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ORIGINAL EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

The influence of service employees and other customers on customer unfriendliness: a social norms perspective

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Abstract This research investigates the influence that social sources in the service environment exert on customer unfriendliness. Drawing on social norms theory, the authors demonstrate that descriptive norms (i.e., what most people are perceived to be doing in a certain situation), in the form of unfriendliness by service employees and fellow customers, predicts customers' unfriendliness toward employees. Injunctive norms (i.e., beliefs about which behaviors are approved by important others) and identification with fellow customers exert moderating effects. Specifically, strong injunctive norms can buffer the effect of descriptive norms. Furthermore, fellow customers influence a customer's unfriendliness only if he or she identifies either very strongly or very weakly with them. By clarifying the role of norms in service encounters, this study provides insights on when unfriendly customer behavior is likely to occur. Managerial implications for companies who want to diminish customer unfriendliness are discussed.

Keywords Customer to customer influence · Unfriendliness · Descriptive norm · Identification · Injunctive norm · Social influence

Service encounters are governed by norms among the people who are connected through an exchange, as well as those who are aware of the exchange (Aubert-Gamet and Cova 1999). Two norms in particular shape behavior in the service encounter: descriptive norms, or perceptions of what the majority of people do in this environment, and injunctive norms, or beliefs about which behaviors are approved of by important others (Cialdini et al. 1990). Descriptive and injunctive norms refer to different sources of human motivation (Cialdini et al. 1990), in that the former are motivated by social proof and desires to conform with the behaviors of others (Schultz et al. 2007), whereas the latter are motivated by desires to fulfill obligations and adhere to the expectations of important others (Hornsey et al. 2003; Jacobson et al. 2011).

By behaving in a certain way (e.g., courteously, unfriendly), employees and other customers establish descriptive norms of acceptable behavior, which should guide the behavior of the focal customer (Cialdini 2009). These descriptive norms are specific to the situation and temporal in nature (Cialdini et al. 1990). We consider how descriptive norms set by both service employees and other customers affect a focal customer's behavior, and in particular, how unfriendly behavior of other customers or the employee affects the unfriendliness of the customer. Unfriendliness can result from negative behaviors, such as verbal transgressions (Grandey et al. 2007; Walsh 2011), or the omission of positive behaviors such as greeting and thanking (Dudenhöffer and Dormann 2013; Sliter et al. 2010). This study focuses on the latter form, because the omission of positive behaviors is a frequent event (Harris and Reynolds 2003; Walsh 2011) that negatively affects employee performance and well-being (Kern and Grandey 2009).

We propose that the extent to which customers respond to descriptive norms depends on customers' perceptions of injunctive norms. Injunctive norms prescribe generally accepted behaviors across situations and thus transfer easily from one situation to the next (Reno et al. 1993). Thus, injunctive norms

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reflect the existing norms with which customers enter a service setting. If customers believe that others who are important to them expect them to behave in a positive manner, they should rely on these strong injunctive norms, without much consideration for the actual behavior of others in any specific situation (i.e., for the descriptive norms that they encounter). In contrast, customers who lack such injunctive norms can be influenced more by the actual behavior of others, as we will show with this study.

We draw on Reno et al. (1993) distinction between injunctive norms, with their transsituational influence, and descriptive norms, which are confined to the specific situation. This critical distinction has received surprisingly little research attention, despite its obvious relevance to service management. Consequently, the underlying mechanisms and interplay of descriptive and injunctive norms, in which descriptive norms arise during the situation while injunctive norms are brought into the situation by the person, are not yet well understood. Based on uncertainty reduction theory, we predict that strong injunctive norms lessen the influence of situation-specific descriptive norms on behavior. In his meta-analysis on social norms Manning (2009, p. 692) notes that "it may be that inasmuch as descriptive normative perceptions may directly lead one to behave in line with those perceptions, it does so more for individuals who do not perceive simultaneous injunctive expectations from important others." However, he did not formally test the potential interactive relation between descriptive and injunctive norms. Our theoretical rationale for the moderating effect of transsituational injunctive norms on situation-specific descriptive norms builds on, but differs from, two streams of research that predict either that descriptive and injunctive norms have distinct, separate effects (see the meta-analysis by Rivis and Sheeran 2003) or that they exhibit positive interaction effects when the norms come from the same source (Göckeritz et al. 2010; Rimal 2008). We investigate whether descriptive norms deduced from observing the behavior of unknown others in a particular situation might have effects that vary with the injunctive norms already instilled in the focal actor. We specify and demonstrate an interaction whose meaning and interpretation are vastly different from those detailed in prior research.

The current study deviates from prior research in other ways as well. Whereas prior research tends to focus on other customers as descriptive norm sources (Goldstein et al. 2008; Prinsen et al. 2013; Salmon et al. 2015), we seek to show that both employees and other customers need to be considered in service encounters. Finally, we contend (and show) that descriptive norms based on other customers' behaviors are more influential if the focal customer identifies strongly with those other customers.

These various contributions produce a conceptual model that distinguishes two reference groups as sources of descriptive norms (employees and other customers), accounts for situational (i.e., descriptive) and transsituational (i.e., injunctive) norms, and incorporates injunctive norms and identification with other customers as moderators. We test this model in two lab experiments and an observational field study. Our findings inform service managers about how and when customer unfriendliness can be triggered by employees and other customers, offering managerial implications related to the management of both employee behavior and customer behavior. For example, positive descriptive norms may be fostered by informing customers about such norms in the servicescape, while the potential negative effect of descriptive norms can be buffered by making injunctive norms more salient. Moreover, managing employee behavior or separating customers can be instrumental in avoiding negative behaviors.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

Effects of customer unfriendliness on service employees

A common form of negative customer behavior directed at service employees is customer unfriendliness, which implies a violation of interaction norms in the service encounter. Unfriendliness can arise due to a display of norm-incongruent behavior such as insults (Walsh 2011) or verbal aggression (Grandey et al. 2007), or it might entail omissions of positive behaviors and emotions in a polite service interaction, such as offering greetings or thanking the employee (Dudenhöffer and Dormann 2013; Sliter et al. 2010). We focus on the latter form, omissions of positive behaviors, because this high frequency, low intensity negative customer behavior can have detrimental effects on employee behavior, performance, and well-being (Kern and Grandey 2009; Sliter et al. 2010), which in turn can affect the firm's bottom line. Moreover, such behaviors can be readily observed in service interactions.

The influence of social norms

Social norms theory attempts to explain why people adopt others' behaviors or attitudes (e.g., Cialdini 2009; Cialdini and Trost 1998; Melnyk et al. 2010), highlighting social norms as powerful sources of influence, even between people who are not familiar with each other (Cialdini 2009). The focus theory of normative conduct (Cialdini et al. 1990) distinguishes two types of norms: descriptive and injunctive. *Descriptive norms* describe what most people are perceived to be doing in a certain situation. The (normative) behaviors of others function as "a decisional shortcut when one is choosing how to behave in a given situation" (Cialdini et al. 1990, p. 1015), leading to emulation (Cialdini 2009). The behavior of other people in a service encounter, such as service employees and other customers, similarly can be a descriptive norm that

influences the behavior of the perceiver (Goldstein et al. 2008). *Injunctive norms* reflect what people who are important to a person think he or she should do and mirror perceptions of generally accepted and approved or disapproved behavior (Cialdini and Trost 1998). To prescribe desirable behavior (Lapinski and Rimal 2005), injunctive norms define morally approved behavior by broader society or specific reference groups (friends, family, colleagues) and therefore imply social sanctioning (Cialdini et al. 1990). Overall then, descriptive norms define the "is" or what other people do, whereas injunctive norms define the "ought" or which behaviors relevant others expect (Fugas et al. 2011).

The influences of descriptive and injunctive norms have been studied for a wide range of behaviors (Manning 2009; Melnyk et al. 2010). Initially, injunctive social norms (or subjective norms) were included in prominent theories such as the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein and Ajzen 1975) and the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen 1991), where their influence appeared relatively weak (Armitage and Conner 2001). Yet an adjustment in the conceptualization of social norms showed that they are more influential than initially thought, prompting renewed research interest in the area (Jacobson et al. 2011; Staunton et al. 2014). Specifically, after the introduction of descriptive norms (Cialdini et al. 1990; Reno et al. 1993), a growing number of studies have focused on their role, in addition to that of injunctive norms (Lynn and Brewster 2015; Rivis and Sheeran 2003; Yi et al. 2013).

