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DOES MODE OF INTERACTION IMPACT EMOTIONAL LABOUR? A MIXED METHOD STUDY AMONG SERVICE EMPLOYEES IN INDIA

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Abstract

The emergence of service sectors has signaled way to employment to greater extent across the various countries (Lee and Wolpin, 2006). Service sectors has catered way to many service jobs which require interpersonal contacts with customers and employees are often required to engage in emotional labour (EL). Emotions are integral part of employees and customer interactions and understanding of emotional labour will benefit the service sectors to manage employee-customer relationships better. The objective of this study is to find whether emotional labour in hotels and call centres differs based on mode of interaction. To begin with, 12 in-depth Interviews were conducted from service employees. Then, standardized questionnaires were distributed to the employees to collect data through Survey method. Statistical analysis was done on 452 responses from hotels and call centres. As hypothesized, mode of interaction has an impact on emotional labour. The study also discusses managerial and theoretical implications along with limitations and areas of future research.

Keywords: Service sectors, emotional labour, mode of interaction, employees customer, interactions

1. INTRODUCTION

Today world is facing many challenging changes and one such change is the emergence of service sectors. One of the key reasons for this is the globalization, privatization and post industrialization happening across globe. This has made the service sectors vibrant and they play a prime role in the growth of any country, socially or economically. They not only contribute to the global output but also the largest employment opportunity sector. The products of service sector are "intangible" in nature ranging from governance, health, education to communications, information, and business services. Unlike agricultural or industrial goods, service sectors require relatively more human capital and less natural capital. The strength of economy depends on availability of quality services. As service sectors use few natural resources, they are not detrimental to the ecological environment. So it has the eco-friendly behaviour to sustain in long run. In addition, the economic changes due to emergence of service sectors, they have paved way to the employability of many people.

The above arguments are also well supported by Bergesen and Sonnett (2001), who argued the importance of service sectors in nation's economies. The shift of industries from technology to services has led to more people interactions. Exchanges between employees and customers can either be in person (face to face) or thorough telephone (voice to voice). For a service organization to gain competitive advantage, it is necessary to have good relationship between employees and customers. Unlike hardware or software industries which rely on products, service quality relies on emotional element of humans (Alias, 2013). In other words, the service quality dimensions are tangibles,

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assurance, empathy, reliability and adaptability which are dependent on or at least influenced by the emotions.

The research on Emotions in organizations has gained tremendous attention among various stakeholders' viz. Academicians and practitioners (Ashkanasy et al., 2002; Grandey and Gabriel, 2015). Though we have many constructs in emotions, Emotional Labour is the key construct suited in many service roles, which means the regulation of feelings and expressions at work (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). The term "Emotional Labour" emerged in Hochschild's classic work done twenty years ago, titled "The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling". She piloted few studies on airline flight attendants and debt collectors, which led to the emergence of this term. The aforementioned is defined by Hochschild (1983) as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display, which is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange value." Though the research around Emotional Labour has a long history of 30 years, the definitions as well as the dimensions are not clearly known and there exists no consensus. The focus of the researcher is to study this construct in India as service sectors started booming in this country and the literature on Emotional Labour in India is very limited which is a promising research gap to be filled.

There are certain characteristics that need to be followed for jobs involving Emotional Labour. They are as follows: i) The jobs that require interactions with customers, either face to face or voice to voice; ii) The job that require the worker to create an emotional state in another person; iii) The job that allows the employees to exercise some degree of control over their emotional activities. Service organisations postulate set of rules to display emotions and employees must dynamically adjust both their emotional displays and emotions to fulfill these requirements. The studies done by various researchers like Grandey (2000), Diefendorff and Gosserand (2003) suggest that employees may simply display fake emotions which are unfelt or suppress felt emotions (Surface Acting) to manage an interaction. Alternatively they can also display genuine emotions (Deep Acting). Put together, it can be concluded that Surface Acting (SA) and Deep Acting (DA) are the strategies that employees use when they cannot naturally display the appropriate emotions.

