

# The Impact of Service Scripts on Customer Citizenship Behavior and the Moderating Role of Employee Customer Orientation

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## ABSTRACT

**Service scripts are behavioral and verbal prescriptions used in many organizations as a way of standardizing employees' behaviors during their interactions with customers. Yet, they have rarely been studied empirically. There are mixed suggestions in the literature about the beneficial vs. detrimental effects of service scripts. Based on social exchange and citizenship behavior theories, this study investigates whether the relationship between service scripts and an important customer outcome, customer citizenship behavior (CCB), depends on employees' level of customer orientation. Based on 285 matched dyads of employees and customers from a variety of service organizations, the study found that when service scripts are performed by employees with low customer orientation, service scripts have more detrimental effects on CCB in terms of reducing the propensity among customers to provide unsolicited feedback and their intentions to return to the service firm. There was also support for the mediating role of perceived service quality in accounting for these contingent relationships. These findings contribute to the literature on managing employee behavior and CCB. © 2014 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.**

Employees' actions have a decisive impact on customer attitudes and behaviors (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997), which in turn affect organizational success (Liao & Chuang, 2004; Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Niles-Jolly, 2005). A key challenge for many organizations is managing the often-heterogeneous behaviors of frontline employees in order to provide a more consistent service experience for customers.

One strategy is to deliberately control the behavior of frontline employees through the use of service scripts (Solomon, Surprenant, Czepiel, & Gutman, 1985). Service scripts are a type of organizational control for managing frontline employees' interactions with customers (Kirsch, 1996). In most cases, service scripts specify what actions an employee needs to take during a service encounter. This includes general rules and proto-

cols to follow during each step of the service process (Walsh, Gouthier, Gremler & Brach, 2012). For example, counter employees at McDonald's follow the Six Steps of Window Service, which is to greet the customer, take the order, assemble the order, present the order, receive payment, thank the customer, and ask for repeat business. Similarly, employees at Starbucks are required to greet a customer within 30 seconds from the time he or she enters the store, chat with the customer before taking the order, call out the coffee order according to company specs (e.g., size, any modifiers, name of drink in that order), then make eye contact and say "Have a nice day."

Sometimes employees are provided with even more detailed written scripts outlining exact phrases and wording they must use when speaking with customers. For example, employees of the Ritz Carlton were given

a 20-item checklist of rules to follow when interacting with guests. The 20 rules included specific types of words and phrases to use when speaking with guests, such as “certainly” or “my pleasure” rather than “ok” or “no problem” (Sanders, 2006). Many call-center employees are also provided with detailed written scripts.

Despite service scripts being used across a myriad of organizations to facilitate organizational control over employee–customer interactions (Elvin, 2003; Hsu & Chiang, 2011), there has been surprisingly little empirical research on service scripts. Within the management and organizational behavior literatures, most research relating to organizational controls of frontline employees has been conducted within the context of emotional labor (Hochschild, 1983). It has focused on the emotions employees ought to display to customers (e.g., Diefendorff & Richard, 2003) and, to a lesser extent, how they should dress and present themselves aesthetically (e.g., Entwistle & Wissinger, 2006; Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003). Service scripts have a broader impact on the interactions and conversations between employees and customers by controlling what employees should say and do, and the sequence of events that should take place (Abelson, 1981; Gioia & Poole, 1984).

The few studies that have focused on service scripts have tended to discuss the construct from the *employees’* perspective, in terms of how scripting impacts employees’ job design and how it shapes employee behavior (Tansik & Smith, 1991). Less is known about how scripted service encounters might influence *customer* attitudes and behaviors. The lack of research on service scripts from the customer’s perspective is surprising, given the dyadic, interdependent nature of service interactions in which the actions of one exchange partner (e.g., employee) directly impact the actions of the other (e.g., customer; Solomon et al., 1985). Drawing on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), this study argues that although service scripts are designed to deliberately shape the behavior of employees, they can also impact how customers perceive, respond to, and participate in the service encounter itself. The focus of this study is specifically on customer citizenship behavior (CCB)—an important customer outcome of service scripts and one that has received scant empirical attention in the literature.

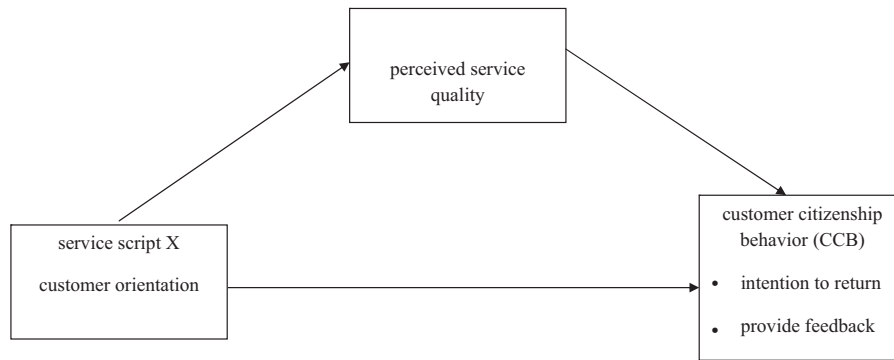
Conceptually based on organizational citizenship behavior (Organ, 1988, 1997), CCB comprises extrarole behaviors that customers voluntarily engage in during, or after, the service delivery. Although CCBs are not required for successful service delivery (they are actions that go above and beyond what is required by the customer), in the aggregate, they promote organizational effectiveness (Groth, 2005). This research focuses on two dimensions of CCB as discussed by Groth, i.e., customers’ intention to return—which refers to repeat and future service use—and customer feedback—which refers to providing unsolicited information to help the organization improve its service delivery process. To the authors’ knowledge, no studies have yet

to empirically investigate whether constraining employee behaviors through the use of service scripts impacts on the scope of customers’ own behaviors such as CCB.

