Service with a Smile: A Study on the Psychological Burden of Leisure Facility Employees Using Emotional Labor Theory

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Abstract

In this paper, we conducted a questionnaire survey on the psychology of customer service among employees working in leisure facilities based on emotional labor theory, taking into account the premise that always delivering service with a smile may become a psychological burden for employees in some cases. The questionnaire asked about the psychology of customer service by dividing the situation of service provision into four categories: normal service provision; service provision in the recovery of trust in the event of one's own failure; service provision in the recovery of trust in the event of the failure of others; and failure of machinery. To understand the relationship between employees' personalities and customer service psychology, we have also surveyed the five major personality factors used in psychology. The results of the analysis showed that the younger the age, the more toward female the gender balance, and the longer the tenure of the employee, the more likely they were to provide "service with a sincere smile." In terms of personality attributes, those with high extraversion, low cooperativeness, and high openness tended to be the ones who were more likely to provide "service with a smile." When hiring new employees, the results suggest that hiring young females in terms of subject characteristics and those with high extraversion and high openness in terms of personality attributes will improve service and the ability to respond positively to complaints.

1. Introduction

To provide exceptional customer service, organizations must have a keen understanding of their customers' wants, needs, and preferences (Bitner et al., 1990). Thus, a growing number of scholars are turning to non-verbal communication for this purpose (Puccinelli et al., 2010, 2013; Sundaram and Webster, 2000). Among service providers, the term "service with a smile" has been commonly used. This is because smiling is believed to have a positive impact on customers' perceptions of service encounters and on the overall perception of the company (Barger and Grandey, 2006).

There is a marked difference in smiling behavior by gender. Women tend to smile more than men (Deutsch, 1990), and women are said to be more emotionally expressive than men (Mattila et al., 2003). Therefore, smiling female service providers are considered to be more common than smiling male service providers. However, smiling of female service providers does not necessarily enhance the positive image of female service providers, as it simply confirms the expectations based on customers' past experiences (Andrzejewski and Mooney, 2016).

The growing demand for "service with a smile" suggests that perceived authenticity will become even more important in service interactions. This is because experienced customers have the ability to distinguish

Table 1: The Big Five factors and explanations

Factor	Description
(O) Openness	People who like to learn new things and enjoy new experiences usually score high in openness. Openness includes traits like being insightful and imaginative and having a wide variety of interests.
(C) Conscientiousness	People who have a high degree of conscientiousness are reliable and prompt. Traits include being organized, methodical, and thorough.
(E) Extraversion	Extroverts get their energy from interacting with others, while introverts get their energy from within themselves. Extraversion includes the traits of being energetic, talkative, and assertive.
(A) Agreeableness	These individuals are friendly, cooperative, and compassionate. People with low agreeableness may be more distant. Traits include being kind, affectionate, and sympathetic.
(N) Neuroticism	Neuroticism is also sometimes called emotional stability. This dimension relates to one's emotional stability and degree of negative emotions. People who score high on neuroticism often experience emotional instability and negative emotions. Traits include being moody and tense.

This table is created by the author based on van Thiel (2020).

unconsciously between authenticity and inauthenticity of emotional expressions during service encounters (Hochschild, 1983).

Customers may feel that a service provider has provided superior customer service beyond their expectations if the service provider displays what are perceived as genuine positive emotions (Grandey et al., 2005).

In addition, in terms of service providers providing "service with a smile," it is difficult for them to always provide service with a truly authentic smile, and they may provide service with a markedly inauthentic smile. In addition, there are cases where providing the latter service becomes a psychological burden for the service provider (Hochschild, 1983).

Thus, in this paper, a questionnaire survey on authenticity and inauthenticity when providing "service with a smile" was conducted using employees of leisure facilities as subjects, and the analysis and discussion of the results are developed.

In other words, this paper analyzes and discusses the psychological burden of service providers in the hospitality industry, which mainly provides human services, from the aspect of labor emotion theory.

