



Facial attractiveness and stereotypes of hotel guests: An experimental research

Žana Čivre^{a,*}, Mladen Knežević^{b,1}, Petra Zabukovec Baruca^{a,2}, Daša Fabjan^{a,3}

^a University of Primorska, Faculty of Tourism Studies – Turistica, Obala 11a, 6320 Portorož, Slovenia

^b University of Zagreb, Faculty of Law, Study Centre for Social Work, Nazorova 51, 10000 Zagreb, Croatia

HIGHLIGHTS

- Stereotypes affect social interaction between hotel employees and their guests.
- In the experiment three most common perceived guests' characteristics were examined.
- Guests are stereotyped by hotel employees according to their facial attractiveness.
- Facially more attractive are perceived as more demanding, kind and better consumers.

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 March 2012

Accepted 3 November 2012

Keywords:

Service encounter
Social interaction
Facial attractiveness
Stereotypes
Experimental research
Hospitality industry

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to determine social interaction between hospitality employees and their guests, and consequently assess how front-line employees categorize and stereotype hotel guests based on their facial attractiveness with reference to three main characteristics. Social stereotypes represent a means of information transmission in the communication process and can enable a more rapid transfer of information during the service delivery in the hospitality industry. The experimental research was conducted with 113 hospitality employees at seven hospitality organizations on the Slovenian coast. The results showed a correlation between the perception of hotel guests' facial attractiveness with their assumed characteristics that can lead to stereotyping. Hotel employees often link the guest's facial attractiveness with three common perceived characteristics – guests' propensity to spend, guests' predisposition to being demanding and guests' 'kindness', and tend to stereotype them on the same basis. These research findings contribute to a better understanding of the complex interactions that occur during a service encounter and show how facial attractiveness of guests plays an important role in the construction of stereotypes by the hospitality employees.

© 2012 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Service encounter can be understood as an interaction in the process of communication between two participants – an employee and a guest, each acting out their specific role (Grandey & Brauburger, 2002). This is why the service encounter plays a crucial role in service marketing as well as in service differentiation, quality control, delivery systems, and customer satisfaction (Wu, 2007). There are numerous researches about the customer's perspective and their perception (Bansal & Taylor, 1999) that show

the importance of an employee's attitude toward the guest in the field of quality. In social cognition, as the prevalent topic of contemporary experimental social psychology, many researchers try to understand sense making of perceivers' social worlds (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2001). Relating to social cognition, Bruner (1957) argues, that categorization is an inevitable component of perception. McGarty (1999) defined categorization as “the process of understanding what something is by knowing what other things it is equivalent to, and what other things it is different from”. Crisp and Turner (2010) argue that people can also be categorized much like objects, events, concepts, attitudes and opinions. In fact, categories can be applied to all aspects of our lives ranging from purchases of basic items through entertainment venues such as, e.g. cafés or restaurants. This can also be valid with regards to the employee–guest relationship in which both are perceivers from their own point of view, as Ule (2005) adds that one role of categorization is to simplify a person's world perception. This makes it possible for a person to compose a fast impression of another

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +386 41 773 563; fax: +386 5 617 7020.

E-mail addresses: zana.civre@turistica.si (Ž. Čivre), mladen.knezevic@pravo.hr (M. Knežević), petra.zabukovec@turistica.si (P. Zabukovec Baruca), das.fabjan@turistica.si (D. Fabjan).

¹ Tel.: +385 1 489 5815.

² Tel.: +386 41 822 311; fax: +386 5 617 7020.

³ Tel.: +386 5 617 7042; fax: +386 5 617 7020.

person (Crisp & Turner, 2010; Sanderson, 2010) as impressions are based on only small pieces of information (Sanderson, 2010). According to social cognition theories, first impressions may be important in relation to the initiation and maintenance of social relations and have a great effect on a person's attitude and behavior toward others (Kuzmanovic et al., 2012). Additionally, first impressions are formed on the basis of facial expressions, appearances, or particular actions as people tend to infer more about the personality, actions and their own expectations after forming their impressions. When people develop impressions of others, stereotypes are used as beliefs about personal traits (Biernat & Billings, 2001).

To understand a world of complex stimuli people regularly develop and use categorical representations (e.g. stereotypes) when dealing with other people (Fiske, 1998; Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Deaux and Lewis (1984) argue that stereotyping is an array of inferences about physical characteristics. Physical appearance is, along with perceived similarity, complementarity and reciprocity one of the four key determinants of interpersonal attraction (Crisp & Turner, 2010). Additionally, the physical appearance is the basis of physical attractiveness and the face is the main determinant (Patzner, 2006). Many physical attractiveness researchers study facial attractiveness (Berscheid & Reis, 1998); and the general consensus is that people do assign others a place in social categories by using physical facial features (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Facial characteristics play an important role in determining attractiveness and subsequently attributing behavior and personality characteristics (Deaux & Lewis, 1984).

