



Fostering employee service performance and customer-oriented organizational citizenship behavior: The joint effect of customer empowering behaviors and employee core self-evaluation

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Abstract

While the empowerment literature has largely considered leaders and organizations as sources of empowerment, it has neglected the role of customers, who have more direct service experience and interact more with front-line employees. Focusing on customer empowering behaviors, we draw on self-determination theory to examine how and when such behaviors result in service outcomes. Using an experimental study (Study 1) and a field study (Study 2, which utilizes multi-wave and multi-source data from five hotels), we obtain three main findings. First, customer empowering behaviors benefit service performance and customer-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) by enhancing harmonious passion. Second, employee core self-evaluation moderates customer empowering behaviors' positive effects on harmonious passion such that the effects are greater when an employee has a high core self-evaluation. Finally, customer empowering behaviors' indirect effects on service performance and customer-oriented OCB via harmonious passion depend on core self-evaluation, and a high core self-evaluation strengthens the above-mentioned relationships.

Keywords Customer empowering behaviors · Core self-evaluation · Harmonious passion · Customer-oriented OCB · Service performance

Introduction

To better satisfy customer needs and expectations, front-line service employees are often provided more discretion or latitude in service delivery (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1998). Such empowering behaviors' value has been well documented in the service literature (Aryee et al., 2019; Wu & Chen, 2015). This extends to direct service encounters, wherein customers grant service decision-making cues. For instance,

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in a barbershop, customers might ask the stylist to create a hairstyle that flatters their face; in a restaurant, numerous customers seek recommendations from servers regarding what to order; finally, in a travel agency, customers frequently consult and adhere to travel service personnel's suggestions when planning their trips. These scenarios exemplify customer empowering behaviors. Such an empowerment construct, which emphasizes the empowerment perceived by employees from customers, is defined as "customers creating conditions that make employees feel motivated and capable of making important decisions about their work" (Dong et al., 2015, p. 1366).

The existing literature on empowerment has primarily focused on organizational and leader empowerment of employees (Arnold et al., 2000; Cheong et al., 2019; Vecchio et al., 2010; Wang et al., 2022), overlooking empowering behaviors from external sources, such as customers. Unlike the aforementioned types of empowerment, customer empowering behavior represents a widespread yet unique form of behavior. Compared with leader empowerment, customer empowering behavior's importance lies in its unique directness, personalization, and immediate feedback mechanisms. Leader empowerment primarily occurs within management hierarchies, which emphasize the trust and authority granted by superiors to subordinates (Wang et al., 2022; Zhang & Bartol, 2010), whereas customer empowering behavior occurs directly in the service delivery process, an area that leaders cannot continuously and directly influence (Dong et al., 2015). Hence, customer empowering behaviors grant employees greater autonomy and a sense of participation at critical moments. Moreover, this direct empowerment from customers encompasses knowledge and information input and customers' lateral influence on service personnel, such as specific and personalized feedback that enables employees to immediately adjust their behaviors and service strategies based on direct customer needs and feedback (Dong et al., 2015; Tuan et al., 2019). Personalization and immediacy are particularly crucial in the service industry, as they significantly enhance service adaptability and response speed, thereby directly affecting customer satisfaction and loyalty. Accordingly, our study focuses on customer empowering behavior and aims to unveil its impact mechanism on employee service behavior.

In researching this topic, our literature review reveals that existing studies have explored how customer empowering behavior influences employee service creativity, service performance, and customer satisfaction (Dong et al., 2015; Öksüz, 2021). Despite these findings, two significant gaps remain that warrant further investigation. First, in the context of continuously changing customer needs and expectations (Ji et al., 2022), service personnel are required to not only fulfill their prescribed duties but also transcend formal job descriptions (Castro et al., 2004; Jiang et al., 2015; Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 1997) and proactively enhance customer satisfaction. This requirement underscores the necessity of identifying key factors that foster both in- and extra-role behaviors transcending basic responsibilities. Second, following the "service-dominant logic," customers participate in the creation or delivery of services by providing direct input, primarily in the form of knowledge and information, thereby achieving superior service outcomes (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008). However, research has frequently overlooked customers' indirect contributions to the service creation or delivery process. This raises an important question: Beyond

providing knowledge and information, how can customers influence service personnel during the service process? This question prompts us to explore the potential lateral or indirect influences that customers may exert on service interactions, thereby offering a more comprehensive perspective on the interactions between customers and service personnel. Consequently, this study aims to introduce and explore the previously under-examined domain of customer-oriented organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). This concept emphasizes the discretionary power that employees possess when engaging in customer service behaviors (Organ, 1988). This study incorporates extra-role behaviors and in-role service performance within the same theoretical framework to offer a more comprehensive perspective on customer empowering behavior's cumulative impact on employees.

In theorizing customer empowering behaviors' influence on employees' in- and extra-role performance, we draw on self-determination theory, which emphasizes that an individual's motivation and behavior are driven by the fulfillment of their basic psychological needs—specifically, autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000a, b). Within this framework, we propose that customer empowering behavior, by granting employees greater decision-making authority and providing the necessary support information, directly satisfies employees' basic psychological needs, thereby stimulating their intrinsic motivation and enhancing their in-role and extra-role performance. Aligned with the motivational essence of customer empowering behaviors, we consider harmonious passion a mediator connecting customer empowering behaviors (autonomy support) with employees' in- and extra-role performance. The two main reasons for this are as follows. Initially, the notion of harmonious passion was conceptualized and empirically supported as a pivotal motivational channel reflecting the autonomy level within an individual's motivation, thus determining the quality of such motivation (Vallerand et al., 2003). In contrast to intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, harmonious passion may more accurately encapsulate the psychological process whereby the support for autonomy within a context is internalized into an individual's positive emotional experiences and engagement with their work (Ahmed et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2011). Second, harmonious passion highlights the “high-priority goals with emotionally important outcomes” (Frijda et al., 1991, p. 218), reflecting an emotional motivation process. Unlike cognitive motivation processes, which focus on how individuals process information and make rational judgments (i.e., state promotion focus; Dong et al., 2015), the emotional motivation process delves into the core of how an individual's emotional experiences and states drive their behavior. Our focus on the emotional motivation process of harmonious passion emphasizes the role of emotional states in forming motivation and guiding behavior—in accordance with self-determination theory's emphasis on fulfilling basic psychological needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000b).

Additionally, we consider the conditions under which customer empowering behaviors result in employees' harmonious passion and their subsequent performance. Empowerment, despite providing employees with opportunities for autonomy (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1998), can expose them to potential risks, such as decreased role clarity, and, thus, may be interpreted as a threat (Harris et al., 2014). The empowerment literature has posited that not all employees respond positively to empowerment and, under specific conditions, empowerment backfires (Bowen &

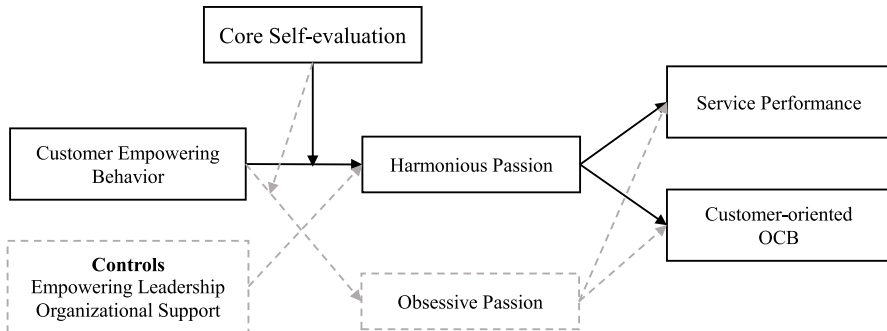
Lawler, 1992; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1998). Core self-evaluation—“fundamental assessments that people make about their worthiness, competence, and capabilities” (Judge et al., 2005, p. 257)—may influence whether people interpret a specific condition as either a threat or an opportunity (Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). As such, we explore core self-evaluation’s moderating role in the relationship between customer empowering behaviors and harmonious passion. We argue that employees with high core self-evaluation feel confident about themselves and in control over their work; thus, they may interpret customer empowering behaviors as opportunities for autonomy and, in turn, experience increased harmonious passion. By contrast, employees with low core self-evaluation may feel uncertain about whether they can satisfy customers’ needs, and thus, they may interpret customer empowering behaviors as a psychological burden and, in turn, experience less harmonious passion.

