

CUSTOMERS' EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO EMPLOYEES' DISPLAYED POSITIVE EMOTIONS

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to determine the customers' emotional responses to employee displayed emotions at lunar parks in Zimbabwe. Hundred adult consumers were surveyed soon after an observation of the employee-consumer interaction. Employee emotional displays were measured using observational methods and customers' emotional states were assessed using the PAD scale. Bivariate regression analysis was used to analyse data. The study revealed that employee displayed emotions positively influences customers' emotional states of pleasure, arousal, and dominance. Unlike the findings from previous studies the dominance dimension was found to be relevant to the lunar park services.

Keywords; *Displayed Emotions, Pleasure, Arousal, Dominance.*

INTRODUCTION

It's been over three decades since Mehrabian and Russell (1974)'s work revealed that customers' emotional states during service encounters are stimulated by the environment in which the service is delivered. Boon and Bitner (1982) termed the service environment servicescape. The servicescape is composed of environmental dimensions such as ambient conditions, space/function, and signs, symbols and artefacts.

Service employees are also part of the servicescape. Several researchers agree that the service employees can be considered as environmental features (Eroglu and Machleit, 1990; Grossbart, Hampton, Rammohan and Lapidus, 1990; Kaya and Erkip, 1999). Service employee feature as social factors of the physical service environment (Baker, 1987).

There is a general consensus that customers have got emotional responses to their immediate service environment (Hosany and Gilbert, 2010). Customer reactions to the service environment are more related to emotional states than cognitive perception, particularly in a hedonic consumption situation (Ryu and Jang, 2007). Mehrabian and Russell (1974) indicated that almost all service environments produce an emotional state in consumers that is characterised by the three emotional dimensions of pleasure, arousal and dominance. These three emotional dimensions are commonly referred to by the acronym PAD. PAD dimensions adequately capture the emotional states of customers that are elicited by service environments (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

Previous research on the antecedents of customers' emotional states in the service environment had mostly looked at individual stimuli as lighting (Summers and Herbst, 2001), music (Dube and Morin, 2001; Mattila and Wirtz, 2001), colour (Belizzi et al, 1983), scent (Spanenburg et al., 1996).

An extensive search of literature did not reveal any empirical efforts to link customer emotional states to employee displayed emotions. This situation exists despite the fact that the purpose of expressing emotions during service encounters by the service employees is to induce the desired emotional states in customers (Pugh, 2001). Such a glaring gap is so surprising considering that service employees have since been recognised as an undeniable part of the service environment. This knowledge gap motivated the present research whose contribution involves empirical testing of the constructs identified in this study.

Likewise previous research on the outcomes of employee displayed emotions had concentrated on variables such as customer satisfaction (Tidd and Lockard, 1978; Brown and Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Barger and Grandey, 2006), customer loyalty (Tsai, 2001; Tsai and Huang, 2002), service quality evaluation (Pugh, 2001), customer orientation (Hennig-Thurau et al, 2006), and organisational sales (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1988). A search of literature did not also reveal any attempt to link employee emotional expressions to the basic customer emotional states identified under the PAD model.

The content of displayed emotions is manifested in facial expressions, bodily gestures, tone of voice, and language (Mattila and Enz, 2002). In some service contexts like those that involve tour guiding proxemics may also act as an indicator of service employee's expressed emotions towards the customer.

Customers' emotional states

There are several perspectives through which customer emotions can be studied. The most common perspectives are the discrete emotions perspective and the dimensional perspective. The discrete emotions perspective proposes that the conceptualisation of emotions appears as discrete and phenomenologically distinct affective states (McInnis, Park and Yoo, 1998). Some of the notable proponents of this perspective are Dawson, Bloch, and Ridgway (1990); Batra and Ray (1986) and Izard (1977).

The dimensional perspective proposes that various types of emotions can be reduced into a set of underlying dimensions. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) suggested that the universe of all possible emotional responses is represented by the three emotional dimensions of pleasure, arousal, and dominance. These customer emotional responses to service environments can be explained in terms of the three conceptually orthogonal independent bi-polar dimensions.

