing is one of these approaches, in which a company tries to co-create value with its customers by making them feel that they belong to an ideal image of themselves, others, or a particular culture or group (Schmitt, 1999). Based on the above, we decided to examine the characteristics of "culture views of self" that companies should keep in mind when implementing RELATE marketing by focusing on others, especially in this case other customers in the store. To this end, we found it meaningful to identify the correlation between "culture views of self," the degree of influence exerted by other customers, and RELATE. We then derived the following two hypotheses.

- H1: Interdependent construal of self has a positive effect on RELATE.
- H2: Independent construal of self has a negative effect on RELATE.

(4) Retention and WOM

Goodman (2014) argues that the customer experience of completing services under value co-creation influences customer retention and word-of-mouth(WOM), suggesting that improving and enhancing the customer experience reduces customer defection and increases positive WOM. In

a study in financial services, which, like travel counseling, proposes intangible service goods, Wong, Hung, and Chow (2007) found that relationship quality was the best predictor of customer loyalty. In addition, maintaining high- quality relationships spreads positive word-of- mouth intentions that lead to increased customer willingness to refer (Wu & Li, 2011), which increases willingness to spend and purchase further (DeWulf, Odekerken-Schröder & Iacobucci, 2001) suggested that the word-of-mouth intention of the respondents is more likely to be positive (Wu & Li, 2011). To confirm the correlation between the quality of the company-customer relationship, or RELATE, and "post-purchase customer behavior," the following hypothesis was formulated.

- H3: RELATE has a positive effect on RETENTION.
- H4: RELATE has a positive effect on WOM.

(5) Research Model

The above suggests that the correlation between the two components of "culture view of self" and RELATE, as well as the correlation between RELATE and the two types of customer behavior as outcomes, can be examined in an integrated manner. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated and their structural model is shown in Figure 4.

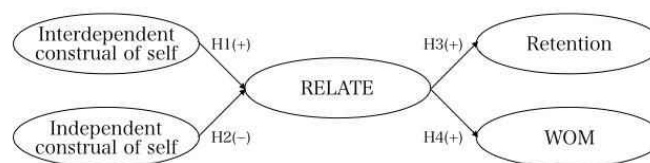


Figure 4. Research Model

METHOD

(1) Target of the verification study

The survey was conducted online from April 3 to April 4, 2023. Respondents were Japanese aged 20 to 69, and the survey was commissioned to Rakuten Insight, which has approximately 2.2 million users, one of the largest in the research industry in Japan. The screening was conducted from the following four perspectives: first, those who had worked for a travel agency were excluded; second, those who had visited a travel agency in Japan within the past five years were included; third,

those who stopped by or were escorted on a visit unrelated to the purchase of products or services offered were excluded; and fourth, those who visited a travel agency for business trips other than private trips were excluded. Based on the above, valid responses were obtained from a total of 500 Japanese respondents. The sample size was equally allocated to the age (in 10-year increments) and sex (by gender) of the survey respondents. Subjects who had used more than one store were asked to respond about the store they had used most recently. The screening collection sample size was 3,730. Detailed demographic variables are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographics of Respondents (n=500)

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	250	50.0
	Female	250	50.0
Age	20-29	100	20.0
	30-39	100	20.0
	40-49	100	20.0
	50-59	100	20.0
	60-69	100	20.0
	70-79	100	20.0
Education	Junior High School	5	1.0
	High school	104	20.8
	Vocational School	61	12.2
	Junior college	48	9.6
	College	243	48.6
	Graduate School	20	4.0
	Others	19	3.8
Annual Household Income	4,000,000 JPY or less	138	27.6
	4,010,000 to 6,000,000 JPY	101	20.2
	6,010,000 to 8,000,000 JPY	100	20.0
	8,010,000 to 10,000,000 JPY	75	15.0
	10,100,000 JPY or more	86	17.2
	Others	10	2.0
Region	Hokkaido / Tohoku	34	6.8
	Kanto	208	41.6
	Chubu / Hokuriku	79	15.8
	Kinki	110	22.0
	Chugoku / Shikoku	34	6.8
	Kyushu / Okinawa	35	7.0

(2) Survey design

The culture view of self was obtained using the Self-Construal Scale (SCS) created by Singelis (1994), with 30 items as observed variables: 15 items measuring the interdependent construal of self and 15 items measuring the independent construal of self. The SCS is most commonly used in studies involving views of the self in the West. However, it is pointed out, for example, that question item "I feel comfortable using someone's first name soon after I meet them, even when they are much older than I am" is defined by the characteristics of North American culture and includes items that lack validity for questions targeting Japanese respondents. Matsumoto (1999), for example, argues that the validity between Western and Asian cultures has not been recognized.