We enhance the empowerment literature in multiple ways. First, we focus on customer empowering behaviors, thereby addressing the emerging discussion on customer-sourced empowerment. To date, only scattered evidence has indicated customer empowering behaviors’ beneficial consequences (e.g., service creativity and service performance; Dong et al., 2015; Öksüz, 2021). Therefore, our focus on service performance and customer-oriented OCB (i.e., in- and extra-role performance) as outcomes provides a relatively comprehensive overview of customer empowering behaviors’ beneficial impacts and contributes novel insights to the expanding research on this topic. Second, through an emotional motivation lens, we identify harmonious passion as a critical motivational path for uncovering how customer empowering behaviors heighten performance. As such, we offer a novel perspective to understand why customer empowering behaviors improve service-related in- and extra-role performance. Third, we investigate for whom customer empowering behaviors can have a better impact. Although prior research has demonstrated that empowerment may not benefit all employees (Rafiq & Ahmed, 1998), this proposition has yet to be empirically assessed. By considering core self-evaluation as an important boundary condition, we demonstrate that customer empowering behaviors do not always exhibit beneficial impacts under all conditions and are only beneficial for employees possessing high core self-evaluation. Figure 1 presents the theoretical framework.

Theory and hypotheses

Theoretical framework

Self-determination theory emphasizes human motivations’ role in fostering positive work behaviors, goal pursuit, and psychological well-being (Ryan et al., 1997). It proposes that humans have three basic innate psychological needs—namely, autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000a). When these needs are satisfied, positive work outcomes, such as high job performance, are triggered (Deci et al., 2017). However, when these needs are not fulfilled, employees are less motivated to engage in work and fulfill their assigned tasks (Gagné & Deci, 2005). Customer empowering behaviors encompass customers’



Note. Obsessive passion was controlled in the experimental study (i.e., Study 1), and empowering leadership and organizational support were controlled in the field study (i.e., Study 2).

Fig. 1 Hypothesized theoretical model

acceptance and respect for employees' capabilities, along with the provision of autonomy support, thereby enabling employees to exercise discretion in their service delivery decisions. This can satisfy employees' needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence. By fulfilling these fundamental psychological needs, employees are inspired to immerse themselves in their work with "genuine" passion without being driven by external factors, such as personal rewards and social pressure. This state of mind, known as harmonious passion (Hao et al., 2018; Vallerand et al., 2003), allows individuals to truly love and embrace their work wholeheartedly and subsequently contributes to favorable work outcomes (e.g., in- and extra-role work outcomes).

Based on the principles of self-determination theory, the effectiveness of support for needs satisfaction in eliciting motivation varies among individuals based on the importance that they place on such support (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Individuals who place a higher emphasis on support for their psychological needs tend to develop stronger motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Accordingly, we further investigate the boundary condition of customer empowering behavior by focusing on employees' core self-evaluation, defined as the fundamental assessment that individuals make about their own self-worth, effectiveness, and capabilities (Judge et al., 1997, 2003). We propose that the perception of customer empowering behaviors as motivational is significantly influenced by employees' evaluation of the importance of this particular situation. Specifically, employees with high core self-evaluations tend to view challenging and stressful situations (e.g., customer empowering behaviors) as prospects for personal growth and work, resulting in positive workplace outcomes (Chiang et al., 2014). By contrast, employees with low core self-evaluations are likely to perceive challenging situations as stress-inducing, thus precipitating unfavorable work outcomes (Seibert et al., 2011).

Customer empowering behaviors and employee harmonious passion

The customer service literature has highlighted that customers have direct interactions with and exert great influence on service employees (Dong et al., 2015; Zhao

et al., 2008). During service encounters, customers may highlight the significance of employees' jobs, exhibit confidence in employees' capabilities, and endow employees with more decision-making autonomy (Ahearne et al., 2005; Zhang & Bartol, 2010). Such customer empowering behaviors may considerably impact service employees' moods, motivations, and behaviors (Dong et al., 2015; Tuan et al., 2019).

In this investigation, we focus on harmonious passion, a pertinent concept in the self-determination theory framework. Harmonious passion is a high-quality motivation that captures individuals' internal acceptance of an activity as significant without any external controls (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Vallerand & Miquelon, 2007; Vallerand et al., 2003). It is characterized by engagement in an activity primarily driven by personal pleasure and the activity's integration into an individual's identity (Deci, 1975; Vallerand et al., 2003). Drawing on self-determination theory and the defining features of customer empowering behavior, we posit that customer empowering behaviors stimulate employees' harmonious passion, resulting in superior service outcomes.

Self-determination theory posits that autonomy (the source of one's behavior), relatedness (the sense of connection with others), and competence (the perception of effectiveness and ability to apply and express one's skills) constitute the triad of job-related psychological needs for employees in the workplace. Contextual support for these needs is pivotal in maximizing personal enjoyment and choice and minimizing job demands and stress when pursuing certain activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). The fulfillment of these essential psychological needs fosters an environment wherein employees experience heightened self-determination willingness, and freedom from external rewards, pressure, and punishment, thus culminating in the development of harmonious passion for their job roles (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Vallerand et al., 2003).

While contextual support for psychological needs can be derived from supervisors and team members, as indicated by previous research (Ahmed et al., 2023; Dong et al., 2015; Ji et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2011; Ye et al., 2019a, b; Zhao et al., 2008), customers have often been overlooked as an important source of such support. Customer empowering behaviors can satisfy the fundamental needs of autonomy, relatedness, and competence. First, customer empowering behaviors provide autonomy support that enables employees to think and act autonomously, without interference from external pressures and punishment (Ryan & Deci, 2000b; Tuan et al., 2019). Thus, service employees can complete service tasks and make important decisions freely (Spreitzer, 1995; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990), which produces an emotional force to willingly engage in work activities, perceive their work as meaningful, and achieve personal endorsement, thus developing a robust sense of harmonious passion toward their work (Dong et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2006). Second, by engaging in empowering behaviors, customers convey their acceptance of employees and forge opportunities for enhanced interpersonal interactions. Considering that customers are vital components of front-line service employees' work lives (Liao & Chuang, 2004), such interactions significantly fulfill employees' needs for relatedness. Finally, customer empowerment acts as a testament to the trust and confidence placed in employees' competencies and decision-making prowess.

Interactions with customers exhibiting empowering behaviors grant employees the liberty to apply their problem-solving and customer-service skills more uninhibitedly. This freedom facilitates the honing of these skills and instills deeper confidence in their professional abilities. Consequently, employees' competence needs are fulfilled. Satisfying these needs produces an emotional drive that motivates employees to willingly participate in work activities, perceive their work as meaningful, and achieve personal endorsement, thus developing a robust sense of harmonious passion toward their work (Dong et al., 2015; Liu et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2006). Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Employee perceptions of customer empowering behaviors are positively associated with their harmonious passion.

