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Friendly or Freaky? The Balancing Act of Encouraging Customers to Share Information

An Experimental Study of Employee Encouragement of
Customer Self-Disclosure in the Service Encounter and Customer
Satisfaction

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Abstract

Companies collect more data about customers than ever before to understand customer needs in the contemporary marketplace, and more such data collection activities are expected in the upcoming years. Firms have incentives to collect customer information to achieve better business performance, while customers have incentives to disclose information about themselves to enjoy adapted offers. Thus self-disclosure, a process where a person reveals one's intimate feelings, attitudes, and experiences to another, is therefore essential that customers engage in so that firms can provide a match between their offers and customer needs. In the service encounter, this typically includes employee encouragement of customer self-disclosure (EECSD), to identify customer needs by asking them questions. However, research in marketing has neglected the service encounter as a context where self-disclosure takes place, while also predominantly focusing on self-disclosure antecedents, leaving limited understanding of its consequences in customer-employee interactions. This quantitative study aims to bridge this gap by investigating a series of possible consequences stemming from EECSD in the service encounter, and whether EECSD and these consequences have an impact on customer satisfaction. Specifically, we investigated whether EECSD impacts customer satisfaction, and the mediating effects of perceived customization, the customer's perceived own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness. An experiment, collecting 241 valid responses from a UK-sample, was conducted, where participants were either exposed to high EECSD or low EECSD. The results showed that EECSD reduced customer satisfaction, and the customer's own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness mediated this effect. These findings contribute to the limited knowledge of consequences stemming from EECSD in the service encounter, and add a new set of such possible consequences (perceived employee warmth and competence). These findings also provide insights for team leaders that manage frontline employees, who are interested in customer responses from customer data collection in the service encounter.

Keywords: *Self-disclosure, Service-encounters, Customer satisfaction*

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List of Definitions & Abbreviations

The list below presents abbreviations and terms.

Service-encounter	The time a customer interacts with a service (Bitner, 1990)
Self-Disclosure	“[...] the process of telling another about one’s intimate feelings, attitudes, and experiences” (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004, p. 858)
EECSD	Employee encouragement of customer self-disclosure

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Customer data collection has become increasingly crucial for firms as they collect more data than ever to understand customer needs and preferences in the contemporary marketplace (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012). Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the volume of data created, captured, copied, and consumed worldwide has increased by 192%, reaching 123 zettabytes in 2023 (Statista, 2024a). Nevertheless, this number is projected to grow exponentially, reaching 394 zettabytes in 2028. This sheds light on the importance of customer data collection activities for firms in the current and future marketplace.

Customer data collection can be viewed from both the company's and the customer's perspectives. On the one hand, companies can expect to profit from collecting customer data and adapting their offers to personalized preferences. These advantages for firms have been conceptualized as market orientation and have been extensively examined by Kohli and Jaworski (1990). Data collection, or market intelligence generation as it is called in their framework, constitutes one component of market orientation. Several advantages have been identified for market-oriented firms, most significantly greater business performance and greater organizational commitment within the workforce and organization (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). This suggests that firms can benefit from receiving information about customer preferences because they can leverage this data to provide tailored customer offers.

On the other hand, from the customer's perspective, sharing information with companies has become more important. A previous report from McKinsey (2021) indicates that consumers expect businesses to adapt to their changing needs and preferences, whereas 71% expect companies to deliver personalized offers, and 76% get frustrated when this does not happen. Therefore, consumers and firms can mutually benefit when customers reveal their needs and preferences to companies, as consumers can expect more tailored offers, and companies can more successfully tailor their products and services.

Considering that consumers expect to receive tailored offers (Mckinsey, 2021), they have incentives to disclose their needs and preferences to companies. The process of doing so has been conceptualized as self-disclosure, which has been defined as “[...] the process of telling another about one’s intimate feelings, attitudes, and experiences” (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004, p. 858). Such information is unique to the individual disclosing (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977), which, therefore, can be necessary to collect for companies interested in producing a fit between a firm’s offers and customer needs.

In the service encounter, firms often collect customer data by having the frontline employee ask the customer questions to adapt the firm’s offer accordingly (Söderlund, 2020a). Research has also shown that frontline employees’ adaptation of offers to customer needs can improve the customer’s experience of the service encounter (Bitner, 1990). The employee encourages the customers to self-disclose intimate information about themselves by asking questions and uses this information to provide tailored products and services. That sheds light on the service encounter as relevant to examine from a customer self-disclosure point of view.

Several positive consequences have been found for employee encouragement of customer self-disclosure (EECSD) in the service encounter; for instance, it leads to increased perceptions of customization and employee effort, which boosts customer satisfaction (Söderlund, 2020a). However, negative consequences of EECSD have also been identified, such as increased privacy concerns and increased effort expended by the customer, reducing customer satisfaction. This sheds light on the fact that EECSD has both positive and negative consequences and can influence customers’ overall evaluations of the service encounter concerning customer satisfaction. Moreover, creating positive overall evaluations in terms of customer satisfaction with service encounters has been shown to increase business performance, for example, through increased customer loyalty and word-of-mouth (Anderson, et al., 1994; Fornell, 1992). Since data collection is expected to increase in the coming years (Statista, 2024a) and EECSD, in a service encounter to the authors’ knowledge, has received limited attention in research, this specific employee behavior is important to examine further.

1.2 Research Gap

From the previous section, it is evident that EECS in the service encounter is highly interesting to investigate. Self-disclosure has received extensive attention in research on interpersonal relationships (e.g., Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Moreover, the concept of self-disclosure in marketing settings has mainly been examined in interactions between customers and digital technologies that collect customer data (e.g., Mothersbaugh et al., 2012 et al.; Smith et al., 2011; Choi & Zhou, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). However, the research on self-disclosure in customer-employee interactions during service encounters is sparse, and research has neglected this as a channel for customer data collection (Söderlund, 2020a). As mentioned earlier, the service encounter can, in fact, serve as a source for customer data collection, and an expanded examination of the service encounter through the perspective of self-disclosure is therefore needed.

Research of interpersonal relationships has established several positive and negative consequences of self-disclosure, e.g., an increase in self-worth and feelings of vulnerability (e.g., Derlega & Chaikin, 1977), while marketing scholars have primarily focused on antecedents to self-disclosure (e.g., Smith et al., 2011). However, Söderlund (2020a) identified a set of positive and negative consequences of EECS in a service encounter and found that they impacted customer satisfaction. Nevertheless, research on its consequences is still sparse, and marketing scholars call for examining additional possible consequences of self-disclosure (Söderlund, 2020a). It is, therefore, of high interest to extend the current knowledge of the consequences of EECS and their impact on customer satisfaction in a service encounter and marketing setting.

To the authors' knowledge, previous research on EECS in service encounters has only examined it in a movie recommendation service (Söderlund, 2020a). Söderlund (2020a) calls for more research on other services, prompting an opportunity to examine the consequences of EECS and its impact on customer satisfaction in another service to potentially provide new insights into the field of EECS in service encounters.

1.3 Purpose of the Study & Research Questions

In light of this background and research gap, the purpose of this study is to investigate a series of possible consequences stemming from EECSD in the service encounter, and whether EECSD and these consequences have an impact on customer satisfaction. More specifically, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- a) *How does EECSD affect perceived customization, the customer's own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, competence, and humanness in the service encounter?*
- b) *How does perceived customization, the customer's own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth and competence, humanness, and EECSD influence customer satisfaction?*

1.4 Expected contribution

First, self-disclosure has received limited research attention in service encounters (Söderlund, 2020a). Theoretically, this study then aims to contribute with more knowledge of self-disclosure during the specific context of a service encounter where the customer is involved in interactions with frontline employees. More specifically, it aims to enrich Söderlund's (2020a) findings on the concept of EECSD in service encounters.

Second, this thesis aims to answer Söderlund's (2020a) call for research of additional potential consequences of EECSD in a service encounter by investigating new possible consequences that, to the author's knowledge, have not been examined in previous research.

Third, this thesis aims to contribute with additional research on the consequences of EECSD in another service than the one examined by Söderlund (2020a). More specifically, we want to contribute with new knowledge about a service that, compared to research by Söderlund (2020), can inspire future research on whether there are differences or similarities between services regarding the consequences of EECSD and whether EECSD and these consequences have an impact on customer satisfaction.

Fourth, practically, this study aims to provide implications for service team leaders who work closely with frontline employees and can influence their behavior with more insights into how the employee behavior of encouraging customers to self-disclose impacts customer reactions. Given that EECSD has been shown to have the power to affect customer satisfaction (Söderlund, 2020a), the knowledge generated by this study can potentially improve business performance (Anderson et al., 1994; Fornell, 1992). Therefore, this study can interest service team leaders in companies that want to match their offers with customer needs. The results can contribute to how service team leaders instruct their frontline employees to encourage customer self-disclosure in the service encounter so as not to jeopardize customer satisfaction.

1.5 Delimitations

The study examines a service encounter in the context of a travel agency. Although this study captures the consequences of EECSD and its impact on customer satisfaction, the choice of a travel agency might limit the generalizability of our findings to other types of service encounters. The choice of industry will be explained in section 3.2.1.1.

The next delimitation concerns the study's focus on EECSD rather than voluntary customer self-disclosure. This means the results may only apply to service encounters where customers decide to self-disclose if they are encouraged to do so. In line with the purpose of this study, voluntary self-disclosure was also not the researchers' objective.

Further, this research is limited to a UK sample, as it was deemed relevant that the participants were fluent in English to understand the content of the experiment. Another delimitation was that the authors included a limited set of consequences of EECSD, namely perceptions of customization, customer own effort, privacy concerns, warmth, competence, humanness, and customer satisfaction. This limitation was made because of limited existing knowledge of the consequences of EECSD in service encounters and restricted time and resources for conducting this study to explore additional variables. The experiment's length could also be too long, making it harder to recruit participants willing to commit their time to participate.

1.6 Thesis Disposition

The thesis is organized as follows: the next section presents the theoretical framework examining previous research related to EECSD, the mediating effects of perceived customization, the customer's own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, competence, and humanness, and their effect on customer satisfaction. The subsequent hypotheses are also presented. Further, the research method, results from the preparatory study, and the quality of the study are discussed. Next, the analysis and results of the main study are presented, followed by a discussion of the results based on the theoretical framework. Finally, the thesis ends with a conclusion that answers the purpose, theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2.0 Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

The theoretical framework begins with presenting previous research on self-disclosure, followed by a description of EECSD. After this, hypotheses or specific research questions about the immediate consequences of being exposed to EECSD: perceptions of customization, the customer's own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness, are presented. These are addressed as five separate routes of mediation of EECSD's effect on customer satisfaction. Finally, the chapter ends by presenting a specific research question of EECSD's overall impact on customer satisfaction.

2.1 Self-Disclosure

Self-disclosure can be defined as a process where the information disclosed is of an intimate nature. This is also the definition that is adopted in this thesis. Intimate information involves "[...] aspects of the self that are unique or central and vulnerable" (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977, p. 104). Such self-disclosure can, for example, be "I am on a very tight budget right now because I just lost my job" or "I have a gluten allergy, so I cannot eat any gluten whatsoever because I get sick if I do so." In contrast, non-intimate information is more superficial (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977), such as "I prefer vanilla latte over all other types of coffee." The critical difference between the intimate and non-intimate types of self-disclosure is the feeling of vulnerability due to disclosing high-risk information that the disclosing individual can experience (Moon, 2000; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). In the context of this study, intimate information is expected to be required to collect for companies interested in producing a fit between a firm's offers and customer needs.

A lot of research in the self-disclosure domain has focused on interpersonal relationships (e.g., Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Cozby, 1973). This research stream has concluded that self-disclosure has several benefits. For instance, it can enhance perceived uniqueness and define one's identity (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977), increase one's sense of self-worth (Ho et al., 2018), increase liking for the recipient of information (Berg & Archer, 1983; Collins & Miller, 1994), and increase relationship love, commitment, and

satisfaction (Sprecher & Hendrick, 2004). However, research has also supported the idea that self-disclosure may produce exploitation, vulnerability to being influenced, and loss of independence (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Vulnerability can also be emotional, related to material damage, or physical harm (Moon, 2000).

Self-disclosure can occur either as a response to encouragement from another person by being asked questions or spontaneously, where the discloser voluntarily shares personal information (Söderlund, 2020a). The focus of this study is EECSD, where a service employee will encourage a customer (by asking questions) to self-disclose (by responding to those questions) in a service encounter.

Moreover, in a customer-employee interaction as the service encounter, encouragement of self-disclosure has been shown to have both positive and negative consequences (Söderlund, 2020a). Although it positively impacted perceptions of customization, employee effort and humanness, privacy concerns, and own effort, it had mixed influence on customer satisfaction, with both positive and negative impacts. Given these mixed influences on customer satisfaction, several mechanisms guide the direction of the end effect. In this study, there are five different routes for mediation (see Figure 1).

2.2 Mediating Variables

2.2.1 Perceived Customization

Customization of a product or service builds on the assumption that customers have needs and preferences that marketers should identify and satisfy by adapting their offers to those individual needs (Simonson, 2005; Coelho & Henseler, 2012; Ball et al., 2006). Firms that want to adapt their offers to customer needs require information about those individual needs to make customization possible (Coelho & Henseler, 2012; Kondamuri, 2024). Firms can access such information by asking questions that encourage customers to self-disclose. Additionally, customers increasingly demand personalized offers (McKinsey, 2021), and most want firms to know about them (Hyken, 2024).

Previous research on self-disclosure and customization has found that consumers engage in a privacy calculus, weighing the costs and benefits of self-disclosure, where receiving customized offers is considered a benefit (Smith et al., 2011; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012). Thus, consumers are more willing to self-disclose when they perceive customization benefits (Smith et al., 2011; Martin & Murphy, 2017), and this benefit can outweigh the negative impact of intimate information requests (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012). Empirical evidence also suggests that perceived customization increases when customers are exposed to EECS (Söderlund, 2020a). Söderlund (2020a) argues that it can be due to customers' ability to recall a past event where their self-disclosure was necessary to receive a customized offer from the firm. Thus, when a customer is exposed to EECS, it can activate a schema that tells them that customization of the offer is about to take place. This leads us to hypothesize the following:

H1a When customers are exposed to high EECS in a service encounter, perceived customization is higher than when customers are exposed to low EECS.

Given that customized offers are expected by customers today, and 76% of customers report that they get frustrated when this does not happen (McKinsey, 2021), customization of an offer is expected to be highly valued by customers. Previous studies also suggest that a high level of offer customization can offer great value to customers (Martin & Murphy, 2017), which ultimately increases customer satisfaction (Ostrom and Iacobucci, 1995; Coelho & Henseler, 2012).

In service encounters, the positive link between perceived customization and customer satisfaction has been supported in, for instance, Söderlund (2020a) and Bitner (1990), where customizing the service to customer needs had a positive impact on customer satisfaction. Moreover, Ball et al. (2006) supported the notion that customization positively impacts downstream variables such as satisfaction, trust, and customer loyalty. Given this, it is expected that a similar result will be obtained in this study. We hypothesize the following:

H1b Perceived customization of an offer has a positive influence on customer satisfaction.

