

Factors Affecting Customer Positive Emotion and Service Relation-Restaurants in Hotel as Examples

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Abstract

In the past, the researches about emotional contagion usually focused on the effect of waiter's smile on customers' affections. Instead of only researching the waiter's emotional expressions, this research based on the theory of emotional labor and emotional contagion, extend the conceptual structure of Henning-Thurau et al. (2006), then hen combine the concept of positive emotional expression that Tsai andHuang (2002) proposed. Besides, we take some other variables into consideration,including waiter's emotional expression, customer's positive affection that affect customer-employee rapport and customer satisfaction.

The sample of this study includes 458 consumers in hotel restaurants in Haulien area.Because a part of the questions are related to some psychological aspect, we sample through the customers who had just finished their meals to avoid the change of thecustomers' actual feelings or thoughts. Finally there are 330 valid questionnaires. Then we apply structural equation modeling to analyze the data and test thehypotheses. According to the analysis of the surveys, this study concludes with three rmajor implications:

1. Waiter's emotional expression has no direct effect customer satisfaction, but it will affect customers' satisfaction through customer-employee rapport.
- 2.Customer's positive affections affect customer-employee rapport and customer satisfaction directly.
3. The rapport between customer and employee positively affects customer satisfaction.

Keywords: Emotional Contagion, Emotional Labor, Customer-Employee Rapport, Customer Satisfaction

1. Introduction

In the era of the service economy, the economic development of Taiwan has been moving towards a service-oriented age. In a service economy, customers are the most significant assets for an organization. If organizations want to increase their customers, they have to place the emphasis on the true feelings of their customers and offer customized services to satisfy their customers' needs, something which is known as truly possessing customers. For enterprises, how to establish the bridge and maintain a good relationship with customers is a topic worthy of exploration.

Meuter et al. (2000) stated that the interaction between customers and service providers in the course of providing a service is an important key to measure the service quality felt by customers. Therefore, "service encounter" has become one of the most important topics in services' marketing (Bitner, 1992; Fisk, Brown & Bitner, 1993; Bitner, Booms & Mohr, 1994; Zhou Yiheng, Guan Fuyong, Ling Yiling, 1998). Furthermore, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) also verified that the positive affect of customers have become an important variable that can affect the level of customer satisfaction.

Meuter et al. (2000) also suggested that the interaction process between customers and service providers in the course of providing services is critical for evaluating the service quality for customers. Therefore, the interaction between customers and employees providing service has a significant influence on the perception and expectation of customers. In addition, most enterprises believe that building up a long-term relationship with customers can promote the profitability of the enterprises (Martin, 1996). From the perspective of emotional labor, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) proposed that emotional displays by service employees will have the effect of emotional contagion on the positive affect of customers, and further affecting customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study takes the restaurant service as a research object, regards the positive affect of customers as the mediator and explores the influence of emotional displays by service employees (e.g., smiling, sincerity) on customer satisfaction.

Organizations and employees should endeavor to understand how to affect customer emotions and enrich their service experience through the shape of the actual service environment. In addition, emotional displays or skills and customer-oriented behavior shown by employees

help bring customers happiness and joyful feelings, meet customer expectations and enhance customer satisfaction. However, in a review of domestic and foreign literatures, most of the related researches on service encounters focused on interaction between service employees and customers, and the influence of actual environment on customers; few of the researches have explored emotional display and customer-employee rapport. Therefore, based on the above background and motivations, this study focuses on an exploration of the influence of emotional displays by employees, the relationship between the positive affect of customers, customer-employee rapport, and customer satisfaction in order to offer references for service practitioners when creating marketing strategies.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Relationship between Emotional Display and Positive Affect of Customers

Hatfield, Cacioppo, and Rapson (1994) pointed out that emotional displays by employees would strengthen the emotional consistency between employees and their customers. The degree of sincerity of the emotional display of employees is helpful to enhance inducing the positive affect of customers. That is because customers experience sincere and cordial service rather than fake and pretended guises displayed by service employees. Conversely, when employees are not sincere, it is not possible to induce the positive affect of customers. Therefore, a sincere emotional display can better induce the positive affect of customers. Based on the above literatures, it can be seen that emotional displays by employees will affect the emotional response of customers; and a sincere emotional display will induce the positive affect of customers. As a consequence, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1: The sincere emotions displayed by service employees have a significant and positive influence on the positive affect of customers.

