

Exploring the Role of Personality Traits and Perceived Expertise as Antecedents of Relationship Marketing in Service Context

Kambiz Heidarzadeh Hanzaee and Sepideh Farzaneh

Department of Business Management, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran

Abstract: The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of consumer sociability and agreeableness and service provider perceived expertise on service relationship success. In total, 388 useable questionnaires were collected from customers of beauty salons in Tehran, Iran. Structural equation modeling was used to analyze the data. The findings indicated that expertise is an important antecedent of satisfaction and trust, while, agreeableness and sociability play key roles in level of trust and commitment. Moreover, Satisfaction is affected by customer agreeableness. In addition, the findings introduced the duration of the relationship as a consequence of satisfaction and an antecedent of social benefits, which strengthen commitment. So, this research found that sociability and agreeableness have a significant impact on service relationship success; thus, providing support for the importance of customer traits in relationship marketing especially in service contexts.

Keywords: Agreeableness, relationship duration, service marketing, sociability

INTRODUCTION

Today's rapidly changing marketing environment is compelling service firms to search more creative and flexible means for dealing with competition. Many firms have responded to this challenge by building collaborative relationships with customers (Sheth and Parvatiyar, 2002; Chen *et al.*, 2008). Generally, it is believed that the effects of positive interpersonal relationships are more important in services than in most marketing contexts because of the unique characteristics of many services (Gummesson, 1994; Gremler and Gwinner, 2000; Macintosh, 2009).

As a relatively new research topic, relationship quality still has room for further exploration, particularly in the area of high-credence services marketing (Chen *et al.*, 2008). Previous studies on relationship quality focused on high-credence services such as insurance, finance, banking and hair salon services (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Wray *et al.*, 1994; Bejou *et al.*, 1996; Sharma and Patterson, 1999; Shamdasani and Balakrishnan, 2000). These studies show that in a high-credence service setting, an understanding of relationship quality can help ease the uncertainty of customers of the abstract and complicated service that is provided by service firms (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Wray *et al.*, 1994; Chen *et al.*, 2008).

Customer provider relationships have received much attention in the literature, yet little research has been conducted on customer personality (Bove and Mitzifiris, 2007) as it may impact service relationship development and success. Literature suggests that strong relationship

outcomes not only depend upon successful relationship marketing tactics, but also upon consumer personality (Odekerken-Schroder *et al.*, 2003).

While antecedents and consequences of relationship success have been explored, Palmatier *et al.* (2006) point out that some high-impact antecedents (e.g. seller expertise) have appeared in relatively few primary studies and that other key drivers of a strong relationship from the customer's perspective offer opportunities for future research. Spake and Megehee (2010) Furthermore, these interactions are dyadic in that the success of the interaction depends on the efforts of both parties. Emotion shapes personal interactions and has long-term social consequences, as well as impacts personality traits long-term (Harker and Keltner, 2001; Spake and Megehee, 2010).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how personality traits and service provider expertise is linked to consumer satisfaction, trust, commitment, relationship duration and social benefits in the context of hairdressing. We concentrate specifically on two personality traits: sociability and agreeableness.

Expertise is frequently cited as an important employee characteristic that contributes to customer trust (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Macintosh, 2009). Expertise is also defined as "knowledge, experience and overall competence" (Palmatier *et al.*, 2006)

Perceived expertise is the customer's evaluation of relevant competencies associated with the exchange partner (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Spake and Megehee, 2010).

By demonstrating expertise, a service provider can help customers reduce the uncertainties and the consequent feelings of vulnerability that they are likely to experience during the purchase (Andaleeb and Anwar, 1996). Frazier and Summers (1984) suggest that a strategy of relationship marketing is to influence the perceptions of the other party of one's own abilities and competence. In high-credence services, where uncertainties and risks are high, customers may want to take control over the proceedings to ensure that every detail is covered (Nakata and Sivakumar, 1996; Chen *et al.*, 2008). In a high credence service market, professional knowledge and expertise should be the most important criteria for customers in the selection of a service provider (Chen *et al.*, 2008).