A review of the literature revealed mixed views about the impact of service scripts on customers. Advocates of service scripts have suggested that employees following learned service scripts are more likely to generate the behaviors and outputs that are desired by the organization (Merchant & van der Stede, 2007). Thus, service scripts should have *beneficial* effects on customer outcomes. On the other hand, others have argued that service scripts may restrict employees’ discretion to go above and beyond prespecified procedures in helping customers. As argued by Rafaeli, Ziklik, and Doucet (2008), “It is difficult if not impossible to identify the precise and exhaustive set of behaviors that employees should employ in each situation to ensure high-quality service” (p. 240). Failing to read and respond effectively to idiosyncratic customer expectations is likely to make customers feel as if they are being treated as a “number,” which could have *detrimental* effects on customer outcomes.

The mixed views about the beneficial vs. detrimental effects of service scripts suggest there may be important boundary conditions in the relationship between service scripts and CCB that have yet to be taken into consideration. This study investigates the role of one key contingent factor, i.e., a service employee’s customer orientation. Customer orientation refers to the importance an employee places on meeting customers’ needs and expectations (Liao & Subramony, 2008; Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). The central argument of this study is that in the “wrong hands” (i.e., employees with low customer orientation), scripts can have detrimental effects on CCB. This study also seeks to investigate the *mechanism* by which service scripts and employees’ customer orientation jointly impacts CCB by testing the mediating role of perceived service quality that prior studies have demonstrated to be an important mechanism in the link between employee behavior and customer outcomes (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Rafaeli, Ziklik, and Doucet, 2008; Schneider et al., 2005). It is predicted that there will be a negative relationship between service scripts and CCB when scripts are performed by employees who are low on customer orientation. It is further predicted that this contingent relationship can be explained by the mediating effects of customers’ perceived service quality.

The theoretical model underpinning the present research is shown in Figure 1. In the following, a review of the literature pertaining to the central constructs, i.e., service scripts and CCB, is presented first. This is followed by a discussion of the moderating role of customer orientation and the mediating role of perceived service quality. Next, a description of the design of the study is provided, which consisted of 285 matched dyads of employees and customers from a variety of service organizations. Finally, the findings and their implications for the literature are presented.



**Figure 1.** Theoretical model.

## Service Scripts and CCB

The conceptualization of service scripts is theoretically based on the psychological construct of cognitive scripts. Cognitive scripts are memory structures and mental schemas that comprise knowledge of expected sequences of behaviors, actions, and events (Abelson, 1981; Gioia & Poole, 1984; Schank & Abelson, 1977). Cognitive or mental scripts are developed through the repetition of behavior, which then becomes cognitively structured into the typical order and content of an event (Abelson, 1981). Scripts in the service context are conceptually similar to mental scripts in that they guide behavior by specifying the actions and procedures an employee should carry out during a service encounter. “Service scripts” are different from cognitive scripts, however, in that they are “not chosen or developed by the employee, but rather designed by the service organization and formally used to guide and control the service delivered” (Victorino, Verma, Bonner, & Wardell, 2012, p. 2). In this way, service scripts are akin to routines or standard operating procedures and are learned through training.

In the service marketing literature, service scripts have been conceptualized as an organizational control, which are activities designed to increase the probability that specified plans are implemented properly and desired outcomes are achieved (Jaworski & MacInnis, 1989). Service scripts are implemented in many organizations under the assumption that employees who follow learned scripts generate the behaviors and outputs that are desired (Merchant & van der Stede, 2007). Indeed many organizations implement service scripts because they deem them the most effective strategy for ensuring a consistent level of service quality. Thus, from an organizational perspective, service scripts can be an effective means to control employee behaviors because by standardizing the service encounter, service scripts can overcome differences in employees’ skills, abilities, and attitudes (Rafaeli, Ziklik, and Doucet, 2008). Thus, scripts lend themselves to tight management control, decrease the variability between service encounters, and create an encounter that can be highly predictable for the customer and employee. As argued by Bowen

and Lawler (1992), many customers value predictability of services, and service delivery may be inconsistent when it is left to employee discretion.

The conundrum, however, is that while customers value the efficiency and predictability of individual services, they also prefer to be treated as a “number” by service personnel (Surprenant & Solomon, 1987). Schau, Dellander, and Gilly (2007) observed that while scripted encounters were more time efficient, they were also associated with fewer positive comments and gestures from customers. There are also issues associated with the perceived inauthenticity of scripted service encounters and the negative effects this may have on customer outcomes. Victorino et al. (2012) found evidence to suggest that customers are not only capable of detecting the presence or absence of a script, but can also detect subtleties in terms of the degree of scripting during service encounters. As argued by Johnston (1999), “many customers are sophisticated consumers not taken in by the veneer of gloss manufactured into the service” (p. 102). Examples of firms that have abolished the use of service scripts include the Ritz Carlton, which eliminated the formal 20-item checklist of rules mentioned earlier along with its famous motto “we are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen” in favor of a less scripted, more laid-back approach to customer service (Sanders, 2006).

The fact that customers can detect subtleties in service scripts (Victorino et al., 2012) suggests that there may be implications in terms of how customers perceive the service encounter and how they behave in return, such as their likelihood of engaging in extrarole behaviors as customers (i.e., CCB). Due to the inherently social and reciprocal nature of service interactions, service scripts may influence what mental model customers evoke in their participatory role in the service encounter and as a result may impact their CCB. This study focuses on CCB rather than in-role behaviors (i.e., customer coproduction behaviors) because extrarole behaviors are more likely to vary across customers than in-role behaviors. CCB is distinct from customer coproduction behaviors, which are behaviors that are required of customers in order to complete the service delivery, such as providing account information

during a transaction (Lengnick-Hall, 1996). This is in line with research showing that employee extra-role behaviors (i.e., organizational citizenship behavior) are more likely to vary across employees than in-role behaviors (i.e., task performance; Morrison, 1994; Organ, 1988).