Employee harmonious passion and service performance/customer-oriented OCB

Based on self-determination theory, which proposes that individuals are intrinsically motivated to align their actions with their self-concept, individuals typically regulate their behaviors based on their motivation levels toward specific activities (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Ryan & Deci, 2002). When individuals possess a profound sense of harmonious passion toward their work, they tend to become deeply engaged in their responsibilities, set ambitious goals, and proactively dedicate additional time and effort to work-related tasks (Frijda et al., 1991; Vallerand et al., 2003). Such behaviors comprise both formalized (i.e., in-role behaviors—pertaining to formally assigned work roles) and discretionary (i.e., extra-role behaviors—pertaining to duties beyond formal work roles' scope) elements (Raub & Robert, 2010; Van Dyne & LePine, 1998). Targeting customers as the foci of empowerment in the service context, we select two main employee behaviors, namely, service performance (i.e., in-role) and customer-oriented OCB (i.e., extra-role), and discuss why harmonious passion promotes these two kinds of behaviors.

We argue that harmonious passion positively influences service performance and customer-oriented OCB. On the one hand, harmonious passion entails individuals' personal choice and energy to engage in work activities, which fosters their sense of autonomy and control over work-related matters (Liu et al., 2011; Mageau & Vallerand, 2007). Employees can choose what and how to perform their work, which cultivates an internal desire and enjoyment for their tasks. With this internal passion and interest, employees are inspired to actively participate in their work, concentrate on achieving personal goals, and, ultimately, fulfill their job responsibilities more effectively (Ryan & Deci, 2000a; Shalley et al., 2004). On the other hand, harmonious passion is characterized by a deep internal desire and enjoyment for an activity or pursuit. Numerous studies have demonstrated that individuals exhibit positive behavioral intentions and proactive behavior when they develop a harmonious passion for activities that align with their values and interests (Amabile & Fisher, 2009; Liu et al., 2011). Therefore, when individuals internalize harmonious passion, they generate a motivational force that drives them to voluntarily participate in extra-role activities, fulfill duties beyond their formal ones, and engage in discretionary behaviors that transcend their job

requirements (Amabile & Mueller, 2007; Ryan & Deci, 2000b). Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2: Employee harmonious passion is positively related to employee service performance (H2a) and customer-oriented OCB (H2b).

Integrating the theoretical logic for Hypothesis 1 with the above-given arguments, we suggest that customer empowering behaviors provide employees with contextual support for autonomy, relatedness, and competence, which maximizes their personal enjoyment and choice of external activities, as captured by harmonious passion. In turn, harmonious passion triggers perceptions of autonomy and fosters employees' enthusiasm for fully immersing themselves in work-related activities. Grounded in self-determination theory, harmonious passion serves as a motivational conduit that transforms customer empowering behaviors into service performance and customer-oriented OCB. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Employee harmonious passion mediates the positive relationship between customer empowering behaviors and employee service performance (H3a) and customer-oriented OCB (H3b).

Moderation by employee core self-evaluation

The tenets of self-determination theory underscore the universality of basic psychological needs while acknowledging that the capacity for need support to engender motivation may differ across individuals who attribute varying degrees of significance to these needs (Ryan & Deci, 2000a). Notably, individuals who attach substantial importance to these needs are more prone to developing heightened motivation when confronted with corresponding support for these needs. Conversely, those who assign less significance to these needs tend to exhibit lower motivation in response to the provision of need support (Ryan & Deci, 2000a).

Drawing from self-determination theory, our prediction posits that employees' core self-evaluation assumes a moderating role in customer empowering behavior's influence. Core self-evaluation captures how employees perceive their worthiness, competence, and control over their lives (Judge et al., 1997, 2004). Employees with higher core self-evaluation possess underlying traits such as self-efficacy and self-esteem and an internal locus of control (Judge et al., 1998, 2003). As a form of positive self-view, core self-evaluation can be considered a valuable personal resource for interpreting challenging work environments as full of opportunities for future development (Liang & Gong, 2013; Wang & Xu, 2019). Thus, core self-evaluation reinforces customer empowering behaviors' favorable influence on harmonious passion.

Employees with higher core self-evaluation tend to view situations as controllable and possess the capability to effectively navigate challenging and stressful situations (Harris et al., 2009; Hobfoll, 2001; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). When customers empower service employees by allowing them to act and make important

decisions, they experience an increasing degree of trust and recognition from customers. Employees with a heightened sense of core self-evaluation are predisposed to view situations as controllable and effectively cope with challenging situations (Harris et al., 2009; Hobfoll, 2001; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). Empirical evidence has supported that individuals possessing high self-evaluation seek challenging roles and, therefore, select organizations or jobs that provide more opportunities to experience authorized work (Seibert et al., 2011). Customer empowerment behavior enables employees to make decisions and act effectively without customer intervention (Dong et al., 2015). In such situations, employees with strong core self-evaluation are inclined to embrace customer empowering behaviors and consider such empowerment a desirable opportunity to perform the work that they like, which stimulates employees' harmonious passion toward their work (Judge et al., 2002). By contrast, employees who lack confidence in their own worthiness and competence are likely to interpret customer empowering behaviors as threatening and stressful; they may even experience external pressure to participate in certain activities and perceive their involvement in such activities as punishment, thus hindering their development of harmonious passion (Harris et al., 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). Ample empirical evidence has supported core self-evaluation's attenuating role in coping with stress (Lim & Tai, 2014; Tsaousis et al., 2007; Yuan et al., 2014). Thus, we postulate that the positive link between customer empowering behaviors and harmonious passion would be more pronounced for employees with higher levels of core self-evaluation.

Hypothesis 4: Employee core self-evaluation moderates the relationship between employee-perceived customer empowering behaviors and employee harmonious passion, such that the positive relationship is stronger when employee core self-evaluation is higher (vs. lower).

Employees with high core self-evaluation tend to be less sensitive to stressful and threatening situations; thus, they are likely to view customer empowering behaviors as an opportunity rather than a threat (Harris et al., 2009; Kammeyer-Mueller et al., 2009). In turn, they demonstrate increased energy, enjoyment, and passion when engaging in external activities, such as achieving greater service performance and demonstrating OCB toward customers (Liu et al., 2011; Rousseau & Vallerand, 2008). In sum, we propose that employees' core self-evaluation conditionally affects the strength of the indirect effects that employee-perceived customer empowering behaviors exert on employee service performance and customer-oriented OCB, reflecting a moderated mediation pattern. Accordingly, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Employee core self-evaluation moderates the mediated effect of employee-perceived customer empowering behaviors on employee service performance (H5a) and customer-oriented OCB (H5b), such that the indirect relationship is stronger when employee core self-evaluation is higher (vs. lower).

Overview of studies

We carried out two studies to examine the theoretical model. In Study 1, we use an experimental study to rule out the potential mechanism of obsessive passion and to establish causality of our studied variables. In Study 2, we conducted a field study (i.e., 232 supervisor-employee dyads) to enhance the generalizability of our findings.

Study 1: an experiment study

Participants and procedure

Sample We recruited participants from the Credamo platform and paid each of them 5 RMB for their participation. The final sample consisted of 227 participants. These participants had an average of 31.8 years of age ($SD = 4.46$) and an average of 6.44 years of work experience in their current organizations ($SD = 4.29$). Most of them were female (73.13%) and held a bachelor's degree (51.98%).

Procedure We utilized an experimental design in Study 1 in which customer empowering was manipulated. The manipulation of customer empowering was created with reference to the definition and measure of empowerment. As core self-evaluation is a personal trait, we asked participants to rate their core self-evaluation. After that, participants were randomly assigned to a scenario illustrating customer empowering, encompassing a high customer empowering and a low customer empowering condition.

In the high customer empowering condition, participants were presented with the following scenario:

Assuming you are a specialized interior designer in home decoration, your daily tasks comprise proposing interior design solutions for clients. You just entertained a client named Zhang Wei and discussed with him about decoration requirements. After the discussion, Zhang Wei said: "Thank you for assisting me to renovate my home. I have utmost confidence in your design abilities and am truly fond of your design style. You have the autonomy to independently design without consulting me on specific details. Please kindly proceed with the design at your own pace and in your own manner. Once you have completed the design, we can make a final appointment to discuss the design plan. I firmly believe that you can create a comfortable and cozy home for me".

