

# Too Much of a Good Thing——A Study of Active Service Behavior

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**Abstract:** Under the background of customers exceeding universal and standardized service requirements, high-tech change and increasingly fierce market competition, the service quality of the service industry has already become an important factor in the comprehensive evaluation of customers, and the number of enterprises attaching importance to the training of staff service level and other qualities has surged. Starting from the active behavior paradox that actually exists in the industry but has not attracted theoretical attention, this paper clarifies the concepts and boundaries of active service behavior, excessive active service behavior and weak active service behavior, answers the differences in the implementation of three active service behaviors in different situations, and draws conclusions by exploring and reasoning.

**Keywords:** Active Service Paradox; Over-Active Service Behavior; Weak Active Service Behavior; Customer Brand Relationship

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## 1. Introduction

In recent years, Haidilao hot Pot has broken through the traditional service mode in the Chinese catering market with innovative features and active service, and has taken a place in the domestic catering industry. Haidilao features both standardization and individuation. On the one hand, Haidilao pays attention to the construction of standard and normative service system. On the other hand, Haidilao does not take personalized service lightly and empower its front-line employees. Such proactive service has touched and surprised many customers, but at the same time, there is another voice -- some customers say that Haidilao's "excessive service" will cause embarrassment and discomfort during the dining process. The actual situation shows that under different situations, the proactive service provided by front-line personnel not only brings unexpected surprises to customers, but also dissatisfyingly unpleasant service redundancy. The contradiction generated in the process of proactive service provided by a customer is called "proactive service paradox". The usurpation in the process of active service leads to the difference and disharmony between customers' psychological expectation and service value perception, which brings psychological discomfort to customers and inevitably influences customer loyalty and satisfaction.

As we all know, the meaning of customer self-esteem is the core and basis of improving customer satisfaction. When front-line employees provide some services for customers, customers' self-esteem cannot be significantly improved due to multiple influencing factors such as the uncertainty of supervisor's judgment, excessive or superficial employees' self-sufficiency and inaccuracy. At present, although there have been studies focusing on and exploring excessive and redundant active service behaviors<sup>[1]</sup>, there is still a gap in the research literature on the practical solution of active service paradox behaviors, and many problems and service dilemmas need to be solved. This paper combines with the active service behavior of Haidilao practice cases, and focuses on the derivative concept of the active service paradox, as well as the concepts of excessive active service behavior, active service behavior and weak active service behavior and makes expansion, so as to reduce the service redundancy of enterprises and improve the mobility of employees' active service and customer satisfaction.

Based on the gaps in the current problems stated, this study conducted an empirical study based on the case of Haidilao, aiming to illustrate the importance of choosing three different types of proactive service behaviors under different situational factors and how to guide employees to increase the unconscious surprise of customers and improve customer satisfaction, so as to better meet the needs of customers at different levels and seek long-term competitiveness for enterprises.

## **2. Research Findings**

The service industry needs to face different types of customers, so it requires employees in the service industry to adopt different service methods and different service attitudes for different types of customers. At present, there are three main types of services in the industry: They are weak active service behavior, active service behavior and excessive active service behavior. These three types of service effectively respond to customers with different types of demands in reality, enable customers to get good service experience, greatly improve the competitiveness of enterprises, and expand the depth and potential of the consumer market. The following will introduce these three types of service behavior in detail.

### **2.1 The Concept and Application of Overactive Service Behavior**

The meaning of over-initiative service behavior is as follows: "excessive" is embodied in that the staff does not accurately judge the customer's expected demand from the side, and provides the customer with vigorous, low diversity and low personalized service independently. Even such proactive service behavior makes it difficult for the front-line staff to obtain accurate customer demand in the service providing process. Therefore, this paper summarizes the core characteristics of excessive service behavior, which can be divided into three categories: spontaneity, uncertainty and self-reliance. Spontaneity and uncertainty are the basic characteristics of front-line employees to provide active services for customers. Spontaneity, as the name implies, means that front-line employees give full play to their autonomy and flexibility to initiate service behaviors independently when there is no requirement from managers, customers or rules and regulations. This feature distinguishes active service from passive service. Uncertainty refers to the multiple possibilities of front-line personnel's subjective judgment of customer needs, and the possibility of employees' missing capture of the implicit expression of customer needs. Self-retention is a key characteristic of over-active service behavior, which means that employees have a conceited mentality in the process of active service, and fail to fully and accurately predict the hidden potential needs of customers. Under the circumstance that employees rely on subjective speculation and act independently, they forcibly transfer their own ideas to improper service of customers.