According to social exchange theory, which is based on the norm of reciprocity, there is felt obligation to reciprocate when one perceives benefits from the actions of another party (Blau, 1964; Gouldner, 1960). This is supported by research findings suggesting that positive, beneficial actions directed at employees by the organization or its representatives (e.g., supervisors) contribute to the establishment of high-quality exchange relationships (Konovsky & Pugh, 1994). This creates a sense of obligation among employees to reciprocate with behaviors that typically are neither formally rewarded nor contractually enforceable by the organization (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005; Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). For example, social exchange mechanisms have been used to explain why employees express loyalty to their organization (Aryee, Budhwar, & Chen, 2002; Eisenberger et al., 1986). As noted by Konovsky and Pugh (1994) and Organ (1988), one of the most common ways for employees to reciprocate in an organizational setting is to engage in extra-role behavior.

Compared to employee organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), there has been less research on the customer equivalent, i.e., CCB. Similar to employee OCB, the voluntary nature of CCB makes it an ideal currency for customers to give or withhold at their own discretion depending on the perceived quality of the social exchange with employees during a service encounter (Bove, Pervan, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009). There is a lack of research, however, investigating the reciprocal relationship between employees and customers in terms of how scripting service employees' behavior might impact CCB, and little is known about the role of boundary conditions in this relationship. This study investigates whether the relationship between service scripts and CCB depends on the person who is enacting a service script and, more specifically, the service employee's level of customer orientation.

### **The Moderating Role of Service Employees' Customer Orientation**

A service employee's customer orientation refers to the importance the employee places on meeting customers' needs and expectations (Liao & Subramony, 2008; Susskind, Kacmar, & Borchgrevink, 2003). Customer orientation represents an individual difference characteristic that is directly related to the job context (Brown, Mowen, Donovan, & Licata, 2002). Research has shown that employee customer orientation is an important predictor of customer outcomes, such as sales performance (Boles, Babin, Brashear, & Brooks, 2001; Brown et al., 2002), perceptions of service qual-

ity (Brady & Cronin, 2001), and customer satisfaction (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Stock & Hoyer, 2005). This study investigates the moderating role of employee customer orientation in the service scripts—CCB relationship. A central argument in this study is that although service scripts are prescribed by organizations, they are ultimately performed by service employees. Thus, the success of the service encounter should depend heavily on the service employee and the importance they place on meeting customers' needs and expectations.

Specifically, based on social exchange theory, it is proposed that when scripts are in the hands of employees who have low customer orientation, these scripted encounters are likely to be characterized by more contractual, economic terms, which invariably limits social exchange implications. Such low-quality social exchanges between employees and customers are not conducive to engendering feelings of obligation among customers to go above and beyond their own role as customers to engage in positive, reciprocating behaviors such as CCB. Other theories, such as social learning theory, make similar predictions to the reciprocity norms, i.e., the notion that observing or directly interacting with individuals who exhibit certain behaviors produces similar behaviors in others (Bandura, 1977; Crittenden, 2005). In this case, a customer interacting with an employee who is low on customer orientation and thus performs only the bare minimum, "scripted" requirements is likely to produce similar behaviors (i.e., by narrowly sticking to their role as customers, thus withholding CCB). This "spillover" effect between employee behaviors and customer behaviors has been discussed by numerous researchers (Bell & Mengac, 2002; Bettencourt & Brown, 1997).

Moreover, although scripting employee behavior in essence entails restricting employees' discretion to help customers above and beyond prespecified procedures (Chebat & Kollias, 2000), employees with low customer orientation are less likely to deviate from a prescribed script to serve customers in the best possible way. As demonstrated by Humphrey and Ashforth (1994), employees may mindlessly follow a script and thus make mistakes and fail to meet customer needs. In particular, employees low in customer orientation are more likely to fail to recognize or process important cues in the environment, a process which Ashforth and Fried (1988) describe as "mindless" scripted behaviors, which is unlikely to engender citizenship behavior from customers. For example, mindlessly chanting the saying "have a nice day" to every customer because it is scripted rather than actually meant, is not likely to have a positive impact on customers. Similarly, employees who fake a smile and have little interest in genuinely creating a positive service experience for customers are unlikely to engender CCB in customers. This is supported by evidence that customers can detect inauthentic emotional displays as well as evidence that a customer's knowledge of an employee's inauthenticity negatively affects customer's outcomes (e.g., Grandey, Fisk,

Mattila, Jansen, & Sideman, 2005; Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, & Gremler, 2006).

In contrast, even in the presence of services scripts, employees who exhibit a high level of customer orientation are likely to have a more positive impact on customers because of their greater dedication to the overall performance of the service (Brown et al., 2002). In an effort to foster positive customer outcomes, Chebat and Kollias (2000) argue that these so-called “service enthusiasts” (p. 69) have a tendency to put greater effort into making scripts more understandable and likable to customers (e.g., repeating questions for elderly or foreign-born customers) and are more willing to make efforts that are not explicitly called for in the script (e.g., a warm smile or genuine eye contact). Building on the theatrical or dramaturgical perspective of services, which is often used to describe the dynamics of service encounters (Harris, Harris, & Baron, 2003), employees who are customer-oriented are likely to perform a given script more convincingly, similar to good actors on stage. The extra dedication to the performance of their customer service role means that service scripts are performed in ways that do not make the service delivery appear to be tightly scripted by the organization but rather a spontaneous performance by the employee.

