# Impact of Communication Dyads on Healthcare Service Experience

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## ABSTRACT

*Marketing communication is more complex today due to the difference between a firm's promise about a service and what it actually delivers. Expectations of the customers are shaped on the basis of what types of promises are offered by the organization and how efficiently it is delivered to them. Here, the study attempts to empirically examine the impact of service communication triangle on the service experience in the healthcare sector. The Data was collected from sixty inpatients from several healthcare institutions located in Pondicherry (UT), at least with two days of service experience through the Email survey. Multiple regression is employed to explain the relationship between a criterion variable (Patients service experience) and three predictor variables, Patients employee relation (PE), Patients firm relation (PF), and Employee firm relation (EF). The study observed that three communication dyads contribute significantly to the service experience and it is relevant and timely to the healthcare service providers of the country in respect of first empirical study on service communication triangle in India and in this Healthcare sector.*

*Keywords: Service experience; Service triangle; Healthcare; Communication.*

## 1.0 Introduction

Integrated marketing communication is an anticipated responsible act from the various parts of a company, like a sales department, marketing department, and public relations department are specialized in disseminating sales communication, advertisement information and publicity matters respectively for the company affairs. The human resource department takes the initiation to recruit, select, and train the employees with respect to their communication channels. Here, integrated marketing communication (IMC) is an important concept in today's business, which is usually practiced by many of the multinational companies to efficiently and effectively organize and integrate firms operations in this day and age. A marketing executive explained it as

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"An IMC builds a strong brand identity in the marketplace by tying together and reinforcing all your images and messages. IMC means that all your corporate messages, positioning, and images, and identity are coordinated across all venues. It means that your public relation materials say the same thing as your direct mail campaign, and your advertising has the same 'look and feel' as your website" (Kotler, P, 2005)).

Service experience is a holistic encounter with the customer and the firm, and it requires coordination of a firm, its employees and the customers (Zeithaml et al, 2010). Service experience can be a critical business performance driver (Klaus and Maklan, 2013) for a brand in future and where the service experience is termed as a key strategic objective of a firm (Palmer, 2010; Verhoef et al, 2009) to build customer loyalty (Badgett et al., 2007; Wieseke et al., 2012).

Service triangle is a dynamic model interlinked with three entities (customer, employees, and the firm) to create three dyads together to develop, promote and deliver the services. This study attempts to determine whether these dyads are significantly contributing to the healthcare service experience or not. Therefore, the study on interaction within the service triangle is essential due to its special character, that is, in services, all the dyads required to contribute jointly to the services experiences. Then only it can process an absolute or clear-cut anticipated result on service experience (Zeithaml et al, 2010).

It is indispensable to make a balance between cognition and behavior of customer towards a firm and its employees to stabilize his positive attitude in all its ways (Heider, 1958).Sundry Literature talking about the in-depth relationship between customer and the firm, and how it assists in the achievement of desirable outcome from the service experience (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Bouzaabia et al., 2013). Good service experience leads to a positive impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Whereas, few studies stressed on the importance of employees and firm dyads on service experience (Morse, 1975;Chatman, 1989;Kristof-Brown et al., 2005;Amos and Wheathington, 2008). Finally, employees ability found to institute a good relationship between the customer and the firm (Ahearne et al., 2005); Sluss and Ashforth, 2008; Anaza and Ruther Fords, 2012). Therefore, this study tries to highlight the dyadic impact of communication triangle on healthcare service experience.

To the best of existing knowledge from the literature, no prior empirical study has examined in the healthcare service triangle. And as a result, some of the evidence is existing there about, whether these three dyads within the service triangle differ in terms of their impact on the service experience in different service sector other than the healthcare.

## 2.0 Conceptual Framework

In a service setting, it is necessary to perform all the three actors (customers, employees, and firm) in accordance with the service encounter. Service triangle is a visual representation of these three dyads that interact between and among these actors. The value of each service has to co-created with the combined effort of these actors only (Ballantyne and Varey, 2008; Vargo and Lusch, 2008).

**The customer firm dyad:** In a customer firm relationship, it is mandatory to create a good alliance with both parties through firm's image (Dutton et al, 1994), and customer value (Whetten and Godfrey, 1998), and customer image (Graeff,1996). For instance, customers may happier in the enhancement of their self-image (Onkvisit and Shaw, 1987) through getting a competent positive experience, where the same product or service is linked to their identity also (Chowdhury et al, 2014). In overall, this relationship also helps to motivate an individual to be a part of that effective interaction to experience superior services and to identify the firm's real position (Brewer, 2003).

**The employee firm dyad:**Most compatible and efficient employees of a firm can behave in accordance with the norms of the organization and which can bring a new ambiance as an extra-role in the same organization (Morse, 1975). In every organization, the employees are delivering the services what the firms are promising before the public. Therefore, the character of an employee towards customers is very important in each and every action they are dealing with (Muchinsky and Monahan, 1987). So, building a better relationship between an employee and a customer is a challenging task before the firm and it can be improved through hiring good employees, who can socialize individuals and adhere organizational practices as per its norms.

