Clothes, Condoms, and Customer Satisfaction:  
The Effect of Employee Mere Presence on Customer Satisfaction Depends on the Shopping Situation

TOBIAS OTTERBRING¹,* & CHAOREN LU²

¹ Assistant Professor, Aarhus University, Department of Management/MAPP, Fuglesangs Allé 4, 8210 Aarhus 
V, Denmark (email: toot@mgmt.au.dk), & Research Fellow, Karlstad University, Department of 
Psychology/CTF, Service Research Center, Universitetsgatan 2, 65188 Karlstad, Sweden (email: 
tobias.otterbring@kau.se).

² Doctoral Candidate, Karlstad University, CTF, Service Research Center, Universitetsgatan 2, 65188 Karlstad, 
Sweden (email: chaoren.lu@kau.se), & Guest Lecturer, Kunming Academy of Governance, Wanfeng Street 
1606, Kunming City 650250, China.

* Corresponding author.

Abstract

Söderlund (2016; Psychology & Marketing) found that customers entering a store with an employee present 
(vs. absent) reported higher levels of customer satisfaction, with their pleasurable feelings mediating this effect. 
However, that article was restricted to data collected in a Western society. Given the rapid economic growth in 
many Asian regions, there is a need to examine the applicability of such Western-based findings from an Asian 
perspective. Accordingly, the present research investigated whether Söderlund’s (2016) results could be 
replicated among Asian customers (N = 498). Study 1 replicated Söderlund’s (2016) results and further found 
that employee presence (vs. absence) significantly increased consumer loyalty. These results were reversed in 
Study 2, in which the shopping situation involved the purchase of an embarrassing product. Under such 
circumstances, employee presence (vs. absence) produced negative effects on customers’ levels of pleasure, 
satisfaction, and loyalty.

Keywords: customer satisfaction; pleasure; loyalty; employee presence; embarrassment; purchase intentions; 
word-of-mouth.