Further, employees with high customer orientation are likely to be cognitively more engaged in the service delivery process than those who are low in customer orientation. Therefore, they are less likely to fall into the “mindlessness” that Ashforth and Fried (1988) ascribe to rigidly following service scripts. In other words, employees high in customer orientation may be flexible in their treatment of service scripts and may employ “code switching”—a form of improvisation whereby service employees alter a normally scripted interaction to make it more enjoyable for customers and themselves (Schau, Dellander, & Gilly, 2007). By being more engaged in the service process, employees with higher customer orientation are likely to be more attuned to how their behaviors affect customers and, as a result, internalize this feedback into their overall service delivery. Thus, service scripts may not have the same detrimental effects on reducing CCB when it is performed by employees with high customer orientation. To the extent that these employees are generally more geared toward satisfying customers’ needs, any negative effects of service scripts in terms of reducing the propensity among customers to engage in extrarole behaviors (Groth, 2005; Stock & Hoyer, 2005), such as returning to the service firm and to providing unsolicited feedback to help improve the organization, may be alleviated.

**H1:** Customer orientation will moderate the relationship between service scripts and customers’ intention to return to the service such that when customer orientation is low, service scripts will have more negative effects on return intentions than when customer orientation is high.

**H2:** Customer orientation will moderate the relationship between service scripts and customer feedback such that when customer orientation is low, service scripts will have more negative effects on customer feedback than when customer orientation is high.

## The Mediating Role of Perceived Service Quality

This study also seeks to understand the mediating process through which service scripts and customer orientation jointly impact CCB. As argued by several researchers, moderation analysis only tests for *when* effects occur, not *why* they occur (Baron & Kenny, 1986; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007), thus it is important to also investigate mediators of contingent relationships. This is known as *mediated moderation* where the focus is on determining the mediating variable that can help explain a moderating effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Edwards & Lambert, 2007; MacKinnon, Fairchild, & Fritz, 2007; Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt, 2005).

Service quality has been the subject of ongoing interest by both researchers and practitioners. In general, service quality refers to a customer’s overall impression of the relative superiority of a service (Bitner & Hubbert, 1994). Models of service quality often emphasize two dimensions of service quality, i.e., the “output” and “process” quality (Grönroos, 1984). Output quality refers to *what* is delivered to the customer, such as a meal in a restaurant or a hotel room a guest sleeps in. Although *what* the customer receives as a result of his or her interactions with a service firm is important, it is insufficient to account for the concept of service quality. A second important dimension is process quality, which refers to the *way* in which the output is transferred to the customer. This concerns both psychological and behavior aspects, in terms how service employees perform their tasks, what they say, and how the service delivery is carried out.

Service scripts have a major influence on how an employee delivers a service. Thus, one way service scripts and customer orientation might jointly impact CCB is through the mediating effects of perceived service quality (i.e., the overall moderation effect is produced by customers’ perception of service quality). The prediction that perceived service quality serves as one of the main mechanisms that transmits the effects of service scripts and customer orientation on CCB is supported by evidence showing that the behavior of frontline employees plays a critical role in determining customer reactions to service delivery (Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). This literature is built on the foundation of Fishbein and Ajzen’s (1974) attitude–behavior theory and is supported by well-established evidence showing attitudes and perceptions (e.g., perceived service quality) as the immediate antecedents of behaviors (e.g., CCB).

To the extent employees are low on customer orientation, service scripts should have negative effects on perceived service quality and subsequently reduce CCB. According to social exchange principles, service scripts enacted by employees whose overall behavior is generally not geared toward pleasing customers is unlikely to generate high-quality social exchanges. These exchanges should have deleterious effects on customers in terms of their perceived service quality and, in turn, reduce the likelihood of CCB. This prediction is supported by evidence of perceived inauthenticity (Grandey et al., 2005; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006) of scripts and the greater likelihood of scripts been followed “mindlessly” (Ashforth & Fried, 1988; Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994) when they are enacted by employees low in customer orientation. By the same token, high customer orientation should buffer against the deleterious effects of service scripts by creating an overall impression of superiority of service and this, in turn, affects the likelihood that customers will engage in voluntary, helpful behaviors such as remaining loyal to the service firm and providing feedback.

- H3:** Perceived service quality mediates the interaction between service scripts and employee customer orientation on customers’ intention to return to the service firm such that when customer orientation is low, service scripts will have more negative effects on perceived service quality, which in turn has a negative effect on customers’ intention to return to the service firm.
- H4:** Perceived service quality mediates the interaction between service scripts and employee customer orientation on customer feedback such that when customer orientation is low, service scripts will have more negative effects on perceived service quality, which in turn has a negative effect on customer feedback.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants in this study were 285 matched dyads of service employees and customers from a wide variety of services immediately after both had engaged in a service transaction. Thus, the unit of analysis in this study is the service transaction between an employee and a customer. These data were initially collected from Groth, Hennig-Thurau, and Walsh (2009). Customers had a mean age of 26.7 years ( $SD = 10.5$ ). Forty-two percent of customers were male. Service employees had a mean age of 27.8 years ( $SD = 9.6$ ) and their average job tenure was 3.1 years ( $SD = 4.9$ ). Thirty-seven percent of employees were male.

## Procedure

Surveys were distributed to approximately 60 graduate students of a large university, who were paid for their participation. Each participating student received a survey package that contained five pairs of matching customer and employee questionnaires. All survey pairs contained unique identifying codes so that the researchers could subsequently link the employee–customer dyads. Other quality checks were also included to ensure the accurate matching of survey dyads, such as asking for information about the date and time of the service transaction, the name of the business, and the name of the employee in both the customer and employee survey. The graduate students were informed that the researchers would verify this information and that they would only get paid for completed survey pairs with valid data.

Participating graduate students were instructed to use one pair of questionnaires for themselves and distribute the remaining five pairs to friends and family, thus employing a snowballing technique (Salganik & Heckathorn, 2004). Customers were instructed to take both the customer survey and employee survey with them to their next service encounter. Immediately after the service transaction, they then asked the service employee who had served them to fill out the employee survey. If the employee agreed, the customer simultaneously filled out the customer survey. Employees also received a short letter assuring the confidentiality of responses and instructions to put the completed survey into a sealed envelope, which was provided with the survey. The sealed employee survey was then handed back to the customer, who returned the completed survey pair to the researchers. Customers were informed that breaking the seal would invalidate a questionnaire. Participating customers and employees were not informed about the nature of the research topic; the cover letter only suggested that the study was about “satisfaction with services.”