Expertise has been found to be a determinant of key relationship measures including trust (Moorman *et al.*, 1993; Swan *et al.*, 1985) and satisfaction (Crosby *et al.*, 1990) across a variety of contexts (Macintosh, 2007).

Service employee expertise should have a positive impact on customer trust because of a greater perception of the employee's capability to deliver (Macintosh, 2009). So, if the expertise is proven after consumption, the trust and satisfaction of customers towards the service provider will increase (Smith, 1998; Chen *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, Customers may be more willing to maintain ongoing relationships with service providers when the provider is perceived to be an expert (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Spake and Megehee, 2010). Based on this literature, we propose:

- H1:** There is a direct relationship between perceived expertise and satisfaction
- H2:** There is a direct relationship between perceived expertise and trust
- H3:** There is a direct relationship between perceived expertise and commitment

A personality refers to the relatively stable pattern of behaviors and consistent internal states that explain a person's behavioral tendencies (Bove and Mitzifiris, 2007). Sociability is the tendency to affiliate with others and to prefer being with others to remaining alone (Cheek and Buss, 1981). High sociability people tend to seek friendships and opportunities to engage in relationships, including retailing relationships (Reynolds and Beatty, 1999), online relationships (Blais *et al.*, 2008) and sports activities (Ko and Pastore, 2005) in order to fulfill social needs. The social benefits are often an important outcome in service relationships (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998) and the sociability of a service provider is evaluated as part of the service encounter are well established in the services marketing literature; however, the sociability of the consumer has received less attention (Spake and Megehee, 2010).

High sociability people are commonly referred to as extraverts. The traits of agreeableness and extraversion represent socially oriented personality types. Extraversion reflects sociability, cheerfulness, gregariousness, talkativeness, energy and activity. The opposite pole dimension is introverted, quiet, shy and reserved (Bove and Mitzifiris, 2007).

The extravert needs to have people to talk to, craves excitement and opportunities for physical activity, likes to laugh and be merry and engages in many social interactions, which are a major source of happiness (Hills and Argyle, 2001). Conversely, the introverts are commonly characterized as a quiet individual who prefers reading books rather than socializing with people, does not like excitement and is socially distant except with intimate friends (Spake and Megehee, 2010).

The sociability of a hairdressing customer is expected to differentially impact the satisfaction-trust-commitment relationship. If the hairdresser is unwilling or unable to socially interact with the high sociability customer, then that customer is likely to form negative perceptions about the provider and the quality of service delivered. In this way, the sociability of the customer may impact his/her level of satisfaction with and commitment to the hairdresser based on their need for social interaction. Personality also plays an important role in one's predisposition to trust and is influenced by interpersonal interactions which build relationships (Young and Daniel, 2003). Since high sociability of the hairdresser's customer value social interaction they should more quickly build relationships, which help to form trust. Hence support is given for the following hypotheses:

- H4:** There is a direct relationship between customer sociability and satisfaction
- H5:** There is a direct relationship between customer sociability and trust
- H6:** There is a direct relationship between customer sociability and commitment

Agreeableness reflects a general warm feeling towards others and involves being courteous, good-natured, empathic, cooperative, tactful, forgiving and softhearted. The opposite pole is cold, rude, unkind, irritable, ruthless, suspicious and inflexible (Bove and Mitzifiris, 2007).

Agreeableness refers to the quality of one's interpersonal relations and extraversion to the quantity and intensity of these relations (DeNeve and Cooper, 1998). Higher agreeableness is linked to knowledge sharing and to better interpersonal relationships, life satisfaction and health (Mooradian *et al.*, 2006; Ferguson *et al.*, 2010). Roccas *et al.* (2002) found a significant positive correlation between the personality trait of agreeableness and the value of benevolence (viewed as a dimension of trust). Based on this literature, we propose:

- H7:** There is a direct relationship between customer agreeableness and satisfaction
- H8:** There is a direct relationship between customer agreeableness and trust
- H9:** There is a direct relationship between customer agreeableness and commitment

Frequently reported relationship outcomes are relationship satisfaction, trust and relationship commitment (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Doney and Cannon, 1997; Baker *et al.*, 1999; Odekerken-Schroder *et al.*, 2003).