Given that EECSD is expected to boost perceptions of customization, and this has a positive influence on customer satisfaction, perceived customization can be seen to mediate the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction. To explicitly examine this, the following is hypothesized:

H1c EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is positively mediated by perceived customization.

2.2.2 The Customer's Perceived Own Effort

Effort has been defined as “[...] the amount of energy put into a behavior or series of behaviors” (Mohr & Bitner, 1995, p. 240). Perceived effort is the amount of energy that one believes they have put into a behavior, and it is easily recognized in the self because the exertion of effort is easily perceived (Inzlicht et al., 2018). Literature on effort in marketing has focused on the effort exerted by the customer (e.g., Cardozo, 1965; Söderlund, 2020a; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017) and by the supplier (e.g., Söderlund, 2020a; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017; Morales, 2005). This study focuses on the perceived effort exerted by the customer; the reason for excluding employee effort is presented later in section 3.2.2.1.

Customer effort “[...] includes the physical, mental, and financial resources expended to obtain a product” (Cardozo, 1965, p. 244). The relationship between EECSD and the customer's perceived own effort can be explained with the dual-process theory, which is based on the notion that human behavior is guided by two different and complementary cognitive processes (Zhang et al., 2024). One process operates automatically and unconsciously, while the other operates in a controlled fashion and consciously. The former requires few cognitive resources, while the latter requires considerable cognitive resources (Gawronski & Craigton, 2013).

Exposure to EECSD involves careful consideration of the negative consequences of self-disclosing (Zhang et al., 2024; Söderlund, 2020a), such as vulnerability (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977) and loss of control of information (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Dinev & Hart, 2004; Smith et al., 2011; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Therefore, self-disclosure is a balancing

act weighing these costs against the benefits, such as customization (Smith et al., 2011; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012), while deciding what information to keep private or share (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Smith et al., 2011; Cozby, 1973). Thus, self-disclosure is not a decision made unconsciously. This balancing act implies that customers must make deliberate decisions about what information to self-disclose or not. Consequently, customers must use their controlled mental process, which demands significantly more cognitive resources for the self-disclosure balancing act (Gawronski & Craigton, 2013). As a result, EECSD is likely to increase the customer's perceived own effort. Empirical evidence supporting this relationship has been produced by Söderlund (2020a). The following is therefore hypothesized:

H2a When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, their perceived own effort is higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.

Previous literature on effort has supported the notion that humans tend to be effort-averse (Inzlicht et al., 2018; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017). If customers choose between tasks that offer equal rewards but different levels of effort, humans tend to avoid the effortful task (Inzlicht et al., 2018). In line with that, customers also prefer activities that involve minimal effort (Sweeney et al., 2015) and are more satisfied when shopping convenience is high (Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017). Additionally, customers prefer to minimize the effort required when processing information (Mothersbaugh et al., 2002; Berry et al., 2002). Thus, consumer effort often carries a negative charge because effort is costly, and activities demanding high consumer effort are likely to be perceived as less enjoyable, more tiring, and increasingly frustrating (Inzlicht et al., 2018; Cardozo, 1965; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017). Therefore, when the customer's perceived own effort increases, it carries a negative charge regarding customer satisfaction with the offer (Söderlund, 2020a; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017). Given the above reasoning, it is expected that higher levels of customer perceived own effort will result in lower levels of customer satisfaction. We hypothesize the following:

H2b The customer's perceived own effort has a negative influence on customer satisfaction.

Considering that EECSD is expected to increase the customer's perceived own effort, which has a negative impact on customer satisfaction, the customer's perceived own effort can be seen to mediate the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction. To investigate this explicitly, the following is hypothesized:

H2c EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is negatively mediated by the customer's perceived own effort.

2.2.3 Privacy Concerns

This variable needs a clear explanation. First, privacy refers to controlling the information one chooses to maintain with others (Acquisti et al., 2015; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Privacy is maintained if one can choose how much information to share with another party (Acquisti et al., 2015; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Thus, if another party can determine how much information one shares about oneself, this entails a lower level of privacy, and as a result, concerns about losing control over the information become prevalent (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Dinev & Hart, 2004; Smith et al., 2011; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Second, a concern refers to the feeling of nervousness or worries about something (Cambridge University Press, n.d.), and that "something" can either already have happened (e.g., concerned about my health) or not happened yet (e.g., concerned about how my personal information will be used) (Smith et al., 2011).

By combining "privacy" and "concerns" in a marketing context, the following definition has been made: privacy concerns are "[...] consumer concerns about the use of their revealed information for marketing purposes beyond its intended purpose" (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012, p. 77). Privacy concerns have been given significant attention in the literature (e.g., Acquisti et al., 2015; Dinev & Hart, 2004; Smith et al., 2011), likely because privacy has been deemed "[...] the issue of our times" (Acquisti et al., 2015, p. 509). Previous research suggests that customers are increasingly concerned about how companies collect and use their data (Martin & Murphy, 2017; Smith et al., 2011).

Furthermore, customers use a privacy calculus when deciding whether to self-disclose information (Smith et al., 2011; Culnan & Armstrong, 1999; Dienlin & Metzger, 2016), where costs are weighed against benefits. Costs include vulnerability (Dinev & Hart, 2004; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977), shared information being used unfairly (Culnan & Armstrong, 1999), and loss of control of information (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Dinev & Hart, 2004; Smith et al., 2011; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Benefits can be customization (Smith et al., 2011; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012) and financial rewards (Smith et al., 2011). As such, customers are generally aware of the privacy risks associated with self-disclosure, and this privacy calculus is likely to be performed when they are exposed to EECSD.

Thus, customers exposed to EECSD are likely to feel vulnerable because self-disclosure has been linked to feelings of vulnerability (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Martin & Murphy, 2017; Dinev & Hart, 2004), which in turn is positively linked to privacy concerns (e.g., Dinev & Hart, 2004). Privacy concerns are also heightened when information of higher intimacy is asked for (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012). In line with the definition of self-disclosure adopted in this study, EECSD implies requesting intimate information; hence, privacy concerns are expected to be heightened when customers are exposed to EECSD. Additionally, feelings of privacy concerns are enhanced when self-disclosure occurs as a response to encouragement, as a lower level of privacy exists and the information is not voluntarily disclosed (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Previous empirical findings have also supported the existence of this relationship (Söderlund, 2020a). Therefore, the hypothesis is summarized in the following way:

H3a When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, privacy concerns are higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.

Further, increased privacy concerns can lead to several negative effects, such as lower trust and increased feelings of privacy violation with respect to the company, which are negatively charged emotions (Martin & Murphy, 2017; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012). Previous studies in service encounters have shown that boosted privacy concerns are likely to produce anxiety, lower trust and discomfort, leading to lower overall evaluations of the encounter (Söderlund, 2023). In addition, privacy concerns induced by EECSD have a negative impact on customer

satisfaction (Söderlund, 2020a) and similar results have been found by Inman and Nikolova (2017). Therefore, satisfaction is likely to be negatively impacted. We hypothesize the following:

H3b Privacy concerns have a negative influence on customer satisfaction.

As EECSD is expected here to increase privacy concerns, and this negatively influences customer satisfaction, privacy concerns mediate the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction. To test this empirically, we hypothesize the following:

H3c EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is negatively mediated by the customer's privacy concerns.

2.2.4 Perceived Employee Warmth and Competence

Previous literature has examined warmth and competence in contexts of social perception (e.g., Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2024). This type of perception is the ability to interpret others' behavior to form opinions and make inferences about their motives, attitudes, or values (American Psychological Association, 2018).

Warmth refers to another person's personality trait, the person's intentions, and whether he or she intends good or ill (Fiske et al., 2007). It relates to a person's character, ranges from cold to warm (Söderlund, 2021), and helps us separate friends from foes (Fiske et al., 2007). Thus, a person with high warmth has good intentions toward others (Asch, 1946; Aiello et al., 2020). Competence refers to an individual's or group's ability to effectively act on and carry out their intentions to achieve a goal (Fiske et al., 2007).

Determining a person's warmth and competence are the universal dimensions that are used to make judgments about other individuals and groups (Fiske et al., 2007; Fiske et al., 2024; Fiske, 2018). From an evolutionary perspective, the ability to perceive warmth and competence in others has been crucial, because recognizing another person's intent – whether good or ill – has been important for survival (Fiske et al., 2007). Antecedents to a person's

warmth include smiles, eye contact, a rhythmic vocal tone, and movements of the body, head, arms, and hands (Sundaram & Webster, 2002; Bayes, 1972). Fiske et al. (2007) provide additional indicators of a person's warmth, which are traits such as friendliness, helpfulness, sincerity, and trustworthiness. On the other hand, competence captures traits that are related to perceived ability, such as intelligence, skill, creativity, and efficacy (Fiske et al., 2007)

Beyond studies on social perception, warmth and competence have been examined in the social context where a customer interacts with an employee in a service encounter and can make inferences about the target employee. The typical result is that warmth and competence perceptions lead to an increase in the overall evaluation of the employee (e.g., Söderlund, 2020b; Söderlund & Berg, 2020; Söderlund, 2021). Söderlund (2021) found that customers perceive warmth and competence of a service agent although the study participants were asked to only imagine themselves being in a service encounter with an employee in a scripted role-play experiment. Fiske et al (2007) further argues that humans can easily recognize another person's warmth and competence, because recognizing these from an evolutionary perspective has been important for survival. Therefore, we assume that the personality traits of warmth and competence can also be recognized and reflected in a scripted role-play experiment, as this study uses, where the employee encourages the customer to self-disclose. The methodology of this study is further described in section 3.2. However, previous research of warmth and competence when customers are exposed to EECS in a service encounter is sparse. This presents a novel opportunity to examine whether perceived employee warmth and competence are consequences of EECS in a service encounter, which is why they were included as mediators in this study.

Next, in section 2.2.4.1, the relationship between EECS and perceived employee warmth is discussed, followed by a discussion of the relationship between EECS and perceived employee competence in section 2.2.4.2. Further, specific research questions of both perceived employee warmth and competence are developed in section 2.2.4.2 & 2.2.4.3.

2.2.4.1 EECSD & Perceived Employee Warmth

According to previous research, retailers who ask for personal information are perceived as less warm (Aiello et al., 2020). The reason is that customers perceived retailers' requests to collect customer data as too pushy and aggressive, indicating that they were self-interested rather than primarily serving the customer. Therefore, customers feel that they are not a priority and infer that the retailer does not have good intentions toward them.

Warmth perceptions in service encounters have been examined in several studies. For instance, demanding identification from customers in a service encounter decreased perceived employee warmth (Söderlund, 2023). Demand for identification can be viewed as EECSD, as a person who is asked to identify him or herself is encouraged to disclose intimate information about themselves. Given that, one would expect that when customers are exposed to EECSD, perceptions of employee warmth are attenuated because they feel that the employee has negative intentions towards them. Thus, the employee is expected to be seen as less friendly, trustworthy, helpful, and sincere, resulting in lower perceptions of employee warmth.

In contrast, previous literature on self-disclosure has supported the notion that self-disclosure can help form positive beliefs and view the receiver of self-disclosure as more friendly, trusting, and warm (Collins & Miller, 1994). Moreover, self-disclosure can increase liking for the receiver (Berg & Archer, 1983; Collins & Miller, 1994) and increase the self-discloser's mental well-being (Collins & Miller, 1994; Huang, 2016). Thus, one could expect that these positive consequences of self-disclosure would carry over to perceptions of employee warmth in a valence-congruent way. Upon exposure to EECSD, customers would perceive the employee as more friendly, helpful, trustworthy, and sincere. This leads us to expect that perceptions of employee warmth would instead be boosted. However, given that research is ambiguous whether perceptions of employee warmth will be heightened or lowered upon exposure to EECSD, it is hard to hypothesize what the effect will be.

2.2.4.2 EECSD & Perceived Employee Competence

Altenmüller et al. (2023) have produced empirical evidence that there is a relationship between the perceived appropriateness of self-disclosure and competence-related abilities. Too much self-disclosure is seen as inappropriate (Cozby, 1973) and has a negative effect on perceptions of another person's competence (Altenmüller et al., 2023). Previous studies that have examined warmth and competence as dimensions to judge employee behavior in the service encounter have found that, for instance, employees who violate social norms regarding appropriate behavior during covid-19 are seen as less warm and competent (Söderlund, 2020b). Norms are common understandings of appropriate behavior (Buckholz & Marois, 2012). A common norm is that people should avoid discomfort by not asking sensitive questions (Hart et al., 2021), as it can make the person requesting such information be perceived as inappropriate, intrusive, and somewhat rude, which can offend the information discloser (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012). Customers exposed to EECSD are expected to feel that the employee is violating this norm, which can reduce perceptions of employee warmth and competence.

On the other hand, however, one study conducted by Ludwig et al. (2022) found that self-disclosure was positively linked to enhanced perceptions of competence. It may be because it involves personal conversation, defined as communication with another person aimed at building understanding and connection, rather than concentrating on a particular task (Söderlund et al., 2022). As argued by Söderlund et al. (2022), engaging in personal conversation is regarded as an act of building relationships (Franzer Winsted, 2000). Asking questions to customers, which thereby exposes them to EECSD, can be expected to signal that the employee engages in personal conversation and wants to build a relationship. An explanation for this is that, to engage in a personal conversation with customers, employees must actively listen to the customer and respond to their needs, which is something that requires unique skills (Söderlund et al., 2022). Therefore, when customers are exposed to EECSD, it can signal that the employee expends higher effort by engaging in personal conversation with the customer. Perceived effort of the employee has been positively related to competence (Söderlund et al., 2022). Therefore, it is expected here that EECSD will signal that the employee is more intelligent and skilled, which would increase perceptions of competence.

Considering the arguments that EECSD could both increase and decrease perceptions of employee warmth (which were mainly presented in section 2.2.3.1) and competence, we formulate the following specific research question (SRQ):

SRQ1a: *What is the effect of EECSD on perceived employee warmth and perceived employee competence?*

2.2.4.3 Perceived Employee Warmth, Competence & Humanness

Previous research has shown that perceived employee warmth and competence are positively associated with perceptions of employee humanness (Söderlund, 2020b; Söderlund, 2021). Perceived humanness refers to the traits or characteristics that are commonly associated with humans (Haslam, 2006; Haslam & Bain, 2007). Previous studies have examined humanness as a dimension of social perception of both real humans (e.g. Söderlund, 2020b; Epley et al., 2013), and non-humans (e.g. Söderlund & Oikarinen, 2021). Studies on real humans have supported the notion that not all humans are seen as equally human, mainly because we score higher humanness to oneself compared to other humans (Haslam, 2005), and attribute less humanness to members of out-groups compared to those in in-groups (Epley et al., 2013). As argued by Söderlund & Oikarinen (2021), one reason for this is the inability to fully comprehend another person's inner life, including their emotions and goals. Some humans can even be dehumanized by other humans (Haslam, 2005), and Söderlund (2020b) provided evidence of this in a service encounter setting. Therefore, although this study comprises human-human interactions in service encounters, humanness is a variable that is still of interest to include based on the reasoning above.