On the other hand, Kim et al. (1996), in conducting a questionnaire survey on the culture view of self among college students in Japan, Korea, Hawaii, and the U.S. mainland, modified the SCS items to fit the content of each culture. Shiki (2019) argues that the aforementioned question item has been revised to "I can talk openly with someone even if they are considerably older than me when I first meet them," thereby increasing its validity in Japanese culture. Therefore, the present study adopted a modified version of the 30-item question on the culture view of self by Kim et al. (1996) and

asked for responses on a 7-point Likert scale. The RELATE, Retention, and WOM measures refer to Kanda (2023), who examined the relationship between strategic experiential modules and post-purchase customer behavior. A total of 15 observed variables, five for each of the three factors, were set up and responses were requested on a 7-point Likert scale.

In addition to the studies presented in the structural model, we also measured the extent of influence of other customers in the various spaces where services are provided and investigated the position of real stores of travel agencies in this context. A representative study in this area is Zhang et al. (2010), which identified differences in customer interactions in the service delivery space across 15 industries. In this study, 16 industries were included in the questions, with "travel agencies" newly added to the items where Uemoto (2021) changed the scope of the survey from "parks" to "theme parks" because "they are highly public and rarely subject to management by private companies". The respondents were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert scale to the question, "How important is the presence of other customers to you in each of the spaces where service is provided?".

(3) Results of a survey

IBM SPSS Statistics 29.0 and Smart PLS 4.0.9.2 were used for the statistical analysis.

PLS-SEM was selected because of its flexibility for predictive studies with small sample size data (Hair et al., 2016).

1) Research Models

We conducted a confirmatory factor analysis. Items with factor loadings below .600 were removed, except for observed variables that should ensure content validity. REL5, 'I am sociable', was not excluded because of its content validity, as it is an important observed variable to explain RELATE. Convergent validity is shown in Table 2. Although AVE did not exceed the criterion value of .500, Cronbach's alpha and CR were high enough to be considered adequate without problems. The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was applied to appraise the discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, the highest value of the HTMT score is .864, below the recommended value of .90. Thus, satisfactory discriminant validity was achieved.

Before testing the structural model, the inner and outer variance inflation factors (VIF) were calculated and found to be less than four (1.000-2.365), indicating no issues with multicollinearity. The structural model was then assessed. The standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) value was .085, which was not less than .080, but approximately met the criteria. Furthermore, Q2 (predictive relevance) values were REL=.291, RET=.387, WOM=.414. Each was shown to have good predictive relevance. F2 (effect size) of most paths exceeded .150, indicating medium-to-large effects.

The results of the hypothesis testing are shown in Table 4. H1, H3, and H4 were all supported, as clear correlations were verified. For H2, the Standardized regression weight of the IND is positive, suggesting that the interdependent view of self has a positive influence on RELATE. H2 was therefore rejected. The structural model is shown in Figure 5.

Table 2. Result of convergent validity

	Loading	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Interdependent construal of self		.922	.924	.480
INT 13	.782			
INT 7	.762			
INT 15	.756			
INT 14	.742			
INT 9	.738			
INT 11	.734			
INT 4	.698			
INT 12	.672			
INT 8	.668			
INT 6	.666			
INT 10	.649			
INT 2	.639			
INT 5	.639			
INT 1	.615			
INT 3	.603			
Independent construal of self		.907	.909	.475
IND 6	.754			
IND 3	.753			
IND 14	.747			
IND 7	.723			
IND 10	.714			
IND 9	.710			
IND 12	.685			
IND 4	.682			
IND 2	.657			
IND 5	.654			
IND 1	.641			
IND 8	.617			
IND 13	.604			
RELATE		.825	.848	.604
REL 3	.868			
REL 2	.837			
REL 1	.829			
REL 4	.757			
REL 5	.501			
Retention		.897	.909	.709
RET 2	.915			
RET 3	.870			
RET 1	.858			
RET 5	.802			
RET 4	.757			
WOM		.957	.957	.853
WOM 3	.937			
WOM 2	.935			
WOM 5	.926			
WOM 4	.921			
WOM 1	.897			