Reno et al. (1993) note that descriptive norms are situation specific, formed by behavior perceived in a specific situation. Descriptive norms influence the perceiver's behavior in that same situation but do not transcend to other situations. In contrast, injunctive norms are transsituational (Reno et al. 1993), with influences that span across different situations (e.g., greetings generally should be reciprocated). The situation specificity–based distinction of descriptive versus injunctive norms has received little research attention, though. Rather, descriptive norms tend to be operationalized as "average" or "usual" behavior by relevant others (e.g., how much alcohol fellow students usually drink, Rimal and Real 2005; how often neighbors try to save energy, Nolan et al. 2008). But the key distinction between situation-specific descriptive norms and transsituational injunctive norms is relevant, especially because research on social norms usually seeks to predict behaviors in a specific situation (Göckeritz et al. 2010; Reno et al. 1993). In many contexts, such as interactions between customers and service personnel, employee and customer behavior may vary from moment to moment and change as customers enter and leave. Injunctive norms, which are based on perceived approval or disapproval of important others, should remain the same, regardless of the current situation. To study the effects of descriptive and injunctive norms, and their interaction, it is pertinent to consider the specific situation in which descriptive norms arise.

Our study extends prior research that regards descriptive norms as related to the general behavior of important others across situations (e.g., Bodimeade et al. 2014; Thøgersen 2008; White and Simpson 2013), by considering the influence of situation-specific descriptive norms. Table 1 provides a comprehensive, but not exhaustive, overview of prior research on descriptive norms in service environments. We focus on the most relevant research regarding the effect of descriptive norms on behavior; studies examining only injunctive norms or not examining actual behavior are not included in the table. Neglecting the situation-specific nature of descriptive norms, prior studies often refer to the average behavior of other customers over a period of time when operationalizing descriptive norms. While two of these studies use indicators for situation-specific customer behavior such as litter, our study is the first to operationalize descriptive norms as actual situation-specific behavior in the service environment. Also, almost no other study included injunctive norms, and our research is the only one to investigate the moderating role of injunctive norms on the effect of descriptive norms. It is also noteworthy that while prior studies use a single source (i.e., other customers) for the descriptive norms, we consider both employees and other customers.

Employees as sources of descriptive norms

Service employees' behaviors affect customers' moods and behaviors (Tsai and Huang 2002; Van Dolen et al. 2002). As representatives of the service firm, they also influence customers' perceptions of the firm and embody company norms and values (Schwepker and Hartline 2005). Therefore, customers witnessing negative employee behavior tend to generalize the behavior as typical of the entire firm (Porath et al. 2010) and perceive employee behaviors as seemingly appropriate conduct in that servicescape (Yi and Gong 2008). Negative behavior then might spill over from the employee to the customer.

H1: Descriptive norms, in the form of employee unfriendliness during the service interaction, have a positive effect on displayed customer unfriendliness.

Injunctive norms as moderators

Because injunctive norms work across situations (Reno et al. 1993), they may moderate the effect of descriptive norms. This prediction resonates with uncertainty reduction theory (Lapinski and Rimal 2005; Smith et al. 2007), which states that social influence has the strongest impact on behavior when people are not sure how to behave (Wooten and Reed 1998). The influence of descriptive norms is strongest in (somewhat) ambiguous situations (Goldstein et al. 2008;

Table 1 Literature studying the effect of descriptive norms on customer behavior in a service environment

Authors	Sample / Study design	Research focus and findings	Operationalization of descriptive norms (DN)	Operationalization of dependent variable (customer behavior)	Injunctive norms (IN) included	Interaction of DN and IN considered	Sources of descriptive norms
Goldstein et al. (2008)	1058 (Study 1) and 1595 (Study 2) hotel guests / experimental field studies	Guest response to information encouraging (through DN) reuse of towels. More guests reused their towels after receiving an information card with a DN (Study 1). Normative messages were more effective when referring to guests that stayed in the same room (provincial norm) compared to all other hotel guests (global norm) (Study 2).	Average behavior of other customers (*manipulated*)	Observation of actual behavior	No	No	Other customers
Jung et al. (2016)	2761 museum visitors (Study 8) / experimental field study	Customers did not anchor the amount they paid as admission donations on the amount the average customer paid.	Average behavior of other customers (*manipulated*)	Observation of actual behavior	No	No	Other customers
Prinsen et al. (2013)	144 customers (Study 1) / experimental field study	Cafeteria customers were more likely to take chocolate if indicators (e.g., empty chocolate wrappers) suggested that other customers did the same earlier.	Indicators for situation-specific behavior in the service environment (*manipulated*)	Observation of actual behavior	No	No	Other customers
Schaefers et al. (2015)	41 student participants (Study 3)	Participants were not more likely to leave litter in a rental car if previous customers appeared to have littered in the car. If participants had high communal identification they tended to remove litter from the car.	Indicators for situation-specific behavior in the service environment (*manipulated*)	Observation of actual behavior	No	No	Other customers
Schultz et al. (2008)	2359 hotel guests (Study 1), 794 timeshare condo guests (Study 2), 865 condo guests (Study 3) / experimental field studies	More guests reused their towels if they were presented with a combination of a descriptive and an injunctive normative message compared to no or only one type of message.	Average behavior of other customers (*manipulated*)	Observation of actual behavior	Yes	No	Other customers
Yi et al. (2013)	182 consumers (Study 2) / retrospective survey	Customer responses to other customers' citizenship behaviors (CCB). Other CCB (DN) predicts self-reported CCB. Other customer credibility and identification with other customers moderate this relationship.	Retrospective assessment of other customer behavior (*measured*)	Self-report of behavior	No	No	Other customers
This study	112 student participants (Study 1), 215 service customers (Study 2) / experimental study (Study 1), observational and survey study (Study 2)	Customers align their behavior with the perceived employee behavior. Customers only align with other customer behavior if they strongly identify with the other customers. If identification with other customers is very weak customers demonstrate behavior that is opposite to that of other customers. Injunctive norms moderate the effect of employee and other customer behavior.	Situation-specific behavior in the service environment (*manipulated ;* Study 1 / *measured*; Study 2)	Observation of actual behavior	Yes	Yes	Other customers and employees

DN descriptive norms, *IN* injunctive norms, *CCB* customer citizenship behavior, *manipulated* descriptive norms were experimentally manipulated, *measured* descriptive norms were measured with a survey

White and Simpson 2013), yet the degree of ambiguity need not be especially high for descriptive norms to have an effect on behavior. For instance, reusing hotel towels (Goldstein et al. 2008) or composting (White and Simpson 2013) are fairly unambiguous contexts, yet behavior in such contexts has been shown to be influenced by descriptive norms. Ambiguity in a situation can vary from person to person such that individual ambiguity is higher when injunctive norms are less well established. If a person is ambivalent toward an injunctive norm, his or her behavior should be influenced more by the descriptive norms arising from others' behavior. In contrast, strong injunctive norms provide rules of generally accepted behavior across situations (Reno et al. 1993), so they can reduce uncertainty about how to behave, thereby reducing the influence of descriptive norms. For this study, we contend that customers should be affected less by an employee's unfriendly behavior if they already embrace the strong injunctive norm that they should always be friendly toward service employees.

H2: Customers' injunctive norms moderate the effect of descriptive norms, in the form of employee unfriendliness, on displayed customer unfriendliness, such that the relationship is weaker when customers' agreement with the injunctive norm of being friendly toward an employee is stronger.

Other customers as sources of descriptive norms

When a customer encounters a frontline service employee, other customers often are present as well, so the focal customer can observe the behaviors of both employees and other customers. Customers influence one another (Tombs and McColl-Kennedy 2010), even without any direct interaction (Argo et al. 2005). When a customer is aware that fellow customers behave in an unfriendly way, he or she may perceive this behavior as the descriptive norm for the situation and engage in similar behavior (Gino et al. 2009). Injunctive norms should moderate this effect of descriptive norms from other customers on customer behavior, following the same rationale we offered when discussing the moderation of injunctive norms and employee behavior.

H3: Descriptive norms, in the form of perceived other customer unfriendliness, have a positive effect on displayed customer unfriendliness.

H4: Customers' injunctive norms moderate the effect of descriptive norms, in the form of perceived other customer unfriendliness, on displayed customer unfriendliness, such that the relationship is weaker when customers' agreement with the injunctive norm of being friendly toward an employee is stronger.

Identification as a moderator

People generally try to act in congruence with their social identities (Turner 1987a), such that they likely conform to the behavior of other customers with whom they identify. A sense of similarity with others, even for short-lived situations, can be sufficient for group formation and identification (Brocato et al. 2012; Hogg 1987). Norm theory states that people are more likely to comply with descriptive norms when their identification with the group is high (Lapinski and Rimal 2005). Members of the same social group should have similar views, because they align their views and behaviors with group norms (McGarty et al. 1993; Turner 1987b). Thus people who identify with a group should infer group norms from other members' behavior and consider this behavior appropriate for themselves (e.g., Gino et al. 2009; Lapinski and Rimal 2005). Customers should be more likely to follow the descriptive norms of other customers when their sense of identification is higher.

