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Customers' behaviour depiction in the Italian railway transportation: the role of customer-centricity

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Abstract:

Purpose: In the actual fast-changing socio-economic context, it is meaningful for firms not only to satisfy and engage customers, but also to make customers feel at the center of firm's strategies. Consequently, the study aims at investigating the role of perceived customer centricity in the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer engagement.

Methodology: A quantitative methodology was adopted using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM). Data were collected through an online survey administered to railway transportation passengers. 308 valid responses were gathered. Data analysis was performed firstly through a confirmatory factor analysis to evaluate the conceptual model, and then through a path analysis to test the study's hypothesis.

Findings: The results show a non-significant direct impact between customer satisfaction and customer engagement, whereas a significant and positive effect of customer centricity as a mediating variable in the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer engagement emerged.

Research limitations/implications: Employing a customer-centric view of customer centricity provides the literature with a fresh point of view of this construct, which has approached mostly from a firm perspective. Limitations are linked to the specific country and service context considered in the study, further research can take in account other countries and service contexts for the generalization of the results.

Originality/Value: Existing research has considered a vast amount of constructs to detect customers' behaviour, this paper considers perceived customer centricity which has been less investigated.

Keywords: Customer centricity, customer satisfaction, customer engagement, railway transportation industry, structural equation model

Paper type: Research paper

1. Introduction:

In the current fast-changing business scenario, customers can conveniently compare services and decide how to interact with firms, thereby satisfying their needs in multiple ways. For firms, it becomes essential to communicate the value of their service offerings and to understand customers' behaviour, by satisfying and engaging customers, to drive their strategies and nurture their competitive advantage (Mittal et al., 2018; Otto et al., 2020).

Accordingly, a vast amount of management and marketing literature has focused on customers' behaviour. On the one hand, scholars focused on service-related factors that influence customers' behaviour, such as perceived value. It refers to customer evaluation on the discrepancy between the benefits they obtained with the sacrifices they performed (Sumaedi et al., 2014a, b). On the other hand, they deepened customer-related factors, such as customer satisfaction and customer engagement, which are paramount and essential in the current literature to improve firm performance and survival (Mittal et al., 2018). Customer satisfaction refers to a good emotional state that results from a positive evaluation of the customer's experiences with a company (Zhou et al., 2018). Many important performance consequences have been connected to consumers' satisfaction as a meaningful driver of behavioural intentions (Chaudhuri et al., 2021a, b). Customer engagement is seen as the frequent interactions with a focal object (brand or medium), beyond the transactional motive of making a purchase (Jaakkola and Alexander, 2014).

Despite the well-established literature about these concepts, some scholars have started in the last decades to consider another factor that can contribute to detect customers' behaviour, which is customer centricity. Customer centricity is conceptualized as the focus of firms on customers' needs and their prioritization (Kumar et al., 2008; Shah et al., 2006). Particularly, scholars provided different definitions depending on their unit of analysis. For example, Crecelius et al. (2019) took in consideration the customer-centric organizational structure, defining it as the degree to which the firm's business units are aligned to distinct customer groups; Cheng and Dogan (2008) detected customer-centric marketing activities, seeing it as the practice in which firms focus on the needs, wants, and resources of customers as the starting point of the planning process. The literature has largely affirmed the need for firms' to ensure they are perceived as strongly customer-centric to achieve and maintain their competitive advantage (Lee et al. 2015; Shah et al., 2006; Selden and MacMillan, 2006). Indeed, most existing research pointed out that being perceived as customer-centric contributes to firm performance and success (Fader 2012; Lee et al. 2015; Crecelius et al. 2019).

However, existing literature explored customer centricity by adopting a firm-centered perspective, depicting the management factors to embrace it. In other words, this concept has not been empirically examined from the point of view of customers' perceptions (Habel et al., 2019). Moreover, limited research has explored the relationships between customer centricity and other constructs of customers' behaviour. Therefore, by filling these gaps, this study aims at employing a customer-centered approach of customer centricity, by exploring and measuring the role of customer centricity in relation to other constructs. Accordingly, the following research questions is drawn:

RQ. What is the role of customer centricity in the depiction of customers' behaviour?