It was way back in 1980s, the interest of researchers spun to OCB (Bateman and Organ, 1983; Smith et al., 1983). This term is often related the employees act of helping others beyond their job responsibilities (Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004). In today's dynamic work environment, service employees are in need to communicate with customers either short-term or lengthy to maintain good professional relationships. In addition, they may need to engage in behaviors (eg. make customers happy) that are not explicitly mentioned in their job description. These behaviors which enrich the interface between employees and customers are termed as OCB (towards customers). A study conducted by Diefendorff et al. (2006) investigated the link between Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB) and Emotional labour. The study emphasized that employee who display positive emotions (deep acting) genuinely are more likely to participate in OCB in the workplace as compared to those who falsify their emotions (surface acting).

Underlying this context, the researcher framed the following objectives for the current study:

- i. To study the impact of mode of interaction on dimensions of emotional labour viz., surface acting and deep acting as well as on Organizational Citizenship Behaviour.
- ii. To examine the mediating role of Dimensions of Emotional Labour (Surface Acting and Deep Acting) between the mode of interaction and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Emotional Labour is considered as an inbuilt component of any job which mandates service exchanges with the customers. But whether the mode of interaction has an impact on emotional labour is not explored much in literature except for few studies in Western context (Kinman, 2009). This section will provide theoretical literature and empirical evidence which supports the study variables.

2.1. Mode of interaction

As discussed earlier in this paper, Emotional labour as conceptualized by Hochschild (1983) in her seminal work is a inseparable element of jobs executed either "face to face" (in person) or "voice to voice" (on the telephone). In spite of lack of studies with respect to mode of interaction, few studies have examined the emotion work in face to face interaction in service sectors like banking, hospitality, retail, theme parks (e.g. Tolich, 1993; Abraham, 1998; Zapf et al., 2001; Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Heuven and Bakker, 2003). Most of the service sector employees require to interact with customers on a daily basis through telephone, but very few studies have investigated the mode and outcomes of emotional labour through voice interaction (Callaghan and Thompson, 2002; Grandey and Fisk, 2006). Lewig and Dollard in 2003 concluded that call centres employees need to follow emotional display rules. Also they need to regulate the emotions during their interactions with customers (e.g. Deery et al., 2002; Zapf et al., 2003). Unlike voice interactions, emotional labour performed face to face might be more demanding for several reasons. As customers can see employees in person, the employees' vocal tone, facial expression and body language must be in congruence when employees interact with customers face to face. But emotions are conveyed to the customer by voice over the telephone and call centre employees need not bother much on this congruence. This study aims to investigate this difference in emotional labour performed by employees with respect to their mode of interactions with customers viz. face to face (hotel employees) or voice to voice (call centre employees).

2.2. Emotional labour

The body of emotional labor literature suggests that employees need to comply with display rules to exhibit desired emotions (Deep Acting) or fake emotions by hiding their true feelings at the workplace. It was well accepted fact in service organizations that employees must display positive emotions which in turn means that they must practice Deep acting so that positive emotional display will take place. In contrast, Surface Acting usually involves falsifying positive emotions and suppressing felt emotions which doesn't comply with display rules, so that positive displays will follow. Deep Acting (acting in good faith) embroils employees to experience the emotions. Alternatively, Surface Acting (acting in bad faith) makes them to go through the emotions (Grandey, 2003). It has been argued by few researchers that focusing on just two strategies of emotional labour viz. SA and DA, ignores the possibility of human nature of displaying emotions (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). This means some employees tend to naturally exhibit the required emotions as a nature of their personality. Ashforth and Humphrey (1993) argues that the naturally felt emotions constitute the dimension of emotional labor. But this dimension is not studied in this current research. Undeniably, SA and DA are the compensatory strategies that help employees to express emotions that do not come naturally. Though we have studies that examine natural emotions as a dimension of emotional labour, (Diefendorff et al., 2005), no published research has examined the relationship between natural emotions mode of interaction. Though, there is a gap in literature, this study considered only two dimensions of Emotional labour and empirically differentiates SA and DA. In this context, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1a: Mode of interaction will have significant relationship on Surface acting H1b: Mode of interaction will have significant relationship on Deep acting

2.3. Organizational citizenship behaviour

Individual behavior of employees that are discretionary in nature, not directly or explicitly acknowledged formally by the reward system, and that in aggregate promotes the effective functioning of the organization is termed as OCB (Organ, 1988). The degree to which employees perform Surface acting or Deep acting will correlate with their exhibition of extra role behaviours in service interactions. These roles are not rewarded extrinsically by the organizations. However, some employees engage in such behaviours as they find an intrinsic reward. In simple words, the benefit associated in helping colleagues is weighed much in their work satisfaction. However, if the amount of emotional demand is high, then it actually discourages employees to engage in OCBs as the energy involved in faking emotions to match the demand. Employees who engage in Deep acting create a positive environment at work as they actively tries to feel the job demanded emotions