H5: Identification with other customers moderates the effect of descriptive norms, in the form of perceived other customer unfriendliness, on displayed customer unfriendliness, such that the relationship is stronger when identification with other customers is stronger.

Before testing these hypotheses, we seek to confirm that situational descriptive norms actually form in response to observing the behavior of service employees. Thus, in our pilot study, we assess the general assumption that customers perceive employee unfriendliness as a descriptive norm in the service encounter.

Pilot study: employee behavior as descriptive norm

Participants

We recruited a student sample of 112 participants for the study. One participant indicated that he was not able to understand the employee in the video and was thus removed from the sample. From the remaining 111 participants, among those who indicated their gender, 62 (58%) were men, and 45 (42%) were women. The average age was 22.81 years (SD = 2.81).

Design and procedure

Participants were instructed to imagine they had received a voucher for ice cream as a reward for taking part in a scientific study. They imagined entering a store to redeem the voucher, where they meet a service employee. Participants then were shown a video of this service employee. In a two-group design, participants were randomly assigned to the unfriendly or

friendly condition. All versions of the video were staged, such that the employee appeared to address the participant watching the video. The service employee in the video was a professional actress who had several years of service experience. In the friendly condition, she was instructed to smile and maintain a friendly facial expression the entire time, look into the camera, and talk in a friendly tone of voice. In the unfriendly condition, she was instructed to suppress smiles, show an unfriendly facial expression, frequently look away from the camera, and speak in a low, negative tone of voice. Appendix 1 Table 5 contains the scripts for both experimental conditions. After watching the video, participants answered a series of questions.

Measurements

We developed a scale to measure descriptive norms in the form of perceived employee unfriendliness (9 items; $\alpha = .98$), in line with prior research (e.g., Nolan et al. 2008) that measures descriptive norms by asking for customers' perceptions of others' behaviors. For the perceived normativity of unfriendly employee behavior, we used 11 items ($\alpha = .98$). Perceived approval of unfriendliness was measured with 8 items ($\alpha = .89$). We measured injunctive norms (4 items; $\alpha = .87$), adapted and extended from Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) and Minton and Rose (1997).

When developing the new scales for perceived employee unfriendliness, perceived normativity of employee unfriendliness, and perceived approval of unfriendliness, we followed procedures outlined in prior research (e.g., Homburg et al. 2007; Lewin 2001; Walsh and Beatty 2007). In line with our definitions and following previous research on descriptive norms (e.g., Nolan et al. 2008), items were phrased in such a way that they directly asked for customers' perceptions of the behavior of others, for the perceived normativity, or for the approval of these behaviors respectively.

Initial item generation was inspired by Walsh's (2011) work on perceived customer unfriendliness and also based on depth interviews with a group of 10 service employees and 10 customers, using an open-ended elicitation procedure. For example, interviewees were asked to produce the first words to come to mind that are related to "normative employee behavior." Based on the transcribed responses, we developed multiple items with respect to each construct. The items referred to unfriendliness in general as well as to relevant normative behaviors such as smiling or greeting.

Next, the initial item pool was submitted to a panel of five service marketing scholars. These experts rated each item for clarity, face validity, and consistency with the respective construct and also recommended additional items for inclusion. Based on suggestions and criticisms during these developing stages, the items were further refined. Finally, the items were pre-tested on 25 service customers to assess readability.

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) on the pilot study data reveals good fit with the data ($\chi^2/df = 1.75$; confirmatory fit index [CFI] = .93; root mean error of approximation [RMSEA] = .08). The composite reliability (CR) values range from .88 to .98, above the recommended threshold of .7 (Bagozzi and Yi 2012). The average variances extracted (AVE) range from .51 to .86 (see Appendix 2 Table 6). In support of discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE of every construct is greater than its interconstruct correlations with any other construct.[1]

Manipulation check

As a manipulation check, we used a t-test to compare the two experimental conditions according to the perceived employee unfriendliness measure. The results ($t(109) = -29.86$, $p < .001$) indicate that the employee is perceived as more unfriendly in the unfriendly ($M = 6.12$, $SD = .82$) than in the friendly ($M = 1.90$, $SD = .66$) condition, so the manipulation succeeded.

Results and discussion

Unfriendly behavior is perceived as more normative in the unfriendly ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.06$) than in the friendly ($M = 2.15$, $SD = .83$, $t(109) = -15.12$, $p < .001$) condition, and also as more acceptable in the unfriendly ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 1.06$) than in the friendly ($M = 2.71$, $SD = .73$, $t(97.67) = -8.49$, $p < .001$) condition. The significant differences in the perceived normativity of employee unfriendliness and perceived approval affirm that service employees set descriptive norms during the service encounter. Injunctive norms do not differ across experimental conditions ($M_{unfriendly} = 5.95$, $SD = .65$, $M_{friendly} = 5.68$, $SD = 1.05$, $t(89.93) = -1.62$, $p = .11$), in support of our prediction that injunctive norms are transsituational and not influenced by a specific situation. Thus, the pilot study supports a central assumption: The service employee establishes relevant norms in the service environment.

Study 1: effects of descriptive and injunctive norms on customer unfriendliness

With Study 1, we aim to test the influence of a descriptive norm based on employee behavior on displayed customer

[1] In order to provide scales that can be used in research contexts where scale parsimony is desirable we re-ran all analyses with reduced scales for perceived employee unfriendliness, perceived normativity of employee unfriendliness, and perceived approval of unfriendliness. Psychometric properties of the shortened scales were good while the pilot study results with the shortened scales remained consistent with the full scale results. Items included in the short scales are marked with * in Appendix 2 Table 6.

unfriendliness (H1) and the moderating role of injunctive norms (H2) in a controlled lab experiment in which participants interact with a confederate who poses as a service employee. As a second objective, we attempt to rule out mimicry as an alternative explanation. That is, people might copy the behavior displayed by others, and if the effects we find are due to behavioral mimicry, then the customer might display the same behaviors as the employee (e.g., more or less smiling). However, this effect is unlikely to generalize to behavior that is not part of the employee's behavioral repertoire (see McFerran et al. 2010). Accordingly, in this study, the employee does not voice a verbal farewell at the end of the service encounter in either condition. If participants still are more likely to voice a farewell at the end of a friendly, compared with an unfriendly interaction, this action cannot be regarded as an act of mere mimicry.

Participants, design, and procedure

Any service interaction can be divided into three stages (Hansen and Danaher 1999; Jüttner et al. 2013): initial (arrival, greeting sequence), main (actual service delivery), and final (goodbye). The final event of a service interaction (i.e., last impression) tends to have strong impacts on service interaction perceptions (Hansen and Danaher 1999; Verhoef et al. 2004), so we focus on customer unfriendliness at this point. Measuring customer unfriendliness after the service interaction has ended allowed the participants to express unfriendly behaviors freely, without risk of negative consequences.

Potential participants were approached on campus by research assistants and asked to complete a short questionnaire. As an incentive, they were promised a voucher that they could redeem for ice cream. The study was framed as a survey about online and offline shopping experiences. Among distractor items, the questionnaire contained our measure of injunctive norms. After filling out the survey, participants received a voucher, were informed they could pick up the ice cream nearby, and received directions to a room decorated as an ice cream shop (Appendix 3 Fig. 4). Out of 144 participants who completed the survey, 130 (90%) immediately went to pick up the ice cream. Participants entered the shop one at a time.

The service interaction began when the participant entered the room, was greeted by the service employee, and was asked to provide the voucher. The participant chose his or her ice cream (four choices available), received it, and left the room. The service employee was the same actress as in the video of the pilot study. She was instructed to alternate between friendly (e.g., smiling, eye contact, pleasant tone of voice) and unfriendly behavior toward participants, similar to the pilot study (see Appendix 1 Table 5 for the script). Adopting a procedure used by Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006), we monitored participants with a hidden camera during the service interaction, positioned such that we could view their upper bodies (including faces) during the entire interaction. The actress was not visible. After leaving the ice cream shop, participants completed a second questionnaire about the perceived unfriendliness of the service employee (descriptive norms). Finally, they were debriefed and asked if they would allow their video to be used for the study; 18 refused this request. We deleted those videos and did not use their data for any further analyses. Of the remaining 112 participants, 44 (39%) were women. The average age of the sample was 23.1 years (SD = 2.69).

Measurements

We used the scales from the pilot study to measure injunctive norms (4 items; α = .80) and descriptive norms in the form of perceived employee unfriendliness (9 items; α = .98). We examined the factor structure; the CFA reveals good fit with the data (χ^2/df = 1.88; CFI = .97; RMSEA = .09). The CR values are .81 for injunctive norms and .98 for descriptive norms. The AVE values are .52 for injunctive norms and .87 for perceived employee unfriendliness (Appendix 4 Table 7). The square root of the AVE is greater than the absolute value of the interconstruct correlation (−.15), in support of discriminant validity.