Although excessive proactive service behavior is subject to adverse consequences such as service redundancy, which leads to employee emotion first, resulting in discomfort and negative emotions of customers, and disharmony between employee service efforts and customer value perception, which is prone to antagonizing customers, positive service results will be generated for choleric consumer groups. To sum up, over-active service behavior is not a useless type of active service. Only when it is targeted at specific groups and implemented in appropriate situations, can it give full play to its maximum effectiveness.

### **2.2 The Concept and Application of Active Service Behavior**

The meaning of active service behavior is: reflected in the front-line staff fully and effectively capture the expression of customers' potential demand information, efficiently obtain customer needs and wishes, and put themselves in customers' shoes to provide accurate and complete personalized and differentiated services from customers' perspectives. Therefore, this paper extracts and analyzes the essential characteristics of active service behavior, which are spontaneity, effectiveness and empathy. The connotation of spontaneity is the same as above; Effectiveness means that employees can accurately grasp the needs of customers and effectively predict and solve the needs and wishes of customers. Empathy requires employees to have the ability of perceptive empathy. It means that employees can put themselves in the other's shoes, grasp and understand the feelings of customers, and provide satisfactory services through understanding and perceiving the real emotional experience of customers on the premise of making accurate judgments on the potential needs of customers in the process of active service. Active service behavior will enable customers with blood and mucus to receive effective and reasonable service, make customer experience value perception in line with customer satisfaction, and avoid contradiction with the original vision.

### **2.3 Concept and Application of Weak Active Service Behavior**

Analyze the meaning of weak proactive service, and the "weakness" is reflected in the fact that employees do not capture potential information in a one-sided way, subjectively assume customer needs and impose services based on one-sided views. Instead, they prepare to judge customer needs through observation and lateral analysis, and provide services according to the situation. Appropriate and appropriate service methods make customers feel warm and at home. Spontaneity, accuracy, and empathy are the core

characteristics of weakly active service behavior. First, spontaneity, as the core trait of active and passive service division based on employees' behavioral willingness and service rights; Second, accuracy. Under the weak initiative service concept, accuracy is determined that employees should try their best to exert their subjective initiative, observe the behavior, emotion and other details of customers, improve the accuracy of information acquisition, and determine it through a variety of verifiable ways, so as to minimize the wrong implementation of initiative service behavior caused by employees' subjective judgment error. Thirdly, the connotation of empathy is the same as above. Weak active service behavior employees consciously initiate, through extra efforts and side to accurately analyze the potential needs of customers, supplemented by empathy empathy thinking, the behavior of providing service to customers is of great benefit to improving customer self-esteem and satisfaction, and arousing high level of positive emotional experience of customers.

To sum up, the three types of service behaviors have different applicable groups under different situational factors. Enterprises should pay attention to training employees' ability to flexibly serve customers with different service behaviors under different situations.

### **3. Research Conclusions and Practical Implications**

#### **3.1 Research Conclusion**

This paper conducts an empirical study on the case of Haidilao, aiming to explore the selection and application of three active service behaviors under different situational factors to solve the active service paradox. The main practical findings include the following: First, the current academic discussion and research on active service behavior has laid a good theoretical foundation for some service enterprises to explore new directions of competitive advantage<sup>[2]</sup>. As time shifts, the academic circle has not studied too much about strategies to solve the active service paradox. Through literature review and empirical research, this paper sorts out the concepts and applications of weak active service behavior, active service behavior and excessive active service behavior, and summarizes the core characteristics of weak active service behavior as spontaneity, accuracy and empathy. The core characteristics of the three active service behaviors distinguish them like a gulf. In this paper, the research on weak active service behavior has a great contribution to both theory and practice. Employees' accuracy and empathic behavior avoid service redundancy and inappropriate service caused by excessive subjective judgment and wrong service implementation. The concept of weak active service behavior has important theoretical enlightenment for enterprises to provide personalized service of "thousands of faces" and strengthen enterprise brand construction in the post-industrial society which is free from "product thinking". In most cases, over-active service is easy to form misplaced service and service redundancy due to the characteristics of employee self-maintenance. On the other hand, weak active service behavior takes consumers as the central point of thinking in most cases. Employees provide accurate services through high accuracy judgment and high empathy, sublimating "product thinking" in the industrial era into "experience thinking" with customer perception as the core and personalized satisfaction as the essence.