In addition to conducting quality checks by matching up the information contained in the customer and employee surveys, random checks were conducted by calling service businesses in order to verify that the transaction had taken place. In addition, to ensure that no customer had filled out an employee questionnaire or multiple customer questionnaires, the researchers compared the handwriting on all questionnaires. As a result of these quality checks, 14 pairs of questionnaires were deemed either questionable or to contain too much missing data. These paired questionnaires were removed from further analysis. The final sample consisted of 285 employee–customer dyads.

The breakdown of service types visited by customers is as follows: Cafes and restaurants (20%); specialty stores (e.g., clothing, footwear, electronics): 18.6%; professional services: 18.2%; supermarkets and department stores: 8.5%, fast-food restaurants: 4.2%, 7.8%; cinemas and movie rentals: 3.9%; trade: 2.8%, lodging: 2.1%; other: 21.8%.

## Measures

The study included measures of service scripts and customer orientation in the employee survey and perceived service quality and CCB in the customer survey. All multiple-item measures were assessed on a 7-point Likert-type scale, ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. All scale items are shown in the Appendix.

**Employee Measures.** As there is no published scale on service scripts, the construct was measured using five items that were drawn from previous research on standardizing services (Bowen, 1990; Solomon et al., 1985). Qualitative, in-depth interviews were also conducted to ensure the items were valid and consistent with the conceptual definition of service scripts. Customer orientation was measured with five items developed by Brown et al. (2002).

**Customer Measures.** The customer questionnaire consisted of a 5-item CCB measure that assessed two dimensions of CCB identified by Groth (2005): intention to return and provide feedback. Customers' intention to return was measured using two items from Groth (2005). Similarly, providing feedback to the organization was measured with three items from Groth (2005). Perceived service quality was measured using five items developed by Brady and Cronin (2001).

**Control Variables.** The first control variable was customers' past service use, which was measured with the question "in total, how many times have you consumed this type of service within the past 12 months?" This is likely to influence key variables in the study such as perceived service quality and CCB. Employee tenure was also controlled for as it is likely to influence employees' familiarity with their work and service scripts. Finally, the duration of the service interaction (as reported by customers) was controlled for given that the longer an interaction, the more interdependent the exchange becomes, which also has implications for social exchange principles (Tekleab & Taylor, 2003).

## RESULTS

### Validity and Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents means, SDs, correlation coefficients, and reliability estimates for all variables in the study. The reliability of all scales is satisfactory, with  $\alpha$  scores ranging from 0.66 to 0.91. To assess the convergent and discriminant validity of all of the multi-item measures, a measurement model was subjected to confirmatory factor analysis. The fit of several models was estimated, including the fit of a five-factor model (i.e., service scripts, customer orientation, CCB—intention to return, CCB—provide feedback, and perceived service quality). The fit statistics indicate an acceptable fit

to the data:  $\chi^2(142, N = 285) = 385.22, p < 0.01$ ; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = 0.92; Incremental Fit Index (IFI) = 0.92; root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.08. The fit of the five-factor structure was significantly better than that of a one-factor model ( $\Delta\chi^2[10] = 1540.90, p < 0.01$ ) and a four-factor model in which the two dimensions of CCB were modeled as a single construct ( $\Delta\chi^2[4] = 75.57, p < 0.01$ ).

The correlations in Table 1 show that the two dimensions of CCB are positively related to each other ( $r = 0.52, p < 0.01$ ) and also positively related to employee-reported customer orientation. Specifically, customers who interacted with employees who rated themselves high in customer orientation reported a greater likelihood of returning to the service ( $r = 0.19, p < 0.01$ ) and providing feedback to the organization ( $r = 0.23, p < 0.01$ ). Perceived service quality was also positively associated with customers' return intentions ( $r = 0.55, p < 0.01$ ) and customer providing feedback ( $r = 0.38, p < 0.01$ ). Finally, perceived service quality was negatively associated with the presence of service scripts ( $r = -0.14, p < 0.05$ ).

### Results of Hypotheses Testing

To test the hypotheses, three hierarchical regression analyses were conducted following Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt's (2005) process for testing mediated moderation models that is based on the three steps specified by Baron and Kenny (1986) in their conceptualization of mediation pathways. Specifically, the following three equations were tested:

$$y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Mo + b_3XMo + e, \quad (1)$$

$$M_e = b_0 + b_1X + b_2Mo + b_3XMo + e, \quad (2)$$

$$y = b_0 + b_1X + b_2M_o + b_3XMo + b_4Me + b_5MoMe + e. \quad (3)$$

Following Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt's (2005) prescription,  $b_0$  is the constant,  $X$  is service scripts,  $Mo$  is the moderator customer orientation,  $XMo$  is the interaction between service scripts and customer orientation, and  $Me$  is the mediator perceived service quality. According to Muller et al., to demonstrate mediated moderation, there needs to be an overall moderated effect of service scripts on CCB, i.e., a significant interaction between service scripts and customer orientation in predicting both customers' intention to return and customer feedback (Equation (1)). Next, there needs to be a significant interaction between service scripts and customer orientation for perceived service quality (Equation (2)) and perceived service quality needs to have a significant effect on the CCB outcomes (intention to return and provide feedback, Equation (3)). Importantly for

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics, Study Variable Intercorrelations, and Internal Consistency Estimates<sup>a</sup>.**

Construct	Mean	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
1. Service interaction duration (min)	17.19	29.74	-							
2. Employee tenure	3.10	4.94	0.22**	-						
3. Service use	33.48	44.85	-0.19**	-0.15*	-					
4. Service scripts	3.41	1.10	-0.09	-0.01	-0.07	<b>0.74</b>				
5. Customer orientation	5.61	1.14	0.09	0.16**	-0.08	0.02	<b>0.87</b>			
6. Perceived service quality	5.10	1.13	0.21**	0.04	-0.02	-0.14*	0.15**	<b>0.90</b>		
7. CCB: Intention to return	5.29	1.25	0.13*	0.07	-0.07	-0.10	0.19**	0.55**	<b>0.66</b>	
8. CCB: Provide feedback	4.92	1.28	0.10	0.13*	-0.02	-0.09	0.23**	0.38**	0.52**	<b>0.91</b>

Note: *N* = 285 matched dyads.