In the low customer empowering condition, participants were presented with the following scenario:

Assuming you are a specialized interior designer in home decoration, your daily tasks comprise proposing interior design solutions for clients. You just entertained a client named Zhang Wei and discussed with him about decoration requirements. After the discussion, Zhang Wei said: “The interior design of this house holds great significance to me, as it will determine my satisfaction with living here for the next few years. Frankly speaking, I am uncertain whether you possess the ability to design a style that aligns with my preferences or if you truly comprehend my needs. Therefore, I think that throughout the design process, you should maintain regular communication with me regarding the details, ranging from substantial adjustments in the structure to minor details such as color schemes and materials. You can provide me with multiple kinds of choices and I insist on making decisions by myself”.

After reading the scenario, participants were requested to complete a questionnaire that included a manipulation check, harmonious passion, obsessive passion, service performance, and customer-oriented OCB.

Manipulation check We assessed customer empowering behavior (*Cronbach’s alpha = 0.91*) using the scale created by Dong et al. (2015). An example item was “My customers helped me understand the meaning of my work to them.” An ANOVA analysis revealed that those ($n=112$) in the experimental group (i.e., high in customer empowering behavior) reported higher levels of customer empowering behavior ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.29$) relative to those ($n=115$) in the control group (i.e., low in customer empowering behavior, $M = 2.60$, $SD = 0.82$), $F(1, 225) = 456.81$, $p < 0.001$), providing evidence for the validity of the manipulation of customer empowering behavior.

Measures

Adhering to the back-translation method suggested by Brislin (1980), the English-version scales were translated into the Chinese version. Participants were invited to report on the 5-point Likert (“1” = strongly disagree, “5” = strongly agree) regarding to what extent they agree with the description of each item.

Core self-evaluation (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.73) A twelve-item scale derived from Judge et al. (2003) was used to measure core self-evaluation. A representative item was “I am confident I get the success I deserve in life”.

Harmonious passion (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.94) We measured harmonious passion by adopting the seven-item scale (Vallerand et al., 2003). A representative item was “This job allows me to live a variety of experiences”.

Service performance (Cronbach's alpha = 0.91) We measured service performance by adopting Liao and Chuang's scale with seven items. An example item was "Asking good questions and listening to find out what a customer wants".

Customer-oriented OCB (Cronbach's alpha = 0.93) Customer-oriented OCB was measured using the seven-item scale developed by Dimitriades (2007). A representative item was "To serve the customers, this employee volunteers for things that are not required".

Control variables Customer empowering behavior may result in obsessive passion because such behavior can create expectations and burdens from the external service context. This may compel employees to work in order to feel valued, which can lead to obsessive passion. Previous studies have documented that empowering behaviors from leaders can decrease intrinsic motivation and increase role stress (Wong Humborstad & Giessner, 2016; Wong Humborstad et al., 2014; Humborstad & Kuvaas, 2013), and promote obsessive passion (Hao et al., 2018). Therefore, obsessive passion was controlled for in this study. We measured obsessive passion by adopting the seven-item scale (Vallerand et al., 2003). An example item was "I cannot live without it" and "I have difficulty imagining my life without this activity" (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89).

Results

As Table 1 presents, customer empowering behavior (manipulation) had a positive correlation with harmonious passion ($r = 0.46, p < 0.01$) and obsessive passion ($r = 0.18, p < 0.01$). In addition, harmonious passion was positively correlated to service performance ($r = 0.75, p < 0.01$) and customer-oriented OCB ($r = 0.77, p < 0.01$). Obsessive passion was positively associated with service performance ($r = 0.32, p < 0.01$) and customer-oriented OCB ($r = 0.29, p < 0.01$).

Confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) were carried out by using Mplus to confirm the dimensionality and discriminant validity of variables (see Table 2). As the sample size (i.e., 227) is relatively small, we created item parceling (i.e., three parcels for each variable) to reduce the number of parameters requiring estimation in CFA analysis (Little et al., 2002). As Table 2 presents, the hypothesized six-factor model (i.e., baseline model) was a better fit to the data ($\chi^2 [80] = 207.32, p < 0.001, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.08$) compared to parsimonious models.

We firstly conducted an ANOVA analysis to see whether high customer empowering versus low customer empowering were associated with harmonious passion and obsessive passion. The results revealed that customer empowering behavior was positively associated with harmonious passion ($F[1, 225] = 59.10, p < 0.01, M = 4.43$ vs $M = 3.59$) and obsessive passion ($F[1, 225] = 7.25, p < 0.01, M = 3.15$ vs $M = 2.80$). Further, we adopted the path analytic approach outlined by Preacher et al. (2007) and Hayes's (2013) to test conceptual model using Mplus. The path analytic results are illustrated in Table 3 and Fig. 2. As Table 3 shows, customer

empowering behavior was positively related to harmonious passion ($b = 0.84$, $SE = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$), thereby supporting *Hypothesis 1*. Customer empowering behavior was also positively related to obsessive passion ($b = 0.35$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < 0.01$). In addition, harmonious passion was significant in predicting both service performance ($b = 0.65$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$) and customer-oriented OCB ($b = 0.66$, $SE = 0.09$, $p < 0.01$); obsessive passion had a non-significant relation with both service performance ($b = 0.02$, $SE = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$) and customer-oriented OCB ($b = -0.01$, $SE = 0.02$, $p > 0.05$), which was in support of *Hypotheses 2a* and *2b*.

For *Hypothesis 3a (3b)*, stating that harmonious passion mediates the association of customer empowering behavior with employee service performance (customer-oriented OCB), our results (i.e., Table 4) uncover that customer empowering behavior's indirect effect onto employee service performance via harmonious passion was significant ($b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.11$, $CI = [0.331, 0.749]$), and its indirect effect onto customer-oriented OCB through harmonious passion was statistically significant ($b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.12$, $CI = [0.194, 0.661]$). Thus, *Hypotheses 3a* and *3b* were supported.

Hypothesis 4 specifies that the moderating effect of core self-evaluation was positive and significant ($b = 0.83$, $SE = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$). And the simple slope analyses (see Fig. 3) indicated that the effect that customer empowering behavior had on harmonious passion was stronger when core self-evaluation was high (simple slope = 1.10, $p < 0.01$) than when core self-evaluation was low (simple slope = 0.57, $p < 0.01$). Thereby, *Hypothesis 4* was supported. Following the procedure suggested by Aiken and West (1991), we plot the interactive effect at varying levels ($-1SD$, $+1SD$) of core self-evaluation in Fig. 3.

Hypothesis 5a (5b) states the conditional indirect effect that customer empowering behavior has on employee service performance (customer-oriented OCB) via harmonious passion under high and low levels of core self-evaluation (i.e., $-1SD$, $+1SD$). The bootstrapping procedure results (i.e., Table 4) suggest that customer empowering behavior's indirect influence on employee service performance via harmonious was positive when core self-evaluation was high (indirect effect = 0.71, $SE = 0.15$, 95% $CI = [0.417, 1.006]$) and was low (indirect effect = 0.37, $SE = 0.08$, 95% $CI = [0.204, 0.533]$). The difference between the two conditional indirect effects was 0.34 ($SE = 0.12$, 95% $CI = [0.112, 0.575]$). And customer empowering behavior's indirect influence on customer-oriented OCB was positive when core self-evaluation was high (indirect effect = 0.73, $SE = 0.15$, 95% $CI = [0.435, 1.031]$) and was low (indirect effect = 0.38, $SE = 0.08$, 95% $CI = [0.214, 0.544]$). The difference between the two conditional indirect effects was 0.35 ($SE = 0.12$, 95% $CI = [0.116, 0.591]$). Thus, *Hypothesis 5a* and *5b* were supported.