Pleasure

Pleasure refers to the degree to which an individual feels good, joyful, content and happy (Mehrabian, 1976). It is a direct subjective response to the environment (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011).

Ryu and Jang (2007) suggested that employees can have a positive influence on customers' pleasure state. Positive affect is associated with pleasure (Russell and Pratt, 1980). Based on the above literature the following hypothesis was proposed;

H1: Employee displayed emotions positively influence consumers' state of pleasure.

Arousal

Arousal refers to the state alertness, wakefulness or readiness caused by the nervous system activity (Mehrabian, 1976). It varies from the feelings of excitement to the feelings of being bored, tired and sleepy.

Ryu and Jang (2007) also suggested that employees can have a positive influence on customers' state of arousal. Since arousal is a psychological and emotional state influenced by environmental stimuli, there is a higher possibility that in environments where employee emotional displays are part of the service environment they can act as a predictor to the consumers' state of arousal. It is therefore hypothesised that;

H2; Employee displayed emotions positively influences consumers' arousal states.

Dominance

Dominance relates to an individual's feelings of being in control (Blackwell, Miniard, and Engel, 2006). Mehrabian (1976) posit that a person's feelings of dominance in a service outlet relies on the extent to which that person feels unrestricted or free to act in a way that he or she find suitable. The dominance dimension is more relevant in a service outlet that has got crowding, waiting time and where personal control of the servicescape is necessary (Kearney, Kennedy and Coughlan, 2007). A direct eye gaze, and an upward head tilt are indicators of dominance and a downward head tilt is regarded as highly submissive (Shang, Liu, and Fu, 2008).

Dominance dimension seems to be relevant to the lunar park service's despite it being deemed unnecessary by several studies (e.g Sweeney and Wyber, 2002; Ridgway, Dawson, and Bloch, 1989).

According to Kearny et al (2000) the dominance dimension is the most under researched of the three PAD dimensions. This could be due to the narrow range of the settings used in past studies (Foxall and Greenley, 1999). It is therefore hypothesised that;

H3; Employee displayed emotions positively influence consumers' dominance.

METHODOLOGY

Population and Data collection

Data shall be collected from 100 adult customers to the lunar parks that run along the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF) and the Zimbabwe Agricultural Show (ZAS). Employee displayed positive emotions were collected through observational methods similar to those used by Rafaeli and Sutton (1988). Two research assistants were trained to collect the data through unobtrusive means. Unobtrusive observations made in a public place are ethical since the subjects are aware that others can observe their behaviour (Webb, Campbell, Schwartz, Sechrest, and Grove, 1981). Since making observations in a public place does not harm or embarrass anyone, there is nothing unethical about it (Rafaeli and Sutton, 1990).

Soon after observing the service interaction between the customer and the service employee, the customer was approached and requested to fill in a short survey. That short survey was accompanied by a consent form that customers had to fill in together with a short questionnaire.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT

Measures

Employee displayed emotions

Employee displayed positive emotions had been conceptualised as “the act of expressing socially desired emotions during service transactions” (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993, p 88-89). Employee displayed emotions was measured using a scale developed by Sutton and Rafaeli (1990), which had six items. The scale consists of two verbal items of greeting and thanking and two non-verbal items of smiling and eye contact. The other two items, attentiveness and pleasantness took into account the nuances of emotions that could not be captured by the mechanics of displayed emotions (Tan, Foo, and Kwek, 2004). Each of the six items was standardised before combining them to form a single index for the display of positive emotions.

Customers’ emotional responses

There are many scales for measuring customers’ emotions, but the five commonly used scales for measuring emotional responses are; Consumption Emotion Set (CES) (Richins, 1997), Positive Affect and Negative Affect Scales (PANAS) (Watson, Clark, and Tellegen, 1988), Emotions Profile index (EPI) (Plutchik, 1980), Differential Emotion Scale (DES) (Izard 1977) and Pleasure, Arousal, Dominance (PAD) (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974).