2. Existing Research

2.1. Definition of emotional labor and occupations

Hochschild (1983) states that the types of labor can be roughly divided into three categories: physical labor, which is a traditional concept, brain labor, and emotional labor, which is a new concept. Emotional labor requires the coordination of the mind and emotions with the task of inducing or suppressing one's own emotions to bring the other person's (i.e., the customer's) mind to the desired state.

Typical examples of industries that feature emotional labor include service industries that involve customer service (the airline industry, food and beverage industry, retail industry, and hotel industry), medical industry, childcare and education industry, financial industry, government and public offices, and advertising and media industries that transmit information.

2.2. Authenticity and inauthenticity when providing service with a smile

Hochschild (1983) posited the idea of surface acting and deep acting in the field of psychology, taking inspiration from the framework of theater theory.

Surface acting: Facial expressions and gestures are "coy" and express surface emotions, regardless of one's inner feelings. It is the act of providing customer service, such as making up a smile, while not being in accord with one's true feelings (Hochschild, 1983).

Deep acting: "From the heart," oriented toward changing

the very emotions one experiences to make them more appropriate to the situation, so that spontaneous and accompanying expressions will emerge (Hochschild, 1983).

In other words, deep acting is a process in which employees alter their internal emotions to align with organizational expectations in order to produce a more natural and genuine expression of emotion (Grandey et al., 2013).

Although the basic processes are different, e.g., "service with a smile," both are generally aimed at showing positive emotions, which are presumed to influence customer feelings and outcomes (Grandey et al., 2013; Pugh et al., 2013; Tsai, 2001). However, workers who repeatedly engage in surface acting have also been found to accumulate stress (Grandey, 2003; Hülsheger and Schewe, 2011).

2.3. The five-factor model of personality: Big Five inventory

The Big Five is a model of personality traits with five factors that represent personality at the broadest level of abstraction. The Big Five framework shows that most individual differences in human personality can be categorized into five empirically derived domains. Table 1 shows the Big Five factors and their descriptions.

The Big Five has been the most widely used and widely studied personality model, although it is not widely accepted (John and Srivastava, 1999; McCrae and Costa, 1999).

In the Big Five, non-clinical individual differences can be classified based on five major personality factors: (O) Openness, (C) Conscientiousness, (E) Extraversion, (A) Agreeableness, and (N) Neuroticism. Table 1 shows the factors of the Big Five and their descriptions.

Several rating scales have been developed to measure the Big Five. The most comprehensive instrument is Costa and McCrae's (1992) 240-item NEO Personality Inventory, Revised (NEO-PI-R). However, the NEO-PI-R has a problem in that it takes about 45 minutes to complete. Therefore, several frameworks have been devised with fewer questions. For example, the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI; Benet-Martınez and John, 1998; John and Srivastava, 1999), the 60-item NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa and McCrae, 1992), and Goldberg's Trait Description Adjectives (TDA; Goldberg, 1992), are well known and widely used.

2.4. Short Big Five Inventory

Existing frameworks for measuring the Big Five have the problem of taking more than 5 minutes to complete a survey, even if the BFI-44 with 44 questions is used (John and Srivastava, 1999).

This time is too long for many questionnaire surveys, so

Table 2: The questionnaire of Short Big Five Inventory (BFI-10)

Instructions: How well do the following statements describe your personality?					
I see myself as someone who …	Disagree strongly	Disagree a little	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree a little	Agree strongly
1 … is reserved	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
2 … is generally trusting	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
3 … tends to be lazy	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
4 … is relaxed, handles stress well	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
5 … has few artistic interests	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
6 … is outgoing, sociable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
7 … tends to find fault with others	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
8 … does a thorough job	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
9 … gets nervous easily	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
10 … has an active imagination	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

Scoring the BFI‐10 scales: Extraversion: 1R, 6 Agreeableness: 2, 7R Conscientiousness: 3R, 8 Neuroticism: 4R, 9 Openness to Experience: 5R, 10 (R = item is reverse‐scored)