Study 1 discussion

Study 1 provided support for the mediating role of harmonious passion in the link between customer empowering behavior and employee service performance/ customer-oriented OCB, by controlling the mediating effects of obsession passion. This indicates that harmonious passion serves as a more predominant mediating role than obsessive

Table 1 Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
Study 1 (N=227)											
1. Customer empowering behavior (manipulation)	–										
2. Core self-evaluation	0.05	(0.73)									
3. Harmonious passion	0.46**	0.06	(0.94)								
4. Obsessive passion	0.18**	-0.06	0.38**	(0.89)							
5. Service performance	0.30**	-0.02	0.75**	0.32**	(0.91)						
6. Customer-oriented OCB	0.33**	0.11	0.77**	0.29**	0.94**	(0.93)					
Mean	0.49	4.35	4.01	2.97	4.18	4.18					
SD	0.5	0.32	0.92	0.98	0.77	0.79					
Study 2 (N=252)											
1. Employee age	–										
2. Employee gender	0.02	–									
3. Employee education	-0.22**	-0.04	–								
4. Employee tenure	0.51**	0.00	0.03	–							
5. Empowering leadership	-0.13*	-0.01	0.07	-0.01	–						
6. Perceived organizational support	0.01	0.09	-0.02	0.01	0.42**	(0.91)					
7. Customer empowering behavior	0.10	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.27**	0.31**	(0.90)				
8. Core self-evaluation	0.03	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.19**	0.16*	0.23**	(0.95)			
9. Harmonious passion	0.13	0.08	0.09	0.08	0.18**	0.05	0.34**	0.23**	(0.94)		
10. Service performance	0.12	0.10	0.14*	0.15*	0.13*	0.01	0.21**	0.08	0.76**	(0.92)	
11. Customer-oriented OCB	0.10	0.10	0.12	0.21**	0.13*	0.07	0.22**	0.08	0.52**	0.59**	(0.92)
Mean	31.05	–	–	3.17	3.51	3.68	3.84	3.80	3.91	3.99	3.77
SD	11.93	–	–	3.91	0.56	0.67	0.65	0.70	0.58	0.66	0.67

Note. Gender was coded as “1” for male and “2” for female; Education was coded as “1” for high school degree or below, “2” for junior college degree, “3” for bachelor’s degree, and “4” for graduate degree or higher; Values in the brackets are Cronbach’s alpha coefficients. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

Table 2 Confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Study 1 (N=227)						
Six factors (baseline model)	207.32**	80	-	0.96	0.95	0.08
Five factors (combine Harmonious passion & Obsessive passion)	563.19**	84	355.87**	0.85	0.82	0.16
Five factors (combine Core self-evaluation & Harmonious passion)	406.47**	84	199.15**	0.90	0.88	0.13
Five factors (combine Core self-evaluation & Obsessive passion)	676.40**	84	469.08**	0.82	0.78	0.18
Five factors (combine Service performance & Customer-oriented OCB)	239.99**	84	32.67**	0.95	0.94	0.09
Four factors (combine Core self-evaluation & Harmonious passion & Obsessive passion)	761.70**	87	554.38**	0.80	0.75	0.19
One factor (all items merged into one factor)	1133.44**	90	926.12**	0.68	0.63	0.23
Study 2 (N=232)						
Seven factors (baseline model)	302.43	188	-	0.97	0.97	0.05
Six factors (combine Customer empowering behavior & Core self-evaluation)	984.24	194	681.81**	0.80	0.76	0.13
Six factors (combine Customer empowering behavior & Harmonious passion)	900.98	194	598.55**	0.82	0.79	0.13
Six factors (combine Core self-evaluation & Harmonious passion)	944.00	194	641.57**	0.81	0.78	0.13
Six factors (combine Service performance & Customer-oriented OCB)	842.46	194	540.03**	0.84	0.81	0.12
Five factors (combine Customer empowering behavior & Core self-evaluation & Harmonious passion)	1372.17	199	1069.74**	0.70	0.66	0.16
Five factors (combine Customer empowering behavior & Empowering leadership & Perceived organizational support)	884.11	199	581.68**	0.83	0.80	0.12
One factor (all items merged into one factor)	3235.76	209	2933.33**	0.24	0.16	0.25

Notes: CFI Comparative Fit Index; TLI Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA Root mean square error of approximation

** $p < 0.01$

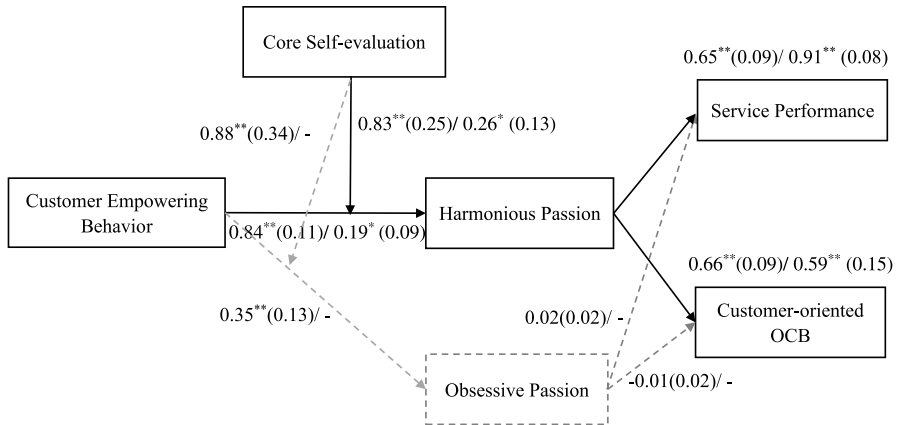
Table 3 Path analytic results for the estimated model

Variables	Harmonious passion		Obsessive passion		Service performance		Customer-oriented OCB	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Study 1 (<i>N</i> =227)								
Customer empowering behavior	0.84**	0.11	0.35**	0.13	-0.08*	0.04	-0.04	0.03
Core self-evaluation	0.08	0.13	-0.23	0.17	-0.17*	0.08	0.14	0.09
Customer empowering behavior × Core self-evaluation	0.83**	0.25	0.88**	0.34	0.06	0.14	0.08	0.14
Harmonious passion	–	–	–	–	0.65**	0.09	0.66**	0.09
Obsessive passion	–	–	–	–	0.02	0.02	-0.01	0.02
<i>R</i> ²	0.23**	0.03	0.06	0.03	0.57**	0.10	0.60**	0.09
Study 2 (<i>N</i> =232)								
Employee age	0.01	0.00	–	–	0.00	0.00	-0.00	0.00
Employee gender	0.08	0.10	–	–	0.06	0.07	0.09	0.10
Employee education	0.07	0.06	–	–	0.06	0.04	0.06	0.06
Employee tenure	0.00	0.01	–	–	0.01*	0.01	0.03**	0.01
Perceived empowering leadership	0.18	0.10			0.02	0.06	0.02	0.07
Perceived organizational support	-0.11	0.10			-0.02	0.05	0.02	0.07
Customer empowering behavior	0.19*	0.09	–	–	-0.03	0.06	0.05	0.06
Core self-evaluation	0.17**	0.05	–	–	-0.11*	0.06	-0.06	0.06
Customer empowering behavior × Core self-evaluation	0.26*	0.13	–	–	-0.10	0.08	-0.04	0.10
Harmonious passion			–	–	0.91**	0.08	0.59**	0.15
<i>R</i> ²	0.23*	0.09	–	–	0.61**	0.06	0.32**	0.10

Note. Estimates are unstandardized regression coefficients

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed)

passion. With the experimental design, we can provide some causality of our focal variables and rule out the alternative explanation of obsessive passion. However, it does exhibit limitations. First, Study 1 tested the hypotheses in controlled and unrealistic conditions, which limits the generalizability of this study that can be enhanced through field studies. Second, in addition to external sources (i.e., customers), internal sources such as supervisors, teammates, and coworkers can exert influences on employees' attitudes and behaviors at work. Therefore, Study 2 utilizes a field study to examine our hypothesized relationships by adding leader empowerment and organizational support as controls, which can enable us explore the incremental effect of customer empowerment beyond these two factors.