Trust and commitment play important role in relationship development (Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and all three constructs are determinant factors in customer retention (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999). Customer satisfaction has been defined as the customer's affective response to the relationship (Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Adjei and Clark, 2010). It refers to an emotional state in response to an evaluation of their consumption experiences by service customers (Westbrook, 1981). Customer satisfaction is important in maintaining healthy customer relationships. Satisfaction in a relationship is centered on the roles that are assumed and performed by the service providers (Crosby *et al.*, 1990; Chen *et al.*, 2008).

Trust is defined as the customer's level of confidence in the firm's reliability and integrity (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Adjei and Clark, 2010). It is also defined as willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence (Moorman *et al.*, 1993; Macintosh, 2009). In service marketing, trust is necessary simply because in most cases, customers must buy a service prior to experiencing it (Chen *et al.*, 2008).

Commitment refers to the extent to which the customer is willing to invest in and maintain the relationship (Moorman *et al.*, 1992; DeWulf *et al.*, 2001; Adjei and Clark, 2010). Commitment is recognized as an essential ingredient for successful long-term relationships (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Morgan and Hunt, 1994) and represents the highest level of relational bonding (Dwyer *et al.*, 1987; Bove and Mitzifiris, 2007). Strong empirical evidence exists for a positive path from trust to relationship commitment (Morgan and Hunt, 1994; Odekerken-Schroder *et al.*, 2003; Spake *et al.*, 2003). Central theories of relationship marketing, such as Morgan and Hunt (1994)'s Trust-Commitment Theory (1994) and Crosby *et al.* (1990)'s Theory of Relationship Quality (1990) suggest that trust is a key mediating variable leading to positive relationship outcomes, such as commitment (Macintosh, 2009). Relationships characterized by trust are so highly appreciated that parties will desire to commit themselves to such relationships, so several marketers indicate that trust should positively affect commitment (Doney and Cannon, 1997; Odekerken-Schroder *et al.*, 2003).

Spake *et al.* (2003) found that satisfaction had a direct impact on trust and trust a direct impact on commitment across two service contexts. Garbarino and Johnson (1999) found that overall satisfaction was the primary mediating construct between satisfaction with components of the experience and future intentions to attend, subscribe and donate for low relational customers; however, trust and commitment, not satisfaction, acted as mediators between component attitudes and future intentions. Satisfactory transactions increase the likelihood that the customer will remain with the seller. Long-term customers are also more forgiving and less likely to defect (Anderson and Sullivan, 1993). Thus, satisfaction should have a positive impact on relationship duration. (Spake and Megehee, 2010) So, based on this literature, we propose:

- H10:** There is a direct relationship between satisfaction and trust
- H11:** There is a direct relationship between trust and commitment
- H12:** There is a direct relationship between satisfaction and relationship duration

The length of time that a customer has been in a relationship with an exchange partner is the duration of the relationship (Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Spake and Megehee, 2010). Over time, as customers have the opportunity for greater interaction with an exchange partner, they may form a bond with the provider and be more likely to form a lasting commitment. However, there have been mixed findings in the marketing literature with respect to the link between duration and commitment, with some studies showing support for a direct link between these constructs (Verhoef *et al.*, 2002) and others finding little support for the significant association of these variables (Spake and Megehee, 2010). The importance of time in a relationship in establishing future expectations has been emphasized in the literature (Spake and Megehee, 2010). Dwyer *et al.* (1987) mentioned that relationships not only emerged over time, but also that each interaction has to be viewed in terms of both the history of the relationship and the anticipated future of the relationship. Lagace *et al.* (1991) mentioned that the duration of a relationship is an indication of the quality of the relationship. If the interactions had been unsatisfactory, the relationship would have ended. Furthermore, the customer must acquire benefits that exceed their costs in order to maintain the relationship. One such benefit studied in the literature has been social benefits to the customer (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998; Spake and Megehee, 2010).