Empirically, a structural modeling equation (SEM) is performed on 308 valid responses collected among customers of railway transportation in Italy, by particularly investigating the role of customer centricity in the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer engagement.

By providing a customer-centered approach of customer centricity, the study contributes theoretically to assess how this concept is related to customer satisfaction and customer engagement. Moreover, it provides managerial implications, suggesting managers to focus on the implementation of customer-centric actions, strategies and vision.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, the research hypothesis are presented. In section 3, the research method is explained and in section 4, findings are presented. Finally, in section 5, discussion and implications are provided. Finally, in section 7, conclusions, limitations and future research are described.

2. Conceptual model and hypothesis development:

2.1 Perceived Value and Customer Satisfaction:

Perceived Value (PV) is a debated complex construct in both management and marketing literature, especially in the service sector (Boksberger and Melsen, 2011). The discussion is linked to the perspectives through which PV is conceptualized, such as the utilitarian and the behavioural perspective. According to the utilitarian perspective, PV is the customer's overall assessment of the utility of a product, or a service based on perceptions of what is received and what is given (Zeithaml, 1988) or "a ratio or trade-off of total benefits received to total sacrifices" (Patterson and Spreng, 1997, p. 416). From the behavioural perspective, PV is given by a multidimensional conceptualization of perceived value (Suphasomboon and Vassanadumrongdee, 2022). According to this perspective, PV depends on several and different dimensions, such as functional, social, emotional and perceived benefits, and non-monetary factors, such as time, effort and energy (Wang et al., 2004), which strongly contribute to understanding customers' actual behaviors (Jiang and Hong, 2023; Yan et al., 2024). At this regard, scholars have focused the attention on the antecedents, outcomes and the interrelations of perceived value to deepen how the customer behaves. Among the several constructs taken into account (e.g. service quality as antecedent (Li and Shang, 2020), customer loyalty and customer trust as an outcome (Chen et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2012)), scholars have also focused on Customer Satisfaction (CS).

CS is defined by Oliver (1980) as the gap between customer expectations and actual feelings before and after experiencing products or services. This concept refers to a good emotional state that results from a favourable evaluation of the consumer's experiences with a company (Zhou et al., 2018, Agag et al., 2023), which influences repurchase and word-of-mouth communication (Islam et al., 2021).

From the literature, CS emerges as a construct that is correlated with PV (Keh and Sun, 2008). Indeed, the customers' perceived value will directly result in whether they are or not satisfied according to what they feel. Customers will develop a satisfied attitude if the perceived value is profitable for them. The value of the service offered brings satisfaction to customers by fulfilling their needs (Angelova and Bekiri, 2021). This relationship has been particularly deepened in the service contexts. Slack et al. (2019) have analyzed how the two constructs influence each other, thereby considering both the effect of PV on CS and then the effect of CS on PV of supermarket customers. El-Adly and Eid (2016) have deepened the effect of PV on CS in regard to malls in the United Arab Emirates, by discovering a strong relationship between PV and CS. Also, Cankül et al. (2024) conducted their study in restaurants, finding out that PV has a significant positive effect on CS. To the authors' knowledge, this relationship has still been less explored in the railway transportation sector. Indeed, several studies mostly focused on customer satisfaction and service quality (Miranda et al., 2017; Wang et al. 2020). Nevertheless, drawing on the discussed literature on service contexts, the following hypothesis is developed, as shown in Fig. 1:

H1: Perceived value has a positive and significant impact on Customer Satisfaction.