Note. *N* of Study 1 = 227 and *N* of Study 2 = 232. Values in the brackets are standard errors. Solid lines and dashed lines represent our proposed relationships and controlled relationships, respectively. The values on the left side of the slash symbol represent the findings of Study 1 and the values on the right side represent the findings of Study 2. * $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed).

Fig. 2 Path analysis results for the hypothesized model. Note. *N* of Study 1 = 227 and *N* of Study 2 = 232. Values in the brackets are standard errors. Solid lines and dashed lines represent our proposed relationships and controlled relationships, respectively. The values on the left side of the slash symbol represent the findings of Study 1 and the values on the right side represent the findings of Study 2. * $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed)

Study 2: a field study

Participants and procedure

We gathered data from full-time frontline service employees and their immediate supervisors from five hotels in Hangzhou, China. The focus of this study is on customer-contact employees positioned at the interface between the hotel and customers, such as receptionists, food and beverage service staff, and guest services employees. To prevent common method bias, we collected three waves of data, with each wave spaced three months apart (Podsakoff et al., 2003). In the first wave, employees reported perceptions of customer empowering behavior and core-self evaluations, and their demographics (i.e., age, gender, education, and organizational tenure). In the second wave, employees reported their harmonious passion at work. In the final wave, supervisors rated the targeted employees' service performance and customer-oriented OCB.

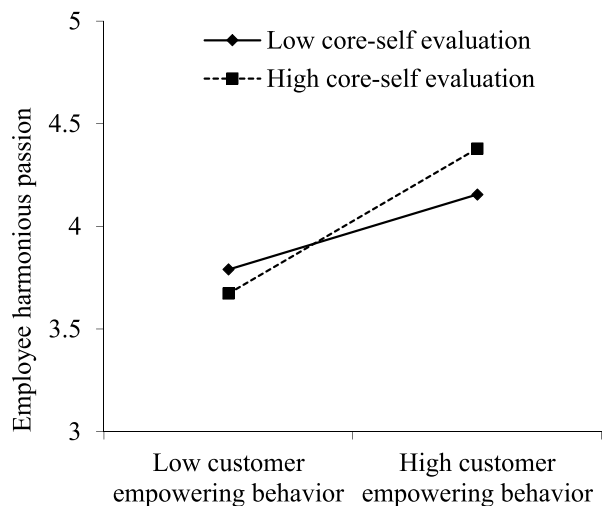
We connected with the human resource department of the target hotels to get the list of the participants and generated a unique code to identify each participant. Before distributing the surveys, we explain to participants about the research goals, and ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. A total of 392 employees and 105 supervisors were randomly selected as our participants, with each supervisor matching with 2–6 employees. To appreciate their participation, the participants were given about \$5 USD when they return each survey.

Table 4 Results for hypothesized indirect effects

Hypothesized relationships	Indirect effect	SE	Confidence interval
Study 1 ($N=227$)			
Customer empowering behavior→ Harmonious passion→ Service performance			
Indirect effect	0.54	0.11	[0.331, 0.749]
High core self-evaluation (+1SD)	0.71	0.15	[0.417, 1.006]
Low core self-evaluation (-1SD)	0.37	0.08	[0.204, 0.533]
Difference	0.34	0.12	[0.112, 0.575]
Customer empowering behavior→ Harmonious passion→ Customer-oriented OCB			
Indirect effect	0.43	0.12	[0.194, 0.661]
High core self-evaluation (+1SD)	0.73	0.15	[0.435, 1.031]
Low core self-evaluation (-1SD)	0.38	0.08	[0.214, 0.544]
Difference	0.35	0.12	[0.116, 0.591]
Study 2 ($N=232$)			
Customer empowering behavior→ Harmonious passion→ Service performance			
Indirect effect	0.17	0.09	[0.001, 0.347]
High core self-evaluation (+1SD)	0.34	0.16	[0.102, 0.585]
Low core self-evaluation (-1SD)	0.00	0.07	[-0.232, 0.235]
Difference	0.33	0.17	[0.020, 0.661]
Customer empowering behavior→ Harmonious passion→ Customer-oriented OCB			
Indirect effect	0.11	0.07	[0.001, 0.253]
High core self-evaluation (+1SD)	0.22	0.13	[0.057, 0.431]
Low core self-evaluation (-1SD)	0.00	0.04	[-0.158, 0.160]
Difference	0.22	0.13	[0.015, 0.481]

Note. 95% confidence interval was reported

Fig. 3 Interaction of customer empowering behavior and employee core self-evaluation on employee harmonious passion (Study 1)



In the first wave, 310 of 392 (a 79.08% response rate) employees returned their completed surveys. In the second wave, we got valid responses from 258 employees (an 83.23% response rate). In the third wave, we received 232 usable surveys from supervisors (an 89.92% response rate). After matching the responses from supervisors and employees, our final sample included 232 matched supervisor-employee dyads, comprising 232 employees and 88 supervisors. Among the 232 employees surveyed, 55.17% were female, 59.48% were under the age of 30, and 50.43% had a high school education or lower. On average, they had been employed at their current hotels for 3.17 years.

Measures

Our studied variables, which are *customer empowering behavior* (*Cronbach's alpha* = 0.90), core self-evaluation (*Cronbach's alpha* = 0.95), harmonious passion (*Cronbach's alpha* = 0.94), service performance (*Cronbach's alpha* = 0.92), and customer-oriented OCB (*Cronbach's alpha* = 0.92) were assessed with the same scales used in Study 1. Participants were instructed to indicate their level of agreement, ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree,” with the presented statements using a 5-point Likert scale.

Control variables As prior studies propose that service employees' demographic characteristics could significantly influence their in-role and extra-role behaviors (e.g., Lyu et al., 2016; Ye et al., 2019a, b), we added these variables as control variables to rule out the intervening effects. Moreover, given that empowering leadership and perceived organizational support are two important variables that are relevant to customer empowering behaviors and have been documented to be significant in affecting employees' service outcomes, we also included them as control variables when testing hypotheses. Empowering leadership (*Time 1*, *Cronbach's alpha* = 0.89) was assessed with twelve items from Zhang and Bartol (2010), and perceived organizational support (*Time 1*, *Cronbach's alpha* = 0.91) was assessed with eight items from Eisenberger et al. (1986).

Analytical strategy

Given that our final sample of 232 employees was organized into 88 teams, we computed two intraclass correlations (ICCs) (i.e., ICC(1) and ICC(2)) (Bartko, 1976; James, 1982) for empowering leadership, service performance, and customer-oriented OCB to assess the hierarchical structure of our data. As per recommendations, the presence of a nested effect is indicated when ICC(1) surpasses 0.05 and ICC(2) surpasses 0.50. Our findings revealed that the ICC(1) values for empowering leadership, service performance, and customer-oriented OCB were .21, 0.44, and 0.39, respectively, while the ICC(2) values were .41, 0.67, and 0.63, respectively.

In light of the nested data structure (i.e., employees' performance and OCB data were rated by supervisors), we employed the Huber/White sandwich estimator of

variance to assess our hypotheses (Bliese, 2000; Huber, 1967; White, 1980). For our analysis, we conducted path analysis with robust full maximum likelihood estimation employing Mplus 7 (Muthén & Muthén, 2012), specifying the supervisory unit as a Cluster variable and employing the “Type = Complex” approach to address the nested data structure. The sandwich estimator has been proved to offer a robust estimation of standard errors (Muthén & Muthén, 2017), and this methodology has been commonly employed in prior research to manage non-independent data (e.g., Deng et al., 2017; Eva et al., 2019; Farh et al., 2017). To establish the confidence intervals (CIs) for the indirect effect, we utilized the Monte Carlo method (Preacher et al., 2010) based on 20,000 replications.