Adapted from Rammstedt & John (2007)

Table 3: Four customer service situations

	Situation	Description
1	Usual services	When you usually serve customers
2	Own mistakes	When you receive a complaint from a customer due to a mistake you made. ● If you receive a complaint from a customer because you gave them the wrong information about a show time, etc.
3	Other people's mistakes	If you receive a complaint from a customer due to a mistake made by another employee. ● Excessive waiting time for an attraction (if it is done manually). ● When a customer complains that an employee's attitude toward the customer was bad. ● Other employees in the situation in 2.
4	Machine failure	If you receive a complaint from a customer due to a problem with a machine or system ● A problem with the ticketing application ● The system of the attraction is down.

This table was created by the author(s).

shorter scales have been devised. Rammstedt and John (2007) developed the BFI-10, which is a 10-item version of the BFI-44) with the aim of measuring the Big Five in a limited amount of time. The BFI-10 is capable of assessing the Big Five with only two items per dimension. Table 2 shows the ten question items of the BFI-10.

Thus, the BFI-10 reduces the number of items in the BFI-44 to less than a quarter of the number of items in the BFI-44, which significantly reduces the survey time. Although it is less accurate than the BFI-44-based survey, it is said to maintain a significant level of reliability and validity (Rammstedt, 2007).

However, it is considered that there are many cases in which correlations are found between the independent variables of the Big Five characteristics of the BFI-10. Therefore, in multiple regression analysis using the BFI-10, it is desirable to apply a model that takes into account the interactions.

3. Purpose of the study

In this paper, using the framework of surface acting and deep acting of emotional labor theory (Hochschild, 1983),

we have conducted a questionnaire survey on the psychology of customer service among employees working in a leisure facility, based on the assumption that providing "service with a smile" in surface acting is de facto a psychological burden for employees. A questionnaire survey on customer service psychology was conducted.

In the questionnaire, customer service psychology is divided into two categories: service provision in restoring trust in the event of failure (Ngan and Yu, 2019) and normal service provision. To understand the relationship between employees' personality and customer service psychology, a survey on the five major personality factors used in psychology (Rammstedt and John, 2007) will be conducted at the same time.

4. Research Process

4.1. Questionnaire survey

This study aims to discuss the relationship between employee personality and customer service psychology by simultaneously conducting a survey of leisure facility employees regarding their emotions when serving customers, and a related study, the Short Big Five.

Table 4: The questionnaire of four customer service situations

	Situation	Surface acting strongly	Surface acting a little	Neither	Deep acting a little	Deep acting strongly
	Instructions: How well do the following statements describe your feelings?					
1	Usual services	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
2	Own mistakes	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
3	Other people's mistakes	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
4	Machine failure	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)

This table is created by the author(s).

Table 5: Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the Big Five characteristics

	(O) Openness	(C) Conscience	(E) Extraversion	(A) Agreeable	(N) Neuroticism	Average	Standard deviation
(O) Openness	1.000	0.092	0.217	-0.004	-0.420	2.927	0.805
(C) Conscientiousness		1.000	0.097	0.020	-0.433	3.184	0.805
(E) Extraversion			1.000	-0.003	-0.251	3.442	0.983
(A) Agreeableness				1.000	-0.055	3.347	0.595
(N) Neuroticism					1.000	2.846	0.944

This table is created by the author(s).

Table 6: Descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for four customer service situations

	Usual services	Own mistakes	Other people's mistakes	Machine failure	Average	Standard deviation
Usual services	1.000	0.430	0.334	0.346	3.293	0.862
Own mistakes		1.000	0.623	0.462	3.293	1.018
Other people's mistakes			1.000	0.409	3.073	1.197
Machine failure				1.000	2.780	1.279

This table is created by the author(s).

Specifically, we will combine the labor emotion theory and the personality assessment in the Short Big Five to discuss whether the personality traits of employees mean they are capable of serving customers sincerely (deep acting).