2.2 Customer Satisfaction and Customer Engagement:

Customer Engagement (CE) is a high discussed topic in literature, due to the different conceptualizations and dimensionalities proposed (Islam et al., 2019). Indeed, on the one hand, some scholars have conceptualized CE as unidimensional. Van Doorn et al. (2010) defined CE as the manifestation of customers toward a firm which is the result of motivational drivers, Jaakkola and Alexander (2014) considered CE as the behaviours through which customers go beyond what is fundamental to transactions, interacting with the focal object and/or other actors. On the other hand, most scholars have conceptualized CE as a multi-dimensional construct encompassing cognitive, affective and behavioral dimensions (Brodie et al., 2011; Claffey and Brady, 2017; Dwivedi, 2015; Bowden et al., 2017; Dijkmans et al., 2015). It can be defined the comprehensive performance of a

customer's investment in cognition, emotion, and behavior in the interaction process of value co-creation with the focus object (Linda and Chen, 2014), in which the customer's psychological level is given by cognition and emotion jointly (Yan et al., 2024).

Brodie et al. (2013, p. 107) view CE as “a multidimensional concept comprising cognitive, emotional, and/ or behavioral dimensions [that] plays a central role in the process of relational exchange.” Drawing on the multidimensionality of CE, this study adopts the conceptualization proposed by Hollebeek et al. (2014). According to them, CE is expressed by cognitive processing, affection and activation. The first is defined as “a consumer's level of brand-related thought processing and elaboration in a particular consumer/brand interaction”, the second refers to “a consumer's degree of positive brand-related affect in a particular consumer/brand interaction”, the third is defined as “a consumer's level of energy, effort and time spent on a brand in a particular consumer/brand interaction”. Therefore, CE is characterized by an interactive nature. For this reason, numerous studies have focused on CE in the service context, that is characterized by high customer/firm interactivity (Kumar et al., 2019; Hollebeek et al., 2017).

Particularly, scholars have explored the relationship between CS and CE. Most existing research have asserted that CS influences CE (Hapsari et al., 2017; Thakur, 2018; Gopalakrishna et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2017; Simon and Tossan, 2018). Carlson et al. (2017) found out that CS has a moderating effect on the relationship between the value in brand experience and CE. Simon and Tossan (2018) discussed CS as an antecedent of CE, by highlighting that when a customer is satisfied with the product or brand, it will have an impact on his/her engagement with the brand. Still, Thakur (2018) observed that CE increases when the customer is satisfied. Petzer and VanTonder (2019) affirmed that a high long-term degree of satisfaction will make customers pay more attention to the focus object, thereby stimulating CE. Therefore, we posit the following hypothesis:

H2: Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on Customer Engagement

2.3 The mediating role of Customer Centricity:

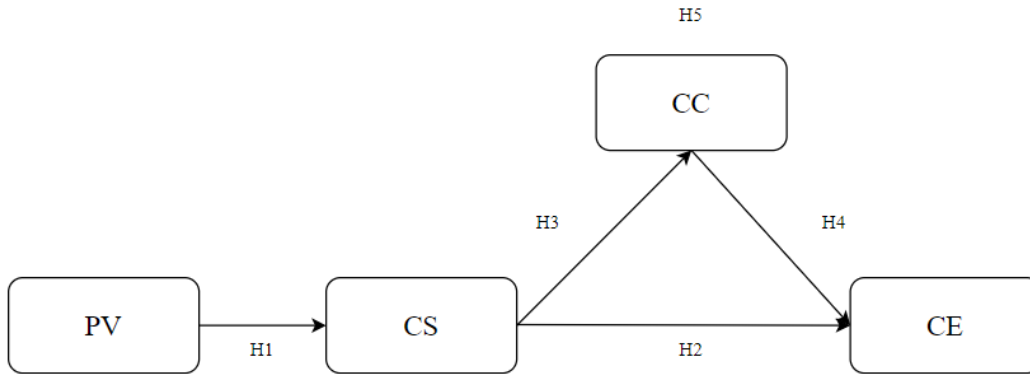
Customer Centricity (CC) is a concept that has been studying for the last 20 years (Lamberti, 2013). It generally refers to the strong focus on addressing customers' interests (Bolton, 2004; Shah et al. 2006; Kumar et al., 2008) and on the active prioritization of customers over internal firm concerns (Jayachandran et al. 2005; Shah et al. 2006; Burmann et al., 2011). For example, Shah et al. (2006) stated that all decisions start with the customer, and Jayachandran et al. (2005, 179) conceptualized a customer-centric management system as a management system where “actions are driven by customer needs and not by the internal concerns of functional areas.” The most existing research has investigated this concept from a firm's perspective (Habel et al., 2019). Indeed, it has been defined as the continuous interaction with customers aimed at generating intelligence and at understanding customer explicit and hidden needs (Lamberti, 2013) or as the degree to which the firm's business units are aligned to distinct customer groups (Crecelius et al., 2019). Only in the last years, scholars have paid attention to conceptualize CC from the customer's perspective. In this regard, Habel et al. (2019) defined CC as “the degree to which a customer perceives a firm to put customers' interests at the center of all its actions”.