Spake and Megehee (2010) found that, social benefits are impacted by duration of the relationship and that social benefits would mediate the link between duration and commitment and may offer an explanation to conciliate prior inconsistent findings. So, we propose:

H13: There is a direct relationship between relationship duration and social benefits

Customers are likely to receive benefits derived simply from their being in a relationship, above and beyond the core service performance. These benefits have been labeled "Relational Benefits" and are the result of having cultivated long-term relationships with a service provider (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998; Hennig-Thurau *et al.*, 2002; Va'zquez-Carrasco and Foxall, 2006). Gwinner *et al.* (1998) offer an extensive study on relational benefits from the customer's perspective, providing a typology consisting in three categories: social benefits, confidence benefits and special treatment benefits (Va'zquez-Carrasco and Foxall, 2006).

Social benefits have been presumed to include feelings of familiarity, personal recognition, friendship, rapport and social support. Social benefits involve the amount of customer-provider interaction that can be considered "non-commercial" (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998). Such social relationships are thought to increase tolerance for service failure and encourage loyalty when competitive differences are few (Berry, 1995). It has been suggested that customers may be more willing to maintain ongoing relationships with service providers when social bonds have developed with the provider (Bendapudi and Berry, 1997; Spake and Megehee, 2010). These social interactions provide opportunities for self-disclosure, mutual understanding and increased familiarity with the service provider (Gwinner *et al.*, 1998). Such social interactions may cause the customer to receive more personal attention from a service provider and gain a sense of uniqueness apart from other customers (Spake and Megehee, 2010).

So, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H14: There is a direct relationship between social benefits and commitment

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The service provided by hairdressers has recently been investigated by several researchers in the field of marketing (Butcher *et al.*, 2001; Va'zquez-Carrasco and Foxall, 2006). Moreover, the enormous recent attention by researchers to this type of service is due to its particular characteristics. So, users of the services of hairdressers in Tehran, Iran constituted the population for the research. In total 425 questionnaires were distributed to consumers as they left hairdressers' premises, of which 388 were correctly filled in and used to test the hypotheses. Data collection was carried out during the months of January, 2012.

The sample included 233 female (60.1%) and 155 male (39.95%). In terms of age, 157(40.5%) customers were younger than 30 years, 162 (41.8%) customers were

30-44 years old, 56 (14.4%) of them were 45-64 and 13 (3.4) customers were older than 65 years. In terms of monthly income of household, 109 (28%) customers had a monthly income of \$US1000 or less, 170(43.8%) customers had US\$1000-2500 monthly income and 109 (28.1) customers had more than US\$2500 monthly income. There was a large prevalence of customers with bachelor degree (42.5%) and large proportion of customers with master degree (34.0%).

Previously published scales were used to measure the constructs in this study. The scale for expertise was a modified form of Macintosh (2002) scale and was composed of 3 Items. The scale for sociability was developed by Ellis (1995) for customer-salesperson relationships in a retail setting (Reynolds and Beatty, 1999) and was composed of 5 items. The 10-item measure of agreeableness scale was taken from McCrae and Jr Costa (1987). The 4-item measure of satisfaction scale is based on Crosby and Stephens (1987) in a services context and Oliver and Swan (1989) in an automobile shopping context. The 4-item measure of trust scale was taken from Morgan and Hunt (1994). The 3-item measure of Commitment was obtained from Bove (2002). The scale used to measure social benefits was taken from Gwinner *et al.* (1998) and was composed of five items.

A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1) strongly disagree to 5) strongly agree was used for all measures except for the satisfaction measure which used a ten-point semantic differential scale and duration which was a single-item measure of respondents' number of years using a particular hairdresser.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Statistical analysis: The model and the hypotheses were simultaneously tested by the linear structural relation analyses (LISREL 8.8). The LISREL model consists of a measurement model and a structural model. According to Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2000), the measurement model specifies how the latent variables are measured in terms of the observed variable and describes measurement properties of the observed variable; the structural equation model specifies causal relationships among the latent variables and describes the causal effects and amount of unexplained variances (Diamantopoulos and Siguaw, 2000). Three steps were developed to test the hypotheses. First, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity were examined. Second, a measurement model with confirmatory factor analysis was used to validate the proposed measurement indexes. Third, the structural equation model was estimated with LISREL 8.8.