Several studies have shown that facial attractiveness can influence our social interactions and behavior (Adams, Ambady, Nakayama, & Shimojo, 2011) to the point of being one of the leading socialization factors from early childhood onward. Numerous studies have confirmed this, following the well-known person perception study of the “beautiful is good” stereotype by Dion et al. from 1972. This thesis was re-confirmed by Langlois, Ritter, Casey, and Sawin (1995), the leading authors and one of the pioneers of studying the impact of facial attractiveness on social interactions, determining that babies with more attractive faces receive more attention than babies with less attractive faces. Johnson (2005) discovered that newborns recognize a face and prefer it over objects or feature assemblies, despite the immature cortex and afferent pathways. This process results in our primary socialization and is rooted in an individual's nature, which can also be applied to the employee–guest relationship in the hospitality industry. In addition, McKercher (2008) establishes that stereotypes in tourism appear frequently and are more or less permanent. Accordingly, we recognized the need for researching employees' perception of their guests.

2. Literature overview

2.1. Social interaction in service encounters

The service encounter is the main service provided by a hospitality organization (Pizam & Ellis, 1999) and it is based on social interaction. Turner (1988) defined social interaction as a situation wherein the behaviors of one person are consciously recognized and influence the behaviors of another person. Even more, social interaction is an elementary process which can initialize social behavior; it can be less or more complex from, for example, the exchange of looks to very complex verbal or non-verbal communication between two or more people (Ule, 2005). The key distinguishing characteristic of hospitality is also the employee–guest relationship from which several dimensions emerge (Stringer, 1981). The reality is that the encounter between the front-line

employee and the guest can vary from a very positive to a very negative experience. To develop an understanding of the employee's behavior in the service encounter it is therefore vital to understand the encounter itself and all perceptions and decisions made arising from that encounter as regards employees. At the moment of a guest's appearance employees in service encounters automatically link the guest with specific categories and tend to act in ways congruent with behaviors associated with these categories – as Bargh, Chen, and Burrows (1996) and Dijksterhuis and van Knippenberg (1998) claim, specific social categories can instigate automatic behavior by first activating a stereotypic trait that in turn spontaneously activates a behavioral representation. According to cognitive information processing models categorization, Lord and Maher (1992) delineated automatic response models where perceivers look for patterns that correspond with their knowledge or experience instead of controlled and analytical processing of data. Since the time employees get to process information exhibited by the appearances of guests at first sight is extremely short, the characteristics of the information processing comply with those of cybernetic (or dynamic) information-processing models. This is applicable to general behavior and also social perceptions (Hastie & Park, 1986). Such models suggest that social perceptions are periodically reformed by updating previous perceptions with current information regarding behavior. During such updating, general impressions remain in the long-term memory, while specific behavioral information can be lost. The control theory models of behavior also reflect cybernetic information-processing (Carver & Scheier, 1982; Powers, 1973). In those models fast feedback alters learning, behavior and the nature of cognitive processes themselves (Lord & Maher, 1992) and those models are congruent with real-world situations as the evaluations of others are constantly revised in work settings (Hastie & Park, 1986). Willis and Todorov (2006) found in their study that personal attributes that are important for specific decisions are inferred from facial appearance and influence these decisions. From both the standard-intuition and the rational-actor points of view, trait inferences from facial appearance should not influence important deliberate decisions. However, to the extent that these inferences occur rapidly and effortlessly, their effects on decisions may be subtle and not subjectively recognized.

Because the guests are able to perceive the attitude of the employee during the first interaction the employees must not stereotype their guests while managing expectations. The key to satisfying guests is to pay attention to the social interaction between guests and front-line employees, who should provide guests with unbiased service. Reflecting this view, the focus is on the social interaction in the context of service encounters through two key features: (1) employee's perception in social encounters and (2) personal characteristics associated with stereotyping.

2.1.1. Employees' perception in service encounter

Social perception is built on a social exchange during which communication on a non-verbal level is an integral component (Rus, 2000). Social interaction, which is also based on non-verbal information, is established with the guest entering the field of an employees' perception, where the main position is that of the employee.

Heider (1958) argues, that in social perception, social behavior is predicted by categorization. To simplify the stimulus world, people tend to categorize (Lennon & Davis, 2001) as categorization helps to explain and improve people's perception (Wyer, 1988), is a time saver and shortens the cognitive processing (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Here stereotypes are deployed rapidly and give a lot of information about unknown persons (Gilbert & Hixon, 1991). Once a category is activated, all members are ascribed the same stereotypical traits

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1012273>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1012273>

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