



# Positive emotions and behavioral intentions of customers in full-service restaurants: Does aesthetic labor matter?

Sheng-Hsiung Tsaur<sup>a,1</sup>, Hsiang-Fei Luoh<sup>b,\*</sup>, Shao-Syun Syue<sup>a,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Graduate Institute of Recreation, Tourism, and Hospitality Management, National Chiayi University, Chiayi, Taiwan

<sup>b</sup> Department of Restaurant, Hotel and Institutional Management, Fu Jen Catholic University, New Taipei, Taiwan

## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 5 September 2014

Received in revised form 31 August 2015

Accepted 31 August 2015

### Keywords:

Aesthetic labor  
Positive emotion  
Behavioral intention  
Full-service restaurant

## ABSTRACT

Based on the Mehrabian–Russell model, this study investigates whether aesthetic labor performance affects the positive emotions and behavioral intentions of customers in full-service restaurants. This research also identifies the mediating effects of positive emotions on aesthetic labor and behavioral intentions. A total of 320 valid questionnaires were collected from the customers of a well-known chain of restaurants in Taiwan. Structural equation modeling was used to estimate a model linking aesthetic labor, positive emotions, and behavioral intentions. The results revealed that aesthetic labor positively and significantly influences positive emotions and behavioral intentions, and that positive emotions positively and significantly influence behavioral intentions. However, when the control variables of food quality, ambiance, and service quality were added, aesthetic labor did not positively influence behavioral intentions. In addition, positive emotions did not mediate the relationship between aesthetic labor and behavioral intentions. Finally, we provide a discussion on practical implications and suggestions for future research.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

## 1. Introduction

In service-related industries, the interaction between customers and service employees forms the critical process of service contact (Kwong and Yau, 2002). First-line service staff interact with customers through face-to-face as well as voice-to-voice contact, and play a crucial role in the evaluation of service quality by customers (Kim, 2014) and their assessment of the restaurant experience (Wall and Berry, 2007).

Lovelock (1996) regarded service as a type of theater in which service employees are the actors, and customers are the audience. First-line service employees embody the specific characteristics of service-related organizations, enhancing the brand image and acting as a type of “living signboard” (Gotsi and Wilson, 2001).

Warhurst et al. (2000) proposed the term “aesthetic labor,” and stated that employees should have the capacities and attributes necessary to perform this labor when they enter the job market. Through recruitment, selection, and training, employers mobilize,

develop, and commodify these capacities and attributes, transforming their employees into aesthetically skilled practitioners. When employees provide a service, they present a particular style that appeals to their customers. Nickson et al. (2003) claimed that aesthetically skilled staff, in other words those that are skilled at manifesting aesthetic labor such as looking good or sounding right, tend to attract a high number of high-paying customers.

According to the Mehrabian–Russell (M-R) model proposed by Mehrabian and Russell (1974), the internal emotional situation of a person results from environmental stimuli, and influences behavioral intentions. Previous research has indicated that this concept of environment should include both hardware and software environments. A software environment should encompass factors such as staff appearance and interactions with customers (Liu and Jang, 2009; Ryu and Jang, 2007, 2008; Turley and Milliman, 2000). Warhurst et al. (2000) defined aesthetic labor as employees exhibiting the capacities and attributes for embodying an organization. Aesthetic labor can be considered an environmental stimulus presented by first-line staff. Through continual aesthetic training, employees develop a service style and effective stimulus. Williams and Connell (2010) argued that the attractive appearances and voices of first-line employees are two major factors in aesthetic labor. Moreover, previous studies have determined that appearance, attractiveness, neat dress, and a professional manner affect the emotional responses of customers, further influencing their

\* Corresponding author at: No. 510, Zhongzheng Road, Xinzhuang District, New Taipei City 24205, Taiwan, ROC.

E-mail addresses: [shenght@mail.ncyu.edu.tw](mailto:shenght@mail.ncyu.edu.tw) (S.-H. Tsaur), [071662@mail.fju.edu.tw](mailto:071662@mail.fju.edu.tw) (H.-F. Luoh).

<sup>1</sup> Address: No. 580, Sinmin Road, Chiayi City 60004, Taiwan, ROC.

behavioral intentions (Liu and Jang, 2009; Ryu and Jang, 2007, 2008).

In the hospitality industry, aesthetic labor is particularly important, since the customer's pleasure, including the pleasure they take in the visual, is paramount. Organizations do not conform to the image of a company primarily through the dress code of their first-line staff (Paules, 1991). The participants (managers) in Warhurst and Nickson's (2007a, 2007b) studies indicated that first-line employees must be good-looking, well presented, and have pleasant-sounding voices, all of which is encapsulated in the concept of, and can distinguish and strengthen, the corporate image. In the hospitality industry, first-line employees of full-service restaurants have frequent contact with customers, and thus, their interactions as well as the service quality are highly emphasized. Using aesthetic labor is clearly vital for employees since it has been proposed that improving aesthetic labor practices for front-line employees in restaurants can enhance customers' perceptions of service quality (Luoh and Tsaor, 2009). The hospitality industry has recently come to require increasing levels of aesthetic labor from front-line employees in order to provide customers with the experience of quality service (Tsaor and Tang, 2013), but whether organizationally-desired aesthetic labor directly results in the positive emotions and behavioral intentions of customers has been little investigated. Therefore, the aims of this study are: first, to examine the relationship between the aesthetic labor performance of first-line employees, and the positive emotions and behavioral intentions of customers; second, to examine whether positive emotions play a mediating role between the aesthetic labor performance of first-line employees and the behavioral intentions of customers. The results will clarify the influence of employees' aesthetic labor performance on customers' positive emotions and behavioral intentions. The results will serve as a useful reference for service marketing and human resource management in the restaurant field.