Results

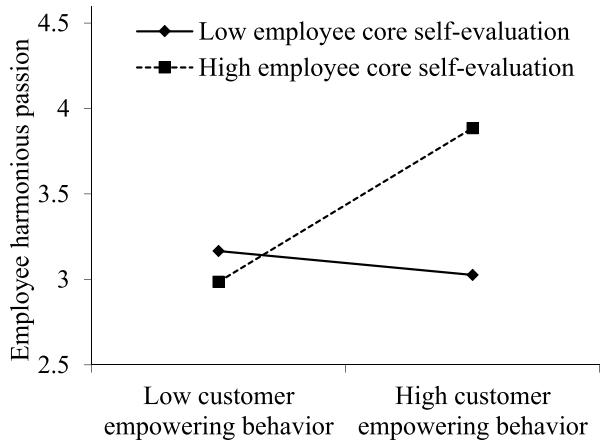
As Table 1 illustrates, customer empowering behavior had a positive correlation with harmonious passion ($r = 0.34, p < 0.01$). In addition, harmonious passion was positively related to service performance ($r = 0.76, p < 0.01$) and customer-oriented OCB ($r = 0.52, p < 0.01$).

CFA was conducted to test the distinctiveness and convergence of the key constructs (see Table 2). Because our sample size is not big enough, we created item parcels for all variables (i.e., three parcels for each single-dimension variable and four parcels for empowering leadership which includes four subdimensions) using the item-to-construct balance method recommended by Little et al. (2002). In a seven-factor model (i.e., baseline model), we include customer empowering behavior, empowering leadership, perceived organizational support, core self-evaluation, harmonious passion, service performance, and customer-oriented OCB. This model generated a better fit ($\chi^2(188) = 302.43, p < 0.01, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.97, RMSEA = 0.05$) than other the alternative models. Also, each item loaded significantly in the corresponding factors. Such evidence verified the distinctiveness and convergence of our measured variables.

First, we specified the lagged effects of customer empowering behavior, core self-evaluation, and its interactive term on harmonious passion. Second, we regressed service performance/customer-oriented OCB on harmonious passion, after controlling the direct effects of customer empowering behavior, core self-evaluation (together with its interactive term), employee demographic information, empowering leadership, and perceived organizational support.

As expected, customer empowering behavior was positive in enhancing harmonious passion ($b = 0.19, SE = 0.09, p < 0.05$) after controlling employee demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, education, tenure) as well as empowering leadership and perceived organizational support. Therefore, service employees who are empowered by the customers would generate higher harmonious passion toward the work, in support of *Hypothesis 1*. Additionally, harmonious passion was positive in promoting both service performance ($b = 0.91, SE = 0.08, p < 0.01$) and customer-oriented OCB ($b = 0.59, SE = 0.15, p < 0.01$), thus supporting *Hypothesis 2a* and *2b*. These findings proposed that hospitality employees who hold harmonious

Fig. 4 Interaction of customer empowering behavior and employee core self-evaluation on employee harmonious passion (Study 2)



passion toward the work would have high service performance, and customer-oriented OCB.

The results of the mediating effects of harmonious passion, as hypothesized in *Hypothesis 3a* and *3b*, are shown in Table 4. On the basis of 20,000 replications, the indirect effect of customer empowering behavior on service performance was 0.17 ($SE = 0.09$, $95\%CI = [0.001, 0.347]$). And the indirect effect of customer empowering behavior on customer-oriented OCB was 0.11 ($SE = 0.07$, $95\%CI = [0.001, 0.253]$). That is, harmonious passion mediated the influence that customer empowering behavior had on service performance/customer-oriented OCB, which supported *Hypotheses 3a* and *3b*.

To test the moderating role of core self-evaluation (*Hypothesis 4*), we found that the interaction of customer empowering behavior and core self-evaluation had positive relationship with harmonious passion ($b = 0.26$, $SE = 0.13$, $p < 0.05$). Following the procedure suggested by Aiken and West (1991), we plot the interactive effect at varying levels ($-1SD$, $+1SD$) of core self-evaluation in Fig. 4. With regard to the association between customer empowering behavior and harmonious passion, the slope was positive (simple slope = 0.45, $p < 0.01$) when employees have higher core self-evaluation, but was non-significant (simple slope = -0.07, ns) when employees' core self-evaluation is low. The moderated mediation effects were presented in Table 4. The conditional association between customer empowering behavior and service performance was significant when core self-evaluation was high (indirect effect = 0.34, $SE = 0.16$, $95\%CI = [0.102, 0.585]$), but was non-significant when employee core self-evaluation was low (indirect effect = 0.00, $SE = 0.07$, $95\%CI = [-0.232, 0.235]$); and the difference was significant (indirect effect = 0.33, $SE = 0.17$, $95\%CI = [0.020, 0.661]$). Meanwhile, the conditional relation between customer empowering behavior and customer-oriented OCB was significant when core self-evaluation was high (indirect effect = 0.22, $SE = 0.13$, $95\%CI = [0.057, 0.431]$), but was not significant when employee core self-evaluation was low (indirect effect = 0.00, $SE = 0.04$, $95\%CI = [-0.158, 0.160]$); and the difference was significant

(indirect effect = 0.22, $SE = 0.13$, 95%CI = [0.015, 0.481]). These results provided evidences for *Hypotheses 5a* and *5b*.

Study 2 discussion

In Study 2, we provided further support of the indirect influence of customer empowering behavior on service performance and customer-oriented OCB mediated through harmonious passion. Core self-evaluation stimulated customer empowering behavior's effect on harmonious passion, and customer empowering behavior's indirect effect on employee service performance and customer-oriented OCB. The findings evidence *Hypotheses 1–5*. Importantly, Study 2 demonstrates the distinct impact of customer empowerment, surpassing both leader empowerment and organizational support.

General discussion

Focusing on customer empowering behaviors, we investigate how and when they result in service performance and customer-oriented OCB. By conducting two studies, we find that customer empowering behaviors significantly influence front-line employee service performance and customer-oriented OCB through harmonious passion. Additionally, core self-evaluation strengthens the association between customer empowering behaviors and harmonious passion, such that customer empowering behaviors are more likely to arouse harmonious passion for employees with high (but not low) core self-evaluations. Furthermore, customer empowering behaviors are more likely to boost service performance and customer-oriented OCB through harmonious passion for employees with high core self-evaluation.

Theoretical implications

We contribute to the empowerment literature in the following ways. First, despite customers' first-hand experience with service delivery and their proximity to the service process (Dong et al., 2015; Schneider et al., 2005), the empowerment literature has predominantly examined leaders and organizations as sources of empowerment (Ahmed et al., 2023; Srivastava et al., 2006). As a relatively new concept of empowerment, current research in this field primarily focuses on the internal organizational and leader empowerment of employees (e.g., Cheong et al., 2019; Srivastava et al., 2006). Research has often overlooked employees' empowerment by customers, even though some scholars have recently begun noticing customer empowering behaviors and studying their effects on service outcomes, such as service quality, customer satisfaction, and service performance (Dong et al., 2015; Öksüz, 2021). This area of study acknowledges that customers may not always wish to contribute actively to the service process, raising the question of how they can influence both the direct and indirect outcomes of service delivery. To address this question, we extend this

line of inquiry by documenting how customer empowering behaviors can spark employees' harmonious passion, thereby elevating both in- and extra-role service performance (i.e., service performance and customer-oriented OCB). Our findings reinforce the empowering behavior literature's assertion that providing employees with more automatic motivation for tasks assigned by leaders or service encounters enables them to more effectively fulfill the expectations of leaders or customers (Bateson, 1985; Liu et al., 2011; Vallerand et al., 2003).