Video coding

The service interactions lasted between 18 and 41 s (M = 25.9, SD = 4.83), with no significant difference in duration between the two experimental conditions ($t(110) = -.66$, *n.s.*). The employee was not visible in the videos, and her voice was muted, so coders remained unaware of the experimental manipulation. Two trained coders rated customers' unfriendliness on a five-point Likert scale (1 = "very friendly," 5 = "very unfriendly"). A .73 correlation of the ratings of the two coders indicates acceptable interrater reliability (James et al. 1984). We aggregated these behavioral ratings to establish a customer unfriendliness variable (M = 3.11, SD = 1.06). The coders also rated the customers' verbal farewell at the end of the service interactions. Of the 112 interactions, the coders agreed on 110 interactions (98%). The remaining two interactions were discussed and agreed upon.

Manipulation check

As a manipulation check, we used a t-test to compare the two conditions on perceived employee unfriendliness. The results ($t(85.45) = -26.29$, $p < .001$) indicate that the employee was perceived as more unfriendly in the unfriendly condition (M = 5.85, SD = 1.02) than in the friendly condition (M = 1.70, SD = .58), so the manipulation succeeded.

Results and discussion

We used two-step regression analysis to test our hypotheses. First, we included only the main effects of employee

Table 2 Analysis results (Study 1)

Antecedent	Outcome							
	Y (customer unfriendliness)							
	Step 1 (main effects only)				Step 2 (main and interactive effects)			
	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
X (employee unfriendliness) [*descriptive norm*]	.40	.09	4.38	<.001	.40	.09	4.45	<.001
Z (injunctive norms)	-.18	.12	-1.53	n.s.	-.25	.12	-2.19	<.05
X × Z (Interaction)	-	-	-	-	-.30	.12	-2.63	<.01
Constant	3.12	.09	34.06	<.001	3.11	.09	34.67	<.001
	R^2 = .17, F(2, 109) = 11.31, p < .001				R^2 = .22, F(3, 108) = 10.24, p < .001 R^2 change = .05, F(1, 108) = 6.89, p < .01			

N = 112, *B* unstandardized coefficient, *X* denotes the experimental manipulation (−1 = friendly and 1 = unfriendly), and R^2 change indicates the change in R^2 from Step 1 to Step 2

unfriendliness (effect coding, −1 = friendly, 1 = unfriendly) and injunctive norms (mean-centered) in the model. Second, adding the interaction term enabled us to determine the gain in R-square. Table 2 summarizes the results. In step 1 (R^2 = .17), in support of H1, the experimental manipulation of employee unfriendliness significantly predicts customer unfriendliness (B = .40, SE = .09, t(109) = 4.38, p < .001); customers were more unfriendly in the final stage of the service encounter when the employee had been unfriendly.

In step 2 (ΔR^2 = .05, F(1, 108) = 6.89, p < .01), we find a significant effect of the manipulation (B = .40, SE = .09, t(108) = 4.45, p < .001) and of injunctive norms (B = −.25, SE = .12, t(108) = −2.19, p < .05), indicating that stronger injunctive norms of being friendly toward service employees predicts less customer unfriendliness. We also find a significant interaction of the manipulation of employee unfriendliness and injunctive norms (B = −.30, SE = .12, $t(108)$ = −2.63, p < .01). In support of H2, the effect of employee unfriendliness on customer unfriendliness is weaker when injunctive norms are stronger. To assess the nature of the interaction, we calculated regions of significance (Bauer and Curran 2005; Spiller et al. 2013) to identify the exact level of the moderator at which the direct effect of employee unfriendliness on customer unfriendliness became significant (see Fig. 1). The abscissa depicts different levels of the moderating variable; the ordinate reveals the effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable (simple slope). Thus, Fig. 1 offers an overview of the conditional effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable for different levels of the moderator. If the interval between the dotted lines that represent the 95% confidence interval (CI) includes 0 on the ordinate, the simple slope is not significant at the 5% level (grey shaded area), whereas the simple slope yields significance in the area with CIs entirely above or below 0 (non-shaded). To facilitate interpretation, we anchored the values on an uncentered injunctive norms scale. The calculated regions of significance for the interaction indicates significant effects of employee unfriendliness on customers' unfriendliness for injunctive

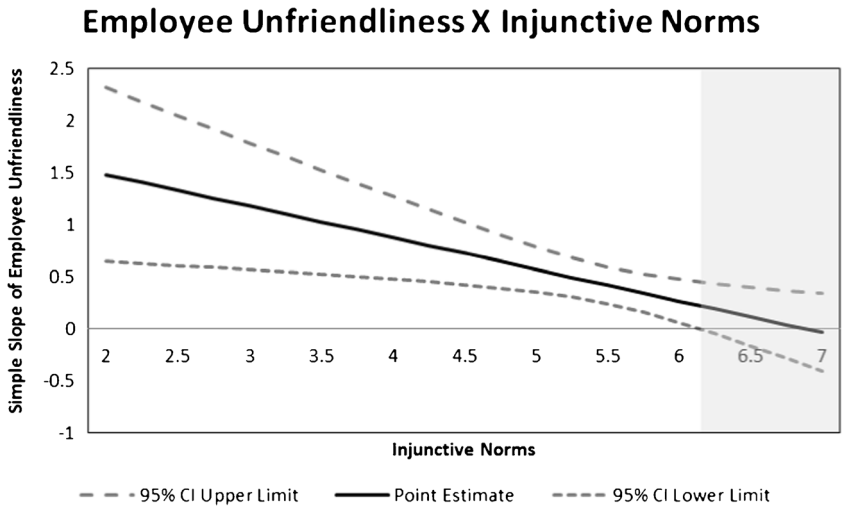


Fig. 1 Interaction results and regions of significance (Study 1) Notes: The black solid line refers to the conditional effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable at different levels of the moderator (simple slope). The two dashed lines frame the 95% confidence interval of the estimate. Estimates of the simple slope are significant in the non-shaded area

norm values below 6.14 on a seven-point Likert scale (B = .22, SE = .11, 95% CI = .00 to .44).

To support our contention that the results are driven by social norms, not by nonconscious mimicry processes, we conducted a follow-up analysis related to the presence (versus absence) of a verbal farewell from the customer at the end of the service encounter. A logistic regression shows a significant effect of the manipulation of employee unfriendliness (B = .62, SE = .23, Z = 2.68, p < .01) and a significant interaction between the experimental manipulation of employee unfriendliness and injunctive norms (B = −.63, SE = .32, Z = −1.99, p < .05), indicating significant effects of employee unfriendliness on "verbal farewell" for injunctive norm values below 5.83 on a seven-point Likert scale (B = .45, SE = .23, *95% CI* = .00 to .91). These outcomes replicate the results from the analyses with general customer unfriendliness, in support of the notion that behavioral mimicry is unlikely to account for the results of our study.

Study 1 thus reveals that descriptive norms derived from employee behavior can influence customer behavior. This effect is contingent on the injunctive norms held by the focal customer. Next, moving beyond employee behavior in a controlled setting, Study 2 is set in a real-life service environment, which contains not just employees but also other customers, to examine the influence of descriptive norms from both employees and other customers.

Study 2: effects of social norms in real-life service encounters

The objective of the Study 2 is to examine if customers align their behavior with the descriptive norms expressed in perceived unfriendliness by the employee and other customers. We also investigate the moderating effects of injunctive norms and identification with other customers. Because descriptive norms are based on perceived rather than the "objective" behavior of others (Lapinski and Rimal 2005; Thøgersen 2008), customers self-report their perceptions of the descriptive norms. To assess employee behavior, we observed and coded actual behaviors by the employee. From a managerial perspective, it is important to know if descriptive norms might be influenced by the behavior displayed by the service employee, because managers can influence employee behavior more effectively than they can alter customers' subjective perceptions of this behavior. Moreover, including both measures allows us to test whether perceived employee unfriendliness mediates the relationship between displayed employee unfriendliness and displayed customer unfriendliness, as we would expect. Covert observations of the behavior of other customers was not feasible, because a large number of other customers could be present. Therefore, we examine customers' perceptions of the unfriendliness of other customers. Figure 2 provides a graphical display of the conceptual model that we test in this study.

Procedure and sample

To obtain an unbiased measure of unfriendliness (Fisk et al. 2010), we used observational techniques. Two trained coders observed employees and customers in service interactions which feature many customer–employee interactions (Rafaeli and Sutton 1990)—namely, in cafes and cafeterias in various locations. By including shops from different locations, we controlled for possible external effects that might systematically bias results in locally clustered samples. An observation approach also helps reduce the threat of common method variance (Podsakoff et al. 2003) and aligns with prior organizational research (Brown and Sulzer-Azaroff 1994).