In any event, warmth and competence are characteristics that are typical of humanness, and people who are perceived as more warm and competent are seen as more human (Haslam, 2006). One could therefore expect that perceptions of warmth and competence are positively related to humanness perceptions. Several empirical studies have supported this link (e.g. Söderlund, 2020b; Söderlund & Oikarinen, 2021). Given this reasoning, the following is hypothesized:

H4a Perceptions of employee warmth and competence will be positively related to perceived employee humanness.

Previous research has shown that perceptions of humanness have a positive impact on customer satisfaction (Söderlund, 2020b; Söderlund, 2021). This relationship can be explained by several mechanisms.

As argued by Söderlund & Oikarinen (2021), one reason is person positivity bias, e.g., other humans generally exhibit a positive charge rather than a negative one (Sears, 1983). Further, Söderlund & Oikarinen (2021) explains that this is because of the fact that humans are social beings and rely on interactions with others to address practical challenges (Epley, 2018). Thus, from an evolutionary perspective, it is natural for humans to foster a liking for one another and view others in a positive light (Epley, 2018; Söderlund & Oikarinen, 2021). Evidence of positivity bias in consumer settings was produced by Söderlund (2016), who found that the mere presence of an employee enhanced customers' positive emotions.

Additionally, Söderlund (2020b) also supported the notion that humanness is positively related to customer satisfaction. Söderlund & Oikarinen (2021) argues that humanness perceptions can increase trust (Castelo et al., 2019), likely increasing customer satisfaction (Anderson et al., 1994). A negative relationship has also been found, where lower perceived humanness leads to worse attitudes towards that person (Söderlund, 2020b). Given the above reasoning, we expect that perceptions of employee humanness will be positively associated with customer satisfaction. The following is hypothesized:

H4b Perceived employee humanness will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.

EECSD is expected to be associated with perceived employee warmth and competence, these are expected to increase perceived employee humanness, and perceived employee humanness is positively associated with customer satisfaction. Thus, perceived employee warmth, competence, and humanness can be seen to influence customer satisfaction in a mediating way. This leads us to the following specific research question (SRQ):

SRQ1b: *Is the impact of EECSD on customer satisfaction mediated by perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness?*

2.3 EECSD and Overall impact on Customer Satisfaction

Altogether, H1-H3 suggest that EECSD will have a mediated influence on customer satisfaction. These aforementioned mechanisms aim to explain EECSD's effect on customer satisfaction. The hypotheses suggest that EECSD is expected to:

1. Increase variables that positively affect customer satisfaction (perceived customization).
2. Increase variables that negatively affect customer satisfaction (customer's own effort and privacy concerns).

Further, as the theory provides contrasting arguments of what the effect of EECSD on perceived employee warmth and competence will be, it is not possible to hypothesise if the mediation on customer satisfaction will be positive or negative. To investigate this, we formulated specific research questions; SRQ1a and SRQ1b. Furthermore, considering that H1-H3 suggest both positive and negative effects on customer satisfaction, we leave it up to the empirics to decide what the total effect of EECSD on customer satisfaction will be. Thus, we formulate the following specific research question (SRQ):

SRQ2: *How will the level of customer satisfaction be affected when customers are exposed to high EECSD, as compared to low EECSD, in a service encounter?*

2.4 Summary and Visualization of Hypotheses and SRQs

The theoretical model includes 8 variables. EECS D is the independent variable, and customer satisfaction is the dependent variable. Perceived customization, the customer's perceived own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness are mediating variables. The hypotheses and SRQs are summarized in Figure 1 and in Table 1.

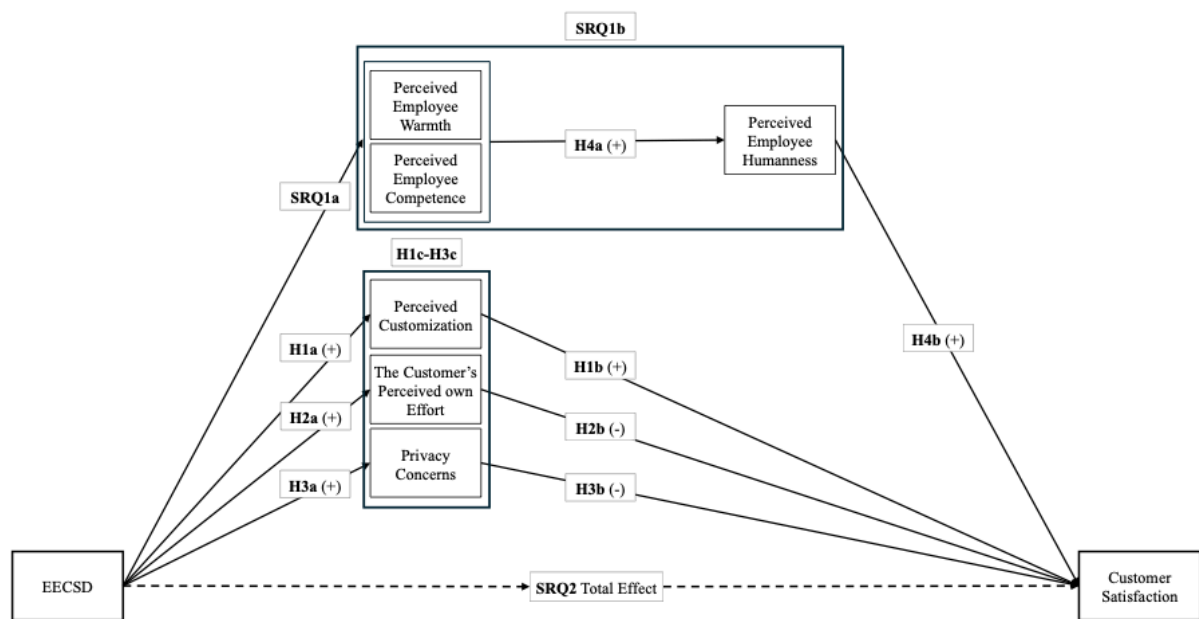


Figure 1 - Visualization of Hypotheses and SRQs

Table 1. Summary of Hypotheses and SRQs.

Hypothesis/SRQ	Description
<i>H1a</i>	When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, perceived customization is higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.
<i>H1b</i>	Perceived customization of an offer has a positive influence on customer satisfaction.
<i>H1c</i>	EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is positively mediated by perceived customization.
<i>H2a</i>	When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, their perceived own effort is higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.
<i>H2b</i>	The customer's perceived own effort has a negative influence on customer satisfaction.
<i>H2c</i>	EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is negatively mediated by the customer's perceived own effort.
<i>H3a</i>	When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, privacy concerns are higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.
<i>H3b</i>	Privacy concerns have a negative influence on customer satisfaction.
<i>H3c</i>	EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is negatively mediated by the customer's privacy concerns
<i>SRQ1a</i>	What is the effect of EECSD on perceived employee warmth and perceived employee competence?
<i>H4a</i>	Perceptions of employee warmth and competence will be positively related to the perceived employee humanness.
<i>H4b</i>	Perceived employee humanness will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.
<i>SRQ1b</i>	Is the impact of EECSD on customer satisfaction mediated by perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness?
<i>SRQ2</i>	How will the level of customer satisfaction be affected when customers are exposed to high EECSD, as compared to low EECSD, in a service encounter?

3.0 Research Method

This chapter will, first, explain the research strategy, process, and design chosen for this study. The treatments will then be described, as well as a preparatory study conducted in advance of the main study. Thereafter, the choices for the main study will be presented and the quality of the study will be discussed.

3.1 Research Strategy and Process

This study investigates a series of consequences of EECSD in the service encounter and how these impact customer satisfaction. For this, a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research has been taken. A deductive approach involves building on existing research to formulate hypotheses that are tested against collected empirical data (Bell, et al., 2019). An inductive approach, on the other hand, aims for the researcher to have an open mind toward reality and to disregard the knowledge that has already been generated by previous research to draw a general conclusion based on the study's results (Bell, et al., 2019). While an inductive or an abductive approach could have contributed with providing new insights about EECSD, the deductive approach was considered to be the most appropriate point of departure for this study. In some cases the theory provides clear evidence of the relationship between two variables, while in others the theory is conflicting and points the relationship in different directions. For the latter, specific research questions have been formulated to let the collected empirical data determine their relationship.

Furthermore, a quantitative method has been used, which entails numerical data collection and analysis (Bell, et al.,). It allows for generalization and is suitable for measuring social phenomena and their relationships. While a qualitative method would have allowed us to make deeper analyses (Bell, et al., 2019), it was considered to be sub-optimal, as it would have limited the scope of the testing and the ability to make generalizations of this study's results. The quantitative approach has also been used widely in marketing research, and more specifically, it has been used in a study about EECSD (Söderlund, 2020a). Furthermore, a quantitative method also enables the researchers to stay more objective (Bell, et al., 2019) and was therefore deemed to be the most suitable method.

Initially, a literature review was conducted where relevant literature in the form of peer-reviewed academic articles and theory was used to develop hypotheses. When reality was examined and empirical data was collected, it was conducted based on consequences of EECSD, in terms of mediating variables, that mainly have been shown in previous research to impact customer satisfaction. The collected empirical data was then analyzed through independent samples *t*-Tests, correlation tests, and parallel and sequential mediation analysis in the statistics program SPSS. Finally, the results were discussed based on existing literature and theories before a conclusion was drawn.

3.2 Research Design

3.2.1 Experimental Design

This study employs a between-subjects experimental design to examine EECSD in the service encounter. Experiments hold the potential to provide knowledge about causality (Söderlund, 2018), which makes it an appropriate research method given the purpose of this study. The experiment was conducted as a scripted role-play scenario. According to Söderlund (2018), several authors suggest that it is a method to make treatments in an easy and affordable way. This type of role-play scenario has been utilized in previous research on customer-employee interactions (Bitner, 1990; Söderlund, 2020a; Söderlund & Sagfossen, 2017) and on EECSD (Söderlund, 2020a). It was therefore deemed relevant to utilize in this experiment, also given the limited resources of time and money for this study. In the experiment, two treatments were created. In one treatment, the level of EECSD was low, while it was high in the other.

The experiment was conducted in the form of an online survey created in Qualtrics. The survey began with a short introduction of the study, describing how it would proceed and stating that the results would serve as the basis for a master's thesis. Basic information about the study was shared with the participants, but no information was disclosed that EECSD was the object for examination. This is referred to as deception by omission, which is a common approach when conducting an experiment to ensure that the data collected is not affected (Söderlund, 2018). Information regarding GDPR was presented, and the participants needed

to give their consent to participate in this study in order to continue with the next step of the study. Participants who did not accept the GDPR terms thus had their participation completed instantly at this survey stage rather than being automatically forwarded to the treatment.

Next, the participants were exposed to a treatment, which will be described in section 3.2.2. Participants were randomly allocated to one of the different treatments and were exposed to either high or low EECSD. Random allocation is a requirement when conducting experiments, as it ensures that observed differences in outcomes could be attributed to the treatment itself (Söderlund, 2018). Moreover, to ensure that participants carefully read through the role-play scenario, a timer of 1,5 minutes was set before they could proceed. After the treatment, all participants received a questionnaire, measuring their reactions and allowing them to respond to the measures from the hypotheses. The measurements will be described in section 3.3.2 and 3.4.2. Several attention checks were also added to the questionnaire to ensure that the data was of high quality. The survey used for the experiment is presented in Appendix A.

3.2.1.1 Choice of Service

EECSD has, to the authors' knowledge, only been examined in a movie recommendation service before (Söderlund, 2020a). Therefore, there were many potential services that were evaluated before it was decided which one to examine. Studying one service and not several was considered to be in line with the aim and the limited resources of time and money for this study. A requirement was that it had to be possible for the employee to match the firm's offer with the customer's needs in the chosen service. We evaluated services in the financial, retail, and healthcare sectors, among others, before we chose a travel agency as the setting for this study. There are several reasons for this.

First, this service offers an opportunity of customizing the travel experience after customer-specific needs, where each trip sold can be different in aspects such as accommodation, room type, flight and activities. Customers must often share detailed personal information to allow the travel agent to customize the offer, which makes a travel agency relevant for studying customer self-disclosure.

Second, the travel agency service industry reached a revenue of 289 billion USD in 2023 and is forecasted to reach 295.7 billion USD in 2024 (Statista, 2024b). The industry has been significantly affected by the emergence of the internet, but approximately a third of the global tourism and travel market in 2023 still stem from physical travel agencies, and customers still seem to seek advice from travel agents (Statista, 2024c). Thus, one can assume that the employee-customer interaction is still important in this industry, which makes it interesting for this study.

3.2.1.2 Choice of Variables

The study of EECSD conducted by Söderlund (2020a) was our main inspiration for the selection of variables to examine. The mediating variables, perceived customization, the customer's perceived own effort, privacy concerns, and humanness, were shown to mediate the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction. Söderlund (2020a) also included perceived employee effort as a mediating variable, and the reason why it is not examined in this current study is discussed in section 3.2.2.1. Further, employee identity was also examined as a moderating variable by Söderlund (2020a) but turned out to have a non-significant moderating effect and was hence not of interest to re-examine.

As presented in section 1.4, an aim of this study is to extend the variables that previously have been studied in the context of EECSD. To do so, a literature review was made and perceived competence and warmth were identified as variables that hold the potential to be affected by EECSD and in turn impact customer satisfaction. Furthermore, they have been identified as antecedents to humanness. The authors therefore decided to be exploratory and include them in the examination.

3.2.2 The Treatments

In the experiment, participants were instructed to imagine themselves as customers in a service encounter who wanted to book a vacation that would fit their individual needs. In this role-play scenario, they interacted with an employee named Kim. The same role-play scenarios with high respectively low EECSD were used in both the pre-study and main-study,

see section 8.1.2-3 in Appendix A for the role-play scenarios. Two treatment groups were created and distinguished by the level of EECSD (low versus high).

To manipulate EECSD, two versions of the same service encounter were created: one version where the employee asked a large number of questions that encouraged the customer to self-disclose intimate information (high EECSD), and one version with a small number of questions that encouraged the customer to self-disclose intimate information (low EECSD).

Keeping other factors constant except those corresponding to a particular cause variable is crucial, as one does not want to introduce other differences between the treatments (Söderlund, 2018; Bell, et al, 2019). Previous studies on EECSD have manipulated this variable by varying the number of total questions asked by the employee as many questions for high EECSD and few questions for low EECSD (Söderlund, 2020). However, more total questions asked by the employee can signal that he or she expends more effort towards the customer (Söderlund, 2020a). Therefore, to not risk that employee effort was also subject to manipulation, it was deemed crucial to keep the volume of text and number of questions as constant as possible between the two conditions.

