

EMOTIONAL LABOUR: AN EMERGING CONCEPT IN SERVICES MARKETING

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to provide the general discussions on the importance and relevance of emotional labour as an emerging concept in Service Marketing. Employees are frequently faced with emotional work during the service encounters that require them to show a specific emotional display in order to meet the organization's requirements and goals. Employees are seen as one of the most important assets in the organisation to ensure organisations remain competitive. The management of employees emotion is perceived as one of the important management aspects as argues in this paper.

Keywords: Emotional labour; Service marketing; Service quality; Customer satisfaction.

JEL Classification Codes: M30; M31.

1. Introduction

In a service industry, employees play a key role in marketing through the provision of service quality and customer satisfaction. Therefore managers and service marketers need to pay attention to issues relating to management of front line employees such as the management of their emotion.

Emotional labour is a relatively new concept that has only been given attention in recent years. Employers' efforts to shape workers' emotions and emotional displays have become an important focus of organisational research (Rafaeli & Sutton, 1987; Sutton, 1991; Sutton & Rafaeli, 1988; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989).

The literature review reveals that there is a growing body of work that addresses emotional labour in general (Wharton, 1993, Adelman, 1995; Pugliesi 1999; Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000; Zapf et al., 1999, 2001) and increasing attention has been given to how service providers express their emotion during service encounter (Hochschild, 1983; Leidner, 1999; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Grandey et al., 2002; Pugh, 2001) However, to date there is very little research that explores emotional labour in relation to employees and customers from the service marketing perspectives.

2. Emotional labour: An emerging concept in services marketing?

Arlie Hochschild introduced the notion of emotional labour in her book, *The Managed Heart*, as the act of expressing socially desired emotions during service transactions (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labour occurs when, according to Hochschild (1983), expressed emotions satisfy display rules, but clash with inner feelings. Emotional labour also refers to the labour that goes beyond the physical or mental skills needed to deliver quality service. According to Zeithaml and Bitner, emotional labour needs the person involved to deliver smiles, make eye contact, show sincere interest and engage in friendly conversation with people who are essentially strangers and who may or may not ever be seen again (1996). They involves human elements such as personal demeanor, courtesy, empathy (Lovelock, 2001), friendliness and responsiveness (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). These elements are directed towards customers who require huge amounts of emotional labour from the frontline employees who are responsible for the organisation. This is true since service encounters entail more than just correct technical execution of a task (Lovelock, 2001).

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A review of the literature (Bowen and Schneider, 1988; Bowen et al., 1990; Brown et al., 1991) suggests that the concept of emotional labour has particular relevance to service encounters because:

- Frontline service personnel are situated at the organisation-customer interface and therefore represent the organisation to its customer;
- Service transactions often involve face-to-face interactions between service agents and customers;
- There is uncertainty created by customer participation in the service encounter, such as those encounters which often have a dynamic and emergent quality; and
- The services rendered during an encounter is relatively intangible, making it difficult for customers to evaluate service quality (Adapted from Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993).

Early organisational literature on emotional labour in service settings has evidenced a prominent work by Rafaeli and Sutton (1987, 1989) and Sutton and Rafaeli (1988). These works focused on emotional labour across a variety of service jobs which showed that customer reactions and organisational outcomes, particularly sales, were clearly affected by how employees express their feelings. Increasing attention has also been given, particularly, on how the organisation attempts to control these displays of emotions (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Hochschild, 1983; Wharton and Erickson, 1993). Most of the research into emotional labour has been concerned with employees working at the organisation-customer interface in the service industry (Mann, 1997) and focused on the customer service (for example, Hochschild, 1983; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989). As Hochschild (1983) noted, “these organisational employees represent the corporation’s frontline to customers and embody the image that the organisation wants to project”. Her studies on flight attendants provide vital evidence of the highly service-oriented employees on emotional labour.

Initially, research on emotion has been the interest of a group of psychologists and sociologists (Hochschild, 1983; Thoit, 1990) and, not long ago, by organisational researchers (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; 1995, Fineman, 1993; Morris and Feldman, 1996a, 1996b, 1997). Only more recently, the management and marketing researchers (Chu and Murmann, 2006; Gountas et al., 2007; Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Phillips et al., 2006) have dealt with emotions work as one of the important determinants in the success of the service transaction. Chu and Murmann (2006), for example, developed a scale for measuring emotional labour in the hospitality industry. Gountas et al., (2007), on the other hand looked at the service provider’s positive affective display from the consumer’s perspective and Phillip et al., (2006) theoretically discussed the relationship between emotional dissonance and the customer’s orientation and job satisfaction. Clearly, this research on emotional labour in service marketing areas is still lacking in many areas, especially in terms of the relationship between emotional labour and its impact on employees and customers.