<sup>a</sup>Values along diagonal represent internal consistency estimates.

\**p* < 0.05 (two-tailed), \*\**p* < 0.01 (two-tailed).

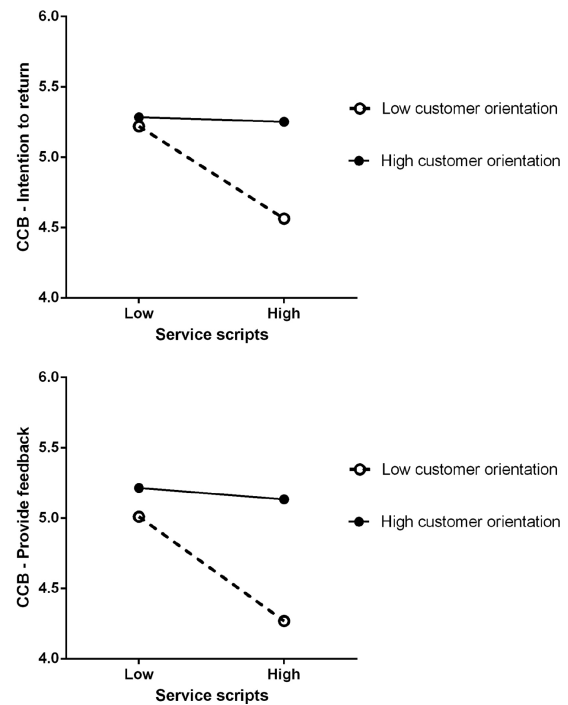
demonstrating mediated moderation, the effect of the overall interaction in Equation (3) (i.e., service scripts × customer orientation) needs to be reduced in magnitude (or may be reduced to nonsignificance in the case of “full” mediated moderation) compared to the overall interaction in Equation (1) while controlling for the effects of perceived service quality.

As can be seen in Table 2 (results for “intention to return”) and Table 3 (results for “provide feedback”), in the first step, the control variables (i.e., service use, employee tenure, and service duration) were entered. In the second step, the main effects of service scripts and customer orientation were entered. In the third step, the interaction term (service scripts × customer orientation) was entered. In the fourth step, the main effect of perceived service quality was entered. To reduce multicollinearity between the main effects and the interaction terms and also to increase the interpretability of the beta-weights for interaction terms (Cohen & Cohen, 1983), all variables were mean-centered and then multiplied to get interaction terms.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 predict that customer orientation moderates the relationship between service scripts and CCB in that the negative relationship between service scripts and CCB would be stronger for customers served by employees with low customer orientation. As seen in Tables 2 and 3, the addition of the interaction term between service scripts and customer orientation in Equation (1) resulted in a significant increase in variance explained for intention to return ( $\beta = 0.16, p < 0.05$ ) and provide feedback ( $\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$ ). These results provide support for Hypotheses 1 and 2.

To better understand the nature of these interactions, the simple slopes of service scripts on intention to return and provide feedback were graphed for participants who were 1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean of customer orientation, following procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991). As shown in Figure 2, and consistent with the study’s prediction, the negative relationship between service scripts and CCB in terms of customers’ return intentions and customer feedback was stronger for customers served by employees with low customer orientation.

Further analysis was conducted to investigate whether the simple slopes of the interactions repre-



**Figure 2.** The moderating effects of employee customer orientation on CCB.

sented in Figure 2 were significantly different from zero (Aiken & West, 1991; Cohen, Cohen, West, & Aikens, 2003). Analysis of the simple slopes of the interaction between service scripts and intention to return yielded a significant, negative relationship between service scripts and intention to return at low levels of customer orientation ( $\beta = -0.33, p < 0.01$ ) but not at high levels of customer orientation ( $\beta = -0.02, p = 0.85, n.s.$ ). The same pattern of results was found for customers providing feedback (low levels of customer orientation:  $\beta = -0.37, p < 0.01$ ; high levels of customer orientation:  $\beta = -0.04, p = 0.67, n.s.$ ).

Hypotheses 3 and 4 predict that perceived service quality mediates the moderated effects of customer orientation on CCB. Based on this assumption, the interaction between service scripts and customer orientation on perceived service quality should be