However, the PAD scale is the most popular measure for customer emotional reactions to the service environment. Despite being criticised for being too narrow in scope and not encompassing all the possible variations in emotional reactions, the Pad typology has the benefit of parsimony and ease of use (Richins, 1997: Machlet and Eroglu, 1998 cited in Machlet and Davis, 2001).

A questionnaire was used to collect data on consumers’ emotional states. The questionnaire was designed using literature from related studies. In an effort to maintain consistency with previous research the measures were selected from previous studies in environmental psychology and marketing. It was deemed unnecessary to develop new measures given the availability of reliable and valid scales for Pleasure, Arousal and Dominance.

Pleasure

Pleasure has been conceptualised as “the degree to which an individual feels good, joyful, satisfied, contented and happy” (Mehrabian, 1976). The pleasure scale had proved to be very reliable as evidenced by 0.97 (Mehrabian, 1976), 0.91 (Russell et al, 1989), 0.95 (Spangenberg, Grohmann, and Sprott, 2005). This scale’s items are measured on a 7 point differential scale with the following listed items;

Unhappy.....happy.

Annoyed.....pleased.

Unsatisfied.....satisfied.

Melancholic.....contented.

Despairing.....hopeful.

Bored.....relaxed.

Arousal

Arousal has been conceptualised as “one’s level of stimulation, excitement, activity, and alertness” (Mehrabian, 1976). In different studies it had recorded a reliability alpha coefficient of 0.89 (Mehrabian, 1976), and 0.88

(Russell et al, 1989), 0.76 (Spangenberg et al, 2005). Its scale items are measured on a 7 point differential scale that has got the following items;

Relaxed.....stimulated.
Calm.....exalted.
Sluggish.....frenzied.
Dull.....jittery.
Sleepy.....wide awake.
Unaroused.....aroused.

Dominance

Dominance has been conceptualised as the “the extent to which one feels unrestricted and in control of the situation” (Mehrabian, 1976). In different studies the Dominance scale had recorded the following reliability coefficient; 0.84 (Mehrabian, 1976), 0.83 (Spangenberg et al, 2005) .The scale’s items are measured on a 7 point differential scale that has got the following items;

Controlled.....controlling.
Influenced.....influencing.
Cared for.....in control
Awed.....important.
Submissive.....dominant.
Guided.....autonomous.

Analysis and Results

The response rate was astonishingly 100%. The demographic profile of the customer respondents was as follows; Age was distributed from 18-25 yrs, 41%; 26-30yrs, 33%; 31-35, 11%; 36-40 yrs,10%; and above 40yrs, 9%. The mean age was 24 yrs (S.D, 7). The gender of customer respondents was 61% female and 39% male. The age of employee respondents was distributed as; 18-25 yrs, 60%; 26-30 yrs, 31% and 31-35 yrs, 9%. The gender of service employees were 56% female and 44% male with the mean age of 28 years (S.D. 9)

The results indicate acceptable reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity for all the employee and customer measures. Confirmatory factor analysis was used to test whether scale items had the relevant properties to represent each construct. All the scales’s composite reliability of 0.71 for employee displayed positive emotions, 0.84 for pleasure, 0.92 for arousal, and 0.88 for dominance exceeded the threshold the 0.70 coefficient suggested by Nunally (1978) for acceptable reliability. This means that all the employee and customer measures are internally consistent. T-tests were used to test for convergent validity and squared correlations for each pair of the constructs were used to test for discriminant validity.

Data was analysed using bivariate regression analysis. All the three dependent variables were regressed on the independent variable in a fashion of one variable at a time. Bivariate regression analysis is a procedure for deducing a relationship of a mathematical nature in a form of an equation between a single criterion variable and a single predictor variable (Maholtra, 2004).

H1: Employee displayed emotions positively influence customers’ state of pleasure

Hypothesis H1 postulates that employee displayed emotions positively influences the customers’ feelings of pleasure. This hypothesis was supported. The regression coefficient between employee displayed positive emotions and pleasure was 0.017 which was significant at 0.829 levels.