**The customer employee dyads:** Capable employees can easily attract new customers to improve the service environment (Jamal and Adelowore, 2008) and they also can convey the firm's identity in an easy manner (Muchinsky and Monahan, 1987). Employees are the actual groups behind the reflection on the firm's image (Kamins and Gupta, 1994). Generally, from these three dyads, customer-employee interaction is the weighty relation, which results in utmost customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Jamal and Adelowore, 2008). It means that the frontline employees are the faces of the organization and this dyad is likely to reflect positively on a better service experience.

**2.1 Theoretical model**
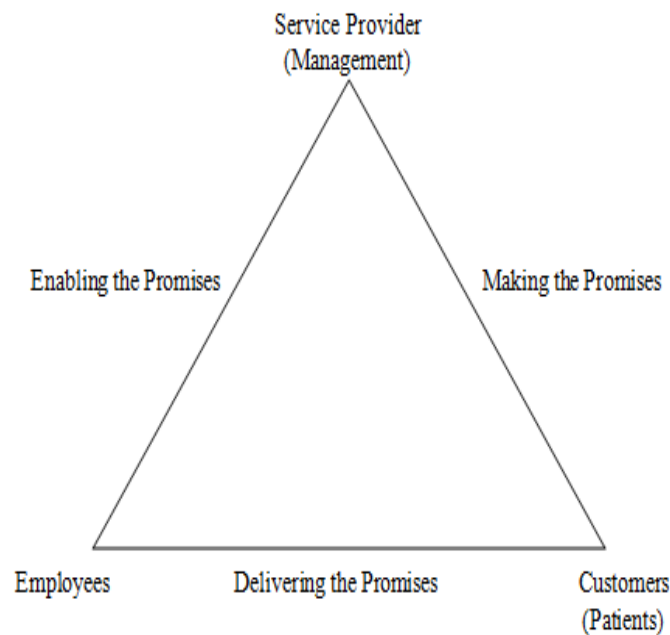
**2.2 Statement of the problem**

Service interaction provides additional information in relation to customer service departments, servicescapes, and everyday service encounters with the employees of the organization. These interactions in between service delivery add to the volume, variety and complexity of information that a customer receives. Where, the marketers of the services should ensure the consistency in the offering, enabling and delivering the services towards its customers. It is an important question before the researcher that at what extent these three dyads (CE, CF, and EF) of service communication developed By Graeff (1996) are effective in healthcare service experience (Van Dolen et al, 2002) and the researcher also found a need to assess the behavioural characteristics of patients towards the healthcare service encounters as well as the overall service experience from the same in its three dimensions.

In 2017, Sidney Anderson and Jeffery Smith conducted an empirical examination on the concept of service triangle on the basis of information collected from the customers of different popular service firms located in the South-eastern USA and that effort suggested as the first empirical study on the service triangle to establish whether there exists a significant role or not. From the review of literature, it is hard to

find more studies on the concept of the service triangle in the phase of the Indian service sector. So, as a prominent contributor to the service sector, healthcare sector considered as the field of study to explain the impact of service communication dyads on the service experience in this era.

**3.0 Objectives of the Study**

The study attempts to empirically examine the effect of service experience of patients by Gender wise and try to test the impact of service communication triangle on the service experience in the healthcare sector with respect to all patients.

**4.0 Methodology**

Initially the researcher collected the contact details of around hundred patients from the records of the visited hospitals with the assurance of data confidentiality and selected some patients from the list with respect to patient's registered mobile number and E-mail ID's. Where all the patients are received their medical treatment from the different healthcare institutions (Includes Primary health center, Clinics, Public sector hospitals, and Private sector hospitals) located in Pondicherry (UT) only, and they had at least for two days of service experience. Out of total responses sixty samples are used for this study and which is collected through an Email/Online survey. The demographic information demonstrate that 23 females and 37 males were the respondents for the survey and from the sample, a majority of the healthcare consumers (35 Respondents) belong to the age group of 45 to 55. The Questionnaire used for the study is an adoption of "An empirical examination of the services triangle" by Sidney Anderson and Jeffery Smith, 2017.Multiple regression is the statistical tool used to explain the relationship between a criterion variable (Patients service experience) and three predictor variables (PE, PF, and EF). And also independent sample t-test is applied here to assess whether there exists a significant difference between the males and female on the overall healthcare service experience.

**5.0 Results and Discussions**

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics for Each Variables**

| Construct | No. of Items | Cronbach's Alpha |
|-----------|--------------|------------------|
| PER | 3 | 0.704 |
| PFR | 3 | 0.875 |
| EFR | 3 | 0.846 |
| PE | 2 | 0.9 |

The reliability output of each variables, Patients employee relation (PER), Patients firm relation (PFR), Employee firm relation (EFR), and Service experience (SE) showing a result of a value more than 0.7 (Cronbach's Alpha), which means that the responses are highly reliable in its sense.