Reliability and validity analyses: Before testing the overall measurement model, internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity were examined. Cronbach's alpha for each construct was calculated to assess reliability. Each value should be

above 0.7 for the construct to be reliable (Hair *et al.*, 1998). If Cronbach's alpha of a construct is below the standard, it should be dropped. Results of this assessment are shown in Table 1. The Cronbach's alpha of each construct is between 0.79 and 0.89. The results show high reliability.

Table 1 presents the CFA results which include the standardized factor loadings and composite reliability. Firstly, the factor loadings (i.e., the regression weight linking construct to indicator) were examined to identify potential problem with the CFA model. The standardized factor loading should be significantly linked to the latent construct and have at least loading estimate of 0.5 and ideally exceed 0.7. Hence, any insignificant loadings with low loading estimate indicate a potential measurement problem. The CFA results (Table 1) indicated that each factor loadings of the reflective indicators were above the cut-point of 0.5

According to many researchers, a scale is deemed to have a reasonable internal consistency if the Composite Reliability value (for standardized estimates) is 0.6 or. Based on the results reported in Table 1, all indicators obtained good CR values. The results therefore prove that the constructs are highly reliable as they are very consistent in explaining the variances constituted in them.

The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was also used to examine convergent validity of each construct. The AVE was checked to see if constructs accounted for more than 50% of the corresponding items (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Results of the AVE were above 0.5 (Table 1). The results suggested convergent validity.

Table 2 presents the results for discriminant validity. As suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity was determined by the variance extracted value, namely whether or not it exceeds the squared inter-construct correlations associated with that construct. Table 2 shows that the variance extracted of each construct is all above its squared correlation with other constructs, indicating proper discriminant validity of the constructs.

The measurement model: Maximum Likelihood (ML) is the most commonly used estimation method in SEM. It maximizes the probability that the observed covariances are drawn from a population that has its variance-covariance matrix generated by the process implied by the model, assuming multivariate normality. Multivariate normality is not generally met in practice and several estimation methods for overcoming the fit problems arising from its absence have been developed. ML, itself, is fairly robust against violations from multivariate normality. However, to extend its applicability, corrections have been developed to adjust ML estimators to account for non-normality including the Satorra and Bentler (1988) statistic incorporated in most SEM packages.

Results of the measurement model were derived from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using LISREL.

Table 1: Results of reliability and convergent validity

Concept	Factor loading	Cronbach alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
Expertise		0.83	0.84	0.65
Q2	0.82			
Q3	0.79			
Q4	0.81			
Sociability		0.87	0.90	0.65
Q5	0.81			
Q6	0.83			
Q7	0.82			
Q8	0.76			
Q9	0.83			
Agreeableness		0.89	0.81	0.65
Q10	0.82			
Q11	0.88			
Q12	0.85			
Q13	0.78			
Q14	0.79			
Q15	0.83			
Q16	0.85			
Q17	0.80			
Q18	0.87			
Q19	0.86			
Satisfaction		0.81	0.89	0.67
Q20	0.80			
Q21	0.79			
Q22	0.81			
Q23	0.88			
Trust		0.82	0.84	0.57
Q33	0.77			
Q34	0.81			
Q35	0.76			
Q36	0.70			
Commitment		0.79	0.82	0.61
Q37	0.82			
Q37	0.78			
Q39	0.75			
Social benefits		0.88	0.92	0.70
Q24	0.83			
Q25	0.86			
Q26	0.80			
Q27	0.81			
Q28	0.85			