Table 3 shows the four customer service situations assumed in this study. The customer service situation asks about the psychology of customer service in normal service and service provision (Ngan and Yu, 2019) in restoring trust in the event of failure, etc., divided by the source of the problem: in the case of one's own failure, in the case of failure of other people, and in the case of machine failure.

Table 4 shows a table of written questions in four customer service situations. In the options, "surface acting state" in which the customer is not really prepared and is forced to smile, apologize, or have a gap between the true intention and the true intention, was given a score of 1. A 5-point Likert scale was used, with five points for engaging in "deep acting."

Table 2 shows the ten question items of the BFI-10, which allows for the assessment of the Big Five with only two items per dimension. The choices were based on a 5-point Likert scale with "Disagree strongly" scored as 1 point and "Agree strongly" scored as 5 points.

4.2.　Statistical analysis

In the statistical analysis, the results of the questionnaire survey were subjected to multiple regression analysis to identify the trends. The dependent variable was the degree of deep acting in each customer service situation, whereas the independent variables were the Big Five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism) and other personal characteristics such as age, gender, and years of employment. Although the Big Five personality traits were used as independent variables, there are some traits whose appearance is not exclusive, and they may appear simultaneously in the same person (Hochschild, 1983). Therefore, in the model of multiple regression analysis in this paper, crossover effects among the factors of the Big Five were taken into account. In addition, the stepwise method was used for the selection of independent variables, and the construction of the model was exploratory. Statistical analysis was conducted using the statistical software R.

5.　Analysis Results

The questionnaire survey and statistical analysis were conducted among leisure facility employees from the perspective of the Big Five personality traits (Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism) and from the perspective of surface acting and deep acting drawn from emotional labor theory (Hochschild, 1983).

For the questionnaire survey, we conducted a

Table 7: Re-entry regression analysis results

Four customer service situations		Usual services	Own mistakes	Other people's mistakes	Machine failure
Analytical model		OLS*1	OLS*1	OLS*1	OLS*1
Independent variable	(Intercept)	20.538 **	25.051 ***	11.487 *	20.523 **
	Age	-0.109 *	-0.137 *	-0.119	-0.118
	Gender	-1.034 **	-	-	-
	Years of service	0.52 *	0.668 **	0.795 *	0.498
	(O) Openness	0.624 **	-4.165 ***	-3.456 *	-2.746
	(C) Conscientiousness	-0.377 .	-	1.295	-
	(E) Extraversion	-3.039 *	-2.57 .	1.088	-3.879 *
	(A) Agreeableness	-4.208 **	-4.772 **	-2.443 .	-
	(N) Neuroticism	-2.605 *	-2.444 *	-1.526 .	-4.739 **
Interaction	(O) Openness: (N) Neuroticism	-	0.513 *	0.616 *	0.506
	(C) Conscientiousness: (E) Extraversion	-	-	-0.368	-
	(E) Extraversion: (A) Agreeableness	0.744 *	0.539	-	-
	(E) Extraversion: (N) Neuroticism	0.431 *	0.409 .	-	0.935 **
	(A) Agreeableness: (N) Neuroticism	0.464 .	0.987 **	0.607	0.562
Coefficient of determination (R2)		0.599 **	0.499 ***	0.387 *	0.379 **

*1: Least squares method with interaction considered (independent variables are selected by stepwise method).
Significance probability: ***p<0.001, **p<0.01, *p<0.05, '.'p<0.10.
This table is created by the author(s).

questionnaire survey of employees involved in the operation of several attractions at Theme Park A in Chiba Prefecture. We sent questionnaires to 50 people allowed by e-mail, of whom 41 (18 males and 23 females) gave a valid response, with a valid response rate of 82.0%. The survey period was 57 days, from September 1, 2021, to October 27, 2021. Table 5 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the Big Five, whereas Table 6 shows the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients for the four customer service situations.

