

Employees' Uniform on Company Image and Employees' Self-perceptions – A Study of Fine Dining Restaurants

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to investigate how different styles of employee uniforms affect customers' perceptions of the restaurant image and employees' self-perceptions in terms of job performance. First, the study is to reveal whether there is a significant relationship between uniforms and employee's job performance. Second, is there a significant difference between employees' job satisfaction and styles of uniforms? Lastly, is there a significant relationship between styles of uniforms and customers' perception of employee performance?

1. Introduction¹

Nowadays, with so many added choices in the hospitality industry, customers are more critical and sensitive of what they are paying for. While ambience and corporate image play an essential role in affecting customer satisfaction, employee uniforms are a significant factor in the overall impression of an establishment (Chathoth, Mak,, Jauhari,, & Manaktola, 2017; Chaturvedi, 2014). Uniforms are the shop front of a company, a symbol of company image, and an essential channel for a company to express its professional services, quality, and cultural background (Chaturvedi, 2014).

The hospitality industry is a demanding industry, which relies on its employees to complete sales and provide services to customers. Besides the visual appeal of food and room settings, many intangible services also depend on employees to deliver excellent service. Guests' satisfaction depends on intangible qualities such as ambience and service attitude. These intangible services make up an important part of a guests' experience while visiting an establishment.

Customers judge intangible experiences to rate service quality and make a final judgment about a hospitality organization. The restaurant uniform is an important element in a customer's evaluation because the uniform is a part of the organization's image and an extension of hospitality service.

The style of employee uniform not only generates external marketing effects such as customer satisfaction and customer perception, but also has a main influence on employees' job satisfaction, work enthusiasm and self-recognition in a restaurant.

Definition of Terms

The color, style, cutting, logo and pattern of uniform all have influence on employees in different ways. In this study, the main focus was on the influence of the employee

uniform styles; they were formal style and casual style of uniform.

- Formal style of uniform: jacket and shirt/blouse,
- Casual style of uniform: polo shirt (Peluchette & Karl, 2007).
- A fine dining restaurant: has a formal atmosphere, is almost always a sit down restaurant, and has a fancier menu than most restaurants. Fine dining restaurants offer wine lists, and sometimes sommeliers, to help you with your food and wine pairing. They also have dress codes in most cases (Barrows, Powers, & Reynolds, 2012).

Objectives of the Study

Customers are sensitive to what they are paying for; therefore, to satisfy customers' demands, hospitality services must understand the relationship between employees' uniforms and customers' perceptions. (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 2018). The majority of customers view people in uniforms as better trained and more knowledgeable about their company's products and services (Barr, 2007). Restaurant uniforms are not only attire employees wear to work, but also serve as restaurant identity. Well-designed uniforms play an essential role in effective communication between customers and restaurants (Burns & Lennon, 1993).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between styles of uniform and employee job performance.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference in preference of styles of uniform among employees.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between styles of uniform and employees' satisfaction with their jobs.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between styles of uniform and customers' perceptions of restaurant image.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant relationship between styles of uniform and customers' perceptions of employee performance.

2. Literature review

Company Image

A restaurant's image includes both tangible and intangible factors, both are important to a restaurant's image. Customers use different ways to estimate the service quality

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ty and to make a final decision about the hospitality organization. Employee uniforms give one of the first impressions that customers get when they visit a restaurant. Uniforms are not just employee working suits, but they also influence the look of the entire restaurant setting (Chathoth, Mak,, Jauhari,, & Manaktola, 2017; Chaturvedi, 2014). Employee uniforms typically constitute an important component of a hospitality establishment's brand identity (Nelson & Bowen, 2000). In other words, uniforms are part of the organization image and an extension of hospitality services (Kwon, 2014). Uniforms of today are used to brand a property and set the tone of a guest's expectation (O'Conner, 2007). A well-designed attractive uniform can make a very positive statement about your company and can completely overhaul your image ("You Wear it Well," 2005).

Because hospitality industries are so competitive, hospitality services must develop new strategies to increase customers' satisfaction and accomplish customers' expectations. Uniforms convey an image to customers. They broaden and expand on the resort's theme, identify employees for patrons seeking information, and create a professional attitude among employees (Robison, 2005).

Uniforms also clarify service by giving the guests an idea of what type of service to expect (Nelson & Bowen, 2000). For example, when guests visit a restaurant at Disney hotel resorts, they are expecting casual and colorful uniforms which create a fun and friendly mood for customers. In contrast, the uniforms at a luxury hotel are understated and formal confirming guests' expectations for that type of property ("Staff Uniforms Reveal a lot About an Organization," 2007). Therefore, well-designed uniforms are not only an extension of a restaurant's image, but they are also a visual message of the type of service to be expected.