2.2 Relationship between Sincere Emotional Displays by Service Employees and Customer-Employee Rapport

This study defines a sincere emotional display as the deep acting, which echoes the findings of

Grandy (2003), the deep acting of employees will bring a relatively higher level of evaluation on service quality by customers. Therefore, this study suggests that sincere emotional displays could enhance the evaluation of customers toward the service quality. In addition, Grandy (2005) also mentioned that a sincere emotional display could directly influence the customer-employee rapport because sincere emotional disguises by employees could affect customers' perceptions of "kindness" and "warmth." These two kinds of awareness are the implied features of rapport. That is to say, if customers feel warmth and kindness in a service encounter, it means that the two sides have a rapport. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Sincere emotional displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer-employee rapport.

2.3 Relationship between Sincere Emotional Displays by Service Employees and Customer Satisfaction

In the service industry, customers regard the display of emotions by service employees as a part of the service (Grove, Fisk, & Bitner, 1992). Customers expect an emotional display by employees, and this expectation will affect the satisfaction of customers toward the services provided (Tsai, 2002). However, Grandy (2005) and his colleague also stated that if customers perceive the sincere behavior of employees, their customer satisfaction will be relatively higher. Therefore, compared with insincere emotional displays by employees, sincere emotional displays will easily induce the positive affect of customers. Based on an exploration of the above literatures, whether the emotional display of employees is sincere or not will affect the satisfaction of customers towards the services provided. Consequently, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Sincere emotional displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer satisfaction.

2.4 The Relationship between Positive Emotional Display of Service Employees and Customer Positive Affect

The positive affect display mentioned in this study refers to the type of behaviors expressed by employees, which are probably facial or physical expressions, including smiling, conventional

greetings, eye contact, voice and intonation, and the like. In service industries, organizations should require their frontline employees to display these types of emotional behavior, and smiling, in particular, is often regarded as the one of the necessary emotional rules established by organizations (Frank, Ekman, & Friesen, 1993). Employees could also conduct surface acting or deliver conventional greetings to customers to express kindness, according to the established emotional rules. Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) adopted video tape renters as research objects to explore whether the smiles of service employees have an influence on the positive affect of customers, or not. The results showed that smiling by employees has no direct effect on the positive affect of customers. Therefore, this study inclines to use restaurant service industry practitioners as research objects to explore whether smiling and other positive affect displays by service employees has an influence on the positive affect of customers, or not. This study proposes the following hypothesis:

H4: Positive affect displays by service employees has a significant and positive influence on the positive affect of customers.

2.5 The Relationship between the Positive affect al Displays of Service Employees and Customer-Employee Rapport

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) pointed out that even if there is no significant influence on the positive affect of customers when service employee smile, the smiling of service employees makes customers feels their kind and friendly attitude. Therefore, if service employees smile, it will affect customer-employee rapport. Furthermore, this study believes that, besides smiling, other positive affect al displays by service employee (e.g., eye contact, conventional greetings) will also have a positive influence on customer-employee rapport. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H5: Positive affect displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer-employee rapport .

2.6 The relationship between positive affect al displays by service employees and customer satisfaction

Customers regard smiling as part of the emotional display by service employees and the smiling

of service employees will generate a kind and friendly attitude toward customers and promote customer-employee rapport. However, Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) indicated that the smiling of service employees could have an influence on customer satisfaction using customer-employee rapport as the mediator rather than direct effect. Therefore, this study also took other positive displays of emotion by service employees, such as conventional greetings, and eye contact, etc. into consideration in order to explore whether positive affect displays by service employees have an impact on customer satisfaction. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H6: Positive affect displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer satisfaction.

2.7 Relationship between the Positive Affect of Customers and Customer-Employee Rapport

A pleasant interaction is critical for customer-employee rapport (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). Pleasant interactions can improve the positive affect of customers, and the promotion of positive affect of customers could improve customer-employee rapport. In addition, scholars Weitz, Castleberry, and Tanner (2004) defined rapport as a kind of close and friendly relationship based on mutual trust. However, Dell (1991) proposed that rapport is the interaction in good customer-employee relationship, which consists of living together in a mutually harmonious way and the establishment of a good interactive relationship. Furthermore, rapport must be equipped with a degree of sensitivity and the attention of a sincere, interactive relationship (Ashforth & Humphery, 1993). Customers' affect also influences customer-employee rapport and the promotion of the positive affect of customers is also conducive to improving the customer-employee rapport, promoting smooth service encounters and enhancing the customer satisfaction of the service encounter (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H7: The positive affect of customers have a significant and positive influence on customer-employee rapport.