Table 3

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	5.393	.409		13.186	.000
Employee displayed emotions	.017	.078	.022	.217	.829

Dependent Variable: Pleasure

This suggests that employees 'positive emotional expressions have a positive impact on customers' feelings of pleasure in an experiential service environment where the customer value is hedonic in nature.

H2: Employee displayed emotions positively influences customers' state of arousal

Hypothesis H2 proposes that employee displayed positive emotions positively influences customers 'state of arousal. This hypothesis was supported. The regression coefficient of this hypothesis was 0.359 which was significant at .000 levels.

Table 4

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.111	.373		8.340	.000
	Employee displayed emotions	.359	.071	.454	5.051	.000

Dependent Variable: Arousal

H3: Employee displayed emotions positively influence the customers' state of dominance.

In this hypothesis, it was predicted that employee displayed positive emotions positively influence the customers' state of dominance. This hypothesis was supported. The regression coefficient was 0.206 which was significant at 0.28 levels. The tables below show the summery statistics for this relationship.

Table 5

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.585	.486		7.376	.000
	Employee displayed emotions	.206	.093	.219	2.225	.028

Dependent Variable: Dominance

Discussion

This study has revealed that employee emotional expressions have got a positive influence on customer emotional states. This suggests that employee emotional expressions act like other individual stimuli like lighting, layout, dining equipment, facility aesthetics that have got positive influence on customer emotional states (Ryu and Jang, 2007). Employee displayed emotions are more likely to have an impact on high contact service organisations whose offerings are experiential and high in hedonic value. This also suggests that like other service environments, the lunar park service environment produce an emotional state in customers that is characterised by the three emotional dimensions of pleasure, arousal and dominance.

The findings of this study are more related to the findings from the study by Baker, Levy and Grewal (1992) which revealed that the friendliness and the number of employees at the disposal of the customers have got a positive influence on the levels of consumers' pleasure and arousal.

Most store environmental studies had left out the Dominance dimension in assessing consumers' emotional states. Although previous research had found little relevance of the Dominance dimension, in this study Dominance proved, not only to be highly relevant, but is also significantly related to the environmental cue of service employees' emotional displays. Therefore basing on the findings from this study, Dominance dimension is very crucial for the lunar park services and indeed for those services that are experiential in nature and high in hedonic value.

This study has also revealed that arousal is highly predicted by employee emotional displays than is the case with pleasure and dominance. This is inconsistent with previous research in store atmospherics where pleasure

was highly predicted by other environmental stimuli than arousal (e.g Yuksel, 2007). It therefore suggests that employee emotional displays are more effective in eliciting the feelings of arousal that are themselves determinants of important customer outcomes.

Lunar parks servicescapes whose environmental cues include service employees are flexible since they elicit the feelings of dominance in customers. Mehrabian and Russell (1974) noted that flexible servicescapes are associated with the feelings of dominance. This is unlike most studied service environments, particularly store atmospherics, that had found the dominance dimension to irrelevant to the universe of customers' emotional states. This implies that lunar parks should not simply concentrate on sophisticated equipment, but should also heavily invest in behaviours exhibited by service employees during service encounters. Borrowing from Wong (2004)'s advice, lunar parks should also desist from concentrating on on equipment breath, depth, and quality, but rather they should also emphasise on creating a pleasant and memorable experience for customers. This therefore entails that capital investment should extend to human capital which can be achieved through regular formal trainings on proper emotional displays during service encounters.

The findings from this study also suggest that employee emotional expression significantly influences the customers' emotional states. This could be due to either cognitive appraisals or emotional contagion (Pugh, 2001). It therefore implies that management should encourage and enforce the display of positive emotions, ideally through the reward system. Alternatively management should simply adopt recruitment and selection processes that favour engaging employees with relevant dispositions like extroverts and those of natural positive affectivity.

Acknowledgements

The authors gratefully acknowledge financial support from Bindura University of Science Education research grant.

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