

The Mediating Role of Customer Commitment in the Relationship Between Customer- Company Fit and Customer Voice: An Empirical Study on Restaurant Customers

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Abstract

Objective: This study analyses value congruence (person-organisation fit) and voice behaviours, which are frequently discussed in the field of organisational behaviour, in the context of marketing. The study aims to examine the effect of customer-company fit (CC fit) on customer voice behaviour as well as the role that customer commitment plays in this effect.

Design/Methodology: The research data were obtained from 390 restaurant customers in one province of Turkey through the convenience sampling method using the survey technique. The SmartPLS software (PLS-SEM) was used to conduct the analyses. The research model was analysed using partial least squares path analysis (PLS-SEM) and bootstrapping (5,000 bootstrap samples).

Results: The results indicate that CC fit directly affects both customer commitment and customer voice behaviour. Furthermore, they reveal that customer commitment plays a mediating role in the effect of CC fit on customer voice behaviour.

Theoretical and practical implications: The present study is the first in the literature to jointly discuss the various relationships between these variables (CC fit, customer commitment and customer voice). Another distinctive feature of the study is that the sample consists of restaurant customers. The high-contact nature of restaurant service makes service failures inevitable. For this reason, it is much more important to reveal customer

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voice behaviours in restaurant services than in other sectors. In this respect, the results of the study may provide guiding information to the sector.

Keywords: value congruence; voice behaviour; social exchange theory; restaurant

JEL Codes: M30; M31

1. Introduction

Values are a powerful aspect in managing the behaviour of individuals in all areas of their lives. In the field of marketing, it is known that values affect consumers' purchasing behaviours (Gutman, 1982). Value congruence (or customer-company fit) occurs when there is a similarity between the consumer's perceptions of their personal values and the company's values (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). This fit may also occur between the consumer and the brand. When deciding whether to continue using a brand they have already used, consumers can decide by looking at the extent to which the brand's values match their own. With this psychological comparison, customers will tend to use brands that are more closely aligned with their personal values (Rather et al., 2022).

Value congruence plays an important role in establishing and maintaining strong relationships between companies and customers within the framework of relationship marketing. It can be said that value congruence has become more important in creating strong ties between customers and service providers, especially due to the unique nature of the service industry (particularly in terms of abstraction and heterogeneity) (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008).

Customer-company relations are very sensitive in the service sector. When a service failure occurs, reactions such as exit, negative word-of-mouth or silence can prevent the relationship between the customer and the company from being maintained and developed. This is why customers should look for ways to convey their complaints or suggestions about service failures to the company. Because a customer's complaints are actually a signal of his or her desire to reconcile with the service provider. However, since complaining and making suggestions are voluntary behaviours (as is customer voice), company managers have difficulties in motivating these behaviours (Beal & Sabadie, 2018).

This study contributes to the literature by focusing on customer voice behaviour (Min & Kim, 2019), which is important for businesses to compensate for service failures and ultimately to survive. The literature review on the topic reveals a limited number of international studies (Beal & Sabadie, 2018; Ran & Zhou, 2020; Wan & Li, 2021; Yang et al., 2021), but no studies on this subject were found in Turkey. In countries with high power distance such as Turkey (Hofstede, 1980), this cultural dimension reduces employees' voice behaviour (Botero & Van Dyne, 2009), which can also be said for customers. This is because the likelihood of expressing complaints or satisfaction may be low in such societies. For example, Lam and Tang (2003), in their research on customers in Hong Kong hotel restaurants, found that

dissatisfied customers may not complain. On the other hand, in societies with high power distance, customers can be extremely critical, even if they do not express it directly and face to face. Instead of voicing their complaints, these customers may simply stop shopping at that business (Koç, 2023). Therefore, it is important to address customer voice in countries with high power distance and to determine the variables that may increase this voice behaviour. This is why this study jointly discussed the variables of customer-company fit and customer commitment, both of which are likely to increase customer voice. It is the first study in the literature to analyse the various relationships between these variables together. Moreover, the study contributes to the literature by selecting restaurant customers as a sample. There are several reasons for choosing the restaurant sector: the high-contact and multi-stage nature of restaurant service makes service failures inevitable in the sector. When customers encounter service failures in this sector, they tend to avoid visiting the restaurant again (exit) or to tell their friends and family about their unsatisfactory experiences (negative word-of-mouth marketing) instead of reporting their complaints directly to the restaurant (McQuilken & Robertson, 2011). Therefore, revealing customer voice behaviour in restaurant services is much more important than in other sectors. In this respect, this study may serve as a guide for the sector.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Customer-Company Fit (CC Fit)