In the Big Five, agreeableness supports the tendency for the standard deviation to be smaller than the other factors, indicating that the subjects' opinions are more unified. Correlation coefficients show weak negative correlations between (O)Openness and (E)Extraversion, and between (N)Neuroticism and (O)Openness, (C)Conscientiousness, and (E)Extraversion. Hochschild (1983) has shown that the Big Five have characteristics whose emergence is not exclusive, and the present results substantiate that claim.

Then, in the descriptive statistics and correlation coefficients of the four customer service situations, it is worth noting that all the relationships show more than a weak correlation, especially between own mistakes and other people's mistakes, which demonstrates a moderate correlation.

Table 7 shows the results of the multiple regression analysis, whereas Table 8 shows the analysis predictions. Since the analysis in this paper is a multiple regression analysis that takes into account the interaction, it is not possible to evaluate the degree of correlation with the dependent variable using the slope of each independent variable. Therefore, in this paper, Table 7 shows the significance of each independent variable, and the predicted values in Table 8 show the degree of correlation with the dependent variable.

In terms of subject characteristics, age is significant at a 5% significance probability and shows a negative correlation in the usual and self-mistake situations. Gender is significant at 1% in the usual situation, with a positive correlation for females and a negative correlation for males. Length of service is significant at 5% significance probability or more in non-machine situations, indicating a positive correlation.

As for personality attributes, diplomacy is significant and positively correlated at 5% in normal and machine failure situations, cooperation is significant and negatively correlated at 1% in normal and own error situations, neuroticism is significant and positively correlated at 5% or

Table 8: Analytical Predicted Values

Four customer service situations		Usual Services	Own mistakes	Other people's mistakes	Machine failure
Age	-10%	0.243	0.306	0.266	0.266
	+10%	-0.243	-0.306	-0.266	-0.266
Gender	Female	0.454	0.000	0.000	0.000
	Male	-0.580	0.000	0.000	0.000
Years of service	-10%	-0.190	-0.244	-0.291	-0.182
	+10%	0.190	0.244	0.291	0.182
Classification	-10%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	+10%	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
(O) Openness	-10%	-0.166	-0.068	-0.010	-0.102
	+10%	0.166	0.068	0.010	0.102
(C) Conscientiousness	-10%	0.111	0.000	-0.030	0.000
	+10%	-0.111	0.000	0.030	0.000
(E) Extraversion	-10%	-0.132	-0.058	-0.000	-0.009
	+10%	0.132	0.058	0.000	0.009
(A) Agreeableness	-10%	0.187	0.122	0.258	0.000
	+10%	-0.187	-0.122	-0.258	0.000
(N) Neuroticism	-10%	-0.065	-0.065	-0.030	0.091
	+10%	0.065	0.065	0.030	-0.091

Note: Cells with a gray background are those where the independent variable did not reach significance at the 5% significance probability.

This table was created by the author(s).

more in situations other than other people's errors, and liberality is significant and positively correlated at 5% or more in non-machine-failure situations.

6. Examination and Summary

This paper investigated the psychology of customer service among employees working in leisure facilities based on the theory of emotional labor, taking into account the suggestion that providing "service with a smile" may become a psychological burden for some employees.

The results of the analysis showed that the younger the age, the more toward female the gender balance, and the longer the years of service, the more likely the participants were to be able to respond in a deep-acting manner. In terms of personality attributes, more extroverted, less cooperative, and more open-minded people tended to be able to respond in a deep-acting manner. An interesting finding was that low cooperativeness tended to be associated with deep-acting responses. Further research is needed on this point. In addition, those with a tendency to high neuroticism were correlated with deep-acting responses, but since this is a minor trend, it will not be discussed as an employee characteristic.

When hiring new employees, hiring young females in terms of subject characteristics, and those with high extraversion and openness in terms of personality attributes is expected to improve service and the aftercare response to customer complaints.

One of the limitations of this paper is the small sample size of 41 respondents. A direction for future research is to conduct a survey with a larger sample size to improve the accuracy of the analysis.

Acknowledgments

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