In both treatments (low EECSD & high EECSD), the service employee asked the customer 24 questions, and the customer responded to those questions. Further, the length of the role-play scenarios were 793 words in the one with low- and 786 in the one with high EECSD. As stated by Söderlund (2018), several researchers propose that the manipulation of a variable must be strong. Strong manipulations are important to cause an effect. Therefore, inspiration was taken from a study of EECSD conducted by Söderlund (2020a) where questions were asked regarding the customer's relationship with its partner. The questions asked by the employee in the high EECSD scenario were such that encouraged the customer to self-disclose intimate information about e.g., their relationship with their travel companion. Such revealed information is in line with the adopted definitions of self-disclosure, and intimate information as "[...] unique or central and vulnerable" (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977, p. 104). This was deemed to be as realistic as possible, considering the trade-off between having a strong manipulation and a realistic one, which strengthens the ecological validity (Bell et al., 2019). In contrast, questions asked in the low EECSD were such that encouraged the

customer to self-disclose non-intimate information which is more superficial (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). For example, “Do you want a taxi or a shared bus?” To test the manipulation of EECSD, a preparatory study was conducted.

3.3 Preparatory study

The purpose of the preparatory study was to manipulation check EECSD, make an initial check if it impacts the dependent variable, customer satisfaction, and perform a confounding check of employee effort. A confounding check ensures that the treatment does not cover any other variable than the one that should be examined (Söderlund, 2018). As employee effort had risked being subject to manipulation in previous studies on EECSD, it was deemed relevant to ensure that no difference between the treatments was found on this variable.

A separate preparatory study as a manipulation check of the independent variable before conducting the main study was appropriate, as it provides the researchers with early warning signals if the treatment measures what it is supposed to measure and prevents false conclusions relating to causality (Söderlund, 2018). Furthermore, the researchers wanted to test if EECSD had an impact on customer satisfaction, as it would provide an initial clue about the relationship between EECSD and satisfaction prior to the main study.

The data for the pre-study was collected using an online survey in Qualtrics and was distributed on the 18th of October 2024. Please see Appendix A for the survey used for the preparatory study.

3.3.1 Participants

The participants were recruited from the Prolific platform. The participants were paid 0.75 £ (10,4 SEK) to complete the survey. Given that the survey was in English, participants living in the United Kingdom were decided to be the most appropriate option for the sample in Prolific. In prolific, participations filters were used to guarantee that the participants were fluent in English and guarantee a sample of 50% women and 50% men. As this study aimed to examine a travel agency, the obvious population to be recruited would be people who had

traveled before. However, it was deemed more relevant and interesting to also include participants without travel experience as it is possible that those have different interpretations of EECSO than experienced travelers, which potentially can influence how satisfied they are with the service encounter. Therefore, no screening of participants was conducted in order to understand how EECSO impacts customer satisfaction for the whole population.

The sample consisted of 150 individuals in the United Kingdom and they were randomly allocated into one of the two groups. Due to one participant failing to respond to two questions that acted as an attention check, the final sample comprised 149 valid responses. The final sample consisted of 49,6 % (N = 74) men and 50,4 % (N = 75) women aged between 18 and 81 years. The average age of the sample was 41,6, and the standard deviation was 13.7.

3.3.2 Measurements

To measure the manipulation of EECSO, the following questions were used: “In the conversation with Kim, I provided personal information about myself”, “In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that is closely related to who I am”, “In the conversation with Kim, I provided private information about myself”, “In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that made me feel vulnerable”, “I felt that too much personal information about me was collected,” and “In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that was sensitive.” All of these questions were measured on a 10-point scale ranging from 1=Do not agree at all to 10=Agree completely, and Cronbach’s alpha was calculated ($\alpha=.953$), The averages formed an index. Similar measures were used by Söderlund (2020a).

To capture perceived employee effort, that would be used for the confounding check, the following questions were used: “Kim put a lot of effort into helping me”, “Kim tried hard to find a suitable trip for me”, “Kim expended much energy to help me”. These items were measured on a 10-point scale (ranging from 1 = do not agree at all to 10 = agree completely). Cronbach’s alpha was calculated ($\alpha = .840$), and the averages were computed to form an

index. Similar measures were used in Mohr and Bitner (1995) and Söderlund & Sagfossen (2017).

Measures for customer satisfaction were adopted from Anderson et al. (1994) and Fornell (1992), and were tailored to our context in the travel recommendation service encounter: “How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the travel booking service?” (1 = very dissatisfied, 10 = very satisfied), “To what extent does this service meet your expectations?” (1 = not at all, 10 = totally)”, and “Imagine a travel booking service that is perfect in every respect. How near or far from this ideal do you find this travel booking service?” (1 = very far from, 10 = cannot get any closer). Cronbach’s Alpha was .934 and an index was formed. For a summary of these measures, see Table 2.

Table 2 - Pre-study Measurements.

Variable	Measurement Items	Sources	Cronbach’s Alpha
<i>Manipulation check of EECS</i>	In the conversation with Kim: I provided personal information about myself I provided information that is closely related to who I am I provided private information about myself I provided information that made me feel vulnerable I provided information that was sensitive. I felt that too much personal information about me was collected	Söderlund (2020a)	.953
<i>Perceived Employee effort</i>	Kim put a lot of effort into helping me Kim tried hard to find a suitable trip for me Kim expended much energy to help me	Mohr & Bitner (1995) Söderlund & Sagfossen (2017)	.840
<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the travel booking service? To what extent does this service meet your expectations? Imagine a travel booking service that is perfect in every respect. How near or far from this ideal do you find this travel booking service?	Anderson et al. (1994) Fornell (1992)	.934

3.3.3 Pre-study Results and insights

To test that the manipulation of EECSD performed as intended, an independent samples *t*-Test was conducted, where the index of EECSD was the dependent variable, while the low ($N_{\text{low self disclosure}}=73$) and high ($N_{\text{high self disclosure}}=76$) EECSD conditions were the independent variable. The results indicate that perceived EECSD was significantly higher in the high EECSD-condition, compared to the low EECSD-condition ($M_{\text{high self-disclosure}}=8.74$, $SD=1.48$), $M_{\text{low self disclosure}}=3.80$, $SD=1.77$, $t=34.2$, $p<.001$). Therefore, the manipulation of EECSD performed as intended.

The confounding check of employee effort showed that there was no significant difference between the groups ($M_{\text{high self-disclosure}}=6.82$, $SD=1.75$), $M_{\text{low self disclosure}}=6.97$, $SD=2.01$, $t=.177$, $p=.675$). Thus, this indicates that this variable was not manipulated.

The effect of high versus low EECSD on customer satisfaction was tested with an independent samples *t*-Test. Customer satisfaction was significantly higher in the low EECSD-condition than in the high EECSD-condition ($M_{\text{high self disclosure}}=5.17$, $M_{\text{low self disclosure}}=6.98$, $t=23.6$, $p<.001$). This provided an initial indication that there was indeed an impact of EECSD on customer satisfaction. The aforementioned results are shown in Table 3.

As the manipulation of EECSD had performed as intended, and the treatments did not measure other variables than what they were supposed to measure, it was deemed relevant to move on to conduct the main study. The results from the pre-study are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 - Results from Pre-Study.

Variable	Significance level	Mean for the Low EECSD condition N=73	Mean for the High EECSD condition N=76
<i>EECSD</i>	<.001*	3.80	8.74
<i>Perceived employee effort</i>	.675	6.97	6.82
<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	<.001*	6.98	5.17

* Significant at the $p=.05$ level

3.4 Main Study

The purpose of the main study was to examine H1-H4 and SRQ1-SRQ2; the relationships between EECSD, the mediating variables perceived customization, the customer's perceived own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness, and customer satisfaction.

An online survey in Qualtrics, was used to collect data for the main study. Please see Appendix A for the surveys that were used for the Main Study. The survey was distributed between the 26-28 of October 2024.

3.4.1 Participants

As in the preparatory study, participants were recruited using the platform Prolific. 250 UK-based users were recruited and paid 1.05 £ (14,5 SEK) to complete the survey. It was again decided that participants living in the United Kingdom would be the most appropriate option, as our study was in English. To further ensure this, Prolific's participation filter was used to guarantee that the participants were fluent in English. An additional filter of the participants' gender ensured that the sample consisted of 50% males and 50% females. As participants were recruited from the Prolific platform and the same scenario scripts were used for both the pre-study and the main study, we chose to add a filter that prevented the individuals who participated in the pre-study from also participating in the main study. This was because we did not want to risk participants recognizing the scenario script and skipping through text in the treatment if they were assigned to a different treatment group in the main study. This meant that there was a risk that they could figure out that EECSD was manipulated if they were assigned to two treatment group when participating in two studies, and according to Söderlund (2018), participants should not receive more than one treatment.

After excluding 9 participants who failed to answer the questions that served as attention-checks, the final sample was 241 participants, of which 50,2% (N = 121) were women and 49,8% (N = 120) were men. The age of the participants varied between 18-84 years, and the average age was 44.4 years, with a standard deviation of 14.07. The demographic comparison between the different treatment groups are shown in Table 4.

Table 4 - Demographic Comparison of The Treatment Groups.

	Low EECSD N=120	High EECSD N=121
<i>Age Range</i>	18-84	18-83
<i>Age Mean</i>	M= 44.6	M= 44.2
<i>Males</i>	49.2%	50.4%
<i>Female</i>	50.8%	49.6%

3.4.2 Measurements

After receiving one of the treatments, respondents were asked identical survey questions (see Appendix). The measures were developed from previous research and used a 10-point likert scale and will be described below.

To assess the manipulation of EECSD, the same questions used in the pre-study were used in the main study (see section 3.3.2) and measured on a 10-point scale. Cronbach's Alpha was computed to .958 and an index was formed. This manipulation check was identical to the pre-study. Similar measures were used by Söderlund (2020). Although not completely necessary, given that the manipulation worked in the pre-study (Söderlund, 2018), it was used to test if the treatments worked also in the main study.

Customer satisfaction was captured with the same three questions used in the pre-study adopted from Anderson et al. (1994) and Fornell (1992), see section 3.3.2 and captured on a 10-point scale. Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to .961 and an index was formed.

Perceived customization was captured with the items: "The trip suggested was tailor-made for my needs", "The trip suggested was adapted to my personal preferences", "The trip suggested was made with full attention to my specific needs", "The trip suggested recognized the uniqueness of my preferences", and "The trip suggested was indeed based on my specifications". They were scored on a 10-point scale as 1 = do not agree at all and 10 =

agree completely. A Cronbach's alpha of .962 was obtained and an index was formed. These items were adapted from Söderlund (2020a) and Mothersbaugh et al. (2012).

To capture privacy concerns, the following items were used: "I felt that too much personal information about me was collected", "The information I provided about myself in the interaction with Kim made me concerned about my privacy", "It felt embarrassing to reveal what I did reveal about myself", "It bothered me to give the requested information to the firm", "I am concerned that the information I provided about myself could be misused", and "To reveal what I did in the interaction with Kim could make others evaluate me negatively" (scored on a 10-point scale as 1 = do not agree at all, 10 = agree completely); $\alpha=0.968$. These measures were adapted from Söderlund (2020a) and similar items have been used by Mothersbaugh et al. (2012) and Dinev and Hart (2004).

To measure the customer's perceived own effort, the following questions were asked: "To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = not effortful at all, 10 = very effortful)", "To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = Not demanding at all, 10 = Very effortful)", "To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = Not energy-consuming at all, 10 = Very energy-consuming)", and "To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = Easy, 10 = Difficult)". A Cronbach's alpha of .932 was obtained and an index was created. We adapted these items from Söderlund & Sagfossen (2017), and Söderlund (2020a).

Perceived employee warmth was measured with the question "What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics" and the following adjective pairs: cold-warm, unhelpful-helpful, harsh-gentle and scored on a 10-point scale. Cronbach's alpha was computed to .871 and was used to form an index. These measures were adapted from Söderlund (2021).

Perceived employee competence was measured with a similar question as in perceived warmth: "What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics" followed by the adjective pairs: incompetent-competent, unintelligent-intelligent, incapable-capable. They were scored on a 10-point scale and Cronbach's alpha was .940. An index was created. Similar measures have been used in Söderlund & Berg (2020).

Perceived employee humanness was recorded using the following questions: “Kim behaved very much as a human”, “Kim was humanlike”, and “Kim acted like humans typically do”. They were scored on a 10-point scale (1 = do not agree at all, 10 = agree completely). Cronbach’s alpha was .956 and an index was formed. These items were adapted from Söderlund and Oikarinen (2021). The measures are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 - Main-Study Measurements.

Variable	Measurement Items	Sources	Cronbach’s Alpha
<i>Manipulation check of EECS D</i>	In the conversation with Kim: -I provided personal information about myself -I provided information that is closely related to who I am - I provided private information about myself -I provided information that made me feel vulnerable -I provided information that was sensitive. -I felt that too much personal information about me was collected	Söderlund (2020a)	.958
<i>Perceived customization</i>	The trip suggested was... -Tailor-made for my needs -Adapted to my personal preferences -Made with full attention to my specific needs -Recognized the uniqueness of my preferences -Indeed based on my specifications	Söderlund (2020a) Mothersbaugh et al. (2012)	.905
<i>Customer satisfaction</i>	-How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the travel booking service? -To what extent does this service meet your expectations? --Imagine a travel booking service that is perfect in every respect. How near or far from this ideal do you find this travel booking service?	Anderson et al. (1994) Fornell (1992)	.961
<i>Privacy Concerns</i>	-I felt that too much personal information about me was collected -The information I provided about myself in the interaction with Kim	Söderlund (2020a) Dinev & Hart (2004) Mothersbaugh et al. (2012)	.968

	made me concerned about my privacy -It felt embarrassing to reveal what I did reveal about myself -It bothered me to give the requested information to the firm -I am concerned that the information I provided about myself could be misused -To reveal what I did in the interaction with Kim could make others evaluate me negatively		
<i>The customer's perceived own Effort</i>	To answer Kim's questions about me was... -(1=not effortful at all, 10= very effortful) -(1 = Not demanding at all, 10 = Very effortful) -(1 = Not energy-consuming at all, 10 = Very energy-consuming) - (1 = Easy, 10 = Difficult)	Söderlund & Sagfossen (2017) Söderlund (2020a)	.932
<i>Perceived employee Warmth</i>	What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics... -Cold-Warm -Unhelpful-Helpful -Harsh-Gentle	Söderlund (2021)	.871
<i>Perceived employee competence</i>	What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics... -Incompetent-Competent -Unintelligent-Intelligent, -Incapable-Capable	Söderlund & Berg (2020)	.940
<i>Perceived Employee Humanness</i>	-Kim behaved very much as a human - Kim was humanlike -Kim acted like humans typically do	Söderlund & Oikarinen (2021)	.956

3.4.3 Significance level

According to Rosekrans (1969), it is common to use a significance level of 5% in research in marketing. This level show the probability that one makes a type 1 error, in other words, a false positive. For instance, it would mean that we would wrongly conclude that EECSD would positively impact customer satisfaction, when it actually does not. In research, it is common to select a level that is tailored to the individual risks of the specific dataset. We have chosen a significance level of .05, which was deemed adequately strict for our study.