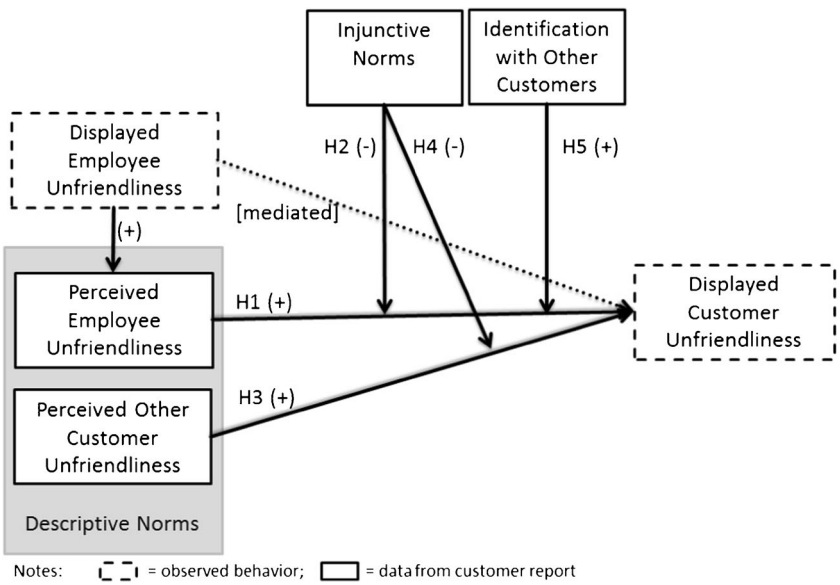


Fig. 2 Conceptual model (Study 2)

We trained two research assistants to observe customer and employee normative behaviors during service interactions (e.g., initial greeting, looking at the interaction partner, final verbal farewell). The training took place in a 90-min session, in which one author discussed observable normative behaviors during a service interaction. The training also included practice sessions and supervised trial observations. The two coders then conducted trial observations on their own, compared their results, and discussed any differences. Before the main data collection, we conducted a pretest to assess the reliability of our displayed employee unfriendliness and displayed customer unfriendliness measures. During the pretest, both coders observed the same 50 customer–employee interactions and independently coded customer behavior. Next, they observed another 50 customer–employee interactions and rated employee behavior. Then during the main study, one coder observed the employee and the other the customer, which helped them remain inconspicuous during the observations (Barger and Grandey 2006). Observations took place in nine stores over a six-week period. Coders sat in the service environment and nonverbally indicated to each other which customer–employee interactions to observe. Customers were approached after the observation period and asked to fill out a short questionnaire, which included questions about perceived employee and other customer unfriendliness, injunctive norms, and demographics.

The coders observed 284 customer–employee interactions; of the 284 observed customers, 230 (81%) agreed to complete the questionnaire. After excluding 15 participants because of inconsistent or incomplete responses, we ended up with 215 participants. Of the final sample, 90 (42%) participants were men, and age ranged from 16 to 72 years (M = 28.6, SD = 10.5). The interactions involved one of 26 different employees, resulting in a customer–employee ratio of about 8:1. Each employee was observed on multiple occasions during a single day.

Measurements

In terms of observable indicators of normative behavior in real-life service interactions, prior literature identifies five behaviors: verbal greetings (Garma and Bove 2011), looking at the interaction partner (Brown and Sulzer-Azaroff 1994), smiling (Barger and Grandey 2006), thanking (Garma and Bove 2011), and verbal farewell (Barger and Grandey 2006). To identify the extent to which these types of behaviors are perceived as normative during a service interaction, in a pretest, we asked a small group of service customers (n = 10, 4 women, average age = 31.8 years) and employees (n = 10, 6 women, average age = 30.9 years) about which behaviors they demonstrate in a normal service interaction. A high level of agreement with our list of five behaviors resulted, and the interview results confirmed each of these behaviors as normative. We provide the frequencies of their occurrence and illustrative quotes in Appendix 5 Table 8.

The coders rated verbal greeting, looking at the interaction partner, thanking, and verbal farewells (one coder observed the customer, the other coder the employee), as either 1 = no or 0 = yes. Following previous research (Barger and Grandey 2006), they coded smiling as a three-stage variable (2 = no smile; 1 = minimal smile: no teeth exposed; 0 = maximal smile: teeth exposed). With the summed indicators, larger numbers indicated greater unfriendliness. We used three items (subset of items from Studies 1 and 2, with the wording adapted for the items for other customer unfriendliness) to measure perceived employees' (α = .94) and other customers' (α = .91) unfriendliness. Similar to Postmes et al. (2013), we used one item from Brocato et al. (2012) to measure identification with other customers (see Appendix 6 Table 9). We operationalized injunctive norms using two items adapted from Bagozzi and Dholakia (2006) (r = .64, p < .001). All items were measured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = "completely disagree," 7 = "completely agree").

The CFA for the factor structure of the two descriptive norms (perceived employee and other customer unfriendliness) and injunctive norms reveals good fit with the data (χ^2/df = 1.94; CFI = .98; RMSEA = .07), with CR values ranging from .78 to .95 and AVEs ranging from .64 to .86 (see Appendix 6 Table 9). The correlations between descriptive and injunctive norm measures are .23 (perceived other customer unfriendliness and perceived employee unfriendliness), −.12 (perceived other customer unfriendliness and injunctive norms), and −.14 (perceived employee unfriendliness and injunctive norms). In support of discriminant validity, the square root of AVE is greater than any interconstruct correlations.

Pretest results: interrater reliability

To assess interrater agreement, we calculated the nonparametric correlation coefficients. Overall agreement was moderate to high for observations of customer behavior (verbal greeting: r_s = .91, p < .001; looking at the employee: r_s = .88, p < .001; thanking: r_s = .91, p < .001; verbal farewell: r_s = .91, p < .001; smiling: r_s = .84, p < .001). The agreement levels on variables capturing employee behavior were: verbal greeting r_s = .73, p < .001; looking at the customer: r_s = .79, p < .001; thanking r_s = .82, p < .001; verbal farewell r_s = .84, p < .001; and smiling r_s = .81, p < .001. Thus, the pretest results indicate sufficient interrater reliability (James et al. 1984).

Results and discussion

Taking part in a scientific study can be considered an act of friendliness, so the sample may be biased and include people who generally are friendlier than average. Therefore, we compared observed customers who agreed to fill out a

questionnaire with those who declined this request on the customer displayed unfriendliness variable (n = 54). Participants who agreed to take part showed slightly lower values on displayed unfriendliness (M = 2.19, SD = 1.34) than those who refused (M = 2.67, SD = 1.64, t(70.60) = −1.98, p = .051). We discuss this group difference in the limitations section. The descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations appear in Table 3.

The hypotheses tests (Fig. 2) used the regression-based SPSS macro developed by Hayes (2013). All independent variables and the mediating variable were centered prior to the regression analysis. We first included the mediated and direct effects in the model without any interaction terms and estimated it using displayed employee unfriendliness, perceived other customer unfriendliness, injunctive norms, and identification as independent variables; perceived employee unfriendliness as the mediator for displayed employee unfriendliness; and displayed customer unfriendliness as the dependent variable. In a second step, we added the perceived employee unfriendliness × injunctive norms, perceived other customer unfriendliness × injunctive norms, and perceived other customer unfriendliness × identification interactions to test the full model.

Table 4 summarizes the results. In step 1 (no interactions), displayed employee unfriendliness significantly explains variance in perceived employee unfriendliness (B = .32, SE = .05, t(213) = 6.91, p < .001, R^2 = .18). This model also explains a significant proportion of the variance in displayed customer unfriendliness (R^2= .20). The significant effect of perceived employee unfriendliness on displayed customer unfriendliness supports H1 (B = .22, SE = .09, t(209) = 2.35, p < .05). We conducted a bootstrap test for the mediation analysis (Zhao et al. 2010), using bias-corrected bootstrapping CI with 1000 iterations. An indirect effect of displayed employee unfriendliness on displayed customer unfriendliness, through perceived employee unfriendliness, emerged, with a 95% CI above 0 (B = .07, SE = .04, 95% CI = .01 to .15). None of the other independent variables, including perceived other customer unfriendliness, exert significant effects on displayed customer unfriendliness, so we do not find support for H3.

Including the interaction terms significantly increases the explained variance in displayed customer unfriendliness (ΔR^2 = .05; see the "Step 2" column in Table 4). The effect of perceived employee unfriendliness on displayed customer unfriendliness ceases to be significant (B = .18, SE = .09, t(206) = 1.86, p = .06). However, this finding must be qualified by the significant interaction between perceived employee unfriendliness and injunctive norms (B = −.29, SE = .14, t(206) = −2.10, p < .05). The interactions of perceived other customer unfriendliness with both injunctive norms (B = −.30, SE = .13, t(206) = −2.28, p < .05) and identification (B = .14, SE = .06, t(206) = 2.28, p < .05) are also significant, as hypothesized.