Second, harmonious passion offers a novel perspective to understand customer empowering behaviors' beneficial impacts. Studies have explored the mediating role of state promotion focus and absorption between customer empowering behaviors and service outcomes, providing a motivational and resource perspective through which customer empowering behaviors' influence can be explained (Dong et al., 2015; Öksüz, 2021). In this study, we employ self-determination theory to provide another motivational perspective to illustrate how customer empowering behaviors precipitate service outcomes. While prior research has connected passion, including harmonious and obsessive passion, with employee outcomes, such as creativity (Konczak et al., 2000), voice (Gao & Jiang, 2019), and employee performance (Dalla Rosa & Vianello, 2020; Yadav & Dhar, 2021), whether only harmonious passion influences customer empowerment behaviors' role on employees' service behaviors and outcomes remains unknown. More importantly, we controlled for obsessive passion as an alternative mechanism when testing the theoretical model in Study 2 and found that harmonious passion exerts a relatively strong influence on service performance and customer-oriented OCB in an empowerment environment. Such evidence provides initial evidence of the potentially different influences of the two different kinds of work passion, which can be investigated further in future research.

Third, we highlight the boundary conditions of core self-evaluation under which customer empowering behaviors distinctly impact employee motivations and behaviors. Our findings further document that under conditions of high core self-evaluation, harmoniously motivated employees possess greater work confidence and responsibility to express higher levels of service behaviors for customers (i.e., service performance and customer-oriented OCB). Additionally, this study introduces an individual propensity perspective to better identify when customer empowering behaviors can be beneficial. Existing studies have focused on contextual factors, such as supervisory empowering leadership and customer complexity, as boundary conditions to investigate customer empowering behaviors' impact (Dong et al., 2015; Öksüz, 2021). However, individual personality traits can also influence how customer empowering behaviors benefit service outcomes (Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1998). Our focus on core self-evaluation (i.e., a personal trait) empirically assesses such arguments and expands our understanding of the conditions under which customer empowering behaviors are most effective.

Fourth, although this study focuses on customer empowering behaviors' impact, it also incorporates empowering leadership and organizational support into its theoretical model. The results demonstrate that customer empowering behavior can influence harmonious passion, customer-oriented performance, and OCB, while considering the effects of key influencing factors from both the organization and

leader (such as leader empowerment and organizational support). Our study supports the idea that customers, as a distinctive source of influence on employees, may exert a distinct impact, compared to internal sources, such as supervisors, teammates, and coworkers (Madjar & Ortiz-Walters, 2008; Saporito et al., 2004). Furthermore, we challenge the assumption that formal hierarchical leaders must be the primary source of empowerment. Instead, in addition to leader empowerment's influence within organizations, customer empowerment is equally significant in shaping employees' motivations and behaviors at work (Dong et al., 2015).

Practical implications

First, we demonstrate customer empowering behaviors' beneficial effects, such as increased harmonious passion, service performance, and customer-oriented OCB. Consequently, organizations and leaders are strongly recommended to encourage customers to empower service employees. For instance, organizations can implement marketing strategies (e.g., offering discounts to customers who consult service employees regarding a particular service) to foster customers' willingness to empower front-line employees (Dong et al., 2015). Moreover, organizations should persuade service employees to be appreciative of—and thereby take full advantage of—customer empowerment (Tuan et al., 2019).

Second, as our findings suggest that customer empowerment behaviors are hardly beneficial for employees with low core self-evaluations, organizations should pay greater attention to their selection and training practices. Service organizations that offer multiple opportunities for employees to receive empowerment from customers should hire employees who exhibit high core self-evaluations. Organizations and leaders should also help foster employee confidence in their service skills and abilities through various training programs (Dong et al., 2015). For example, leaders can express their confidence in their front-line employees to encourage the development of the latter's self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Furthermore, organizations and leaders should provide employees greater freedom to make decisions, which would increase their sense of control over the service process. Collectively, organizations should design training programs, and leaders should regularly encourage and praise service employees to foster their core self-evaluations and recruit employees with strong core self-evaluation.

Limitations and future research

The findings of this study should be considered in light of several potential limitations, which leave numerous opportunities for future research. First, in the field study, we assessed employees' comprehensive perceptions of customer empowering behaviors by evaluating their concurrence with the presented statements, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." The use of a Likert scale featuring such a range has been demonstrated as an effective method for measuring customer behaviors (Li et al., 2016; Zhu et al., 2021, 2023). Nevertheless, future investigations are advised to consider developing innovative scale

responses that directly quantify the frequency of customer empowering behaviors, thereby enhancing the findings' precision and applicability. Furthermore, customer empowering behaviors vary on a daily basis (Dong et al., 2015). However, we only uncover between-person variations and neglect within-individual fluctuations. Consequently, future studies are recommended to utilize an experience sampling method to investigate how customer empowering behaviors affect service performance through a "day-by-day" process.

Second, following the stream of research on customer empowering behaviors' beneficial impacts (Dong et al., 2015; Öksüz, 2021), we explore such behaviors' positive influence on employee passion and service outcomes. However, the empowerment literature has posited that empowering behaviors precipitate both positive and negative outcomes (Cheong et al., 2019). For instance, some employees may interpret supervisory empowering behaviors as challenge stress, whereas others may perceive them as hindrance stress, thereby exerting opposite influences (Cheong et al., 2019). Consequently, we urge future research to explore customer empowering behaviors' double-edged effect and uncover their potential negative effects, such as increased stress (Cheong et al., 2016), decreased role clarity (Harris et al., 2014), and heightened pro-customer deviant behavior. Overall, this would offer an even more comprehensive understanding of customer empowering behaviors' impacts, thus enlightening practitioners and even cautioning them about encouraging customer empowering behaviors.

Third, we focus on harmonious passion to explain the progression from customer empowering behaviors to service employee performance, and our results support our predictions. However, our study does not strongly support the conditional indirect effects exerted via harmonious passion, suggesting that potential mediators can explain the interactive effects of customer empowering behaviors and core self-evaluation on service outcomes. Further, future studies should explore other mediators—such as intrinsic motivation (Deci, 1975), psychological empowerment (Zhang & Bartol, 2010), felt obligation (Eisenberger et al., 2001), and autonomy/ability/relation need fulfillment (Ryan & Deci, 2000a)—to understand the effects of customer empowering behaviors or even compare the strengths of different mechanisms. Moreover, we examine core self-evaluation as a boundary condition to investigate when customer empowering behaviors are beneficial. Additionally, other individual traits, such as conscientiousness, the need for achievement, and regulatory focus, are worth investigating (Cheong et al., 2019).

Finally, customer empowering behaviors are fundamentally dynamic, a characteristic that remains partially unexplored, though our experimental research confirms the causal relationships among customer empowering behaviors, harmonious passion, and service outcomes (i.e., service performance and customer-oriented OCB). Considering the dynamic essence of customer empowering behaviors, future research can adopt a longitudinal approach, thus enabling an examination of the bidirectional influences between customer empowering behaviors and employees' service outcomes. Moreover, in line with Li et al.'s (2022) recommendations, future investigations are encouraged to employ a two-stage least squares regression analysis, which aims to minimize potential reverse causality's impact, thus effectively addressing the issue of endogeneity within the context of customer empowering

behaviors. Such studies would contribute significantly to a deeper understanding of customer empowering behaviors' dynamic nature and the interactive dynamics between customers and employees.

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Data availability The original data are not available to protect the anonymity of the participants of this study.

Declarations

Conflict of interest The authors have no conflict of interest to declare and this article does not contain any studies with animals performed by any of the authors.

Informed consent Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Compliance with ethical considerations All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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