Table 2: Discriminant validity of the constructs

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Expertise	0.65						
Sociability	0.08	0.65					
Agreeableness	0.13	0.17	0.65				
Satisfaction	0.09	0.22	0.08	0.67			
Trust	0.21	0.16	0.19	0.39	0.57		
Commitment	0.19	0.09	0.11	0.23	0.24	0.61	
Social benefits	0.20	0.23	0.24	0.18	0.19	0.24	0.70

Several indices describe overall model fit of a model in LISREL to assess the fitting level between observed data and a model, including chi-square (χ^2), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI),

Root Mean square Residual (RMR), χ^2 ratio and Incremental Fit Index (IFI). Squared Multiple Correlations (SMC) can determine the reliability of each indicator in LISREL. This value is between 0 and 1. Bagozzi and Yi (1988) suggested that SMC should be beyond 0.5. Because SMC q^6 , q^{13} and q^{27} did not achieve the standard and deleting these measurements did not affect the overall model, the three indicators were dropped. Therefore, 36 measurements and 8 latent variables were entered into the LISREL analysis. Results

Table 3: Results of overall model fit

Index	Recommended level	Results of measurement model	Results of structural model
χ^2	$p > 0.05$	$p = 0.00$	$p = 0.00$
GFI	More than 0.9	0.92	0.91
AGFI	More than 0.9	0.90	0.90
SRMR	Less than 0.08	0.061	0.59
χ^2 ratio	Less than 3	1.97	1.89
IFI	More than 0.9	0.93	0.93

Table 4: Results of hypothesis testing

Hypothesized path	Path coefficient	p-value	Conclusion
H1: expertise → satisfaction	0.27	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H2: expertise → trust	0.31	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H3: expertise → commitment	0.09	n.s.	Not supported
H4: sociability → satisfaction	0.01	n.s.	Not supported
H5: sociability → trust	0.18	$p < 0.05$	Supported
H6: sociability → commitment	0.22	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H7: agreeableness → satisfaction	0.35	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H8: agreeableness → trust	0.24	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H9: agreeableness → commitment	0.17	$p < 0.05$	Supported
H10: satisfaction → trust	0.36	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H11: trust → commitment	0.41	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H12: satisfaction → duration	0.32	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H13: duration → social benefits	0.40	$p < 0.01$	Supported
H14: social benefits → commitment	0.39	$p < 0.01$	Supported

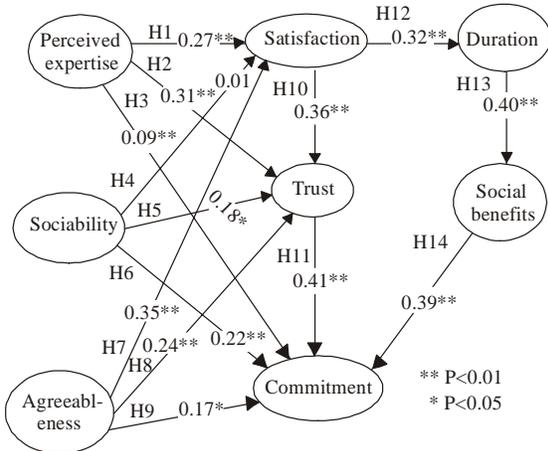


Fig. 1: Hypotheses supported in the structural model

of the measurement model evaluation are displayed in Table 3. In this model, most of these indices were beyond the recommended standard, GFI = 0.92, AGFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.061, χ^2 ratio = 1.97 and IFI = 0.93; these outcomes suggested a good measurement model. The model's chi-square value was not significant at the 0.05 significance level ($\chi^2 = 432.23, p = 0.00$). However, the chi-square value is strongly affected by a sample size. If a sample size is large, the chi-square value is often significant. Instead of chi-square value, χ^2 ratio and other fit indices may be more, representative.

The structural equation model: Generally, the structural equation model had good evaluation results in overall model fit (Table 3) because the results of indices were beyond the recommendation level, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.90, SRMR = 0.059, χ^2 ratio = 1.89 and IFI = 0.93. The

model's chi-square value was significant at the 0.05 significance level ($\chi^2 = 444.24, p = 0.00$). However, χ^2 ratio and other indices exhibited good model fitting results.