The factor names are as follows:

interdependent construal of self = INT, independent construal of self = IND,

RELATE = REL, continued use intention = RET, and word-of-mouth intention = WOM.

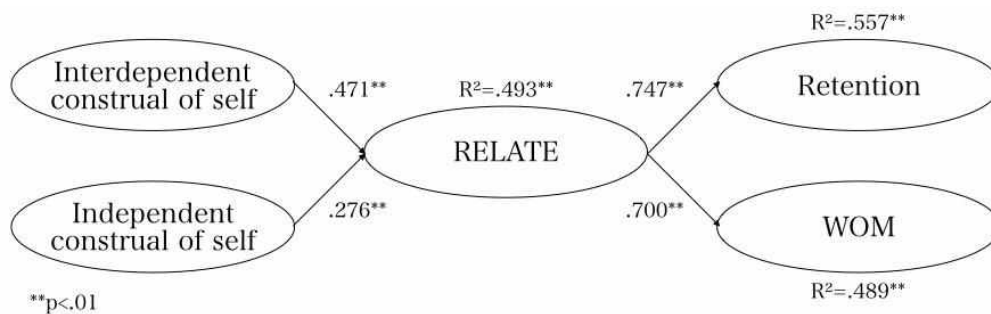
Table 3. Results of discriminant validity (HTMT)

	INT	IND	REL	RET	WOM
Interdependent construal of self					
Independent construal of self	.831				
RELATE	.796	.752			
Retention	.613	.541	.848		
WOM	.609	.543	.782	.864	

Table 4. Results of structural model test

Hypothesis	Path	β	t Value	f^2	p Value	Result
H1	INT $\rightarrow$ REL	.471	8.348 ***	.186	0	Supported
H2	IND $\rightarrow$ REL	.276	4.339 *	.064	0	Unsupported
H3	REL $\rightarrow$ RET	.747	32.390 ***	1.260	0	Supported
H4	REL $\rightarrow$ WOM	.700	25.373 ***	.960	0	Supported

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. β =Standardized regression weight. f^2 =effect size.

**Figure 5. The structural model**

2) Comparison of the influence of other customers across industries

The Friedman test, a nonparametric test of three or more corresponding groups, was used for statistical processing when comparing travel agencies to other industries among the 16 industry groups. The Bonferroni method was used for multiple comparisons. The significance level was set at 5%. As shown in Table 5, the results of the Friedman test were significant ($p < .001$) and there

were significant differences among the 16 groups. Also, as shown in Table 6, the results of multiple comparisons were significantly higher for travel agencies compared to restaurants ($p < .001$), public transportation ($p < .001$), hospitals ($p < .001$), concerts ($p = .007$), and hotels ($p = .008$). This allows us to assume that travel agency customers do not consider other customers in the store to be important when compared to the five industries that showed significant differences with travel agencies.

Table 5. Result of the Friedman test

n	Degrees of freedom	Chi-square score	p Value
500	15	370.569	0.000

Table 6. Result of multiple comparison tests with Travel Agencies

Subject of comparison	Difference of means	Significant probability
Movie theater	-.227	1.000
Bank	-.113	1.000
Air/train/bus	-2.076	.000
Concert	-1.210	.007
Retail	-.670	1.000
Grocery	-.863	.499
Sports	.128	1.000
Gym	.501	1.000
Theme park	-.589	1.000
Bar	.310	1.000
Doctor's	-1.835	.000
Hair salon	-.324	1.000
Hotel	-1.200	.008
Restaurant	-2.099	.000
Cruise	-.251	1.000