Customer-company fit (or value congruence) is based on the concept of person-organisation fit (P-O fit) (Sheikh & Beise-Zee, 2011). P-O fit is the fit between people and organisations. This fit occurs when (1) one party meets the other's needs, (2) the parties share similar basic characteristics, or (3) when both conditions are met (Kristof, 1996). In other words, P-O fit occurs when the goals and values of an individual are compatible with those of an organisation (Chatman, 1989). Sen and Bhattacharya (2001) suggested that this fit between the employee and the organisation may also exist between the customer and the company. Researchers have stated that as customers learn more about companies, their reactions to these organisations may share characteristics with their perceptions of the P-O fit (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001).

CC fit is the customer's subjective assessment of the degree to which their values are consistent with those of the company (Halbesleben & Buckley, 2004). Customers have a range of values that are rooted in their backgrounds and beliefs. Similarly, companies design a set of values that are perceived by their customers. A company's values are considered neutral if they do not provide support for or against the customer's values. If the company's values conflict with those of the customer, a value conflict arises between the two parties. This leads to a lack of value congruence. For value fit to occur, the company's values should be in line with those of the customer (Cazier et al., 2017).

2.2. CC Fit and Customer Commitment

Commitment is considered a key component of successful long-term relationships. Commitment is a persistent desire for a valuable relationship to continue (Garbarino & Johnson, 1999) and is defined as an emotional bond between the customer and the company. Commitment means a high level of devotion to make a successful relationship mutually satisfying and beneficial. Therefore, customers may adopt some positive social behaviours to support the company and maintain their relationship with it (Chiu et al., 2015).

Achieving a high level of person-organisation fit is accepted as key to organisational commitment in the literature on organisational behaviour (Kristof, 1996). The literature on social psychology states that people prefer to establish relationships with people who are similar to themselves in order to strengthen their self-esteem and maintain balance in their self-identity. People with similar values have better interpersonal relationships. It is said that a high level of similarity results in positive attitudes (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). For this reason, if companies can create values that are compatible with those of their customers, they are likely to encounter positive attitudes and behaviours such as commitment, trust, voice and loyalty.

An examination of the studies in the relationship marketing field reveals some studies indicating that value congruence positively affects commitment. For example, Morgan and Hunt (1994) found positive relationships between shared values and commitment. In their adaptation of Morgan and Hunt's (1994) model, MacMillan et al. (2005) found that shared values have a positive effect on commitment. Zhang and Bloemer (2008) revealed that value congruence has significant and positive effects on emotional commitment. In light of these data, the following hypothesis on the relationship between CC fit, also referred to as value congruence, and customer commitment was created:

H₁: CC fit has a positive effect on customer commitment.

2.3. CC Fit and Customer Voice

Customer voice is defined as a proactive behaviour that aims to change or improve an unpleasant situation. Customer voice offers companies the opportunity to make up for and learn from their mistakes when a service failure occurs (Min & Kim, 2019, p. 59). Customer voice (Lacey, 2007), also defined as the general level of comfort customers experience when explaining the problems they encounter in the provision of services, is not only related to customers communicating their dissatisfaction or problems, but also to them giving suggestions to businesses (Ran & Zhou, 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that open complaints, unsatisfied customer needs and overall satisfaction constitute the core of customer voice (Lee et al., 2019).