2.8 Relationship between the Positive Affect of Customers and Customer Satisfaction

In addition to the influences of the service encounter, sincere emotional displays by employees,

and frequencies of the emotional display to customer, customer satisfaction is also affected by customer emotions; and the degree of satisfaction with the service encounter is significantly influenced by customer emotions (Oliver, 1980). When customers evaluate their consumption experience (such as the degree of satisfaction with the service), their responses are frequently based on their emotional status; or they may ask themselves “how did I feel at that moment?” In the meantime, customer emotions are closely connected with employees’ emotions; and the changes in customers’ emotions will affect customer satisfaction (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Furthermore, the promotion of the positive affect of customers is conducive to improving customer-employee rapport, promoting smooth service encounters and enhancing the customer satisfaction of the service encounter (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H8: The positive affect of customers have a significant influence on customer satisfaction.

2.9 Relationship between Customer-Employee Rapport and Customer Satisfaction

Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006) believed that a pleasant interaction has a high degree of customer-employee rapport. Customers may then disclose related personal information, which could help customize the services so as to satisfy the customer s’ needs (Gremler & Gwinner, 2000). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H9: Customer-employee rapport has a significant influence on customer satisfaction.

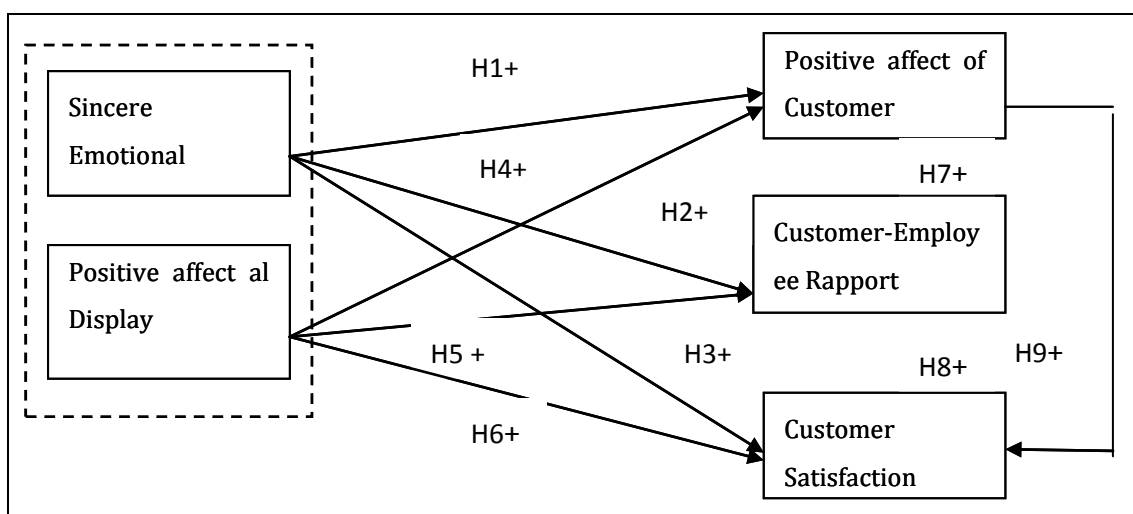


Figure 1 Research Framework

3. Methods

3.1 Data Collection

3.1.1 Samples

The research objects of this study are tourism hotels in Hualian area. Based on the classification of international sightseeing hotels, as defined by the Tourism Bureau, MOTC, and the Republic of China, this study chose the tourism hotels of the Hualian area as the main research objects. The classified directory of international tourism hotels in Hualian County consists of six international tourism hotels, such as the Farglory Hotel and the Parkview Hotel etc.

Before distributing formal questionnaires, this study conducted a pre-test to ensure the validity and consistency of the measurement of questionnaires. The pre-test adopted convenience sampling method and sent out questionnaires online. 71 copies were returned and 57 of them were valid.

3.1.2 Pre-Test Result

In the reliability analysis of the sincere emotional display scale, the coefficient of Cronbach's α was 0.898. The reliability analysis of the positive affect al display scale, showed that the coefficient of Cronbach's α was 0.755; in the reliability analysis of the customer-employee rapport scale, the coefficient of Cronbach's α was 0.907; in the reliability analysis of customer satisfaction, the coefficient of Cronbach's α was 0.964. The reliability levels of these scales are well above the basic benchmark of 0.70 suggested by Nunally (1978). Therefore, each scale has a certain degree of internal consistency, reliability and stability.