In addition, a one-sample t-test was used to compare the data obtained in this survey with the 75 American samples by Zhang et al. (2010) and the 178 Japanese samples by Uemoto (2021) presented in the previous section. Table 7 shows the results of examining the significant differences in the 28 comparable patterns of the two previous studies. The significance level was set at 5%. Compared to Zhang et al. (2010), responses for movie theaters, public transportation, concerts, shopping centers, supermarkets, stadiums, gyms, bars, hospitals, hair salons, hotels, restaurants, and cruises were significantly lower, and the presence of other customers in the service

scape was significantly more respondents indicated that the presence of other customers in the service scape was important. In comparison to Uemoto (2021), public transportation, concerts, shopping centers, supermarkets, stadiums, theme parks, hospitals, hotels, and restaurants had significantly lower responses, and significantly more respondents indicated that the presence of other customers in the service scape was important. On the other hand, responses for banks and bars were significantly higher, and significantly more respondents indicated that the presence of other customers was not important.

Table 7. Comparison with data from previous studies

	This study	Zhang et al.(2010)		Uemoto(2021)	
			Significant probability		Significant probability
Movie theater	3.624	4.900	.000	3.630	.929
Bank	3.610	3.500	.106	3.250	.000
Air/train/bus	3.128	4.700	.000	3.870	.000
Concert	3.376	4.300	.000	4.270	.000
Retail	3.464	4.200	.000	3.630	.009
Grocery	3.412	3.700	.000	3.810	.000
Sports	3.698	4.600	.000	4.030	.000
Gym	3.892	4.100	.002	3.770	.074
Theme park	3.516	-	-	3.650	.039
Bar	3.846	4.200	.000	3.660	.005
Doctor's	3.180	4.300	.000	3.890	.000
Hair salon	3.576	4.000	.000	3.490	.188
Hotel	3.340	4.000	.000	3.670	.000
Restaurant	3.108	5.300	.000	3.780	.000
Cruise	3.784	4.600	.000	-	

The relationship between the degree of influence of other customers in real stores of travel agencies and the five measures of the research model was also examined using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. The responses about the travel agency were significantly positively correlated with INT ($\rho=.420$, $p<.001$), IND ($\rho=.432$, $p<.001$), REL ($\rho=.377$, $p<.001$), RET ($\rho=.391$, $p<.001$), and WOM ($\rho=.395$, $p<.001$). In this case, the larger response about travel agencies indicates that "the presence of other customers is not important in the space where services are provided". The results indicate that those who feel that the presence of other customers is not important tend to have higher INT, IND, REL, RET, and WOM scores tended to be higher.

IMPLICATIONS

(1) Interpretation of Survey Results

The empirical investigation substantiated both hypotheses that RELATE has a significant impact on customer retention and WOM, as in the referenced previous studies. On the other hand, based on previous studies that showed that the presence of other customers increases satisfaction with the services provided by a company, we hypothesized that having an "interdependent construal of self" would have a positive effect on RELATE and having an "independent construal of self" would have a negative effect. However, the former hypothesis was supported, while the latter was rejected. In other words, both "interdependent construal of self" and "independent construal of self" were found to have a positive influence on RELATE. The following three implications can be read from this result.

The first point is to examine the interpretation of the concept of others. As mentioned earlier, RELATE represents the value that results from relating the self to others in a social and cultural context. And it is an "interdependent construal of self" that focuses on the social self that includes

others. Markus and Kitayama (1991) define "others" in this context as, in particular, an inner group. The inner group generally refers to a group with which one shares a common destiny, such as a family, but a group with which one shares similarities also falls under this category. Triandis (1989) identified common preferences, demographics, and behaviors as perspectives of similarity. It is suggested that making customers with either "culture view of self" realize these similarities will improve RELATE and by extension, Retention and WOM.

In this study, which focuses on travel consultation services at real stores, "others" for customers are considered to be "partners" with whom they share the "action" of creating a trip together, as well as "fellow customers" who are considering the same "action" with them. In other words, for customers with an "interdependent construal of self," others include employees and other customers with whom they have contact. For customers with "independent construal of self", only employees who have contact with others are relevant. For companies, it is desirable to maintain and develop their respective social relationships. In addition, "common preferences," such as travel objectives and destinations, and "demographics," such as gender and age, as well as acquired attributes such as education, occupation, and values, should all be similar.