Some scholars have deepened the relationship between CS and CC. In this regard, Mulindi et al. (2024) delves into the dynamics of customer satisfaction in the banking sector by informing customer centricity. Using the banking sector customer satisfaction survey data, the study illustrated that bank customers are satisfied when human interaction is relevant for banks, making them feel valued. Kruezer et al. (2020) affirmed that CS is a key for CC in general. Therefore, CS can be conceptualized as an antecedent of CC. Moreover, Wagner and Majchrzak (2007) have explored the relationship between CE and CC, affirming that CE becomes a metric for the success of customer-centric processes. In other words, it means that when CC increases, also CE increases. In this context, it is possible to evaluate whether CC can play a mediating role between CS and CE.

Give these reflections, the following hypothesis are developed:

- H3:** Customer satisfaction has a positive and significant impact on Customer Centricity
- H4:** Customer Centricity has a positive and significant impact on Customer Engagement
- H5:** Customer Centricity mediates the relationship between Customer Satisfaction and Customer Engagement

Fig 1: The conceptual model



3. Methodology:

3.1 Research setting and sample:

This research focuses on investigating customers' behaviour by particularly detecting the role of perceived customer centricity in the railway transportation industry in Italy. This service context has been chosen as research setting since satisfying and engaging passengers could motivate them to frequently use this environmental-friendly collective mean of transports (European Environment Agency, 2020), thereby reducing the impact of using personal means of transports. Italy was chosen because the level of the use of personal means, such as cars, is extremely high. Indeed, in 2022, the number of cars on the roads exceeded 40 million, with a 1% increase compared to 2021 and a 19% increase over the past 20 years. The motorization rate has risen, going from 58.8 cars per 100 inhabitants in 2002 to 68.1 in 2022. This percentage is 10 points higher than in France and Germany (Isfort, 2023).

A non-probabilistic sampling was employed to catch responses from passengers who have used railway transportation. The data were collected on different occasions to ensure greater diversity in the profile of respondents. At this regard, different digital platforms were used, such as social networks, or online specialist forums. A total of 308 valid responses was collected. The sample size is fitting with Bentler and Chou (1987)'s rule, that set the relationship between number of responses and parameters 5:1 for conducting a Structural equation modeling (SEM), and with Nunnally (1967) rule according to which 10 responses per items are needed for SEM.

3.2 Data collection and data analysis:

An online survey was employed to collect data from March to May 2024. The survey was created and administered using Google Form. It was written in Italian, and it included 26 questions, organized into two sections. The questionnaire was introduced by the objective of the study, the average time needed to fill it out, and the policies for data use and privacy. The first section was structured in 4 questions aimed at shaping the respondents' profile. The second section reported the items related to the constructs included in the conceptual model, which were measured with a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 'completely disagree' to 'completely agree'. Particularly, 3 questions were related to PV from Sumaedi et al. (2016), 3 to CS adapted from Oliver (1980), 6 to CC from Habel et al. (2019), and 10 to CE adapted from Hollebeek et al. (2014). More in detail, the construct of CE was declined

in three sub-constructs: Cognitive Process (CP=3 items), Affection (AFF=4 items) and Activation (ACT= 3 items). To alleviate potential alternative explanations of the results, one control variable was included in the analysis to assess CE.