3.1.3 Questionnaire Distribution

Regarding the distribution of paper questionnaires, based on the top five hotels ranked by the Tourism Bureau, MPTC in 1998, this study plans to use the FarGlory Hotel, Parkview Hotel, China Trust Hotel, Grand Formosa Regent and the Marshal Hotel as the main research objects. However, due to the certain difficulties in practice, it was not possible to acquire data from the China Trust Hotel and the Grand Formosa Regent. Subsequently, they were replaced by the Promised Land Resort & Lagoon and the Azure Hotel, both of which have good performance.

These five hotels could reach relatively more customers and, therefore, has equipped with indexicality. Therefore, this questionnaire is targeted at these five hotels in order to acquire samples that are more diversified. The quantity of questionnaires distributed was 730 copies in total. 458 copies were returned, of which 330 copies were valid. The return rate is 62.7% and the valid return rate is 45.2%.

4. Results

The exploration of the comprehensive model in this study is based on the two-stage structural equation modeling approach suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). In the first stage, this study is aimed at the research dimensions. These measures the items in the questionnaire so as to conduct an analysis of the coefficient of Cronbach's α and a confirmatory factor analysis to understand the reliability and convergent validity of each dimension. In the second stage, multiple measurement items will be reduced to a few or single measuring indicators and the structural equation modeling approach can be used to analyze and test the hypotheses.

During the application of statistical tools, this study adopted AMOS software to conduct analyses and also used a Pearson product-moment correlation to measure the significance level of the correlation among research variables. The analysis results tell us the reliability and the convergent validity of each dimension. All the analysis result in this study has proved to achieve an acceptable level.

H1 "The emotions displayed by service employees have a significant and positive influence on the positive affect of customers" was proven to be true with the path coefficient of 0.278. H2 "Sincere emotional displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer-employee rapport" was proven to be true with the path coefficient of 0.215. However, H3 "Sincere emotional displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer satisfaction" was proven to be false. H4 "Positive affect al displays by service employees has a significant and positive influence on the positive affect of customers" was also proven to be false. H5 "Positive affect al displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer-employee rapport" was proven to be false. In addition, H6 "Positive affect displays by service employees have a significant and positive influence on customer satisfaction" was proven to be true with the path coefficient of 0.261; H7 and H8,

quoted above, were proven to be true with path coefficients of 0.172 and 0.136 respectively. H9 "Customer-employee rapport has a significant influence on customer satisfaction" was also proven to be true with a path coefficient of 0.466.

5. Conclusion

In the service industry, previous researches focused on the factors of service encounter, including actual environment, the profession of service employees and interaction between customers. However, this study started from an emotional dimension and explored the influence of the deep acting of service employees on customer affect. This study divided the emotions of service employees into deep acting and surface acting. The empirical results of this study indicate that the emotions of service employees significantly influence the positive affect of customers. This study concludes that, in the process of a service encounter, if the service employee enables a customer to perceive that they are being treated sincerely rather than with a fake emotional disguise, the positive affect of the customer will be triggered and the customer will feel pleasant and enjoy the process of the service encounter and will feel satisfied with the services.

Generally speaking, in the service industry, the training of service employees by industry practitioners places more emphasis on service skills and professional skills. However, in this study, the "positive affect displays" mentioned in this study are the active display of kindness by service employees, including smiling, conventional greetings, voice, intonation and eye contact etc.

In response to Hennig-Thurau et al. (2006), the promotion of the positive affect of customers will be conducive to customer-employee rapport. This study verifies that, in hotels and restaurants, when the degree of positive customer emotions is higher, the degree of customer-employee rapport is higher. The customer showing positive affect will easily perceive the affability and kindness of service employees. The core concept of "rapport" is affability and kindness (Grandy, 2003). Regarding satisfaction with the services, in addition to the influence of the factors of service encounter and the emotional display of employees, the satisfaction of customers with the service encounter is significantly influenced by their personal emotions (Oliver, 1980). The empirical test results of this study indicate that, in hotels and restaurants,

when the degree of positive affect of the customer is higher, the degree of customer-employee rapport is higher.

Based on the above statement, customer-employee rapport refers to the pleasant interaction between customers and service employees. It can significantly influence the positive affect of customers. In addition, customer-employee rapport directly affects customer satisfaction. In summary, besides service encounters, this study added the emotional display by service employees as the antecedent, and used the positive affect of customers and customer-employee rapport as the mediators to explore the factors affecting customer satisfaction. The empirical test results of this study indicate that, besides service encounters, the factors affecting customer satisfaction also consist of positive affect and customer-employee rapport at a psychological level.

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