On the other hand, in the Servuction Framework, "inanimate environment" such as facilities and equipment, in addition to employees who have contact with customers, are listed as visible elements. The "inanimate environment" corresponds to the fulfillment of customer values such as SENSE and FEEL in the strategic experiential modules described by Schmitt (1999). However, they do not correlate with an improvement in the quality of the relationship between the company and its customers (Kanda, 2023). Based on the above, the Servuction Framework for each self-view focusing on visible elements can be organized as shown in Figure 6.

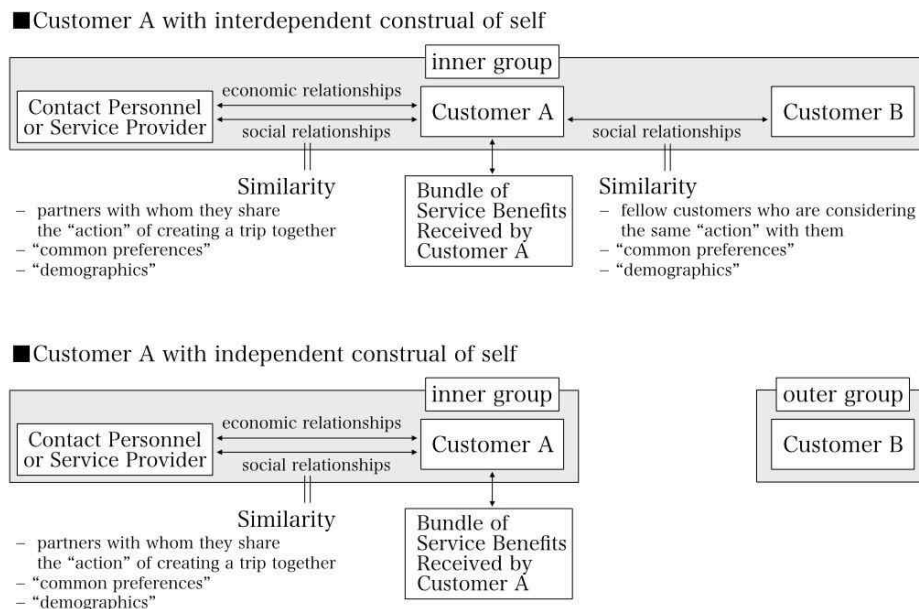


Figure 6. The Servuction Framework limited to visible elements in this study

The second point is to examine the relationship between customers with an “interdependent construal of self” and other customers as an outer group. As mentioned earlier, we found that even customers with an “interdependent view of self” have a positive influence on RELATE due to their similarity to employees. Compared to other typical scenarios where services are provided, travel agency customers do not consider other customers as important. Besides, it was found that RELATE, Customer retention, and WOM improve the more unimportant they think they are. Travel agencies need to avoid the occurrence of events in which customers are negatively affected by other customers. For example, directly, disruptive behavior involving abusive language or behavior. Indirectly, employees spend excessive time on service, forcing customers to wait or crowd the store. However, there is little probability that they will pay special attention to

customer interaction.

On the other hand, customers with an “interdependent view of self” have a desire to impress others by expressing their ideal self (Kurt et al., 2011). This is considered part of manifest consumption, such as trying to make oneself look good through the purchasing behavior of spending more. Kurt et al. (2011) describe them as customers with an “Agency” orientation and argue that they pursue individuality and difference compared to their counterparts with a “Communion” orientation (Figure 7). Although no direct interaction with other customers occurs, employees at the customer contact point must understand the customer's desire to show off such a feeling at a later stage of the travel consultation service and take into account the possibility that appropriate handling in the interaction will lead to an increase in RELATE.