**Table 2. Least-squares Regression Results for Mediated Moderation for “Intention to Return”.**

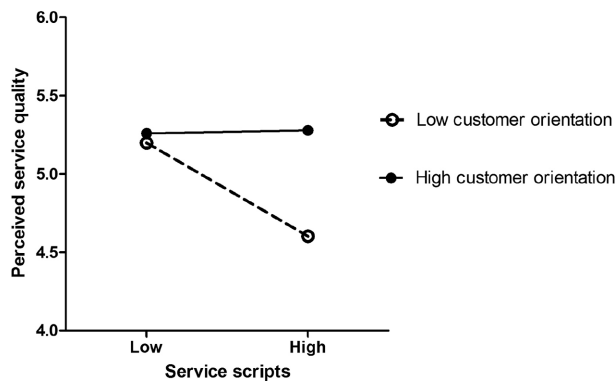
	Equation (1): CCB—Intention to Return			Equation (2): Perceived Service Quality			Equation (3): CCB—Intention to Return		
	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Control Variables	0.02			0.04			0.02		
Service interaction duration		0.00	0.00		0.01	0.00		0.00	-0.02
Employee tenure		0.02	0.02		-0.00	0.02		0.02	0.07
Service use		-0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00		-0.00	-0.06
Direct Effects	0.06	0.04**		0.08	0.04**		0.06	0.04**	
Service scripts		-0.17	0.06		-0.16	0.06		-0.08	0.06
Customer orientation		0.24	0.06		0.19	0.06		0.13	0.06
Interaction Terms	0.08	0.02*		0.10	0.02*		0.09	0.02*	0.13*
Service scripts × Customer orientation		0.14	0.06		0.11	0.05		0.08	0.05
Mediated Moderation							0.31	0.22**	
Perceived service quality								0.55	0.06
									0.50**

Note:  $N = 285$ .  
 All beta coefficients and standard errors are reported for the final step.  
 $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  are reported at each step.  
 \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .

**Table 3. Least Squares Regression Results for Mediated Moderation for “Providing Feedback”.**

	Equation (1): CCB—Provide Feedback			Equation (2): Perceived Service Quality			Equation (3): CCB—Provide feedback		
	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$	$R^2$	$\Delta R^2$	$\beta$
Control Variables	0.03	0.03		0.04			0.03		
Service interaction duration		0.00	0.00		0.01	0.00		0.00	-0.02
Employee tenure		0.04	0.02		-0.00	0.02		0.04	0.12*
Service use		0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00		0.00	0.00
Direct Effects	0.08	0.05**		0.08	0.04**		0.08	0.05**	
Service scripts		-0.21	0.07		-0.16	0.06		-0.16	0.06
Customer orientation		0.26	0.07		0.19	0.06		0.19	0.06
Interaction Terms	0.10	0.02*		0.10	0.02*		0.10	0.02*	0.18**
Service scripts × Customer orientation		0.11	0.06		0.11	0.05		0.08	0.05
Mediated Moderation							0.19	0.09**	
Perceived service quality								0.37	0.07
									0.32**

Note:  $N = 285$ . All beta coefficients and standard errors are reported for the final step.  
 $R^2$  and  $\Delta R^2$  are reported at each step.  
 \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$ .



**Figure 3.** The moderating effects of employee customer orientation on perceived service quality.

significant (Equation (2)). Furthermore, while controlling for the effects of perceived service quality, the effect of the overall interaction in Equation (3) (i.e., service scripts  $\times$  customer orientation) should be reduced in magnitude (or may be reduced to nonsignificance in the case of “full” mediated moderation) compared to the overall interaction in Equation (1). As seen in Equation (2) in Tables 2 and 3, there was a significant interaction between service scripts and customer orientation on perceived service quality ( $\beta = 0.13$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) thus fulfilling the first criterion. As seen in Equation (3) in Tables 2 and 3, perceived service quality had a significant effect on both intention to return ( $\beta = 0.50$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and provide feedback ( $\beta = 0.32$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Importantly for mediated moderation, the inclusion of the mediator in Equation (3)—perceived service quality—reduced the coefficient for the direct interaction effect between service scripts and customer orientation for intention to return ( $\beta = 0.09$ ,  $p = 0.11$ , *n.s.*) and provide feedback ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.17$ , *n.s.*). Sobel tests confirmed that the interaction of service scripts and customer orientation had significant indirect effect on CCB through affective commitment (intention to return:  $t = 6.33$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ; provide feedback:  $t = 2.12$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ; Krull & MacKinnon, 1999).

The analysis also followed Muller, Judd, & Yzerbyt’s (2005) procedure for testing mediation in the simple slopes by calculating simple effects at values of 1 SD above and below the mean moderator score and then calculating the total indirect effects through the mediator. These results suggest that the indirect effect of service scripts on CCB via the mediator (i.e., perceived service quality) is much higher when an employee’s customer orientation is low ( $-0.28$ ) than when an employee’s customer orientation is high ( $-0.03$ ).

To better understand the nature of the interaction between service scripts and customer orientation on perceived service quality, the simple slopes for the participants who were 1 SD above and 1 SD below the mean of customer orientation were separately graphed. As shown in Figure 3, the negative relationship between service scripts and customer orientation was stronger for individuals low in customer orientation. Analysis of

the simple slopes revealed that service scripts are negatively related to perceived service quality at low levels of customer orientation ( $\beta = -0.30$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), but not at high levels of customer orientation ( $\beta = 0.01$ ,  $p = 0.91$ , *n.s.*).

## DISCUSSION

Service scripts play an important role in today’s service-dominated economy, especially given increasing expectations from customers for fast, consistent, and uniform service delivery. Despite their importance for employee–customer interactions, surprisingly little empirical research has examined the nature and consequences of service scripts. Based on social exchange and citizenship behavior theories, this study investigated the link between the use of service scripts and customer outcomes (Groth, 2005; Solomon et al., 1985). Specifically, results show an interaction between service scripts and customer orientation, and this interaction impacts CCBs via a pathway through perceived service quality. The model was tested using a sample of employee–customer dyads drawn from a wide variety of service contexts.

Consistent with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), the results of this study demonstrate that for employees low in customer orientation, the negative relationship between the presence of service scripts and the propensity among customers to return to a service firm and provide unsolicited customer feedback was exacerbated. The results suggest that service scripts “in the wrong hands” can be a negative feature of service delivery. They further show that citizenship behaviors were low when service scripts were performed by service employees who reported low levels of customer orientation. The study further found evidence for the mediating role of perceived service quality in accounting for these contingent relationships. Overall, the results provide support for the proposed mediated moderation in that the moderation between service scripts and employee customer orientation influences citizenship behaviors indirectly through customers’ perceptions of service quality.