Being a part of a restaurant's image, uniforms identify employees for customers. Uniforms communicate a business as professional, reliable, consistent, and detail oriented (Barr, 2007). Uniforms speak to employees' classification and professionalism. The impression you receive in your first five seconds sum up the credibility of the person you are speaking with (Robison, 2005). Uniforms make service quick and direct for customers because uniforms allow customers to identify employees easily, making it simple for customers to ask a question or ask for service ("Staff Uniforms Reveal a lot About an Organization," 2007).

Employees' Self-Perceptions of the Uniform

When employees are satisfied with their appearance, they can deliver good services to customers. Sheehan (2003) reported that "If you're embarrassed to be seen in your uniform, chances are very high that you are not going to make an effort to be seen by the public, nor are you apt to go out of your way to assist a guest" (p. 49). Satisfaction with the uniform is affected by who the selector is—the wearer or people other than the wearer (Haise & Rucker, 2003). Restaurant owners should be willing to spend money on their employees' uniforms so that their employees will feel proud to wear them. Only when employees are satisfied with their appearance, can they deliver good service to their guests.

Career clothing in general, the uniform in particular, can serve to meet a variety of organizational goals and objectives (Joseph & Alex, 1972). Nelson and Bowen (2000) claimed that inappropriate uniforms communicate to customers that the company is careless and inefficient. In addition, employees tend to fail at performing their jobs when they wear ill-fitting uniforms. Employees who do not like their uniform due to color, style, or fit can have a very negative influence on guest satisfaction levels (Sheehan, 2003). Moreover, Fusedell (2002) mentioned that in a hotel, uniforms must do more than identify employees. Employees' appearance plays a role in maintaining morale and building self-esteem. Employees' self-perception about their work attire or image can contribute to attitudes while interacting with guests. Adomaitis and Johnson (2005) found that flight attendants' behavior changed when they wore different uniforms. Participants work behavior becomes relaxed in casual uniforms versus when they are in formal uniforms; their behavior is cautioned. The results of the flight attendant research indicated that types of uniforms do impact the behavior of the individuals as well as flight attendants' perception concerning ability to perform their job.

Workplace attire is a visible way of supporting certain organizational values (Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Peluchette and Karl (2007) also mentioned that organizations have used uniforms to affect employees' attitudes and behaviors, and to reflect organizational values for years; for example, the United Parcel Service (UPS). The brown UPS uniform has come to represent the company's ability to provide services to almost any one in the world. Southwest Airlines provides polo shirts and shorts as uniforms to enhance the casual environment feel in the workplace, which stands out from any other competitor. Also, casual work attire encourages employees to deliver friendly service to customers.

Workplace uniforms serve as a symbol and create consensus in meaning to others influencing their reactions to the wearers (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Solomon and Schopler (1982) found that both male and female employees express that appropriately designed uniforms affect the quality of their performance and their moods in the workplace. Rafaeli et al. (1997) found that employees felt uncomfortable with inappropriate uniforms yet felt increased self-confidence in appropriate attire. These studies showed the influence of employees' uniforms on self-perception.

3. Methodology

Selection of Samples

The participants of this study will be the employees working in the fine dining restaurants and customers visiting of these restaurants. The study will survey employees and customers at 10 restaurants in Southern California, including Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties. This study plans to use their employee meetings for data collection, which both managers and employees attend.

Research Instruments

Two instruments will be used in this research. Six-point Likert-type scale questionnaires will be developed based on the literature and used in studying employees' self-

perception of uniforms and customers' perception of employees' uniforms regarding restaurant image.

Data collection

The researcher will explain to the participants the purpose and synopsis of this study. For employees, the researcher will distribute an informed consent and the employee self-perception survey during a restaurant general meeting.

For customers, the researcher will place a survey on each table containing an informed consent sheet and a customer satisfaction survey.

Data Analyses

The Statistical Packages for Social Sciences (SPSS) program for Windows versions 25.0. (2017) will be used. Standard statistical procedures, such as frequency, mean, standard deviation, Independent Samples t-test, One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), and Multiple Regression will be used for analysis of relationship among study variables.

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4. Expected outcomes and recommendations

- Formal style uniforms should be required by the fine dining restaurants to increase their employees' job performance.
- Uniforms should be considered an element affecting employees' satisfaction and job performance.
- Formal style uniforms should be required by the restaurants that want high-end service for their customers.

5. Further research and limitations

Due to the limitations of this study, the following recommendations can be considered for further research and/or replication of this study:

- Increasing the sample size and widening the geographic areas.
- Investigating students majoring in hospitality to see if students have different perspectives than employees who are already in the industry.
- Replicating the study in convention centers, casinos, resorts, city clubs, or country clubs to examine if differences exist among these hospitality business segments.
- Conducting a similar research in foreign countries and compare.

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