A convenience sample of 20 railway transportation passengers was invited to answer the questionnaire to verify, evaluate and check question comprehension (Lavrakas, 2008). The 308 valid collected responses were analysed through IBM SPSS 22.0 and IBM SPSS AMOS 22. To test the relations among the constructs, a SEM was performed. This method is largely used to analyse the causal relationships between different constructs, which are rooted in theoretical concepts (Iacobucci, 2009). In this study, a two-step method approach is adopted, as suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), consequently it was first performed the evaluation of the measurement model and then the estimation of the structural model.

4. Findings:

4.1 Respondents' profile:

Table 1 summarizes the sample profile. It is shown that the sample is balanced between male and female, the generation most represent in Generation Z, whereas the respondents are mostly from Campania and Lombardy.

Table 1. Sample Profile

Variable	Category	Frequency (308)	Percentage (%)
Gender	F	156	51%
	M	152	49%
Generation	BabyBoomers	16	5%
	GenX	28	9%
	GenZ	165	54%
	Millennials	99	32%
Region	Abruzzo	12	4%
	Aosta Valley	5	2%
	Apulia	18	6%
	Basilicata	5	2%
	Calabria	22	7%
	Campania	57	19%
	Emilia Romagna	11	4%
	Friuli Venezia Giulia	15	5%
	Lazio	25	8%
	Liguria	3	1%
	Lombardy	48	16%
	Marche	10	3%
	Molise	9	3%
	Piedmont	8	3%
	Sardinia	8	3%
	Sicily	9	3%
	Trentino-South Tyrol	7	2%
Tuscany	15	5%	
Umbria	4	1%	
Veneto	17	6%	

4.2 Measurement model estimation:

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed to assess the constructs validity and model fitness by measuring the reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Brown and Moore, 2012). The analysis of factor loadings allowed the measurement of indicators' reliability, Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) measured the constructs' internal consistency reliability, average variance extracted (AVE) measured the convergent validity, and Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion for discriminant validity. Table 2 shows the factor loadings above the 0.50 threshold. ACT1 was deleted since presented a factor loading <0.5; whereas CS3, CC3 and CP3 were deleted because even they presented a factor loading between 0.5 and 0.7, their removal increased AVE over the recommended value (Hair et al., 2021). Furthermore, the values of CA and CR are all higher than 0.70, while the AVE is always higher than the threshold value of 0.50. Finally, following the Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981), for each construct, the square root of its AVE was compared with its highest correlation with other constructs, by showing that the square root of each construct's AVE was greater than its highest correlation with any other construct. Table 3 reports the correlations matrix among the constructs and, along the diagonal the square root of AVE for each construct was reported to allow the verification of discriminant validity (Zaitı̇ and Berteau, 2011).

Table 2. Item descriptive statistics and measurement assessment

CONSTRUCT	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	LOADINGS	CA	CR	AVE
PV	PV1	2.47	0.904	0.80	0.85	0.98	0.94
	PV2	2.79	0.966	0.91			
	PV3	2.77	0.935	0.71			
CS	CS1	2.85	0.964	0.83	0.83	0.85	0.74
	CS2	2.79	0.919	0.86			
CC	CC1	2.42	1.143	0.75	0.89	0.87	0.58
	CC2	2.36	1.035	0.72			
	CC4	2.45	1.065	0.74			
	CC5	2.31	1.080	0.84			
	CC6	2.27	1.057	0.87			
	CE	CP1	2.96	1.146			
	CP2	2.49	1.134	0.80			
	AFF1	2.06	1.000	0.71			
	AFF2	2.14	1.123	0.84			
	AFF3	2.37	1.077	0.90			
	AFF4	2.28	1.199	0.61			
	ACT2	2.82	1.244	0.87			
	ACT3	2.81	1.136	0.76			