**Table 2: Mean difference in Perceived Service Experience by Gender**

| Service Experience | N | Mean | SD | *t* | *p* | *df* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 37 | 4.945 | 1.268 | 1.705 | 0.543 | 58 |
| Female | 23 | 4.37 | 1.281 | | | |

Here, $H_0$: There is no significant mean difference between the Perceived Service Experience by male and female.

$H_1$: There is a significant mean difference between the Perceived Service Experience by male and female.

From Table 2, it is observed that there is no much difference in service experience among male and female. The mean value of male and female are 4.945 and 4.37 respectively, which is too close to be same. Out of 60 samples, it consists of 37 males and 23 females. The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference between male and females in service experience is accepted with the t value of 1.705.

As an integral part of health care service quality, patient experience includes several aspects of health care delivery that ensures patients value creation, when they seek and receive care, such as getting timely appointments, easy access to information, and good communication with health care providers. This study aims to see whether there is any significant difference in perceived service experience by gender. From the result, there is no such difference on the basis of gender male and female. The result is contrasting to the findings of the 'Gender Differences in Patients Perceptions of Inpatient Care' in which it concluded with the finding of less positive experiences for women than men (Elliott et.al, 2012). This may be because of the small sample size or the seriousness of the illness caused.

**Table 3: Correlation Matrix for Study Variables**

| | SE | EPR | PFR | EFR |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| SE | 1 | | | |
| EPR | 0.735** | 1 | | |
| PFR | 0.693** | 0.743** | 1 | |
| EFR | 0.52** | 0.513** | 0.519** | 1 |

*Note. * = p < .05, ** = p < .01*

Table 3 shows the correlation between the variables. A high correlation is evident in Employee patient's relationship (EPR) with Service experience (SE) and Patients firm relationship (PFR) in the result with 0.01 level of significance. Apart from that there is a moderate correlation between the variables. Employee firm relationship (EFR) has a moderate correlation with all the other variables, SE, EPR, and PFR respectively at 0.01 level of significance.

**Table 4: Influence of Predictor Standardized Variable on Service Experience: Regression Analysis**

| Predictor variable | Std Beta Value | $T$ | Model Summary |
|---|---|---|---|
| **1.**Employee Patient Relationship | 0.45 | 3.482** | R=0.776 |
| **2.**Patient Firm Relationship | 0.285 | 2.193* | R²=0.602 |
|  |  |  | Adjusted R²= 0.58 |
| **3.**Employee Firm Relationship | 0.141 | 1.392 | F=28.18 |
|  |  |  | $p{\leq}0.01$ |

*Note. * = p < .05, **= p < .01 , Dependent Variable: Service Experience*

Here, $H_0$: Independent variables does not significantly predict the dependent variable.

$H_1$ : Independent variables significantly predict the dependent variable.

Table 4 shows the influence of predictor variables, which are Employee patient relationship, patient firm relationship and employee firm relationship with the overall Service experience. The R² value in the result indicates that the predictor variables contribute 60 percent of the variance of service experience, which can be assumed as a great contribution. Employee Patient relationship and Patient Firm Relationship has a significant role in prediction with regression coefficient, R= 0.776 at 0.01 and 0.05 level of significance, respectively. Since the p value is less than 0.05, the alternative hypothesis which states that independent variables significantly predict the dependent variable, is accepted.

As part of healthcare service Quality, components such as good communication, punctuality, access to information, etc are playing a vital role in positive service experience. From the above result, it can be inferred that there is a high chance of improving service experience by maintaining a better employee patient relationship and patient firm relationship. correlation matrix specifies that the employee firm relationship also plays a significant role in service experience. In the healthcare sector, understanding patient experience is the key to patient-centred care. Through this study, the researcher could explore the role of the effective communication between the patient, firm, and employee in the service experience.

**6.0 Conclusion**

As per the definition given by Beryl Institute, US in 2014, "Patients experience is the sum total of interactions, shaped by an organizations culture, that influence patient's perceptions, across the continuum of care", and it also considered as one of the end product of the prevailing communication status between the three dyads (EPR, PFR, and EFR) that occurs while the care is delivering. Actually, the service communication process initiates from the time of offer put forward to provide certain service by the service provider before the public and it almost ends with the process of delivering and treating the patients successfully. This study also underlined the fact that, employees are the crucial participants in a services settings for the success of the overall service communication era and for a favourable patients services experience than the firms contribution in it. In addition, in the study it is also noticed that the patients are keeping a connection with the respective service provider for their further treatment and recommendation. Anyway, the impact of service communication triangle on a healthcare consumer's perspective is a new approach and also needful due to the increasing lifestyle diseases and enhanced demand for the healthcare services, this study is relevant and timely to the healthcare service providers to bring a value addition to its patient's prosperity.

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