When customers believe that a company shares values that are important to them, they will develop beneficial attitudes and behaviours towards the company to support and encourage these shared values (You & Hon, 2021). Value congruence

is known to positively affect beneficial customer behaviours such as WOM (word-of-mouth), repurchase and willingness to pay more (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008). Voice behaviour, a type of citizenship behaviour, is also a beneficial customer behaviour (Ran & Zhou, 2019). When customers are dissatisfied with the services of companies that are aligned with their values, they will choose to submit their complaints or suggestions directly to the company officials in order to improve the services. Elsharnouby et al. (2023) state that there is a positive relationship between value congruence and consumer voluntary performance and that strong relationships can be established when CC fit occurs, possibly making it difficult for customers to end the relationship. On the other hand, it is known in the literature on organisational behaviour that there are positive relationships between P-O fit and employee voice (Weber & Avey, 2019; Narayanan & Nadarajah, 2022). It is thought that this relationship structure may also occur between CC fit and customer voice. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H₂: CC fit has a positive effect on customer voice.

2.4. Customer Commitment and Customer Voice

Customer commitment plays an important role in creating and maintaining marketing relationships (Lacey, 2007). In this way, it is expected that when a customer who trusts and is committed to a company experiences dissatisfaction, he or she will complain to the company instead of giving up on it (Crutchfield, 2008). A customer who is strongly committed to a product or company tends to make an effort to contribute to the company. On the other hand, voice behaviour is seen as the opposite of “exit” behaviour (McKee et al., 2006). Thus, it is possible that customers who are committed to the company will convey their suggestions and complaints so that they can improve their services instead of giving up on the company. It is therefore hypothesized that:

H₃: Customer commitment has a positive effect on customer voice.

2.5. The Mediating Role of Customer Commitment

The relationships between CC fit, commitment and voice can be explained from a viewpoint based on social exchange. Blau (1964) explains social exchange theory as individuals feeling the need to respond similarly to people who treat them well. The basic assumption of social exchange theory is that mutual trust and love are created by rewards rather than gains (Demir, 2009). In other words, social exchange theory can be explained as the reactions of one party to reward the positive behaviours of the other and to develop sincerity. The resources exchanged here can be tangible objects with economic value, as well as abstract elements such as appreciation and approval (Cazier et al., 2017). When this perspective is considered in the context of the variables of our research, customers will reward the value-oriented practices

of the company by showing commitment to it (CC fit), which they believe shares common values, or by conveying their complaints and suggestions (voice). Considering these explanations in the context of social exchange theory and the important role that value congruence plays in discovering the basic components of relationship marketing, such as satisfaction, trust, commitment and loyalty (Zhang & Bloemer, 2008), CC fit can be expected to increase customer commitment, thus leading to customer voice behaviour. Hence, the following mediation hypothesis can be formulated:

H₄: Customer commitment has a mediating role in CC fit’s effect on customer voice.

The research model, developed in line with the relationships between the specified variables and the hypotheses, is presented in Figure 1.

3. Method

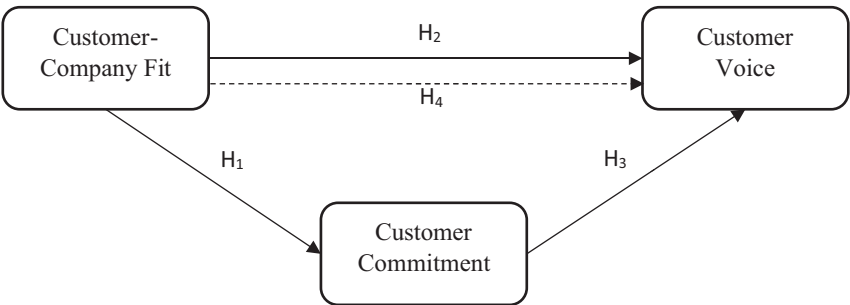
3.1. Participants

Data were obtained from 390 consumers in one province of Turkey through the convenience sampling method using the survey technique. The data were collected in March 2023. Respondents were instructed to consider their favourite local restaurant when responding to the survey statements. Examination of the demographics of the participants revealed that 215 were female and 175 were male. Most participants were between 26 and 41 years old (42.1%) and had an undergraduate degree (41.8%).