3.5 Quality of the Study

3.5.1 Reliability

For quantitative research, reliability relates to whether a measurement is consistent or not (Bell et al., 2019). In this study multiple questionnaire items have been used to measure the same variable, which according to Söderlund (2018) is a common approach in order to assess reliability. To ensure a high internal reliability (Bell et al., 2019), Cronbach's alpha tests were conducted to assess whether the questionnaire items relating to each variable showed consistency (Söderlund, 2018). The measures were considered as acceptable if Cronbach's alpha showed a value of 0.7 at minimum, and as presented in section 3.4.2 all measures exceeded, indicating a high internal reliability. In this study, questionnaire items with a 1-10 scale were used to collect data, which enabled us as researchers to be objective as we did not have to make any subjective assessments regarding collection or translation of data. The data were also collected through Qualtrics and imported directly to SPSS, and that in turn further strengthens the study's inter-rater reliability. Further, it is difficult to claim stability when the experiment only has been distributed once to the participants (Bell et al., 2019). Changes in impact on consequences and customer satisfaction over time was considered not relevant given the study's purpose. Both the preparatory-study and the main-study used the same roleplay-scenario and can hence be argued to be a kind of stability indicator, although it was not distributed to the same participants. As argued earlier, the risk of the participants knowing what the study was about were considered higher than the lowered reliability in terms of stability of measures.

3.5.2 Validity

Validity is one of the most important criteria for research and is concerned with if a measurement measures what it is supposed to measure (Bell et al., 2019). As earlier described, the questionnaire items were inspired by other researchers that had measured the same variable priorly. To ensure content validity, a review of the questionnaire items was conducted by the researchers before the data was collected to assess whether the questions truly related to theory about the variable in question. For questions where the two researchers were unsure about how a greater overlap could be achieved, a third pair of eyes in form of a

friend assisted in the review. After refinement of some questions, the final questions were judged to overlap with their respective related theory to a great degree and hence, content validity was ensured (Söderlund, 2018).

3.5.3 Ethical Considerations

According to Bell et al. (2019) ethics is important to consider when planning and conducting business research. Four main ethical issues are privacy invasion, deception, lack of informed consent and harm to participants (Diener & Crandall, 1978). Regarding harm, the experiment and the questions have been judged to not run any risks of causing neither physical- or emotional harm to the participants. To ensure that the participants took part in the study in an informed and voluntary manner, the experiment began with a short introduction of the study and information about that the results would serve as the basis for our master's thesis.

Information regarding GDPR was presented, and the participants needed to give their consent to participate in this study in order to continue forward to the role-play scenario and the questionnaire items. Participants that did not accept the GDPR terms or wished to not participate in the study were hence not automatically forwarded to the role-play scenario, but their participation was completed instantly.

Further, the participants took part in the study through their own mobile phones or computers and always had the opportunity to withdraw their participation and thus their privacy is considered to be preserved. The purpose of the study was intentionally not disclosed to the participants to not influence the participants' responses. It was deemed to be appropriate as the study does not cause the participants any harm and information was given about that the researchers conduct this study for their master thesis. To mitigate this deception by omission (Söderlund, 2018), all participants were given an explanation of the research purpose, and why this information was withheld through the message function in Prolific after their completion of the study. See Appendix B for the message. Taken together, ethical handling is considered as ensured.

4.0 Analysis and Results

The chapter presents the results of the main study. First, a manipulation check is conducted, followed by statistical testing of the hypotheses and specific research questions.

4.1 Manipulation checks

To ensure that the manipulation of the independent variable EECSD performed as intended, this variable was once again manipulation checked with an independent samples *t*-Test. The index for EECSD was used as input for the test and the group that was exposed to high EECSD (N=121) was compared to the group that was subject to low EECSD (N=120).

The results show that the manipulation of EECSD was indeed performing as intended ($M_{high\ self-disclosure}=9.07$, $SD=1.18$; $M_{low\ self-disclosure}=3.36$, $SD=1.53$, $t=32.4$, $p=<0.001$) and participants that were exposed to the high EECSD scenario perceived EECSD as significantly higher than those that were exposed to low EECSD.

4.2 Statistical testing

4.2.1. Statistical testing for H1a-H3a, SRQ1a & SRQ2

H1a-H3a, SRQ1a and SRQ2 were tested with independent samples *t*-Tests, where the two conditions ($N_{high\ self\ disclosure}=121$, $N_{low\ self\ disclosure}=120$) of EECSD were used as the independent variable, and the indexes on perceived customization, customer's perceived own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and customer satisfaction were used as dependent variables.

The results show that there was no significant difference of *perceived customization* (H1a) ($M_{high\ self-disclosure}=7.64$, $SD=1.93$), $M_{low\ self\ disclosure}=7.70$, $SD=1.68$, two-tailed test, $t=.237$, $p=.813$) between the two conditions (low versus high EECSD).

There was a significant difference for *the customer's perceived own effort* (H2a) ($M_{high\ self-disclosure} = 7.75$, $SD = 1.79$; $M_{low\ self-disclosure} = 3.7$, $SD = 1.72$, $t = 17.9$, $p = < 0.001$), between the two conditions, where it was higher in the high EECSD-condition compared to the low EECSD-condition.

For *privacy concerns* (H3a), there was also a significant difference ($M_{high\ self-disclosure} = 7.98$, $SD = 1.75$; $M_{low\ self-disclosure} = 2.15$, $SD = 1.35$, two-tailed test, $t = 28.9$, $p = < 0.001$) between the two conditions. Privacy concerns were higher in the high EECSD-condition, compared to the low EECSD-condition. Thus, H2a and H3a were supported, and H1a must be rejected.

Lastly, there was a significant difference for *perceived employee warmth* (SRQ1a) ($M_{high\ self-disclosure} = 6.9$, $SD = 1.94$; $M_{low\ self-disclosure} = 7.55$, $SD = 1.57$, two-tailed test, $t = -2.85$, $p = 0.005$) and *perceived employee competence* (SRQ1a) ($M_{high\ self-disclosure} = 7.33$, $SD = 2.0$; $M_{low\ self-disclosure} = 8.19$, $SD = 1.51$, two-tailed test, $t = -3.8$, $p = < 0.001$) between the two conditions. Perceived employee warmth and competence were lower in the high EECSD-condition, compared to the low EECSD-condition. Therefore, SRQ1a was answered.

For SRQ2, in line with the pre-study results, customer satisfaction was significantly lower in the high EECSD-condition compared to the low EECSD-condition, ($M_{high\ self-disclosure} = 5.66$, $SD = 2.66$), $M_{low\ self-disclosure} = 7.66$, $SD = 1.94$, two-tailed test, $t = 6.64$, $p = < .001$). Because the literature could not provide a clear argument how customer satisfaction would be influenced, this variable was formulated as a specific research question. The empirical data therefore answers SRQ2. The results are shown in Table 6.

Table 6 - Results: H1a-H3a, SRQ1a & SRQ2.

Variable	Significance level	Mean for the Low EECSD condition N=120	Mean for the High EECSD condition N=121
<i>Perceived customization (H1a)</i>	.813	7.70	7.64
<i>The customer's perceived own effort (H2a)</i>	<.001*	3.7	7.75
<i>Privacy concerns (H3a)</i>	<.001*	2.15	7.98
<i>Perceived employee warmth (SRQ1a)</i>	.005*	7.55	6.9
<i>Perceived employee competence (SRQ1a)</i>	<.001*	8.19	7.33
<i>Customer satisfaction (SRQ2)</i>	<.001*	7.66	5.66

* Significant at the $p = .05$ level

4.2.2. Statistical testing for H1b-H3b & H4a-H4b

The purpose of this section is to test these hypotheses with correlation tests. Although correlation tests do not measure casual relationships between these variables, it was decided that it was relevant to examine in what direction the hypothesised relationships affect each other. Nevertheless, casualty will be tested in section 4.3 where mediation analyses will be performed where casual claims can be made.

To test H1b-H3b and H4a-H4b, correlation tests were performed. H1b-H3b hypothesize the impact of perceived customization (H1b), the customer's perceived own effort (H2b), and privacy concerns (H3b), on customer satisfaction. Therefore customer satisfaction was set as the dependent variable in H1b-H3b. H4a hypothesize the association between perceived employee warmth and perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness, hence perceived employee humanness was set as the dependent variable in H4a.

The results show that all correlations, except for perceived customization, were significant ($p < 0.01$). Perceived customization (H1b) was not correlated with customer satisfaction ($r = .078$), while customer perceived own effort (H2b) ($r = -.483$) and privacy concerns (H3b) ($r =$

-.480), were negatively associated with customer satisfaction. Perceived employee warmth ($r = .686$) and competence ($r = .650$) were positively associated with perceived humanness (H4a). Therefore, we could find empirical support for H2b-H3b and H4a, while H1b must be rejected.

H4b was also tested with a correlation test, and instead, the index on perceived employee humanness was set as independent variable, while customer satisfaction was set as the dependent variable. The results also indicate that perceived employee humanness was positively correlated with customer satisfaction ($r = .728$) and this was significant ($p < .001$). This then provides support for H4b. A summary of the results are presented in Table 7 and see Appendix C for a correlation matrix.

Table 7 - Results: H1b-H3b & H4a-H4b.

Variable	Relationship with customer satisfaction (r)	Relationship with perceived employee humanness (r)
<i>Perceived Customization (H1b)</i>	.078	
<i>Customer perceived own effort (H2b)</i>	-.483**	
<i>Privacy concerns (H3b)</i>	-.480**	
<i>Perceived employee warmth (H4a)</i>		.686**
<i>Perceived employee competence (H4a)</i>		.650**
<i>Perceived employee humanness (H4b)</i>	.728**	

** Significant at the $p = .001$ level

4.3 Mediation H1c-H3c & SRQ1b

After obtaining results that indicate that EECSD has an overall negative impact on customer satisfaction (SRQ2), we choose to examine if this impact was mediated by the hypothesised variables to explain why this effect was obtained. Therefore, the mediating variables that were included in this analysis were *perceived customization*, *the customer's perceived own effort*, *privacy concerns*, *perceived employee warmth*, *perceived employee competence*, and *perceived employee humanness*.

Based on the hypotheses, 5 routes of mediation have been assumed:

1. EECSD → perceived customization → customer satisfaction.
2. EECSD → the customer's perceived own effort → customer satisfaction.
3. EECSD → privacy concerns → customer satisfaction.
4. EECSD → perceived employee warmth → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction.
5. EECSD → perceived employee competence → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction.

Routes 1-3 (H1c-H3c) were tested using parallel mediation analysis in Hayes Process Model 4 (V 4.2) (confidence level = 95%, 5000 bootstrap samples) in SPSS, while routes 4-5 (SRQ1b) were tested with sequential mediation using Hayes Process model 6 (V 4.2) (confidence level = 95%, 5000 bootstrap samples) in SPSS. The reason why they were tested with two different Hayes Models is because routes 1-3 involve parallel mediation, while routes 4-5 involved sequential mediation (with several mediating variables). See the illustrated routes above.

4.3.1 Mediation: Routes 1-3 for H1c-H3c

To test H1c-H3c, the first mediation analysis that was performed to test the effects of the mediators on customer satisfaction was a parallel mediation analysis, using Hayes Process Model 4. This means that the variables in routes 1-3 (perceived customization, the customer's perceived own effort, and privacy concerns) were tested simultaneously. The results that are presented from the Hayes Models will state the *b*-values, and they show the size of the impact of the mediator and the direction that it impacts customer satisfaction. In other words, positive or negative *b*-values show positive or negative impact on customer satisfaction, and greater *b*-values highlight a greater impact on customer satisfaction. When analyzing mediation, the indirect and direct effects are more relevant to examine. The indirect effect refers to the mediator's impact on the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction. The results are significant if the upper- and lower confidence intervals do not contain the number zero. The direct effect is EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction that cannot be explained by the mediator that is tested. Significance is found using *p*-values. The

total effect of the Hayes models will not be mentioned in the results, but it is the total of the indirect effects and direct effects that was indicated in SRQ2.

In the parallel mediation analysis, the X-variable was set to EECSD (scored as 1 = low, 2 = high), the Y-variable was customer satisfaction, and the mediating variables were perceived customization, the customer's perceived own effort, and privacy concerns.

The results from this test show that there is no significant direct effect between EECSD and customer satisfaction ($b = .64, t = 1.45, p = .148$). However, there is a significant *total negative* indirect effect ($b = -2.64, LLCI = -3.58, ULCI = -1.70$) of EECSD on customer satisfaction. Perceived customization (H1c) did not have a significant indirect effect ($b = -.04, LLCI = -.40, ULCI = .33$). The customer's perceived own effort (H2c) had a significant indirect effect, and the second strongest mediating effect ($b = -.83, LLCI = -1.43, ULCI = -.29$) on customer satisfaction. Privacy concerns (H3c) also had a significant indirect effect, and was seen to have the greatest mediating effect on customer satisfaction ($b = -1.76, LLCI = -2.74, ULCI = -.83$).

These results provide no support for H1c; perceived customization did not mediate the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction. Thus, H1c must be rejected. The results provide support for H2c-H3c, where a *full* mediating effect of privacy concerns and the customer's perceived own effort was present on the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction (Zhao et al., 2010). EECSD leads to an increase of the customer's perceived own effort and privacy concerns, which in turn lead to lower customer satisfaction. A summary of the paths and results is presented in Table 8.

Table 8 - Parallel Mediation Analysis: Perceived Customization (H1c), The Customer's Perceived Own Effort (H2c), and Privacy Concerns (H3c).

Independent Variable		Mediator		Dependent Variable	Effect type	Effects
<i>EECSD (H1c)</i>	→	<i>Perceived customization</i>	→	Customer satisfaction	Indirect	$b = -.04$ LLCI = $-.40$ ULCI = $.33$
<i>EECSD</i>		→		Customer satisfaction	Direct	$b = -.1.95$ $p < .001^*$
<i>EECSD</i>		→		Customer satisfaction	Total	$b = -1.99$ $p < .001^*$
<i>EECSD (H2c)</i>	→	<i>The customer's perceived own effort</i>	→	Customer satisfaction	Indirect	$b = -.83$ LLCI = $-.1.43$ ULCI = $-.29$ **
<i>EECSD</i>		→		Customer satisfaction	Direct	$b = -.33$ $p = .44$
<i>EECSD</i>		→		Customer satisfaction	Total	$b = -1.99$ $p < .001^*$
<i>EECSD (H3c)</i>	→	<i>Privacy concerns</i>	→	Customer satisfaction	Indirect	$b = -1.76$ LLCI = $-.2.74$ ULCI = $-.83$ **
<i>EECSD</i>		→		Customer satisfaction	Direct	$b = -.64$ $p = .29$
<i>EECSD</i>		→		Customer satisfaction	Total	$b = -1.99$ $p < .001^*$

* Significant at the $p = .05$ level

** Significant 95% CI

4.3.2 Mediation: Routes 4-5

To investigate SRQ1b, Hayes Process Model 6 for sequential mediation analysis was used, because this specific research question involved sequential mediation. For route 4 (EECSD → perceived employee warmth → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction), the results show that there is a significant direct effect between EECSD and customer satisfaction ($b = -.1.23$, $t = -6.55$, $p < 0.001$) and a significant *total* indirect effect ($b = -.76$, LLCI = -1.23 , ULCI = $-.30$). Moreover, the indirect effect of EECSD → perceived employee

warmth → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction was significant ($b = -.25$, LLCI = $-.45$, ULCI = $-.08$). EECSD leads to lower perceived employee warmth, in turn leading to lower perceived employee humanness, which in turn leads to lower customer satisfaction.