Table 3. Intercorrelation's constructs and discriminant validity

	PV	CS	CC	CE
PV	0.96			
CS	0.71	0.86		
CC	0.44	0.55	0.76	
CE	0.38	0.43	0.53	0.74

Since data was obtained from a single source at the same point in time, the Harman's single-factor test was employed to evaluate the common method bias (CMB) (Podsakof et al., 2003). The test consists in loading all the items on one factor to determine if the single factor explains more than 50% of the variance. If the explained variance is > 50%, then common method bias occurs. In this case, the single factor explains 29% of the variance. Moreover, Pavlou et al. (2007) affirmed that CMB is improbable when the correlations are not high (<0.9). In this case, the correlations are not excessive.

4.3 Structural model estimation:

Several indexes were employed to test fit model goodness (West et al. 2012). χ^2/df , SRMR (standardized root mean square residual), RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation), GFI (goodness-of-fit index), AGFI (adjusted goodness-of-fit index), NFI (normed fit index), CFI (comparative fit index). Model fit is acceptable when SRMR < 0.09, RMSEA < 0.08, GFI > 0.9, NFI > 0.9, CFI > 0.95. The proposed model show an acceptable overall fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.99$ ($\chi^2=430$; $df= 144$), SRMR=0.07; RMSEA= 0.079, GFI=0.91, NFI= 0.92, CFI= 0.955.

Regarding the effects between the constructs, the results are showed in Table 4. The results illustrate that the effect of PV on CS is strongly positive and significant ($\beta=0.72$, $p\text{-value}<0.001$), thereby H1 is supported. The study reveals that CS has not a direct significant impact on CE ($\beta=0.18$, $p\text{-value}=0.082$), then H2 is not supported. Instead, the results show a positive and significant indirect effect of CS on CE, mediated by CC. At this regard, it is shown that CS has a positive and significant impact on CC ($\beta=0.58$, $p\text{-value}<0.001$), CC has a positive and significant effect on CE ($\beta=0.42$, $p\text{-value}=0.001$), and that the indirect effect between CS and CE mediated by CC ($\beta=0.25$, $p\text{-value}=0.01$). Therefore, a full mediation occurs, supporting H3, H4, and H5 (Table 5). Particularly, to conduct the mediation analysis, the paper implements the bootstrap procedure to verify the magnitude and the statistical significance of the indirect effect. Then, according to Preacher and Hayes (2008), the bootstrap confidence intervals method with 5,000 iterations was used to test the significance of indirect effects. Finally, regarding the control variable, it is worth noting that the Gender has not a significant impact on CE, thereby the characteristics of the sample do not affect the analysis ($\beta=0.048$; $p\text{-value}= 0.5$).

Table 4. Structural model results

Hypothesis	Paths	Estimate	S.E.	t-value	p-value	Remarks
H1	PV -> CS	0.72	0.074	11.662	***	Supported
H2	CS-> CE	0.18	0.049	1.739	0.082	Not supported
H3	CS -> CC	0.58	0.065	8.622	***	Supported
H4	CC -> CE	0.42	0.065	3.210	***	Supported

$p\text{-value}<0.001$ ***

Table 5. Mediation analysis results

Hypothesis	Path	Estimate (Indirect Effect)	Confidence interval		P-value	Remarks
			Lower bound	Upper bound		
H5	CS -> CC -> CE	0.25	0.11	0.42	0.01	Supported

5. Discussion and implications:

The results provide insights about the levels of perceptions of perceived value, customer satisfaction, customer engagement and customer centricity regarding railway transportation in Italy, in order to deepen customers' behaviour. First of all, it is possible to observe that the mean of the respondents' answers with the statements are all around 2.5, which is the middle value of the Likert scale used in this study. However, it is worth noting that the majority of responses' standard deviation of the responses are above 1, which means that there is a high degree of discrepancy among responses, thereby the perceptions of these constructs is very different among the respondents.