To assess the nature of the three interactions, we calculated regions of significance (Bauer and Curran 2005; Spiller et al. 2013) to identify the exact level of the moderator at which the direct effect of perceived employee unfriendliness and perceived other customer unfriendliness (i.e., independent variables) on displayed customer unfriendliness (i.e., dependent variable) was significant. Figure 3 plots the regions of significance for the three interactions. For easier interpretation, we anchored the values on an uncentered injunctive norms scale.

The interaction of perceived employee unfriendliness and injunctive norm (Fig. 3a) reveals significant effects of perceived employee unfriendliness on displayed customer unfriendliness for injunctive norm values below 5.77 on a seven-point Likert scale (B = .18, SE = .10, *95% CI* = .00 to .37), such that we find support for H2 in a real-life service environment. The perceived other customer unfriendliness × injunctive norms interaction (Panel B) produces a region of significance that spans injunctive norms values of less than 4.73 (B = .32, SE = .16, *95% CI* = .00 to .65), in support of H4. For the perceived other customer unfriendliness × identification interaction (Panel C), we find two regions of significance: Perceived other customer unfriendliness significantly predicts displayed customer unfriendliness when identification falls below 1.47 (B = −.33, SE = .17, *95% CI* = −.67 to .00) or exceeds 6.80 (B = .40, SE = .21, *95% CI* = .00 to .81). The significant positive effect of perceived other customer

Table 3 Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations of variables in the model (Study 2)

	M	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5
1. Displayed employee unfriendliness	2.42	1.30					
2. Perceived employee unfriendliness [*descriptive norm*]	1.94	.97	.43**				
3. Perceived other customer unfriendliness [*descriptive norm*]	2.55	.89	.12	.25**			
4. Identification	3.90	1.50	-.01	-.02	-.19*		
5. Injunctive norms	5.80	.71	.02	-.12	-.10	.08	
6. Displayed customer unfriendliness	2.14	1.30	.40**	.30**	.10	-.12	.04

N = 215, all items on 7-point scales (1 = *completely disagree*, 7 = *completely agree*)

*Significant at p < .01 (two-sided). **Significant at p < .001 (two-sided)

Table 4 Analysis results (Study 2)

Antecedent	Outcome											
	M (perceived employee unfriendliness)				Y (displayed customer unfriendliness)							
	Step 1 (main effects only)				Step 1 (main effects only)				Step 2 (main and interactive effects)			
	B	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*	*B*	*SE*	*t*	*p*
M (Perceived employee unfriendliness) [*descriptive norm*]	-	-	-	-	.22	.09	2.35	<.05	.18	.09	1.86	n.s.
X (Displayed employee unfriendliness)	.32	.05	6.91	<.001	.33	.07	4.80	<.001	.31	.07	4.55	<.001
H (Perceived other customer unfriendliness) [*descriptive norm*]	-	-	-	-	.00	.10	.04	n.s.	.00	.09	.03	n.s.
Z (Injunctive norms)	-	-	-	-	.12	.12	1.01	n.s.	.08	.11	.72	n.s.
W (Identification)	-	-	-	-	-.10	.06	-1.81	n.s.	-.08	.05	-1.46	n.s.
M × Z (Interaction)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.29	.14	-2.10	<.05
H × Z (Interaction)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-.30	.13	-2.28	<.05
H × W (Interaction)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	.14	.06	2.28	<.05
Constant	.00	.06	.00	n.s.	2.14	.08	26.73	<.001	2.13	.08	26.64	<.001
	R^2 = .18, $F(1, 213)$ = 47.8, p < .001				R^2 = .20, $F(5, 209)$ = 10.46, p < .001				R^2 = .25, $F(8, 206)$ = 8.60, p < .001 R^2 change = .05, $F(3, 206)$ = 4.60, p < .01			

N = 215, B unstandardized coefficient, R^2 change indicates the change in R^2 from Step 1 to Step 2

unfriendliness on displayed customer unfriendliness at high levels of identification supports H5, whereas the significant negative effect at low levels of identification is an unexpected finding that we address in more detail next.[2]

General discussion

This research set out to investigate the influence of behavior displayed by two social sources (employees and other customers) on customers' unfriendliness toward employees in the service encounter. By treating descriptive norms as situation-specific and injunctive norms as transsituational forms of social influence (Reno et al. 1993), we obtain novel insights into how these two types of norms interact and influence consumer behavior.

Theoretical implications

Descriptive norms play an important role in the service encounter; customer behavior is influenced by the perceived unfriendliness of employees and fellow customers. The pilot study offers empirical support to the notion that employee behavior is perceived as normative behavior in the service encounter. In Studies 1 and 2, we show that descriptive norms by employees and other customers influence customer behavior. We build on the notion that descriptive norms are specific to a particular situation (Reno et al. 1993) and show that others' behavior, as perceived by a focal customer during a service encounter, appears normative in the situation and may be adopted by that focal customer. Consistent with our reasoning, we find a strong relationship between perceived employee unfriendliness and customer unfriendliness, so descriptive norms can prompt negative customer behavior during the service encounter. This finding highlights the important role of employees in causing unfriendliness, in accordance with social norms theory. That is, employee behavior is an important reference for acceptable behavior in service encounters. Service employees may bear the brunt of the problem (i.e., customer unfriendliness), but it may be a problem partially of their own creation.

Social influences on customer unfriendliness are not limited to the customer–employee dyad though. Unfriendly behavior of fellow customers effectively predicts customer behavior toward service employees, with certain boundary conditions. The perceived unfriendliness of fellow customers predicts a customer's unfriendliness toward a service employee if identification levels are high. Our results thus suggest that customers calibrate their behavior with that of fellow customers with whom they identify. Unexpectedly, the perceived unfriendliness of fellow customers predicts customers' unfriendliness when identification is low too, a finding that aligns with

[2] To assess if descriptive norms (perceived employee and perceived other customer unfriendliness) can best be conceptualized as independent predictors or if they are better described in an interactive way, we estimated an alternative model that included the interaction between perceived employee unfriendliness and perceived other customer unfriendliness, as well as a three-way interaction among perceived employee unfriendliness, perceived other customer unfriendliness, and injunctive norms. Neither the two-way interaction (B = .08, SE = .10, $t(205)$ = .88, p = .38) nor the three-way interaction (B = .06, SE = .17, $t(204)$ = .36, p = .72) yielded significant results.