For route 5 (EECSD → perceived employee competence → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction), the results show that there is a significant direct effect ($b = -1.02$, $t = -6.26$, $p = < 0.001$) and a significant *total* indirect effect ($b = -.98$, LLCI = -1.48 , ULCI = $-.46$). Furthermore, the indirect effect of EECSD → perceived employee competence → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction was significant ($b = -.26$, LLCI = $-.42$, ULCI = $-.12$). EECSD leads to lower perceived employee competence, in turn leading to lower perceived employee humanness, which in turn leads to lower customer satisfaction.

These results indicate that sequential mediation was at hand, and we thus could answer SRQ1b with the empirics. However, because the direct effects also were significant for perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness, partial mediation is present (Zhao et al., 2010). A summary of the paths and results can be found in Table 9.

H4a and H4b supported that the correlations were positive between perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, perceived employee humanness, and customer satisfaction. The authors want to be explicit and say that the mediation analysis of H4d showed that EECSD lead to lower perceived employee warmth, and competence, which in turn lead to lower perceived employee humanness, ultimately leading to lower customer satisfaction. Therefore, the latter result should not be confused with the fact that these variables were found to be positively correlated, as shown in the correlation tests presented in section 4.2.2. In other words, EECSD did not increase these variables. The outcome of each hypothesis is summarized in Table 10.

Table 9 - Sequential Mediation Analysis: Perceived Employee Warmth, Perceived Employee Competence, and Perceived Employee Humanness (SRQ1b).

Independent Variable		Mediator		Mediator		Dependent Variable	Effect type	Effects
<i>EECSD (SRQ1b)</i>	→	Perceived employee warmth	→	Perceived employee humanness	→	Customer satisfaction	Indirect	$b = -.25$ LLCI = $-.45$ ULCI = $-.08$ **
<i>EECSD</i>		→		→		Customer satisfaction	Direct	$b = -.1.23$ $p = < .001^*$
<i>EECSD</i>		→		→		Customer satisfaction	Total	$b = -1.99$ $p = < .001^*$
<i>EECSD (SRQ1b)</i>	→	Perceived employee competence	→	Perceived employee humanness	→	Customer satisfaction	Indirect	$b = -.26$ LLCI = $-.42$ ULCI = $-.12$ **
<i>EECSD</i>		→		→		Customer satisfaction	Direct	$b = -.1.02$ $p = < .001^*$
<i>EECSD</i>		→		→		Customer satisfaction	Total	$b = -1.99$ $p = < .001^*$

* Significant at the $p = .05$ level

** Significant 95% CI

Table 10 - Summary of Hypotheses and SRQs Outcomes.

Hypothesis /SRQ	Description	Outcome
<i>H1a</i>	When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, perceived customization is higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.	Rejected
<i>H1b</i>	Perceived customization of an offer has a positive influence on customer satisfaction.	Rejected
<i>H1c</i>	EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is positively mediated by perceived customization.	Rejected
<i>H2a</i>	When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, their perceived own effort is higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.	Supported
<i>H2b</i>	The customer's perceived own effort has a negative influence on customer satisfaction.	Supported
<i>H2c</i>	EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is negatively mediated by the customer's perceived own effort.	Supported
<i>H3a</i>	When customers are exposed to high EECSD in a service encounter, privacy concerns are higher than when customers are exposed to low EECSD.	Supported
<i>H3b</i>	Privacy concerns have a negative influence on customer satisfaction.	Supported
<i>H3c</i>	EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction is negatively mediated by the customer's privacy concerns.	Supported
<i>SRQ1a</i>	What is the effect of EECSD on perceived employee warmth and perceived employee competence?	Answered
<i>H4a</i>	Perceptions of employee warmth and competence will be positively related to perceived employee humanness.	Supported
<i>H4b</i>	Perceived employee humanness will have a positive impact on customer satisfaction.	Supported
<i>SRQ1b</i>	Is the impact of EECSD on customer satisfaction mediated by perceived employee warmth, perceived employee competence, and perceived employee humanness?	Answered
<i>SRQ2</i>	How will the level of customer satisfaction be affected when customers are exposed to high EECSD, as compared to low EECSD, in a service encounter?	Answered

5.0 Discussion

This chapter begins with summarizing the main findings of the main study. The results are then discussed based on the theoretical framework. Each variable will be discussed separately.

5.1 Summary of Main Findings

The main findings of the study can be summarized as the following:

1. EECSD has a positive impact on the customer's perceived own effort and privacy concerns. These fully mediated EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction and ultimately lead to lower customer satisfaction.
2. EECSD has a negative impact on perceived employee warmth and perceived employee competence. This partially mediated the effect on customer satisfaction and reduced customer satisfaction by reducing perceived humanness.
3. EECSD leads to no difference in perceived customization which causes no difference in customer satisfaction.
4. EECSD produces a significantly *lower* total level of customer satisfaction.

Figure 2 contains the findings from the main study. The indirect, direct, and total effects are visualized in the revised theoretical model (see figure 2).

- The indirect effect of the path EECSD → perceived employee warmth → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction is presented on the line between perceived employee warmth and perceived employee humanness.
- The indirect effect of the path EECSD → perceived employee competence → perceived employee humanness → customer satisfaction is presented on the line between perceived employee competence and perceived employee humanness.
- The indirect effects of perceived customization, the customer's perceived own effort, and privacy concerns are presented on their respective paths to customer satisfaction.
- The total effect and the direct effects are also presented.

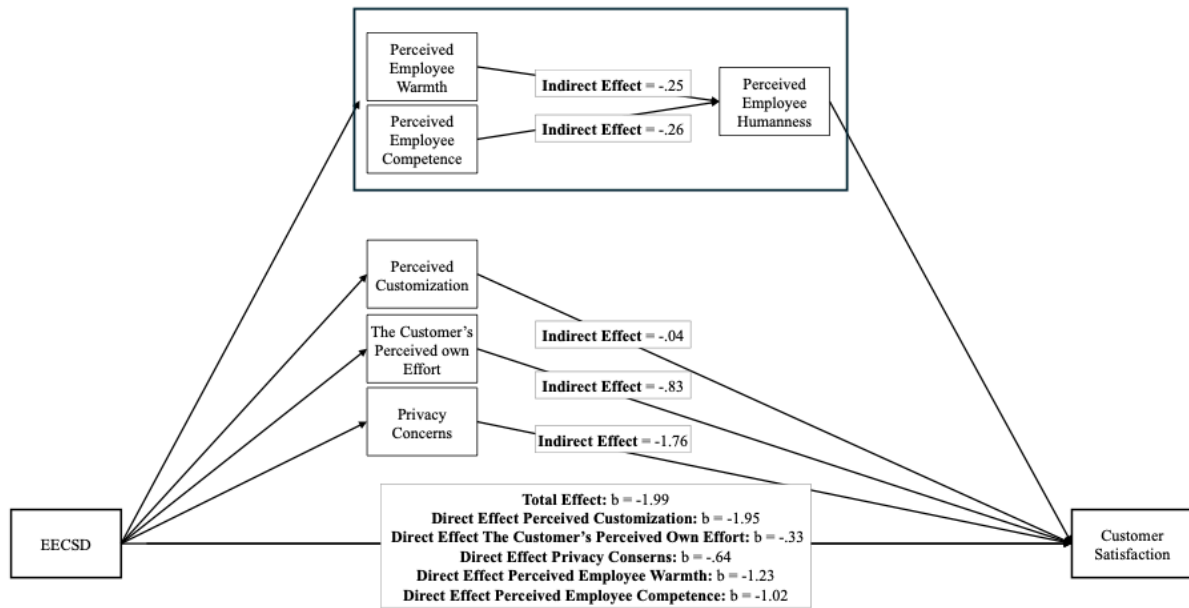


Figure 2 - Revised Theoretical Model

5.2 Discussion of Results

5.2.1 Overall Impact of EECS on Customer Satisfaction (SRQ2)

After discussions with our supervisor, it was deemed relevant to begin by discussing the relationship between the independent and dependent variables, because if an effect between these two was absent, the mediators would serve no purpose. Therefore, SRQ2 is presented first in this discussion.

While the impact of EECS on customer satisfaction has mainly been attempted to be explained through the different mechanisms (mediators), this first hypothesis discussion provides an overview of the impact on satisfaction. Based on our findings, customers that were exposed to high EECS were significantly less satisfied with the offer and travel agent compared to customers that were exposed to low EECS. This therefore answers SRQ2.

This relationship was formed as a specific research question indicating that the authors could not hypothesise if satisfaction would be lower or higher based on previous literature and the variables that would impact customer satisfaction. Notably, customer satisfaction was drastically reduced when customers were exposed to high EECSD ($M_{\text{high self-disclosure}} = 5.66$, $M_{\text{low self disclosure}} = 7.66$), and this result was consistent across both the pre- and the main-study. We argue that this can be explained by the fact that EECSD did not boost variables that previous literature has shown to be *positively* related to satisfaction (perceived customization, perceived employee warmth, competence, and humanness). Rather, EECSD had *no* impact on perceived customization, a *negative* impact on perceived employee warmth, competence, and humanness, while it also boosted variables that prior literature has shown to *negatively* impact satisfaction (own effort and privacy concerns). Therefore, we believe that the net reduction in customer satisfaction can be attributed to these negative mechanisms and responses of customers when they were exposed to EECSD in the service encounter.

Surprisingly, the result contradicts Söderlund (2020a), who found an increase in customer satisfaction when customers were exposed to EECSD. This was due to the fact that EECSD also boosted variables that were *both* positively and negatively related to satisfaction (customization, employee effort, and humanness), resulting in a net increase. However, as our findings suggest that EECSD did not have a positive influence on *any* variables that are positively related with satisfaction, while boosting variables negatively related to satisfaction, the net effect on satisfaction was negative. This is in line with the self-disclosure literature, where too much self-disclosure can produce exploitation (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977), exposure to mistreatment and embarrassment (Moon, 2000), and vulnerability (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). Although self-disclosure can also produce positive responses, e.g. increased liking for the recipient (Berg & Archer, 1983; Collins & Miller, 1994), our results indicate that EECSD only produced the negative responses. Therefore, we believe that customers exposed to high EECSD did not see it as a balancing act (Cozby, 1973) of balancing positive and negative consequences; rather, only the negative consequences primed the customers. In other words, customers might have perceived that too much self-disclosure was encouraged by the employee.

5.2.2 Perceived Customization (H1)

The findings showed that the customers who were exposed to high EECSD did not have more favorable perceptions of customization than those who were exposed to low, and it was not positively related to satisfaction. As a result, perceived customization did not have a mediating effect. These results do not provide support for H1a, H1b and H1c.

This result is surprising as it contradicts previous research. First, this finding is not in line with findings from Söderlund (2020a), where EECSD enhanced perceived customization, which in turn enhanced customer satisfaction. We argue that this was because Söderlund (2020a) used a different method, where the EECSD was manipulated by asking more and fewer questions to the customer. Previous literature has shown that more questions asked to the customer can indicate higher customization (Ball et al., 2006). We therefore argue that keeping the number of questions constant, and rather varying the degree of self-disclosure, is a more appropriate method to ensure that the intended cause variable is manipulated (Söderlund, 2018). Thus, we believe that the absence of results on customization is due to our choice of method.

Second, these results support the notion that consumers engage in a privacy calculus and weigh the trade-off between costs and benefits of self-disclosure when exposed to EECSD. Ultimately, we found that this trade-off did not favor perceived customization benefits due to exposure to EECSD. We argue that this can be explained by Mothersbaugh et al. (2012), where a higher intimacy of information disclosed can have a diminishing effect on customization benefits. As high EECSD implies that a higher level of intimate information is requested, this can explain why customers perceived the customization benefits to be weak. Although perceived customization benefits can overcome the costs of privacy concerns when these concerns are lower (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012), the findings show that privacy concerns were drastically increased. This can explain why customers were primed with privacy concerns rather than perceived customization when exposed to high EECSD. This aligns with literature on the privacy calculus (Smith et al., 2011; Dinev & Hart, 2004; Mothersbaugh et al., 2012), which explains why self-disclosure benefits did not outweigh costs when exposed to high EECSD. In turn, because no such benefits primed customers, we

believe that they perceived the offer to be of low value, and customer satisfaction was therefore unaffected.

5.2.3 The Customer's Own Effort (H2)

The results show that customers who are exposed to high EECSD in the service encounter perceived that they expend higher effort than customers who are exposed to a low EECSD. Moreover, perceived own effort fully mediated the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction, where a higher perceived expended effort ultimately led to lower customer satisfaction. Thus, these results provide empirical support for H2a, H2b, and H2c.

Notably, the results showed that there was a drastic increase in own effort between low EECSD and high EECSD ($M_{high\ self-disclosure}=7.75$, $M_{low\ self-disclosure}=3.7$). This was expected, as it was in line with previous literature. For instance, this result aligns with Söderlund (2020a), where a similar result was obtained, although the difference in means was not as large. We argue that this result can be explained by, and supports the notion of, the dual-process theory (Zhang et al., 2024). It can be argued that customers exposed to high EECSD must use their controlled mental process to determine the potential trade-off of self-disclosure in terms of positive and negative consequences. Thus, their cognitive effort increases (Gawronski & Craigton, 2013), and more effort is expended. This is also in line with the information disclosure literature, where self-disclosure is a conscious balancing act of evaluating pros and cons of disclosure (Cozby, 1973; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977; Smith et al., 2011)

In fact, perceived own effort had the second strongest mediating effect on customer satisfaction ($b=-.83$), and this implies that own effort can be attributed to explaining a large portion of the reduction in customer satisfaction. This finding is also consistent with Söderlund (2020a) and Söderlund & Sagfossen (2017), where own effort had significant satisfaction-reducing potential. This is not unsurprising, given that previous literature has shown that humans are effort-averse (Inzlicht et al., 2018) and perceive effortful activities as costly (Cardozo, 1965). We argue that this can also be explained by the notion that satisfaction will be reduced if customers experience a cognitive dissonance when there is an imbalance between their input (in terms of own effort expended) and output (in terms of offer

received) (Cardozo, 1965). If the offer received is not in line with expectations, satisfaction will be reduced. As literature shows, being asked to self-disclose can prime customers with expectations of receiving a customized offer (Söderlund, 2020a), and if no such offer is given to the customer, satisfaction can be reduced. Considering that customers exposed to high EECSD did not perceive higher customization (H1a), while effort increased (H2a), this could also explain why customer satisfaction was reduced when effort increased.

5.2.4 Privacy Concerns (H3)

The results show that when customers are exposed to high EECSD, their privacy concerns increase, which ultimately leads to lower levels of customer satisfaction. Therefore, the results provide empirical support for H3a and H3b, and H3c: privacy concerns fully mediate the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction.