## 2. Literature review and hypotheses

### 2.1. Aesthetic labor

#### 2.1.1. Conceptualization and theory of aesthetic labor

Before the conceptualization of aesthetic labor came about, emotional labor was defined as the labor employees are required to do in order to manage their emotions at work and present pleasant facial expressions or body language to the public (Hochschild, 1983). However, Warhurst et al. (2000) and Witz et al. (2003) noted that Hochschild's (1983) construct of emotional labor focused on the worker as a conscious, emotional being but did less to focus on the worker as an "embodied" being, in other words embodying the brand that is an organizational entity. Therefore, Warhurst et al. (2000) proposed the term "aesthetic labor," and defined it as an attribute that should be "embodied" when employees enter the industry. After mobilization, development, and commodification through recruitment, hiring, training, and management, this disposition can be transformed into a type of ability or skill. Employees thus develop a particular style of service contact more tailored to the aesthetic sense of their customers.

The theory of aesthetic labor was developed by the so-called Strathclyde group researchers. The Strathclyde group's interest in aesthetics was fueled by the increasing availability of jobs in the clothing retail sector in Glasgow, Scotland. In this sector, sales employees were expected to dress and act in a particular manner, one suitable to both product and customer (Dahl, 2013; Nickson et al., 2001). The concept of aesthetic labor did not go unchallenged, however. Karlsson (2012) argued aesthetic labor to actually be a subcategory of corporeal labor, whilst Williams and Connell (2010)

and Sheane (2012) saw aesthetic labor as being essentially similar to emotional labor, with both concepts referring to characteristics embodied by employees, as well as being a kind of presentational labor. For both these types of labor the end goal remains the same: the commercial gain of organizations (Warhurst et al., 2009).

#### 2.1.2. Aesthetic labor in organizations

Warhurst et al. (2000) indicated that service managers are eager for employees to have a matrix of skills, namely technical, social, and aesthetic skills. Nickson et al. (2005) stated that soft skills, such as appearance and attitude, are also called "aesthetic skills." According to the demands of aesthetic labor, employees are required to have a pleasant appearance (a good look) as well as an appropriate appearance (the right look) (Nickson et al., 2005). Warhurst and Nickson (2007b) determined that employers do not merely attempt to monitor employee appearance, but actively construct the image of a company employee by implementing uniforms and dress codes. Biswas (2009) observed that employers selected only those employees whose appearance satisfactorily conformed to the company image. Therefore, Sheane (2012) regarded aesthetic labor as the selling of an embodied "face," approved social attributes used to create and maintain a corporate image.

Warhurst et al. (2000) classified aesthetic labor in relation to an organization regarding the process of recruitment, internal training, and external process, through which employees experience service contact with customers. According to Warhurst et al. (2000), a cordial smile, clean teeth, neat hair, and appropriate body proportions are all desirable attributes. However, when recruiting employees, appearance is apparently not the only aesthetic standard; having the appropriate voice and even accent are of great importance (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007b). After employees are recruited, a company continues the process of developing its aesthetic skills, which include training them in dress styles, body language, and make-up (Warhurst and Nickson, 2007a, 2007b). These standards are not only for women; men are required to shave, for example, and flight attendants of both sexes are expected to mind their weight. Employees in theme parks are expected to conform to highly strict standards of appearance (Tyler and Abbott, 1998; Van Maanen and Kunda, 1989). Nickson et al. (2005) found that 56% of employers provided training in self-presentation, and nearly 77% provided training in body language. These findings clearly show that employers seek to construct an aesthetically pleasing image for attracting potential customers, and seek to achieve this by training employees to understand and use their body language to provide a better service.

Korczynski and Ott (2004) found that the key factors of service interaction in restaurants are the menu and food descriptions, aesthetic labor and empathic performance of the staff, and the process of the interaction. People who are accepted into, and employed by an organization represent the most public face of that organization. In addition, Pounders et al. (2014) used pictured stimulation, and found similarities in service-provider appearance to influence feelings of affection, hedonic value, along with future patronage intentions for fashion retail consumers. Therefore, aesthetic labor is considered critical for interactive services.

From the above it is clear that considerations of aesthetic labor influence how an organization recruits, selects, internally trains, and ultimately transforms employees into competent and skilled individuals who are then better geared towards producing a corporate 'look' and service encounters that appeal to the customers (Warhurst et al., 2000). Although the concept of aesthetic labor is not entirely concerned with an attractive appearance, the assessment of aesthetic skills is notoriously subjective, and organizational demand for aesthetic skills capable of portraying the firm's image and appeal for commercial benefit involves potential discrimination in terms of power, class, appearance, ethnicity and gender

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1009271>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1009271>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)