Second, the comparative research on customer surprise and customer satisfaction in the academic circle has reached a saturation state, and it is more effective to achieve customer surprise in the process of seeking long-term maximization of corporate interests<sup>[3]</sup>. In the cognitive level of customer emotion and the reasons for customer surprise research is becoming more comprehensive. However, there is still a large gap in the field of customer unexpected surprise, which is concerned by a few scholars. This paper also discusses the unexpected surprise of customers. The core points of the analysis include expectation, high satisfaction and positive emotions. In contrast, the unexpected surprise of customers can bring superior emotional experience to customers. Therefore, this study can effectively promote the understanding and realization of customer surprise of waiter managers and employees.

Thirdly, the existing literature has proposed in the process of exploring the root causes of customer surprise that work beyond the duties of employees to help customers solve problems, better service attitude, and more extraordinary service are of great benefit to creating customer surprise<sup>[4]</sup>. However, apart from this study, there are few similar studies on the realization value of customer surprise from the perspective of active service behavior analysis. This study discusses and proves the influence of three kinds of proactive service behaviors on the realization of unexpected surprise. In addition, the analysis of the core mechanism of this positive influence shows that the satisfaction of customer self-esteem is the key. Thus, three kinds of enhancement types after satisfaction of customer self-esteem are extracted, including attention perception, importance perception and self-improvement perception. Therefore,

this paper makes a theoretical contribution to the creation of unexpected surprise and the core intermediary mechanism of three types of active service behavior.

Fourthly, in recent years, most of the studies on proactive service behavior focus on the research and control of antecedent variables<sup>[5]</sup>, while few focus on the end of the chain results, and the impact of proactive service behavior on customer brand relationship is even less. In addition, although many literatures have discussed and studied customer brand relationship, they are all discussed in the western background, while the research on special customer brand relationship in the Chinese background is relatively lacking. This study focuses on the Chinese local brand Haidilao, and then explores the customer brand relationship in the Chinese context. Based on the literature, this paper summarizes the unique customer brand relationship under the background of Chinese culture, including three dimensions: brand affinity, brand affinity and brand affinity. Customers come to the store as they like, and employees provide appropriate and active service to produce unexpected surprises. Customers feel comfortable physically and mentally, which is compatible with each other. Customers feel at home, from the heart to identify with the brand culture and brand value, this is a kind of affinity; It is fortunate that the nexus of karma generates buy-back behavior and actively spreads its spirit and culture for the sake of the brand. This paper further enriches the existing research of customer brand relationship, refines the new customer brand relationship in the Chinese context, and provides a new idea and inspiration for the study of customer brand relationship.

### **3.2 Practical Enlightenment**

The research results of this paper have implications for marketing and enterprise management in the following three aspects: First, in the process of providing active services, employees should pay attention to the analysis of the potential needs of customers that have not been directly expressed, and meet the needs of customers in a very appropriate way, so as to enhance the unexpected surprise of customers. This study shows that the three kinds of active service behaviors are rooted in the latent needs of customers, and the accurate needs of customers can be understood through empathy and analysis. Customers are a crucial external resource for an enterprise<sup>[6]</sup>. The best information source for employees to accurately understand customer needs and provide services in the best way is the customers themselves<sup>[7]</sup>. Therefore, to improve the precision and perfection of employees' active service, it is necessary to capture and utilize customer information efficiently in the service process. The following points should be emphasized: (1) Based on the core characteristics of three types of active service behaviors summarized and refined in this paper, evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the active service of employees and enterprise managers in different situations, so as to detect the effect of their active service in a short time, strengthen the sense of personal responsibility and service consciousness of employees, and avoid the involvement of rules in the dislocation of employees' service roles; (2) Strengthen the construction of employees' weak active service ability, build a talent training matrix, explore employees' active service ability at multiple levels and in a wide range of fields, stimulate employees' internal momentum, expand the feedback channels of staff ability training, and establish a complete solution guarantee mechanism for the pain points and difficult problems reported by employees in the training process. (3) The enterprise should actively combine the current emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data, establish and improve the special customer information demand database, constantly enrich and develop the customer potential demand and case situation in the enterprise database, refine the tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge for managers and employees to learn, and accumulate experience and guidance methods for employees' active service behavior.