Among the model's 14 hypotheses, twelve hypotheses are supported (Fig. 1), including H1 ($t = 2.21, p < 0.01$), H2 ($t = 2.66, p < 0.01$), H5 ($t = 1.81, p < 0.05$), H6 ($t = 2.08, p < 0.01$), H7 ($t = 2.93, p < 0.01$), H8 ($t = 2.14, p < 0.01$), H9 ($t = 1.79, p < 0.05$), H10 ($t = 2.99, p < 0.01$), H11 ($t = 3.35, p < 0.01$), H12 ($t = 2.69, p < 0.01$), H13 ($t = 3.29, p < 0.01$) and H14 ($t = 3.24, p < 0.01$); two hypotheses were not supported, including H3 ($t = 1.06, p > 0.05$) and H4 ($t = 0.42, p > 0.05$). The summary of results is presented in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

Service relationship is affected by customer and hairdresser traits. Hairdresser expertise is an important antecedent of customer satisfaction with the provider and also plays an important role in level of trust in the provider. The findings also indicate that personal attribute variables impact commitment and trust to the provider. Moreover, satisfaction is affected by customer agreeableness. The results support the suggestion made by Spake and Megehee (2010) that personal attribute variables should be included in the services literature as important customer antecedents in relationship models. The findings introduced the duration of the relationship as a consequence of satisfaction and an antecedent of social benefits, which strengthen commitment. In prior research, there were some disagreements on the role of relationship duration in relationship quality models (Palmatier *et al.*, 2006; Verhoef *et al.*, 2002); the findings of this research may conciliate them by presenting evidence that duration is an outcome of satisfaction, but its impact on commitment is moderated by customer benefits.

There are some differences in the social style of the customers. Some customers are more eager to be involved in social exchange, while others avoid social interaction with their provider. Hairdressers have been encouraged to improve social interaction with customers; however, this may not be a suitable suggestion for all types of customers in efforts to improve customer commitment to the provider. Instead, the sociability and agreeableness of the customers as their personality traits do appear to influence perceptions of and commitment to the hairdresser. Hairdressers are encouraged to evaluate the social style of the customer. Hairdressers should perceive that sociable customers, who are interested to begin social conversations, consider the social interaction as a requirement of long-term commitment to the provider; so for them, the conversation with the hairdresser is as important as the outcome of the service.

Social benefits fall to customers who remain with hairdresser over time and work as a bond that strengthen the customer's commitment to the provider. As with other service industries, hairdressers should take efforts to

retain customers with the understanding that relationship duration serves as a barrier to exit and satisfied customers will have a higher intention to stay in the relationship, despite higher prices and/or a better alternative offer.

One of the conclusions that might be drawn from the results is that, at least in this context, service provider expertise is not a guarantee of customer commitment, but customer personality could help to foster positive commitment. Moreover, service provider expertise could affect the commitment by increasing the level of satisfaction in the customers, especially those with agreeableness personality. Although the results did not support the positive effect of customer sociability on satisfaction, but finding showed that service provider expertise and customer agreeableness could increase satisfaction. Higher satisfaction would result in higher trust and social benefits which finally lead to higher commitment.

Some limitations may be related to the way we collected our data and interpreted our results, which could inspire researchers to define their future research agendas.

This study focuses on one type of service, which may limit the generalizability of the findings across service contexts. Our sample of Iranian consumers reporting on hairdressing services cannot necessarily be generalized to other service contexts. This limits the findings as relevant only to these types of consumers and service. Further research should include the establishment of generalizability of the results across other service industries and geographic regions.

This research focused on sociability and agreeableness as personality traits of the customers. Examination of other personality traits offers opportunities to advance research on customer commitment. Personality traits that might be examined as influencing customer behavior in a services setting include defensiveness and neuroticism. Each of these may have an impact on interactions with services providers.

Finally, future research should also develop our findings to other relational success measures such as word of mouth, active voice, loyalty and purchase amount.

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