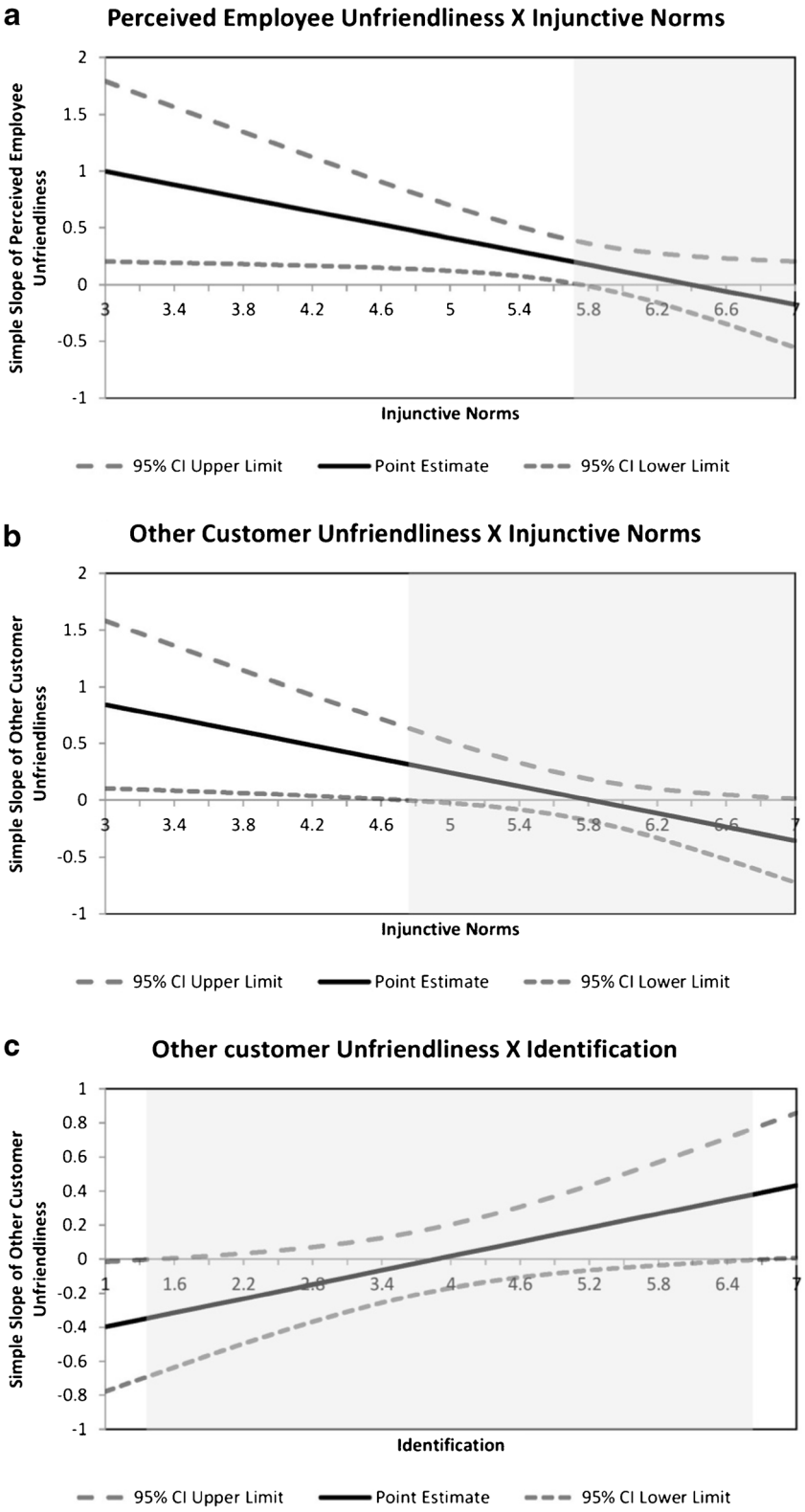


Fig. 3 Interaction results and regions of significance (Study 2) Notes: The black solid line refers to the conditional effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable at different levels of the moderator (simple slope). The two dashed lines frame the 95% confidence interval of the estimate. Estimates of the simple slope are significant in the non-shaded area

the concept of disidentification (Elsbach and Bhattacharya 2001). That is, customers appear to avoid behaviors and products linked to dissociative reference groups with which they cannot identify (White and Dahl 2006).

Despite substantial research on social norms, little work at the theoretical or empirical level explores the potential interactive effects of descriptive and injunctive norms, with a few exceptions (e.g., Göckeritz et al. 2010; Rimal 2008). Our study is the

first to demonstrate the moderating effect of transsituational injunctive norms on situation-specific descriptive norms. We present a conceptual framework and an empirical test for an interactive effect that has been speculated (Manning 2009) but never formally tested. In so doing, our study extends norm theory to situations in which situation-specific descriptive norms are moderated by transsituational injunctive norms. The significant interaction of injunctive norms with perceived employee unfriendliness and perceived other customer unfriendliness suggests that different norms should be considered simultaneously, not in isolation. In particular, customers who are ambivalent toward the injunctive norm of being friendly toward employees likely follow descriptive norms. But strong agreement with an injunctive norm such as "be friendly toward employees" implies that the customer already has clear ideas about how to behave, so he or she is less prone to situational influences. To understand the influence of situation-specific descriptive norms fully, it thus is necessary to consider their connection with transsituational injunctive norms.

Managerial implications

Frontline employees contribute to value creation (Vargo and Lusch 2008), so negative customer behaviors toward employees likely hurt the bottom line (Kern and Grandey 2009; Sliter et al. 2010; Walsh 2011). Our research suggests the need for signals in the servicescape to cue customers about how to behave, as well as offering human resource and service design implications.

Unfriendly behavior can inspire customers to act accordingly, so any such behavior should be addressed quickly and effectively. For example, service firms could install a "rapid response team" of specially trained employees who deploy whenever unfriendly behavior is displayed (e.g., impatient customers complaining about having to wait, employees looking stressed) to diffuse potentially problematic situations. Members of these teams might have normal service jobs but then could prioritize the other activity (i.e., intervention) whenever needed. Examples of such tactics include the "Cinema Ninjas" at the Prince Charles Cinema in London, who shush noisy customers (Curtis 2012), and Berlin street pantomimes who are deployed to keep partygoers from making too much noise and producing too much garbage (Gross 2015).

Another technique could be to inform customers about descriptive norms by pronouncing them on signs hung in the servicescape (e.g., "Most of our customers say 'thank you' when they are satisfied with our service. We say 'thank you' to our customers for being so friendly!"). Customers may use this information as a descriptive norm for their behavior. However, customers need to identify strongly with the reference group. Service managers should be aware that the use of descriptive norms can backfire and provoke opposing behavior if recipients' identification with the reference group is very low. Moreover, such should be aware that the use of descriptive norms can backfire and provoke opposing behavior if recipients' identification with the reference group is very low. Moreover, such social influences in the service environment likely will be stronger when people's agreement with injunctive norms is weak.

Similar to descriptive norms, injunctive norms might be activated by telling customers explicitly how to behave in the servicescape. Service firms could use reminders that unfriendliness and other negative behaviors toward employees are inappropriate or post a customer code of conduct. The U.K. railway company ScotRail posts notices on its trains, reminding travelers to keep "Hands Off Our Staff" (ScotRail 2004). Even if an employee fails to show friendliness, strong injunctive normative beliefs (e.g., show respect to other people, do not raise voices) may prevent a negative exchange spiral from unfolding. In highlighting the interactive nature of descriptive and injunctive norms, we specify that social norm campaigns cannot focus exclusively on descriptive norms (cf. Neighbors et al. 2004; Nolan et al. 2008). Instead these campaigns should broaden the scope of intervention to injunctive norms—not because they have strong direct effects on behavior, but because they may protect against the effects of undesirable descriptive norms.

Our findings suggest that displayed employee behavior is an important predictor of descriptive norms. Educating employees that their unfriendliness can prompt negative customer behaviors and that they thus benefit individually (not just as members of the firm) when they are friendly might be used as a motivational tool. Service firms might make lack of unfriendliness a criterion when hiring service personnel and encourage the omission of unfriendly behavior during training sessions. A tendency to display unfriendliness (and conversely, friendliness) could be assessed during role-plays with the applicant; unfriendliness-related questions could be embedded in questionnaires (e.g., personality tests) used by service firms. Southwest Airlines is a case in point; it is known to use group exercises during the hiring process (Taylor 2011) to gain deeper insight into potential employees' characters. Highlighting undesirable, norm-incongruent behaviors during service interactions and reminding employees of the norms on a regular basis may be beneficial (Nguyen et al. 2014). For example, Chick-fil-A's service employees are trained to end every conversation with the words "my pleasure." In addition, service scripts could help employees effectively diffuse negative behaviors displayed by customers (which often precede deviance), with potential benefits for service organizations.

Our results have implications for service design. An appropriate measure might be to keep (unfriendly) customers separated, such as by opening another cash register to reconfigure waiting lines, to avoid the spread of negative behaviors. To control for the possibility of identification among customers, firms might consider service by appointment, as a form of customer compatibility management (Martin and Pranter 1989). Such measures need to be assessed carefully though, because separating customers also means forgoing the use of

friendly customers as norm-setting role models. However, separating customers might be advantageous, especially in settings that include homogeneous groups where identification among the customers is likely and negative behavior could quickly unfold (e.g., business travelers on a delayed flight). Such a "disintegrating strategy" has been advocated before (Du et al. 2014).

Limitations and further research

We argued that unfriendliness toward service employees has a negative impact on employees, but we did not actually measure employee outcomes. Further research could examine employee outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction, turnover intention) due to customers' unfriendliness, as well as customer outcomes, such as negative word-of-mouth communication and reduced spending. Additional research could also look into the possible discrepancy between displayed customer unfriendliness and self-perceived unfriendliness. We also acknowledge a potential limitation of our observational measures. Although all our interrater agreement scores are greater than .70 (James et al. 1984), some are below the recommended threshold of .80 (e.g., Braunsberger et al. 2005). Studies using observational designs might aim for higher scores.

A potential shortcoming of Study 2 is the single-item measure of customer identification with other customers. However, the validity and reliability of single-item measures of social identification have been demonstrated (Postmes et al. 2013). Still, researchers might examine the effects further with multi-item measures.

The participants who agreed to complete our survey questionnaire were slightly less unfriendly than those who refused, possibly indicating a non-response bias. However, the differences between participants and non-participants should not have compromised our results, in that our goal was to explain variance in customer unfriendliness, so absolute levels of unfriendliness are less relevant. Further research might focus on situations more likely to invoke an unfriendly reaction, such as after a service failure.