As highlighted in this paper, the initiative to provide service in the context of employees' accurate acquisition of customer demand information is not only based on front-line staff's accurate grasp of customer demand signals, nor does it mean that employees will not take the initiative to provide service when they fail to obtain customer demand information. The purpose is to take a reasonable way to obtain a positive signal before initiating active service when the front-line personnel are not ready to capture the customer demand signal, and to avoid the redundant service and other consequences that damage the brand image caused by excessive service behavior as far as possible. Of course, if employees do not have the opportunity and conditions for accurate insight into the hidden needs of customers, the active service behavior is still necessary. At this time, the problem awareness of employees should be cultivated, the service quality of employees should be enhanced, the appropriate words should be adopted, the polite and appropriate questions should be selected, and the rational active service should be carried out. Avoid bringing discomfort to customers such as a

sense of privacy invasion.

Secondly, it takes the improvement of customer's self-esteem and unexpected surprise as an important purpose of the implementation of proactive service by employees. Unexpected surprise is a positive emotional experience that consumers can obtain at a higher level than unexpected surprise. Therefore, unexpected surprise should be identified as the new goal to pursue by the service industry, and the employees and managers of enterprises should establish the improvement of customer self-esteem and the creation of unexpected surprise as the high priority indicators in the service process. In detail, according to the self-esteem dimension refined in this study, the perception of attention, importance and self-improvement should be strengthened by employees in the process of active service one by one, so as to bring unexpected higher level of positive emotional experience to customers. They should try their best to pay attention to the changes in customers' mentality and psychological activities, and regard the improvement of customers' self-esteem as the first element of service.

Third, strengthen the construction and communication of enterprise brand culture, and export brand culture in the process of service. Through analysis and research, three kinds of active service behaviors can effectively reshape the connection between customers and brands, and promote the relationship between customers and brands. The update and iteration of media technology entrusts customers with rights and channels to join in the enterprise value building activities, and customers can enhance the sense of participation, identity and honor by participating in the enterprise value construction, and form an efficient and stable emotional connection with the enterprise. Encourage customers to play the role of enterprise trust agent, strengthen the customers' love degree, and give important enlightenment to China where brand construction is relatively low. Therefore, enterprise brand construction should follow the trend, seize the new opportunity of the rapid development of Internet technology, enrich the connotation of brand culture under the background of new media, train the service thinking of front-line employees in the post-industrial era through the effective internalization of brand culture, efficiently and subtly export brand culture and brand image, and strengthen the emotional connection with customers from the psychological level. In the deep communication with customers' thoughts, it will touch customers' heartstrings and build the two-way psychological connection and emotional resonance of corporate customers.

#### **4. Research Deficiencies and Future Research Directions**

Although this paper innovatively discusses how to solve the paradox of active service under different situational factors by combining temperament factors, there are still some research deficiencies. In the future, we can focus on the following aspects to continue to improve innovation. First, the case study object selected in this paper is Haidilao, a very representative brand of catering service industry. In the future, it is necessary to discuss whether the views and conclusions of this paper can be applied to other service industries and brands. Secondly, through literature review and empirical research, this paper finds that the meaning of customer self-esteem is the key influencing factor to enhance customer unexpected surprise, and other influencing elements still need further research. Thirdly, this paper takes the inevitable acquisition of customer needs by employees as the basic research premise, and then analyzes three kinds of active service behaviors to dig deeply into their respective influences. In the actual situation, employees can understand customer demand by insinuating, which will be hindered by internal and external factors and is not consistent with the assumed conditions. Therefore, it is of great significance to further explore how to choose the appropriate active service mode under specific circumstances. Fourthly, this paper mainly selects the case of Haidilao for empirical research and analysis, but this research method has its inherent shortcomings and limitations. In order to enhance the credibility of this paper, it is necessary to add quantitative research methods such as questionnaire survey and experiment method for further theoretical test of experimental conclusions.

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