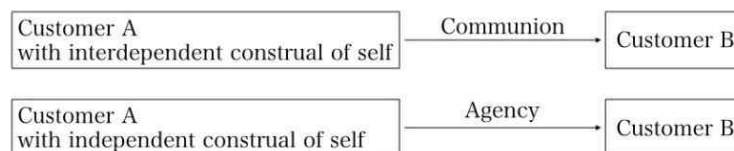


Figure 7. Communion and Agency

The third point is to examine how companies should view their customers' view of self. As mentioned in the previous studies and survey results, it is clear that Japanese people tend to have an interdependent construal of self. However, even if such a state of affairs exists as a national

characteristic, it is not always reflected in an individual's view of self. It is also true that there are individuals for whom the “independent view of self” prevails. In a global society where cross-cultural communication is becoming easier and information distribution is evolving at an accelerated pace, it is

difficult to maintain discussions limited to regional frameworks such as East and West. Given this environment, the number of Japanese with a predominant independent view of self may have increased over the past several decades.

The argument we want to focus on, then, is that the same person may lean toward either “view of self” due to changes in environment or circumstances. It is the concept of “activation” by He et al. (2012) and “developmental change” by Takata (2011) that contribute to this explanation. The view of self is not limited to dependence on the culture in which one was raised, but one view of self will predominate depending on the situation and the developmental stage of the person while both views of self are present. In other words, a person is endowed with both of the two views of self, at which point the predominant “view of self” defines the individual's behavior. In light of the above, what companies need to focus on is that “interdependent and independent construal of self” coexist within individual customers, but the aspects that surface vary depending on their relative strengths (Aaker & Lee, 2001).

The discussion up to this point, from the standpoint of the company, can be summarized as follows. Then, we would like to develop the argument from two perspectives.

A) It is desirable for customers with a predominant view of interdependent construal of self to have other customers in the store that they perceive similarity with.

B) It is desirable to adopt the following responses to customers who have a predominant independent construal of self. For companies, it is meaningless for customers to have contact with other customers, so they should not be allowed to share the same space with other customers, but rather be provided with an environment where they can concentrate on their interactions with employees. And design a situation that makes customers feel Agency when they sign a contract or pay the price.

C) After considering the predominant “culture view of self” of the customer, either A or B should be adopted.

(2) Significance of Real Stores

The possibility of building a good relationship

with customers with any culture view of self and eventually becoming a permanent customer was suggested, and the significance of travel agencies owning real stores and providing in-store travel consultation services became clear. What is important is how to understand the “culture view of self” of customers who visit a store. It is not always possible to classify customers based on their behavior due to their view of self or their age as indicated by Takata (2011), and it is also difficult for employees to determine each time a customer visits a store.

In doing so, it should be noted that the “O2O ratio,” in which consumers use the Internet to gather information before purchasing at a travel agency's real store, has long overwhelmed that of other industries (Kanda, 2023). It is expected that designing questions and practicing communication with consumers who progress to the step of making inquiries or reservations for store visits after accessing stock information on websites and SNS will lead to a certain understanding of their characteristics by enabling them to grasp their view of self. By accumulating records of responses to new customers, and by attempting to create a typology by finding a correlation between some characteristics and “view of self” among existing customers, it is expected that the answer to the aforementioned question can be derived. Fisk et al. (2004) define the “customer mix” as the combination of age, gender, social background, knowledge and experience, and ethnicity of the people who patronize a particular service provider, and they argue that a repertoire needs to be developed when dealing with so many types of customers simultaneously. Even companies that already manage a customer mix are required to implement communication that leads to the understanding of the view of self as part of their repertoire.

We would then like to examine specifically the “other customers” mentioned in A above as measures that should be implemented by travel agencies. To give customers a sense of “common preferences,” it is worth considering limiting the consultation service to specific travel directions or distinctive experiences. For example, a store specializing in Asian resorts or a store specializing in theme park travel sales could be considered. If we keep in mind the similarity of “demographics,” we

can consider setting up stores that limit their customers to seniors or specialty stores that focus on offering travel products with the lowest possible environmental impact. By doing so, there is an expectation of increased loyalty to the company through a sense of similarity to other customers when they visit the store. For B, examples include using a private room or booth as a consultation space so that other customers are out of sight, or having an employee visit the customer's home or workplace, although a reasonable investment of time and money is expected. Then, when the customer purchases the travel product, ideally, the contract and payment should be facilitated in a public space that supports operability, separate from the consultation service.