3.2. Instruments

Customer-company fit was measured using the 4-item person-organisation fit scale developed by Netemeyer et al. (1997). The Likert-type scale (1-strongly disagree / 5-strongly agree) includes items such as “I think my personal values are quite in line with the values of this restaurant”.

Figure 1. Research Model



Customer commitment was measured using the Garbarino and Johnson (1999) scale. The 4-item Likert-type scale (1-strongly disagree / 5-strongly agree) includes items such as “I feel that I belong in this restaurant”.

Customer voice was measured using the scale items from the Bove and Robertson (2005) and Crutchfield (2008) studies. The scale includes 5 items. The Likert-type scale (1-strongly disagree / 5-strongly agree) includes items such as “I feel that I can talk to restaurant employees if I have any problems”. The scale items used in the research are presented in the Annex.

4. Data Analysis and Results

4.1. Reliability and Validity Analyses

Before testing the research hypotheses, validity and reliability analyses of the scales were conducted. Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) coefficients were examined for internal consistency reliability. Cronbach's Alpha and CR values above 0.70 indicate that internal consistency reliability is ensured. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and factor loads were examined for convergent validity. Scale factor loadings are between 0.632 and 0.896, and the AVE values are above 0.50 (Hair et al., 2017). Therefore, convergent validity is ensured. The values regarding validity and reliability are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement Model Results

Scales	Indicators	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
CC Fit	ccf1	0.896	0.923	0.923	0.750
	ccf2	0.889			
	ccf3	0.856			
	ccf4	0.822			
Customer Commitment	cc1	0.751	0.875	0.875	0.637
	cc2	0.822			
	cc3	0.817			
	cc4	0.801			
Customer Voice	cv1	0.756	0.855	0.846	0.527
	cv2	0.632			
	cv3	0.676			
	cv4	0.700			
	cv5	0.846			

The study made use of the HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) criterion to ensure discriminant validity. Looking at the HTMT coefficients in Table 2, values below 0.90 indicate that discriminant validity is ensured (Henseler et al., 2015).

4.2. Hypotheses Testing

The hypotheses were tested using the SmartPLS software. Partial least squares path analysis (PLS-SEM) and bootstrapping (5,000 bootstrap samples) were used to analyse the research model. The structural equation model created to test the research hypotheses is shown in Figure 2.

The VIF, R^2 , f^2 and Q^2 values regarding the study results are presented in Table 3.

The fact that the VIF values in Table 3 are lower than 5 indicates that there is no multicollinearity problem between the variables (Hair et al., 2017). Examination of the R^2 values of the model revealed that customer commitment was explained by 68% and the customer voice variable by 30%. The fact that the effect size coefficients (f^2) are

Table 2. HTMT Coefficients

	Customer Commitment	Customer Voice	CC Fit
Customer Commitment			
Customer Voice	0.507		
CC Fit	0.823	0.512	

Figure 2. Structural Equation Model

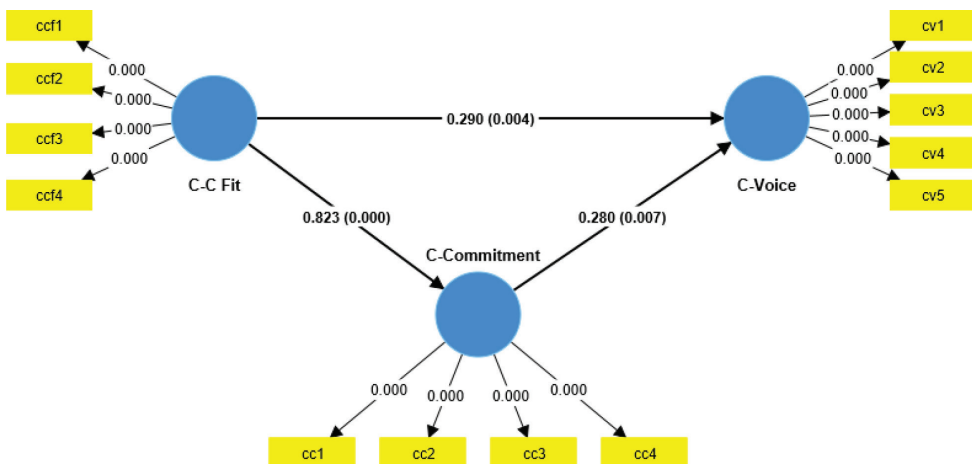


Table 3. Research Model Results

Scales	VIF	f ²	Scales	R ²	Q ²
C-C Fit -> C-Commitment	1.000	2.105	C-Commitment	0.678	0.546
C-C Fit -> C-Voice	3.105	0.039	C-Voice	0.296	0.208
C-Commitment -> C-Voice	3.105	0.036			