Notably, the difference in means between high and low EECSD was greatest for privacy concerns ($M_{high\ self-disclosure}=7.98$, $M_{low\ self-disclosure}=2.15$), and this variable could be attributed to explaining the most of the reduction in customer satisfaction, as it had the strongest mediating effect ($b=-.1.76$). These results are not surprising, as they align with the notion that customers are increasingly concerned about data collection and usage conducted by companies today (Martin & Murphy, 2017; Smith et al., 2011). The findings can be explained through EECSD leading to customers experiencing a loss of control of their disclosed information, which in turn has been shown in previous research to lead to heightened privacy concerns (Dinev & Hart, 2004).

As the service encounter is a place where customer data is collected by the employee, increased privacy concerns are expected as they are in line with previous research. The results align with Söderlund (2020a), where privacy concerns were also seen to be most significantly impacted by EECSD and have the most significant effect on customer satisfaction. Privacy concerns being the strongest predictor of the reduction in customer satisfaction is not strange, as it enlightens the notion that privacy is of significant importance today, put forward by Acquisti et al. (2015). Furthermore, privacy concerns are the main reason why people refrain from self-disclosure and drastically increase when another person

encourages one to self-disclose (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). This could also explain why privacy concerns increased most dramatically and were attributed to the most significant reduction in customer satisfaction of all mediating variables.

Moreover, the results support the notion that customers engage in a privacy calculus (Smith et al., 2011; Culnan & Armstrong, 1999; Dienlin & Metzger, 2016), where they weigh the trade-off between costs and benefits stemming from self-disclosure. Customization (H1a) was expected to be a benefit taken into account in this mental calculation, although this mediating variable was not enhanced for those exposed to high EECSD, while the cost in terms of privacy concerns (H3a) was heightened. This finding is also in line with previous research of self-disclosure (Mothersbaugh et al, 2012). As a result the risks outweighed the benefits, and the net effect was thus negative. This also supports the idea that privacy costs are enhanced when another party encourages self-disclosure (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977).

Previous research has put forward that privacy concerns are negatively charged emotions and are linked to feelings of vulnerability (Moon, 2000; Dinev & Hart, 2004), decreased trust (Martin & Murphy., 2017, and anxiety or discomfort (Söderlund, 2023), and our results clearly indicate that customers are less satisfied when being concerned about their privacy (Söderlund, 2023).

Another possible explanation for this result can be that transparency about data handling has previously been suggested as a method for firms to mitigate customers' privacy concerns that lead to vulnerability (Martin & Murphy, 2017). However, no such transparency was provided during the examined service encounter. In the scenarios, the employee did not provide any explanation of how the data will be used or handled, and as a result, privacy concerns increased drastically.

5.2.5 Perceived Employee Warmth, Competence, and Humanness (H4a-H4b, SRQ1a & SRQ1b)

The results show that, when customers are exposed to high EECSD, they perceive that the employee is less warm and competent, ultimately causing them to perceive the employee as less of a human, which in turn significantly decreases satisfaction. Thus, perceived employee warmth, competence, and humanness mediate the relationship between EECSD and customer satisfaction, and empirical support for SRQ1a, SRQ1b and H4a-H4b was found.

Although we did not hypothesize the direction of the impact of EECSD on these variables, as previous literature provided contrasting arguments, there was indeed an effect, although negative.

The results can be explained by the findings from Aiello et al. (2020), where customers exposed to high EECSD likely perceived the customer data collection attempts made by the employee to be too self-interested, aggressive and pushy. In turn, this could make the customer perceive the employee as unfriendly, and thus less warm. This could also be explained by Fiske et al. (2007), where warmth is inferred from another party's intent. Customers might have perceived that the employee's attempts of data collection were self-interested, rather than serving the customer, which decreased perceptions of employee warmth.

The results align with Söderlund (2023), where a service robot's request of identification to customers decreased its warmth perceptions. It also aligns with Söderlund (2020b), where employees who broke social norms were seen as less warm and competent. We therefore believe that our result can be explained by these findings. Customers might have perceived that employee attempts to encourage self-disclosure were inappropriate. As too much self-disclosure is seen as inappropriate (Cozby, 1973), these attempts could be seen as the employee violating social norms, which reduced customer perceptions of warmth and competence.

However, the fact that there was no positive impact of EECSD on perceived employee warmth and competence contradicts previous literature, where self-disclosure can help form

positive beliefs about another person and view them as more warm and friendly (Collins & Miller, 1994). This finding therefore contributes to the research on the relationship between self-disclosure and warmth perceptions by contradicting this link.

For humanness, the result that lower warmth and competence leads to lower humanness aligns with previous research on humanness. For instance, it aligns with Haslam (2006), where warmth and competence were found as humanness antecedents, and with Söderlund (2021; Söderlund, 2020b), where lower warmth and competence perceptions lead to lower humanness score. Moreover, the result supports the notion that not all humans are seen as equally human (Epley et al., 2013; Haslam, 2006), and that service workers are frequently dehumanized (Söderlund, 2020b). In fact, our results show that the group exposed to high EECSD scored lower on employee humanness, and we thus believe that previous literature where lower warmth and competence lead to lower humanness can explain this result.

For customer satisfaction, the result that lower warmth and competence leads to lower humanness, ultimately leading to lower satisfaction, is in line with the notion that humanness and satisfaction are positively related. For instance, this supports the notion that humans typically have a positive charge, rather than a negative one (Söderlund, 2021b; Söderlund, 2016; Sears, 1983). Moreover, it is in line with the notion that humanness enhances overall evaluations (e.g. Söderlund, 2020a; Söderlund, 2020b; Söderlund, 2021), and that lower perceived humanness leads to lower attitude towards that person (Söderlund, 2020b). However, it contradicts Söderlund (2020a), where EECSD lead to higher humanness and in turn higher satisfaction. This finding is surprising due to that personal information was examined in both studies. According to Aiello (2020), trust is a factor of particular importance, as a lack of trust between the customer and the employee when an employee ask for personal information can lead to weaker perceptions of employee warmth. The difference between the results obtained by Söderlund (2020a) may be explained by the fact that the customers trusted the employee in our study to a lesser extent. Our results is although in line with Söderlund (2023), where the service agent's demand for identification lead to lower perceived warmth. For example, the customers were asked "How do you know this person? Is this person a romantic partner, family member, or friend?" in the experiment, which is similar to identification of the customers' travel partner.

6.0 Conclusion

In this final chapter, we present a conclusion, followed by an elaboration of the study's practical implications and theoretical contribution. Lastly, limitations of the study and suggestions for future research are presented.

6.1 Conclusion

Customer data collection has become a widespread phenomena among firms to be able to match their offers with customer needs, and is expected to grow exponentially in the coming years (Statista, 2024a). The service-encounter is a situation where firms collect data from their customers to better match their offers to customer needs. To pinpoint those needs, employees must ask customers questions that encourages them to self-disclose information regarding those needs. Thus, customer self-disclosure is a required activity (Söderlund, 2020a). Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate a series of possible consequences stemming from EECSD in the service encounter, and whether EECSD and these consequences have an impact on customer satisfaction. Having examined that, this study provide answers to the research questions:

- a) How does EECSD affect perceived customization, the customer's own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, competence, and humanness in the service encounter?*
- b) How does perceived customization, the customer's own effort, privacy concerns, perceived employee warmth, competence, humanness, and EECSD influence customer satisfaction?*

The study found the following: 1) EECSD in the service encounter has a positive impact on the customer's perceived own effort and privacy concerns. These fully mediated EECSD's impact on customer satisfaction and ultimately lead to lower customer satisfaction, 2) EECSD has a negative impact on perceived employee warmth and perceived employee competence. This partially mediated the effect on customer satisfaction and reduced customer satisfaction by reducing perceived humanness, 3) EECSD leads to no difference in perceived

customization which causes no difference in customer satisfaction, and 4) EECSD produces a significantly *lower* total level of customer satisfaction.

Our results are in line with the notion that too much self-disclosure can produce negative effects such as vulnerability (Moon, 2000; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977) and loss of information control (Mothersbaugh et al., 2012; Dinev & Hart, 2004; Smith et al., 2011; Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). The negative consequences of EECSD can lead to discussions of whether customers really are aware of benefits and costs from self-disclosure (Smith et al., 2011; Culnan & Armstrong, 1999; Dienlin & Metzger, 2016), as they did not perceive any benefits of self-disclosure in this study. This can explain the reduction in customer satisfaction. However, these results are contradictory to evidence produced by Söderlund (2020a), which showed that EECSD has an influence on some variables that positively impact customer satisfaction, while other variables negatively impact customer satisfaction, leading to an overall increase in customer satisfaction.

6.2 Theoretical Contribution

With this study we have expanded the theoretical understanding about consequences of EECSD and their impact on customer satisfaction through warmth, humanness and competence. Our findings show support for that warmth, humanness and competence are consequences of EECSD. Further, previous literature has mainly studied warmth and competence as antecedents to customers' willingness to self-disclose (e.g. Aiello et al., 2020), thus this thesis also contributes to this research stream by examining them in their roles as consequences of being encouraged to self-disclose. More specifically, our findings suggest that being exposed to self-disclose as a customer can have a negative impact on warmth, competence, and humanness perceptions of the encourager of self-disclosure.

The findings contribute to the previous research of self-disclosure, through both contradicting and confirming what is known in this sparse field of research about consequences of EECSD in the service encounter and its impact on customer satisfaction. The results from our study contributes by confirming evidence produced by Söderlund (2020a) of that EECSD positively influence customer own effort and privacy concerns. However, the results contradict previous

research that EECSD is positively associated with employee humanness, perceived customization, and customer satisfaction (Söderlund, 2020a). In this study, the opposite was found: it has a negative influence on humanness and customer satisfaction, while no influence on perceived customization, and this is therefore an interesting contribution. The specific context and service (travel recommendations), can therefore potentially be a factor that may influence how customers react to being encouraged to self-disclose. More research is needed to strengthen this further.

Further, this study contributes to the self-disclosure literature through introducing a new way to manipulate EECSD, that has to, the authors' knowledge, not been applied before. This may also be a possible explanation of why the results differed from the study conducted by Söderlund (2020a) who used a different manipulation. We believe that this method is a more rigorous way to manipulate EECSD as it introduces less differences between the treatments (e.g. total number of questions), which is something that should be done in experiments (Söderlund, 2018; Bell, et al., 2022). More research using this method of manipulating EECSD is needed to determine if the same outcomes as this study will be found.

6.3 Implications for Service-Team Leaders

This study sheds light on the customers' responses to data collection through the lens of self-disclosure in the service encounter and the results showed that it had an impact on responses that negatively influence customer satisfaction, (customer's own perceived effort, privacy concerns, warmth, competence, and humanness), and therefore reduced customer satisfaction. Thus, this contradicts the theory suggesting that firms should be market-oriented and collect customer data to enjoy greater business performance (Jaworski & Kohli, 1993). This study introduces that collecting customer data, through the lens of EECSD, leads to a lower customer satisfaction. However, higher customer satisfaction has been shown in previous studies to be positively associated with business performance (Anderson et al., 1994; Fornell, 1992). Therefore, service team-leaders, that manage front-line employees, have a reason to evaluate how they can find ways to mitigate these negative consequences of encouraging customers to self-disclose in service encounters.

More specifically, the results showed that privacy concerns had the greatest effect on reduced satisfaction, and these therefore require specific attention from service team-leaders to mitigate. Previous research has shown that there are several ways to mitigate privacy concerns, such as providing transparency in how they use customer data (Martin & Murphy., 2017). That can be done through providing customers with information about how the collected data in the service-encounter will be used directly in the interaction with the frontline employee.

Our findings also suggest that EECSD increased customer own effort and which had a negative impact on customer satisfaction. Further, customer own effort had the second strongest negative effect on customer satisfaction. This sheds light on the fact that service team-leaders need to direct their attention to make the service encounter less effortful for customers in order to make them more satisfied with the service experience. One potential way to do so is to develop a specific training program for frontline employees to ensure that customer data is collected more carefully during service encounters to not risk negative customer overall evaluations. The frontline employees need to be trained to ask the right questions, that require less customer effort to respond to. Our findings suggest that such questions might be superficial questions that are of less intimate nature.

6.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

First, this study focuses solely on a service-encounter at a travel agency, which may limit the ability to draw generalizations across more industries. Given the time frame and the purpose of this paper, our aim was not to compare multiple services against each other in a single study, but rather to answer the call for more studies of other services from Söderlund (2020a). The findings of this study suggest that there are both differences and similarities between different services, therefore it would be interesting if future research could investigate EECSD in additional services and clarify this further.

Second, this utilized an experimental design in the form of a text-based role-play scenario, which has been commonly used in marketing research (e.g. Söderlund, 2020a; Bitner, 1990), and was considered appropriate due to its convenience and relatively cheap nature

(Söderlund, 2018). However, role-play scenarios can create artificial situations, because participants are instructed to just imagine themselves being in a situation (Söderlund, 2018). Thus, testing EECSD in a service encounter with a field experiment, could be a suggestion for future research, as it could address the drawbacks of the role-play experiment by being more realistic (Söderlund, 2018). Additionally, examining EECSD through conducting a field experiment could be interesting as both EECSD (the questions that the employee asked), and customer self-disclosure (the answers to the questions) were manipulated in this study. It is possible that the responses to the variables that were measured would have been different if the customers could respond to the questions asked by the employee in the treatment voluntarily. In other words, if the customer could choose what information to self-disclose themselves. It could therefore be of particular interest for future research to study EECSD through conducting a field experiment.

Third, this study was delimited to the variables perceived customization, privacy concerns, customer's perceived own effort, perceived employee warmth, competence, humanness, and customer satisfaction. A suggestion for future research is therefore to include additional variables that could be the direct response to EECSD. For instance, this study examined customer satisfaction as the dependent variable, and this has been shown to boost behaviors such as word-of-mouth, and purchase intention (Anderson et al., 1994; Fornell, 1992). Future studies could thus also measure behavioral intentions such as willingness to engage in word-of-mouth.

As described earlier in section 3.2.1, another potential limitation can be that the manipulation of EECSD could have been too strong, and of less realistic nature. Potentially, that can have biased the customers responses to the questionnaire items, for example for perceived customization, and have affected the results of this study. A suggestion for future research is then to conduct a study where the manipulation of EECSD is weaker and more realistic. That could be interesting to combine, with a field experiment, because only scripted role-play scenarios have yet been utilized, to the authors' knowledge. A field experiment with a weaker and more realistic manipulation, could therefore potentially provide new insights to the domain of EECSD in a service encounter.

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8.0 Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: The Experiment

8.1.1 Study Description and Consent

Hello! The purpose of this study is to examine customer reactions a service encounter situation. You will be asked to read a scenario where you imagine that you are the customer in a service encounter who wants to book a vacation. Following this, you will be asked to answer a few questions about the service encounter. The results will serve as the basis for our Master Thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics within the field Business and Management. Your answers will remain entirely anonymous.

Thank you for participating.

If you have any question, feel free to contact us:

50688@student.hhs.se

42546@student.hhs.se

Consent to participation in student's survey:

The student's project. As an integral part of the educational program at the Stockholm School of Economics, enrolled students complete an individual thesis. This work is sometimes based upon surveys and interviews connected to the subject. Participation is naturally entirely voluntary, and this text is intended to provide you with necessary information about that may concern your participation in the study or interview. You can at any time withdraw your consent and your data will thereafter be permanently erased.