Much of the research on emotional labour has been conducted on the emotional expression (emotional display) of the employees, surface and deep acting, and also some on the conceptualisation works. Research into this area has also paid a lot of attention to the negative impact on the employees of performing emotional labour, particularly in relation to emotional dissonance. There is, however, research that found evidence on the positive side of emotional labour but the evidence is still very limited. Evidently, the results and the interpretation of these findings have been mixed and inconsistent. Past research has also concentrated its investigation on the impact of emotional labour in isolation which is from the employees’ view only for example Hochschild (1983); Ashforth and Humphrey (1993); Morris and Feldman (1996, 1996), Grandey (2003); Grandey et al., (2002); Simpson and Stroh (2004), but fewer have given much attention to its impact on consumers (with the exception of Brown and Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994; Grayson, 1998; Pugh, 2001; Tsai, 2001), which is clearly fragmented. What has not been considered is the extent to which emotional labour of employees has had an impact on the customers by taking into consideration both employees and customers. Indeed, examination of the impact of emotional labour on customers’ outcomes is needed, because it could be argued that one of the primary reasons why organisations require emotional labour is the expectation that regulated emotional expression will increase service quality and customer satisfaction. Therefore, more research is necessary to explore this issue in detail.

From a service marketing perspective, this expression of emotion, as part of the work role, is important to the practice and research of service marketing because service employees are often required to express

certain emotions as part of their jobs (Grayson, 1998). The goal of service encounters is to provide and attract new customers and maintain the loyalty of the existing customers. Thus, emotions are deemed to be demanded which in turn will affect the customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction because it is largely dependent on the emotional climate of the service interaction. Customer-contact employees comply with so-called display rules through both acting and the expression of spontaneous and genuine emotions (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). In general, display rules reflect the norms imposed both by society, which may vary from one culture to another, and by specific occupations and organisations (Lovelock, 2001). The display of emotions can have a strong influence on the customer's perception of the service quality (Kotler et al., 1998). Having said that, if management is determined to ensure that, customers receive high service quality, they must therefore also be concerned with emotional labour (Korczynski, 2002). Service quality clearly is one of the major concerns in service marketing. Good provisions of service quality and customer satisfaction are among the most important criteria for the organisation to stay competitive in the market. In relation to this, the management of employees' emotion is seen as relevant because employees are the key people who deliver the service in satisfying the customers. Review of past research however, has not evidenced any research that examined the relationship of performing emotional labour with any one of the organisational outcomes like service quality and customer satisfaction. In particular, the impact of emotional labour and also emotional dissonance on employees has not been clearly explored from both perspectives i.e. employees and customers in relation to these organisational outcomes. This is important because, failure to display emotions that customers expect can be damaging and may actually lead to complaints that employees don't seem to care (Lovelock, 2001). Clearly, the management of customer contact employees, referred by Zeithaml and Bitner (1996) to as boundary spanner is important to maintain the organisational effectiveness and customer loyalty because employees who display pleasant emotions (genuine emotion) may promote the organisational goal. At this point, the need for a marketing involvement in this approach becomes clear, because the need to maintain good organisation performance, high levels of customer satisfaction and customer loyalty is clearly marketing issues.

However, the majority of the previous research in services marketing overlooks the importance of emotional content of service delivery (Price et al., 1995). Having said that, previous service marketing research focuses on the provision not only of predominately functional benefits (Czepiel et al., 1985; Parasuraman et al., 1988), but also low-affect contexts such as bank transactions, making airline reservations or hotel check-ins (Price et al., 1995). Thus, there has been a paucity of marketing research on emotional labour in particular where the customer service role is required. Therefore, it is argued that, emotional labour is not only an important aspect of organisational life but has its place in service marketing. Thus, the role of emotional labour in service marketing should be explored and extended in further details so that the view of emotional labour in the organisation's perspectives can also be integrated into the service marketing context.

3. Conclusions

The rapid rise of the service industry, in which the service encounter is one of the key criteria in ensuring the organisation's success, has made the study of emotional labour increasingly important in the area of services marketing. Given the importance of managing the emotion among the employees, emotional labour is seen at the heart of the emotion study and should be given more attention due to its impact on employees' performance. It is evident that the management of service encounters is vital to enable the organisation to stay competitive in the market. Nevertheless, there is rather less work that studies the impact of emotional labour from service marketing perspectives in particular on service quality and customer satisfaction. Thus, this has left gaps in the literature that demand further investigation due to its importance in managing the employee-customer relationship.

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