greater than 0.02 indicates that there is an effect in the model (Sarstedt et al., 2017). Finally, the fact that the Q² values are above zero indicates that the research model has predictive power (Hair et al., 2017). Additionally, the SRMR value of the research model was found to be 0.057. It can be stated that the model fit is supported since this value is lower than 0.07 (Bagozzi & Yi, 2012).

The direct and indirect effect coefficients of the research model are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Research Model Direct and Indirect Effect Coefficients

Effects	Path Coefficient	S. D.	T Statistics	P Values
Direct Effects				
CC Fit -> C-Commitment	0.823	0.025	33.496	0.000
CC Fit -> C-Voice	0.290	0.102	2.846	0.004
C-Commitment -> C-Voice	0.280	0.103	2.709	0.007
Indirect Effects				
C-C Fit -> C-Voice	0.230	0.086	2.673	0.008

When examining the values in the table, it is observed that CC fit positively affects customer commitment ($\beta=0.823$; $p<0.05$) and customer voice ($\beta=0.290$; $p<0.05$). Therefore, H₁ and H₂ are accepted. On the other hand, the effect of customer commitment on customer voice was positive ($\beta=0.280$; $p<0.05$). Thus, H₃ is also supported. The mediation criteria of Zhao et al. (2010) were used as the basis of the mediation hypothesis in the present study. This is why the steps of the decision tree were followed in the mediation effect. In addition to direct effects, the results revealed that CC fit indirectly affects customer voice through customer commitment ($\beta=0.230$; $p<0.05$). The findings lead to the conclusion that there is partial mediation because the path coefficients have positive values. Therefore, H₄ is also accepted.

5. Discussion

The proposed model and the hypotheses regarding the relationships between customer-company fit, commitment and voice behaviour, all based on the social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), were accepted after statistical analyses. The findings revealed that CC fit increases customer commitment. Therefore, the H_1 hypothesis (CC fit has a positive effect on customer commitment) was supported. This result is consistent with findings in the literature (MacMillan et al., 2005; Zhang & Bloemer, 2008; Zhang & Bloemer, 2011; Ng et al., 2022). CC fit has also been shown to increase customer voice. Therefore, the H_2 hypothesis (CC fit has a positive effect on customer voice) was accepted. Since there is no research in the literature on the relationship between these two variables, this finding was a contribution to this literature. Moreover, the results show that customer commitment has a positive effect on customer voice, thus supporting the H_3 hypothesis (Customer commitment has a positive effect on customer voice). This finding is parallel to the findings of the study by Beal and Sabadie (2018) and Crutchfield (2008). Another result indicates that commitment plays a partial mediating role in the effect of CC fit on voice behaviour. Therefore, the H_4 hypothesis (Customer commitment has a mediating role in CC fit's effect on customer voice) was also accepted. The study is the first in the literature to jointly discuss the relationships between these variables. Hence, the validation of the research model contributed to the related literature.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

This study has made several theoretical contributions to the literature. First of all, there were no studies in the national (Turkish) literature addressing customer voice behaviour. In the international literature, the concept is generally discussed within the scope of organisational behaviour (LePine & Van Dyne, 1998; Duan et al., 2017; Song et al., 2022) and was examined by a limited number of studies in the field of marketing (Beal & Sabadie, 2018; Ran & Zhou, 2020; Wan & Li, 2021; Yang et al., 2021). This study contributed to the literature by examining voice behaviour in the context of marketing in a sample of Turkish consumers with high power distance perception.