Confidentiality. Anything you say or state in the survey or to the interviewers will be held strictly confidential and will only be made available to supervisors, tutors and the course management team.

Secured storage of data. All data will be stored and processed safely by the SSE and will be permanently deleted when the project is completed.

No personal data will be published. The thesis written by the students will not contain any information that may identify you as participant to the survey or interview subject.

Your rights under GDPR. You are welcome to visit <https://www.hhs.se/en/about-us/data-protection/> in order read more and obtain information on your rights related to personal data.

Consent: I have read the information above and consent to participate in this study.

- ☐ Yes, I have read the information above and agree to participate
- ☐ No, I would not like to participate

8.1.2 The treatment - Low EECSD

Imagine that you want to book a holiday to another country and you need help to book the trip. You decide to reach out to a Travel agency, which is a company that provides personal service to help you book a trip. They offer flights and hotels in a package at different destinations across the world and can provide you with personal recommendations for your trip. You go to their office for a drop-in meeting. The travel agent that you have a meeting with is named Kim. Kim helps you find a destination, flight, and hotel that is adapted to your needs.

This is what happens in your conversation with Kim:

- “Hi and welcome, how may I help you today?”, asks Kim.
- “Hi! I would like to book a trip abroad”, you say.
- “Okay, exciting! Do you already know which of our destinations you want to travel to?”, asks Kim.
- “No, not really”, you say.
- “I see, I will ask you some questions to be able to give you a suggestion”, says Kim.
- “That would be great, thank you!”, you say.
- “Can you tell me about where you have traveled before? What is your favorite country to travel to?” asks Kim.

You tell Kim about your favorite country to visit.

- “Okay. Are you more interested in exploring cities or relaxing at a beach or resort? Or a destination that offers both?”, asks Kim.
- “I want to relax on the beach and enjoy a lot of sunny weather”, you say.
- “I see. When do you want to travel? Are there any specific dates or weeks you are considering?”, asks Kim.
- “No, I’m very flexible with the dates, but in the near future”, you say.
- “Ok, good, do you have a budget in mind for the trip? That will help me find the best options for flights and accommodations”, says Kim.

You tell Kim about your budget.

- “Great. Would that budget be for just yourself or are you traveling together with someone?”, asks Kim.
- “It will be me, and another adult”, you say.
- “Got it. On this trip, do you want to stay in a hotel or a private apartment?”, asks Kim.
- “I think we prefer to stay in a hotel”, you say.
- “Okay. Do you want any specific amenities at the hotel? For example a pool and a gym”, asks Kim.
- “I want something simple, but it would be nice to have access to a pool,” you say.
- “I see. Do you want the hotel to have a private beach?”, asks Kim.
- “Yes that would be great”, you say.
- “Okay. Do you prefer to have a kitchenette in your hotel room?”, asks Kim.
- ” Yes, that would be nice”, you say.
- “Do you want a private balcony connected to the room?”, asks Kim.
- “Yes”, you say.
- ”Would you prefer a room with sea view?”, asks Kim.

You tell Kim that you prefer a room with a sea view.

- “Okay, do you prefer that the hotel offers room service?”, asks Kim.
- “Room service is not necessary”, you say.
- ”I see. Do you have any preferences for flight times, like morning or evening departures?”, asks Kim.
- ”Yes, I would prefer an evening departure”, you say.
- "Okay, are you open to changing flights or do you want a direct flight to your destination?”, asks Kim.
- ”I would like to take a direct flight”, you say.
- “Then, do you need assistance with transportation, such as airport transfers or car rentals during your trip?”, asks Kim.
- “Yes, pre-booked airport transfer would be nice”, you say.
- “Okay. And regarding the length of the trip, would you prefer 2 weeks or 1 week?”, asks Kim.
- “I think one week is enough”, you say.
- “Would you want to travel during a holiday season or a non-holiday season?”, asks Kim.
- “I want to travel during holiday season”, you say.
- “Finally, do you have any particular preferences when it comes to payment options?”, asks Kim.
- “We would like to pay in advance”, you say.
- “OK, I think I have a good idea of what you are looking for. I suggest a trip to Santorini, Greece and stay at this hotel. Have you been to Santorini before?”, asks Kim while showing you pictures of the hotel.

- “No”, you say.
- “It is an island with stunning sunsets, beautiful whitewashed buildings, and beaches where you can have a relaxing time. It is one of our most popular travel destinations”, says Kim.
- ”Santorini...Okay, Kim, thanks for this. I must talk to my travel companion first, but I will get back to you when we are ready to book”, you say.
- “Thank you, you are welcome back when you are ready to make the booking or whether you want other recommendations of the travel destinations that we offer”, says Kim.

8.1.3 The treatment - High EECSO

Imagine that you want to book a holiday to another country and you need help to book the trip. You decide to reach out to a Travel agency, which is a company that provides personal service to help you book a trip. They offer flights and hotels in a package at different destinations across the world and can provide you with personal recommendations for your trip. You go to their office for a drop-in meeting. The travel agent that you have a meeting with is named Kim. Kim helps you find a destination, flight, and hotel that is adapted to your needs.

This is what happens in your conversation with Kim:

- “Hi and welcome, how may I help you today?”, asks Kim.
- “Hi! I would like to book a trip abroad”, you say.
- “Okay, exciting! Do you already know which of our destinations you want to travel to?”, asks Kim.
- “No, not really”, you say.
- “I see, I will ask you some questions to be able to give you a suggestion”, says Kim.
- “That would be great, thank you!”, you say.
- “Can you tell me about where you have traveled before? What is your favorite country to travel to?” asks Kim.

You tell Kim about your favorite country to visit.

- ”Okay. Are you more interested in exploring cities or relaxing at a beach or resort? Or a destination that offers both?”, asks Kim.
- “I want to relax on the beach and enjoy a lot of sunny weather”, you say.
- “I see, when do you want to travel? Are there any specific dates or weeks you are considering?”, asks Kim.
- “No, I’m very flexible with the dates, but in the near future”, you say.
- “Ok, good, do you have a budget in mind for the trip? That will help me find the best options for flights and accommodations”, says Kim.

You tell Kim about your budget.

- “Great. Is that budget just for yourself or are you traveling together with someone?”, asks Kim.
- “It will be me, and another adult”, you say.
- “Got it. How do you know this person? Is this person a romantic partner, family member, or friend?”, asks Kim.
- “I will travel with my partner”, you say.
- “Okay. Is the trip intended to bring you closer or is it to just get away from the daily stress?”, asks Kim.
- “I want the trip to bring me and my partner closer”, you say.
- “I see. Do you see this trip as a way to reconnect and talk about important matters in your relationship?”, asks Kim.
- “I want to make this trip to repair certain things in our relationship”, you say.

- ” Okay. Are there things that are not good in your relationship at the moment?”, asks Kim.
- ” Yes, there are things that are not good”, you say.
- “Who is primarily responsible for your situation in the relationship?”, asks Kim.
- “I am responsible”, you say.
- “I see, what has happened?”, asks Kim.

You tell Kim what you have done and what has happened.

- “Okay. How do you feel right now?”, asks Kim.
- “I feel terrible. It feels like I am the worst person in the world right now”, you say.
- “I see. Have you tried couples counseling?”, asks Kim.
- “Yes, we have tried that”, you say.
- “Okay. Do you want to go to a private peaceful retreat where you can reflect on what happened?” asks Kim.
- “Yes”, you say.
- “Then, do you want a romantic hotel where you can rekindle the spark in your relationship?”, Kim says.

- “Yes, a romantic hotel would be nice”, you say.
- “I see. When it comes to the flights, are you or your partner a member of any specific loyalty program?”, Kim asks.
- “No, not that I am aware of”, you say.
- “Then, do you want to prebook any meals or alcoholic beverages on the flights?”, Kim asks.
- “A vegan meal would be nice, but we do not drink alcohol”, you say.

- “OK, I think I have a good idea of what you are looking for. I suggest a trip to Santorini, Greece and stay at this hotel. Have you been to Santorini before?”, asks Kim while showing you pictures of the hotel.
- “No”, you say.
- “It is an island with stunning sunsets, beautiful whitewashed buildings, and beaches where you can have a relaxing time. It is one of our most popular travel destinations”, says Kim.
- ”Santorini...Okay, Kim, thanks for this. I must talk to my travel companion first, but I will get back to you when we are ready to book”, you say.
- “Thank you, you are welcome back when you are ready to make the booking or whether you want other recommendations of the travel destinations that we offer”, says Kim.

8.1.4 The Questionnaire used in the Pre-study

In the conversation with Kim, I provided personal information about myself. (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree Completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that is closely related to who I am (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided private information about myself (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that made me feel vulnerable (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

I felt that too much personal information about me was collected (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that was sensitive (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim put a lot of effort into helping me (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim tried hard to find a suitable trip for me (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim expended much energy to help me (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The trip suggested was tailor-made for my needs (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The trip suggested was adapted to my personal preferences (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The trip suggested was made with full attention to my specific needs (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the travel booking service? (1 = Very dissatisfied, 10 = Very satisfied)

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the travel booking service? (1 = Very dissatisfied, 10 = Very satisfied)

Imagine a travel booking service that is perfect in every respect. How near or far from this ideal do you find this travel booking service? (1 = Very far from, 10 = Cannot get any closer)

What was the name of the travel agent?

- ☐ Jimmy
- ☐ Mimmy
- ☐ Kim

What was this study about?

- ☐ Booking a table at a restaurant
- ☐ Booking a trip
- ☐ Online shopping
- ☐ Mobile phones

What is your age?

What is your gender?

8.1.5 The Questionnaire used in the Main-study

In the conversation with Kim, I provided personal information about myself. (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree Completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that is closely related to who I am (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided private information about myself (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that made me feel vulnerable (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

In the conversation with Kim, I provided information that was sensitive (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

I felt that too much personal information about me was collected (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The information I provided about myself in the interaction with Alex made me concerned about my privacy (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

It felt embarrassing to reveal what I did reveal about myself (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

It bothered me to give the requested information to the firm (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

I am concerned that the information I provided about myself could be misused (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

To reveal what I did in the interaction with Kim could make others evaluate me negatively (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim put a lot of effort into helping me (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim tried hard to find a suitable trip for me (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim expended much energy to help me (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim had to work hard to help me (1 = Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = Not very effortful at all, 10 = Very effortful)

To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = Not demanding at all, 10 = Very effortful)

To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = Not energy-consuming at all, 10 = Very energy-consuming)

To answer Kim's questions about me was... (1 = Easy, 10 = Difficult)

This question serves as an attention check. Please select the word "orange" below.

- ☐ Apple
- ☐ Banana
- ☐ Orange
- ☐ Pear

The trip suggested was tailor-made for my needs (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The trip suggested was adapted to my personal preferences (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The trip suggested was made with full attention to my specific needs (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The trip suggested recognized the uniqueness of my preferences (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

The trip suggested was indeed based on my specifications (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics (1= Cold, 10 = Warm)

What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics (1= Unhelpful, 10 = Helpful)

What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics (1= Harsh, 10 = Gentle)

What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics (1= Incompetent, 10=Competent)

What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics (1= Unintelligent, 10=Intelligent)

What is your view of Kim in terms of the following characteristics (1= Uncapable, 10=Capable)

This question serves as an attention check. Please select the third option below.

- ☐ Strongly disagree
- ☐ Somewhat disagree
- ☐ Neither agree nor disagree
- ☐ Somewhat agree
- ☐ Strongly agree

Kim behaved very much as a human (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim was humanlike (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

Kim acted like humans typically do (1= Do not agree at all, 10 = Agree completely)

How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the travel booking service? (1 = Very dissatisfied, 10 = Very satisfied)

To what extent does this service meet your expectations? (1 = Not at all, 10 = Totally)

Imagine a travel booking service that is perfect in every respect. How near or far from this ideal do you find this travel booking service? (1 = Very far from, 10 = Cannot get any closer)

What was the name of the travel agent?

- ☐ Jimmy
- ☐ Mimmy
- ☐ Kim

What was this study about?

- ☐ Booking a table at a restaurant
- ☐ Booking a trip
- ☐ Online shopping
- ☐ Mobile phones

What is your age?

What is your gender?

8.2 Appendix B: Message sent to the participants after completion of the study

Hello,

Thank you for completing our survey and contributing to our master thesis! This message is to inform you that the purpose of this study is to investigate a series of possible consequences stemming from employee encouragement of customer self-disclosure in the service encounter, and whether employee encouragement of customer self-disclosure and these consequences have an impact on customer satisfaction. This information was withheld from you when conducting the survey in order to not affect your responses.

Thank you again for your participation and do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions!

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8.3 Appendix C: Pearson's Correlation Test

	ECCSD	Customer satisfaction	Perceived customization	The customer's perceived own effort	Privacy concerns	Perceived employee warmth	Perceived employee competence	Perceived employee humanness
ECCSD	1	-.395**	-.015	.758**	.882**	-.181**	-.236**	-.191**
Customer satisfaction	-.395**	1	.078	-.483**	-.480**	.725**	.813**	.728**
Perceived customization	-.015	.078	1	-.055	-.026	.678**	.700**	.515**
The customer's perceived own effort	.758**	-.483**	-.055	1	.835**	-.264**	-.304**	-.259
Privacy concerns	.882**	-.480**	-.026	.835**	1	-.256**	-.286**	-.255**
Perceived employee warmth	-.181**	.725**	.678**	-.264**	-.256**	1	.821**	.686**
Perceived employee competence	-.236**	.813**	.700**	-.304**	-.286**	.821**	1	.650**
Perceived employee humanness	-.191**	.728**	.515**	-.259**	-.255**	.686**	.650**	1

** Significant at the $p = .01$ level

9.0 Gen-AI Appendix

In the final stage of writing this thesis, Grammarly Pro was used to check for spelling- and grammatical errors in already existing paragraphs of text. To use Grammarly, each paragraph was copied from the thesis and pasted into the tool. The tool was considered to contribute to increase the quality of this thesis through providing tips for how the readability and clarity of already existing text could be enhanced. An additional reason for deciding to use Grammarly for the aforementioned reason was that it was judged to potentially have the ability to detect minor errors made by the writers that otherwise risked passing by the authors unnoticed.

However, no direct implementation of the suggestions from Grammarly was adopted without making sure that the message of the original paragraphs was ensured. A risk we came across when using the tool was that it in some instances could miss the message of some paragraphs. Further, it could also provide suggestions to change certain words, that could not be changed due to already adopted definitions in this essay. To mitigate this, every suggestion was discussed and compared to the original text. In general, our reflections are that Grammarly is a helpful tool to improve language, but each generated suggestion requires careful review before it can be accepted to ensure the original message do not get lost.

The tool's contribution was considered to be limited, but did however contribute to improving the language and readability of the thesis. Grammarly is not referenced in the thesis, as it only contributed to this thesis with suggestions on single words, and minor re-formulations of text.