Regarding the research hypothesis, it emerges that PV has a positive and significant effect on CS, thereby confirming H1. In other words, when passengers have a positive or negative perceptions of the railway transportation value, this directly influences their satisfaction. This hypothesis largely confirms the existing literature in service contexts (Slack et al. 2019; El-Adly and Eid, 2016). Nevertheless, it must be considered that the most of studies in railway transportation focused on deepening the relationship between service quality and perceived value (Miranda et al., 2017; Wang et al. 2020), or explored perceived value related to behavioural intentions (Samuedi et al., 2012), or conceptualized perceived value and customer satisfaction as antecedents of customer loyalty (Dölarslan, 2014). Therefore, the confirmation of H1 in this study provides the literature with novel exploration of these two constructs in the transportation industry.

Contrary to the majority of existing research (Hapsari et al., 2017, Thakur, 2018; Gopalakrishna et al., 2017; Carlson et al., 2017; Simon and Tossan, 2018), the findings show that the relationship between CS and CE is not statistically significant, thereby H2 is not supported. This means that if customers are satisfied with the service, it does not mean they are also engaged with the firm. This result can be justified by considering the setting of the present research. Indeed, the transportation industry is characterized by few firms which operate in a particular geographical area (e.g. Italy), consequently passengers have limited alternatives of choice, for which even an high level of satisfaction does not increase directly their engagement. In fact, also Syahputra and Murwatiningsih (2019) that focused their analysis in railway transportation found out a non-significant impact of CS on CE.

Interestingly, the findings illustrate that CS has a direct and significant impact on CC (H3), CC has a direct and significant impact on CE (H4) and finally that CS has an indirect and significant effect on CE (H5), thereby a full mediation occurs. This means that customer centricity plays a key role in engaging passengers in railway transportation industry. In other words, when passengers are satisfied and feel at the center of the firm's actions, they become engaged with the firm. Therefore, this study confirms the scant literature about the direct relationship between CS and CC, and CC and CE (Mulindi et al., 2024; Kruezer et al., 2020). What is worth noting is the indirect effect of customer satisfaction on customer engagement mediated by customer centricity, which to the authors' knowledge had still not been explored before.

The study presents both theoretical and managerial implications.

Theoretically, the study delves into the exploration of the role of customer centricity. Particularly, the research contributes to the existing literature highlighting the mediating role of CC in the relationship between CS and CE. Moreover, it provides the literature with a quantitative study of customer centricity conceptualized according to a customer-centered perspective. In addition, the research offers the investigation of PV and CS in the railway transportation, which is notably a less investigated industry.

Managerially, the study provides valuable insights. Particularly, the study highlights that satisfying customers in the railway transportation industry does not have a direct effect on customer engagement. Consequently, managers should focus their attention not only on implementing actions to satisfy customers' needs, but also to enhance customer engagement. Moreover, it emerged the meaningful role of customer centricity in achieving customer engagement. Accordingly, managers should improve the willingness and efforts they go through to make customers feel at the center of their actions. In this direction, they should formulate customer-centric driven firm's strategies and

vision.

6. Conclusions, limitations, and future research:

The study explored quantitatively the service-related factors and the customer-related factors of customers' behaviour, by detecting the role of perceived customer centricity. The SEM method was employed to investigate these relationships on 308 customers' valid responses in the railway transportation industry. The research showed that customer centricity plays a crucial role in making customers engaged, in fact it mediates the relationship between customer satisfaction and customer engagement, whereas the direct relationship between customer satisfaction and customer engagement is not statistically significant.

Like any research, this one exhibit limitations that provide interesting avenues for future study. First, this study is specific to a specific country (Italy) and service context (railway transportation). Therefore, to generalize this study's results, more investigation in different countries and service settings (e.g. banking, retailing, hospitality) to further validate the model is suggested. Second, while this study explored the relationship between PV, CS, CE, a number of related constructs exist that may be deployed in further research to investigate the role of CC. Thus, researchers could consider the inclusion of other such constructs in their models, such as service quality, customer loyalty, customer trust, as these may exert potential moderating or mediating effects. Third, data were collected through a survey. In the future, different data collection techniques could be used to triangulate data.

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