We operationalized unfriendliness as the omission of positive behaviors, which is highly relevant (Harris and Reynolds 2003; Kern and Grandey 2009; Walsh 2011). Yet our results cannot be extrapolated to more severe forms of unfriendliness such as insults and verbal threats. These extreme forms of unfriendliness likely would be perceived as exceptional, beyond the range of normative behavior, so witnessing them might result in different responses and not necessarily in the adoption of such behavior. Further research should compare the effect of descriptive norms on negative customer behavior with varying degrees of severity.

Researchers could investigate the process by which injunctive norms moderate the relationship between social influence and customer behavior. We assumed but did not test the prediction that, for strong injunctive norms, the effects of descriptive norms on customer behavior diminish due to a reduced sense of behavioral ambiguity. Service contexts characterized by a much higher average degree of uncertainty exist (e.g., customer entering a luxurious restaurant for the first time), and if our proposed process holds, the effect of descriptive norms should be even greater in a service context characterized by higher uncertainty. Additional research might introduce uncertainty as an additional factor and assess if the effect of descriptive norms and the moderating role of injunctive norms increase in high uncertainty contexts. Furthermore, future research could compare the interactive effect of situation-specific descriptive norms and transsituational injunctive norms in different cultural contexts.

Acknowledgments The authors thank Kate Daunt and Thorsten Gruber for constructive comments on an earlier version of the paper.

Appendix 1

Table 5 Scripts for the service interaction (Studies 1 and 2)

Stage in the service interaction	Friendly condition	Unfriendly condition
Employee greets participant	Hi! Do you want to pick up your ice cream?	Are you here for the ice cream?
Employee asks for the voucher	Can I see your voucher please?	Voucher?
Employee receives the voucher	Thank you very much!	(Takes the voucher without saying anything)
Employee asks for the choice of ice cream	Which one would you like?	Which one?
Employee comments on the choice of the ice cream	(Repeats the name of the chosen ice cream), You're welcome!	(Says nothing)
Employee hands over the ice cream	(Hands over the ice cream directly to the customer) Here you go. Enjoy your ice cream!	(Says nothing, just puts the ice cream on the counter and starts cleaning another part of the counter while ignoring the customer)

Appendix 2

Table 6 Pilot study items and scale reliabilities

Constructs and items	Loading[b]	t-Value	*CR*	*AVE*	α
Perceived employee unfriendliness			.98	.86	.98
The employee in the shop was friendly toward me. (r)*	.95[a]				
The employee in the shop was unfriendly toward me. *	.90	22.68			
The employee in the shop behaved in a friendly way toward me. (r)*	.96	28.87			
The employee in the shop had a friendly smile. (r)*	.97	24.95			
The employee in the shop showed an unfriendly facial expression.	.79	12.20			
The employee in the shop talked to me in a friendly way. (r)*	.98	26.39			
The employee in the shop greeted me friendly. (r)*	.97	25.33			
The employee in the shop thanked me when it was appropriate. (r)	.87	15.63			
The employee in the shop had friendly eye contact with me. (r)*	.96	23.16			
Perceived normativity of unfriendly employee behavior			.97	.76	.98
Apparently people behave a bit unfriendly in this service setting.*	.80[a]				
In this service setting it seems to be common to be somewhat unfriendly.*	.80	16.55			
For people in this service setting it is common behave friendly. (r)	.79	9.56			
Apparently in this service setting it is common to behave in a friendly way. (r)*	.97	12.91			
In this service setting it seems to be common to have a friendly smile. (r)*	.94	12.39			
In this service setting it seems to be common to have an unfriendly facial expression.	.79	9.53			
In this service setting it seems to be common to talk in an unfriendly way. (r)	.79	9.52			
In this service setting it seems to be common to greet friendly. (r)*	.97	12.83			
In this service setting it seems to be common not to say ‘thank you’ when appropriate.	.79	9.47			
In this service setting it seems to be common to have friendly eye contact.* (r)	.97	12.84			
In this service setting it seems to be common to have a friendly farewell. (r)*	.95	12.51			
Perceived approval of unfriendliness			.89	.51	.89
I think that people would frown upon me if I were a bit impolite to the employee in the video. (r)*	.72[a]				
Most people would think it is OK if I behave somewhat unfriendly toward the employee in the video.*	.73	7.33			
Most people would approve if I am unfriendly toward the employee in the video.	.68	6.82			
People would approve if I don’t smile to the employee in the video.	.63	6.35			
People would approve if I had an unfriendly facial expression.*	.72	7.25			
People would approve if I talked to the employee in an unfriendly way.*	.85	8.61			
People would approve if I did not to say ‘thank you’ to the employee.*	.74	7.46			
People would approve if I did not say goodbye to the employee when leaving.	.65	6.56			
Injunctive norms			.88	.65	.87
Most of my friends think that it is important to be friendly towards shop employees.	.92[a]				
Many people who are important to me take the view that people should be friendly toward service employees.	.91	13.72			
Most people who are important to me think that people should always be friendly toward service employees even if it can be difficult at times.	.64	7.82			
Most of my friends think that it is important to always say goodbye to service employees in a friendly way.	.70	8.94			

Items marked with * remain in the shortened scales

(*r*) reverse coded

[a] Fixed parameter

[b] Standardized loadings

Appendix 3



Fig. 4 Ice cream shop from the pilot study and Study 1 (left = friendly, right = unfriendly)

Appendix 4

Table 7 Study 1 items and scale reliabilities

Constructs and items	Loading[b]	t-Value	*CR*	*AVE*	α
Perceived employee unfriendliness			.98	.87	.98
The employee in the shop was friendly toward me. (r)	.99[a]				
The employee in the shop was unfriendly toward me.	.90	23.59			
The employee in the shop behaved in a friendly way toward me. (r)	.98	40.60			
The employee in the shop had a friendly smile. (r)	.96	32.41			
The employee in the shop showed an unfriendly facial expression.	.90	20.89			
The employee in the shop talked to me in a friendly way. (r)	.97	33.84			
The employee in the shop greeted me friendly. (r)	.94	26.67			
The employee in the shop thanked me when it was appropriate. (r)	.82	14.55			
The employee in the shop had friendly eye contact with me. (r)	.90	20.85			
Injunctive norms			.81	.52	.80
Most of my friends think that it is important to be friendly towards shop employees.	.81[a]				
Many people who are important to me take the view that people should be friendly toward service employees.	.83	8.13			
Most people who are important to me think that people should always be friendly toward service employees even if it can be difficult at times.	.71	7.32			
Most of my friends think that it is important to always say goodbye to service employees in a friendly way.	.48	4.78			

(*r*) reverse coded

[a] Fixed parameter

[b] Standardized loadings

Appendix 5

Table 8 Qualitative evidence on the normative behaviors in service interactions (Study 2 pretest)

Normative behavior	Participants mentioning the behavior (%)	Key quotes
Verbal greeting	20 (100%)	"Well I greet the customers usually by saying 'Hello' or 'Hi' if the customer is younger." (*employee, female, 28 years*)
		"Depending on the time of the day and my mood I say 'Hi,' 'Hello,' 'good evening,' something like that." (*customer, female, 44 years*)
Looking at the interaction partner	19 (95%)	"You have to look at the customer, I think that is very important." (*employee, female, 29 years*)
		"I look at the employee." (*customer, male, 34 years*)
Smiling	15 (75%)	"Smiling is generally very important." (*employee, female, 23 years*)
		"Usually I am smiling." (*customer, female, 32 years*)
Thanking	8 (40%)	"I thank the customer." (*employee, female, 29 years*)
		"Then I thank the employee." (*customer, male, 25 years*)
Verbal farewell	17 (85%)	"I say 'goodbye' or 'see you'." (*employee, female 31 years*)
		"I say 'goodbye' and leave." (*customer, male, 47 years*)

Appendix 6

Table 9 Items and scale reliabilities (Study 2)

Constructs and items	Loading[b]	t-Value	*CR*	*AVE*	α
Perceived other customer unfriendliness			.92	.79	.91
Other customers were friendly toward the employees in the shop. (r)	.97[a]				
The other customers were unfriendly toward the employees in the shop.	.84	18.00			
The other customers behaved in a friendly way toward the employees. (r)	.86	19.00			
Perceived employee unfriendliness			.95	.86	.94
The employees in the shop were friendly toward me. (r)	.97[a]				
The employees in the shop were unfriendly toward me.	.84	20.25			
The employees in the shop behaved in a friendly way toward me. (r)	.97	32.84			
Injunctive norms (Bagozzi and Dholakia 2006)			.78	.64	.78
Most of my friends think that it is important to be friendly towards shop employees.	.78[a]				
Many people who are important to me take the view that people should be friendly toward service employees.	.82[a]				
Identification (Brocato et al. 2012; Postmes et al. 2013)					
I could identify with the other patrons in the facility.					

(*r*) reverse coded

[a] Fixed parameter

[b] Standardized loadings

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