The present study makes at least three important theoretical contributions. First, this investigation into service scripts rejuvenates a literature on the role of scripts and schemas in influencing behavior in organizations (Lord & Kernan, 1987). Although the conceptualization of service scripts is based on the well-established psychological construct of cognitive scripts (Abelson, 1981), there has been little empirical research investigating the role service scripts play in customer service exchanges, particularly in regard to customer behaviors. To the authors’ knowledge, this is the first study to investigate whether service scripts—the use of which reflects a unique role requirement of many customer service employees—are linked to extrarole behaviors of customers and whether this link is contingent on factors such as employees’ customer orientation. The results of this study suggest that although

service scripts are prescribed by organizations, they are ultimately performed by service employees and thus individual characteristics of frontline employees have an impact on the relationship between service scripts and CCB. Specifically, the results demonstrate the important moderating role of employees' customer orientation, a pivotal construct within the service literature (Brown et al., 2002; Liao & Subramony, 2008), on the service script–CCB relationship.

Second, the findings extend the literature on organizational citizenship behavior by expanding the nomological network of CCB. Although citizenship behaviors are conceptually grounded within social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Organ & Konovsky, 1989), most prior research on citizenship behaviors has focused exclusively on employees (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009). Thus, the present study heeds the calls in the organizational citizenship behavior literature for a focus on citizenship behaviors within the context of frontline service jobs, given the unique job demands of frontline employees (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Paine, & Bachrach, 2000). Specifically, this study extends this literature by testing a social exchange model of employee–customer interactions within the under-researched context of scripted service encounters. Third, results not only test contingent effects of service scripts on CCB, but also extend the literature by testing the mediating role of perceived service quality in accounting for these moderating effects. This is the first study to comprehensively test both moderating and mediating effects in the context of service scripts and CCB.

The results of this study also have important practical implications. Service managers and researchers have long espoused the notion that customers are a human resource that organizations can utilize (Bettencourt, 1997). However, utilization of this resource may be hampered by management's attempts to standardize and increase the efficiency of service encounters. The current findings indicate that service organizations need to be cognizant of how service scripts can be a deterrent to CCB, especially when employee customer orientation is low. These findings should help service managers better understand the potential negative effects of using service scripts and that, when placed in the wrong hands, negative effects of service scripts can be exacerbated.

In addition, given that not all service scripts are created equal, there is a promising avenue for future research investigating different types of service scripts and their impact on employees and customers alike. For example, Chebat and Kollias (2000) distinguished between rigid and weak service scripts; weak scripts do not contain sequential information regarding prior and consequent events and will likely give employees more leeway in deciding how best to respond to customer needs. In this context, Schau, Dellander, and Gilly (2007) showed that service employees are able to adapt to situational requirements and are less likely to fall into the "mindlessness" of providing a scripted

service (Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994). Service firms may thus benefit from distinguishing between those employees who enact service scripts more rigidly and those who do so more freely by trying to establish a fit with customers' preferences, e.g. when customers are served by appointment or when the customer's attitude toward scripts is known. Furthermore, given that the effects of service scripts on CCB depend on employees' level of customer orientation, service organizations can focus employee selection and/or training resources on employee customer orientation.

The findings and contributions of the present study are nevertheless subject to limitations that, in turn, highlight potentially fruitful avenues for future research. The first limitation is the use of cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data. Therefore, conclusions that imply a causal ordering must be treated with caution. Nevertheless, that the data were collected from two separate sources (employees and customers) alleviates some of those problems. Relatedly, although the relationship between service scripts and CCB was investigated in a cross-section of services, the generalizability of the current findings to specific service contexts may require further investigation. Second, the proposed model is static, whereas the process by which employee behavior prompts customer behavior, especially CCB, is dynamic. Future research could attempt to capture entire service episodes to gain a better understanding of how employees enact service scripts and how the enactment affects customer outcomes, specifically CCB. In addition, our measure of service scripts mostly captured the degree to which employees are supposed to use service scripts, rather than their actual use of scripts in the service encounter under investigation. Furthermore, it did not capture the distinction between rigid and weak scripts discussed in the previous paragraph. Future measurement development work may address this issue by developing measures that more precisely capture actual behaviors.

Finally, given the dearth of empirical studies on the impact of service scripts in general, there are numerous avenues for future studies—such as comparing both employees and customers' perceptions of service scripts and investigating whether any discrepancies in perceptions impact on service outcomes; examining a broader range of customer outcomes to include both in-role and extrarole behaviors; and examining other moderating variables such as factors relating to the employee, customer, and service environment. With increasing expectations for personalization in many service industries, this study opens the door to numerous research opportunities and also paves the way for rejuvenating research on the phenomenon of scripts in organizations.

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## APPENDIX

### List of All Study Items.

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Items
Employee service scripts
My supervisor instructs me on what to say and do when serving customers.
I have to follow a rigid script when interacting with customers.
I have strict instructions that tell me how to behave when serving customers.
Each employee in this firm must treat customers in exactly the same way.
The way employees interact with customers is somewhat standardized in this Firm.
Employee customer orientation
I try to help customers achieve their goals.
I achieve my own goals by satisfying customers.
I get customers to talk about their service needs with me.
I take a problem-solving approach with my customers.
I keep the best interests of the customer in mind.
Customer perceived service quality
Overall, I'd say the quality of my interaction with this firm's employees is excellent
I would say that the quality of my interaction with this firm is high.
I always have an excellent experience when I visit this firm.
I feel good about what this firm provides to its customers.
Customer citizenship behavior: Provide feedback
How likely are you to provide information when surveyed by the business?
How likely are you to provide helpful feedback to customer service?
How likely are you to inform the firm about the service received by this employee?
Customer citizenship behavior: Intention to return
I plan to visit this service provider in the next years.
The next time I need services of this type, I will choose this company.

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