(Johnson & Spector, 2007). This positive environment created out of performing Deep acting will enhance psychological well-being of employees which in turn result in their willingness to perform OCBs. There is an association between employees who deep act and performance of more extra role behaviors (Grandey, 2000). The mechanisms by which mode of interaction influences OCBs is underresearched (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2000). A recent study by Goodwin *et al.* (2011) suggests that the relationship between different facets of performance viz. customer service outcomes, task performance, organizational citizenship behaviours and emotional labour is an area which has future research scope.

The following hypotheses are thus decided by the researcher analyzing the above literature.

H2: Mode of interaction will have significant relationship on organizational citizenship behaviour.

H3a: Surface acting will have significant relationship on organizational citizenship behaviour.

H3b: Deep acting will have significant relationship on organizational citizenship behaviour.

H4a: Surface Acting acts as mediator between mode of interaction and organizational citizenship behaviour.

H4b: Deep Acting acts as mediator between mode of interaction and organizational citizenship behaviour

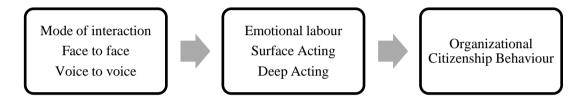


Figure 1: Research framework

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using In-depth Interviews and Survey method.

3.1. Sample

Sample for 12 in-depth interviews comprises of team leaders, vice presidents, Operations Heads and executives from both the sectors. As the total population of employees who interact with customers in the selected hotels and call centres is 650, the researcher decided to distribute the questionnaires to them in person as well as online. 69.5% response rate was achieved. Final data had 461 responses from service employees in hotels and call centres. Selection of respondents is done based on Judgmental/Purposive sampling technique. The final sample is 452 had a good mix of gender comprising 67.7% males and 31.7% females. Out of 452 data, 221 were from customer service centres/call centres and 231 were from star category hotels.

3.2. Instruments

The researcher adopted the standardized questionnaires from existing research which suits this context. The questionnaire had 34 items which measured Mode of interaction (1 item), Emotional Labour (11 items), and OCB (22 items). The respondents were asked whether they work in hotel (Face-to-face interaction) or call centre (voice-to-voice interaction) industry to understand their mode of interaction. The researcher adopted the Emotional labour questionnaire from Diefendorff *et al.*, (2005) study. The scale measures 2 types of emotional labour namely: Surface acting (7 items), deep acting (4 items). Coyle-Shapiro (2002) self-report inventory having 22 items was used to measure the OCB of service employees. The validity and reliability of the questionnaires were re-established for this study and found to be statistically significant (0.89 – 0.91).

4. Findings

Though Emotional labour is a buzz word in service jobs and interaction between customer and employees have changed a lot from face to face interaction to technologically oriented interaction, we still have not explored much on the very basic question whether the mode of interaction affect the way in which emotional labour is performed? Hence the researcher carried out an exploratory study to find some evidence to substantiate the argument.

Employees who were employed in call centres and who were involved in voice to voice interaction with customers hear only the voice of customers; it is requisite for employees to show pleasant emotions in their vocal tone irrespective of their feelings. This behaviour is termed as "surface acting". Employees of hotel industry said that they deal with customers primarily through face to face interaction. This demands them to show pleasant emotions as they are in direct contact with the customers. They reported that though they don't exhibit positive emotions initially they tend to exhibit real emotions in due course of time in their interaction with customers. Team leader of the call centre has said "Since we talk over phone we are not much concerned about facial emotions." This statement implies that they use surface acting.

Service employees in hotels use face to face interaction with their customers to a large extent; hence they use deep acting to show their emotions. Both the sectors demands employees to interact with customers continuously and repeatedly. Thus it was concluded from this exploratory study that there exists a difference in the emotional labour used by the employees based on the mode of interaction with the client (face to face and voice to voice). To confirm this quantitatively, a survey was carried out.

Table 1 shows the means, SD and inter-correlations of study variables. Deep acting has got the highest mean scores among the two dimensions which are represented in Table 1. This shows that on an average service employees present true emotions without faking on the surface level.