On the other hand, the basic approach required of customer-contact employees and companies is, of course, also open to consideration. Table 8 shows the ten retail types discussed in Stephens (2021) that will be required for retailers after the COVID-19 pandemic. It categorizes the stance that retailers with real stores should adopt in the face of the rise of

giant online retailers, in response to questions posed by consumers. If we consider the similarities that correspond to either view of self, we can say that "The Activist" and "The Clairvoyant" are the best candidates for adoption. Stephens (2021), regarding the former, gives the example of Patagonia, an outdoor clothing brand that advocates a corporate philosophy on environmental protection as its "cause," and states that consumers choose brands based on moral solidarity. Regarding the latter, using the example of online clothing retailer Stitch Fix, the report states that by using technology and human intuition to predict customer needs, preferences, and desires, the information coming in from customers will increase, entering a virtuous cycle of increased sales and customer loyalty for the company. It is not sufficient to be aware of only two types, of course, but it is expected to help fulfill communication in which customers themselves are aware of similarities. In addition, it is desirable to be able to guarantee similarities in other aspects of "other customers," such as senior employees in senior specialty stores.

Table 8. Ten Retail Types Surviving the New Era

Retail Types
The Storyteller
The Activist
The Tastemaker
The Artist
The Clairvoyant
The Concerge
The Oracle
The Engineer
The Gatekeeper
The Renegade

(Stephens, 2021)

(3) For companies to co-create value with their customers

Grönroos and Voima (2013) argue that both firms and customers have a role as value co-creators, using the example of direct communication between bank employees and customers at the counter. The same recognition is required for travel agencies in implementing communication strategies that follow the S-D logic. It is important to note here that the psychological motivation "trust" further strengthens the social relationship to reach the stage of value co-creation by reinforcing similarities.

Behind the customer's desire to maintain a relationship with a particular service provider is "dependence," which has a means-end meaning, and "trust," which has a self-fulfillment meaning (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). A relationship of dependence has constraints that prevent the free choice of other service providers. In other words, it refers to a situation in which the economic, social, and psychological costs of dissolving the relationship are so great that it is impossible to disengage from the relationship. On the other hand, a relationship of trust is one in which a person is free

to choose other service providers but continues to have a relationship with that provider based on a sense of trust. The trust eventually leads to feelings of "dedication," a sense of "cooperation and collaboration" with the service provider, a sense of "oneness," and even "advocacy" for the service provider. Bendapudi and Berry (1997) argue that this relationship is elevated from mere customer to "partner" after several stages of increasing intimacy. Two factors contribute to this intimacy: one factor relates to the competence of the service provider, and the other to the frequency of actual interaction between the company and its customers. For the former, it is essential to update vocational training for each of them, but also to disclose their personalities and hone their strengths and abilities to the extent that it contributes to creating a similarity with clients. For the latter, it is possible to see the possibility of strengthening social ties in the future by strengthening relationships through a dedicated customer system and a complete database, and by further increasing opportunities for customers to evaluate the company.

Many travel agencies advocate security and safety in dealing with a service that is unique in that it is an intangible good and the timing of purchase and consumption is different. However, it is difficult to gain understanding by one-way clamoring. It is necessary to design a space where value can be co-created beyond trust while existing as a media venue, not a place to sell services.

CONCLUSION

In conducting the empirical research for this study, we assume that the target companies of each respondent's retrospective experience are diverse and that the products and services purchased are extensive. A more balanced sampling is needed, taking into account the distribution of the sample in the residential areas and the characteristics of the stores, such as the location of the tenants and the location of the stores. In addition, this study did not delve into a discussion that delves into other customer-side factors and circumstances that influence customers. In addition to quantitative analysis focusing on presence, future research from a qualitative perspective, such as the nature and characteristics of others who influence, the distance

of relationships with others, and the circumstances and conditions that influence from others, is an issue to be addressed. We also believe that clarifying the factors on the customer side that are affected will lead to the accumulation of further academic knowledge and the presentation of suggestions useful for practice. We would like to conclude this paper by presenting these as limitations of this study.

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