The second theoretical implication of the study is addressing value congruence within the context of marketing, because value congruence has been examined mostly in the organisational context (Cable & Judge, 1996; Kerse, 2021; Pratama et al., 2022). On the other hand, customer value congruence has not been examined much as a precursor of various consumer behaviours. There has been a very limited number of marketing studies that have attempted to find the effect of value congruence on the behavioural aspects of consumers (Minakshi et al., 2021). The third theoretical contribution of the study is the revelation that CC fit is a precursor of both customer commitment and customer voice.

The study determined that CC fit affects customer voice both directly and indirectly through customer commitment. In other words, the present study is the first to discuss both the attitudinal (customer commitment) and behavioural (customer voice) outcomes of CC fit. Therefore, the finding that CC fit is also important in the field of marketing because it affects customer attitudes and behaviours is another contribution of this study.

Finally, the fact that customers perceive their own values to be compatible with those of a company reinforces their commitment to the company, and customers with this reinforced commitment are also more likely to engage in voice behaviours. From the perspective of social exchange theory, this result has proven that customers are committed to companies they perceive as sharing common values and reward the company's value-oriented practices by communicating their complaints and suggestions directly to the company.

5.2. Practical Implications

The study results offer several practical implications for the service sector and restaurant services in particular. The literature states that one of the ways to retain a customer is through voice behaviour (McQuilken & Robertson, 2011). It is now a known fact that acquiring a new customer is more costly than retaining an existing customer (Çatı & Koçoğlu, 2008). For this reason, businesses should focus on encouraging voice behaviour to retain existing customers rather than spending money and energy on gaining new ones. On the other hand, as stated by Min and Kim (2019), voice behaviour allows businesses to make up for their mistakes when a service failure occurs. Businesses should build a structure in which customers can transfer their complaints directly to the business to prevent them from leaving the business or transferring their negative experiences to others when they have a problem.

Voice behaviour, which is a beneficial and voluntary customer behaviour, is related to customers providing suggestions as well as communicating their complaints (Ran & Zhou, 2020). From the point of view of social exchange theory, the results of this study have proven that customers show commitment and make suggestions (voice behaviour) to respond positively to businesses that are compatible with their values. Therefore, businesses can hit "two birds with one stone" by creating values that are compatible with their customers, as CC fit is a precursor of both customer commitment and voice behaviour. Thus, businesses should aim to find out which values can overlap with customer values. Once these values are discovered, the business should find ways to make the customer identify it with these values in their mind. Social media influencers may be beneficial in this regard. Business values can be imposed on target audiences through influencers instead of direct advertisements.

5.3. Limitations and Recommendations

This study includes certain limitations along with its contributions to the literature. One of these limitations is that the results cannot be generalised because the data were obtained from restaurant customers in Turkey. It would be useful to conduct future studies in countries with high power distance such as Turkey. Testing the research model with studies in different types of restaurants (boutique, fast food, luxury, etc.) or different sectors (hotel, transport, banking, etc.) will enrich the literature.

The study mentions that value congruence (CC fit) and voice behaviour have not been adequately addressed in the marketing context. Therefore, future studies may contribute to the literature by attempting to determine the results of CC fit and the precursors of customer voice. Another limitation is that only the mediating role of commitment was examined between CC fit and voice behaviour. Future studies could examine the mediating role of variables such as satisfaction, identification and trust in the relationship between CC fit and voice.

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Annex***CC Fit Scale***

I think my personal values are quite in line with the values of this restaurant.
This restaurant's values regarding its perspective/attitude towards people are in line with my own.
This restaurant's values on integrity are in line with my own.
This restaurant's values on fairness are in line with my own.

Customer Commitment Scale

I feel a sense of belonging to this restaurant.
I am proud to belong to this restaurant.
I care about the long-term success of this restaurant.
I am a loyal patron of this restaurant.

Customer Voice Scale

I feel that if I have any problems, I can talk to the restaurant staff.
I do not hesitate/fear to discuss my complaints about the restaurant with restaurant employees.
I discuss my complaints with the restaurant staff.
I talk to the restaurant staff comfortably/calmly about my complaints.
I am encouraged to report any complaints to the restaurant.