Table 1: Mean, standard deviation and correlation

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3
Surface acting	3.38	0.822	1		
Deep acting	3.73	0.919	-0.642**	1	
OCB	3.45	0.599	-0.527**	0.520^{**}	1

^{(**}Significance at 0.01 level)

Surface acting has negative correlation (r = -0.642**) with deep acting. This result supports our theoretical argument that faking emotions (Surface acting) and acting in good faith (Deep acting) have negative relationship. This signifies that employees who tend to perform true emotions (deep act) will eventually show less fake emotions. Surface acting has negative correlation (r = -0.527**) with organizational citizenship behaviour. Employees who perform more Surface Acting will decrease their intention to perform extra role behaviour like helping their co-workers, participating in functions not related to job role. In order to find the empirical evidence, independent t tests were conducted to test Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 2 (see Table 2). This table shows that there is a difference in Surface Acting, Deep Acting and OCB based on Mode of interaction.

Table 2: Group differences based on mode of interaction – "t-tests"

		Df	Mean scores		
Variables	t value		Face to face interaction	Voice to voice interaction	
Surface acting	17.13*	451	3.31	3.74	
Deep acting	24.68*	451	4.44	3.19	
Organizational citizenship behaviour	15.33*	451	3.86	3.45	

^{*}Significance at 0.05 level

Two groups differ significantly at p = 0.05 level on Surface Acting, Deep Acting and OCB based on mode of interaction. Service employees interacting face to face with customers tend to show internally modified emotions according to job role and exhibit more OCB compared to those who interact voice to voice with customers.

Table 3: Surface acting (SA) as mediator between mode of interaction (MOI) and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB)

No.	Equations	Beta	Adjusted R ²	F	Sobel Test statistic
1	Mode Of Interaction (MOI) on Surface Acting (SA)	0.744*	0.553	851.38	
2	Surface Acting on Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)	-0.527**	0.514	729.79	19.85*
3	MOI on OCB	-0.936*	0.885	5888.1	
4	MOI on OCB (in the presence of SA)	-0.923*	0.896	2949.1	

^{*} Significance at 0.05 level **Significance at 0.01 level

Mode of interaction has a significant impact on Surface Acting, Deep Acting (p < .05) as well as on OCB. Hence Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 2 were supported. Similarly Hypotheses 3a and 3b are tested using Surface Acting and Deep Acting as independent variables and organizational citizenship behaviour as dependent variable. Table 3 shows Surface Acting has a significant negative impact ($\beta = -0.527**$) on OCB (p < .01). Therefore, the researcher accepts Hypothesis 3a.

To examine Hypotheses 4a and 4b, the researcher did mediation analysis using the steps illustrated by Baron and Kenny (1986) (Table 3 and 4). Surface acting and Deep Acting which acts as mediators between mode of interaction and OCB is tested using four hierarchical regressions.

When employees and customers interact through telephone they don't see each other and hence employees fake emotions. Emotions are faked by employees just by changing their vocal tone to satisfy customers. MOI has positive relationship with Surface Acting. When employees fake emotions in voice to voice interaction their intention to perform OCB is lesser. Surface acting partially mediates the relationship between Voice to voice interaction and employees OCB. This concludes that Surface Acting acts as mediator between MOI and OCB.

Table 4 shows Deep Acting has a significant positive relationship ($\beta = 0.520**$) on OCB at p=0.01. Therefore, the researcher accepts Hypothesis 3b.

MOI has significant negative relationship with Deep Acting. Since employees who are in voice to voice interaction with customers tend to modify vocal tone without changing their inner feelings, employees are emotionally deprived. Therefore they don't engage in behaviours that are not specified in their job responsibilities. The researcher concludes that voice to voice interaction is not the sole reason that makes employee not to engage in OCB but it is by the emotional modification (Deep Acting). Hence Deep Acting acts as mediator between the relationship between MOI and OCB accepting H4b.

Table 4: Deep acting (DA) as mediator between mode of interaction (MOI) and organizational

citizenship behaviour (OCB)

No.	Equations	Beta	Adjusted R ²	F	Sobel test statistic
1	Mode Of Interaction (MOI) on Deep Acting (DA)	-0.193*	0.036	26.45	
2	Deep Acting on Organizational Citizenship Behaviour (OCB)	0.520*	0.034	25.46	3.59*
3	MOI on OCB	-0.946*	0.895	5880.09	
4	MOI on OCB (in the presence of DA)	-0.941*	0.895	2937.29	

^{*} Significance at 0.05 level **Significance at 0.01 level

The beta value of fourth equation is lesser than the third equation in both Table 3 and 4. This shows that Surface acting and Deep Acting acts as mediator between Mode of Interaction and OCB.

5. DISCUSSION

It is mandatory in many service organizations that the employees are required to comply with the emotional display rules or norms to express their emotions. This is possible only if they regulate their emotions in their service interactions (Grandey, 2000). The focus of research in emotional labour is on understanding the two dimensions of emotional labour viz. surface and deep acting (Brotheridge and Lee, 2002; Grandey, 2003). Employees who engage in Deep acting take efforts to change internal feelings to match the emotional display whereas employees who engage in Surface acting modify their emotional and bodily display to conform to rules without changing their inner feelings (Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1983). Still date, the existing research on emotional labour hardly talks about the relationship between mode of interaction and emotional labour. Hence the researcher aims to address the gap by providing a theoretical framework for emotional labour.

Emotional labour need not necessarily associated with negative consequences as stress, burnout etc., it may also have positive effects (Wong and Wang, 2009). Much of the known studies in literature emphasizes on the detrimental effects caused by emotional labor. This is not completely true, as experiencing emotional labour sometimes results in positive consequences especially when employees can control their emotions fully (Pugliesi, 1999). In addition, Emotional labor can be used to enhance relationships between employees and customers in the typical service interactions and facilitate in task effectiveness (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Researchers like (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Totterdell & Homan, 2003) has examined the negative impact of performing emotional labour among various service employees. The attention of researchers in examining effects of emotional labour has suddenly taken a drift because of its ironic effects. This means that emotional labour may have deleterious influence on employees' well-being, but it will actually have constructive impact on organization's success. Therefore, the study focuses on a relevant positive consequence of emotional labour viz. organizational citizenship behaviours rather than any detrimental effects.

Independent "t" tests are done to find the group differences based on MOI with respect to the emotional labour. The group differences are also in the way organisational citizenship behaviour is performed. The employees who interacts through telephone (voice to voice interaction) with the customers tend to show reduced helping behaviour as they spend most of the energy in faking emotions than those who interact face to face with the customers. Literature has enough studies to show that the OCB of employees differ with respect to the dimensions of emotional labour in service settings (Diefendorff *et al.*, 2005). The researcher has found significant negative relationship between Surface acting and organisational citizenship behaviour. Similarly Deep Acting has significant positive relationship on OCB. This implies as more and more employees engage in surface acting, lesser is their tendency to engage in OCB. This occurs as employees face emotional exhaustion when

they engage in intense faking of emotions. Moreover, service employees are deprived of sufficient energy to do extra role behaviours which are not even included as performance criteria in formal reward system of the organization.

Emotional exhaustion, a component of burnout is common when employees engage in Surface Acting for a longer period. This detrimental effect can be reduced by encouraging employees to indulge in OCBs which is a way for them to obtain social supports (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2007). But this study has some contradictory results. This study shows that OCB has negative relationship with Surface acting. This study can draw support from the research conducted by Salami (2007) among public servants, who concluded a negative association between surface acting and OCB and a positive association between deep acting and OCB. In addition, Inigo and colleagues (2007) found a significant association between deep actingand organisational citizenship behaviour. Employees who enjoy doing the jobs are those who show pleasant emotions in the service interactions as they feel emotions from inside. Such employees are more loyal to their organizations and exhibit extra role behaviours which are not in their job descriptions. Some of those citizenship behaviours are like helping their co-workers, spreading optimistic note about their jobs outside the organisations. Supporting the previous findings of research, OCB and deep acting are positively related in this study.

From the above results, the researcher has found that employees who empathize customers exhibit Deep Acting and engage in extra role behaviour. Hence organizations must include this behaviour in reward mechanism. Organizations must identify employees who engage in surface acting and send them for training to adopt the alternative strategy to satisfy their customers.

6. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

As many studies in behavioral research, this study is also not an exception without limitations. The usage of self-report inventories to study the variables under research may have overestimated the results (Organ & Ryan, 1995) or underestimated the results (Organ, 1994). Emotional labour means hiding emotions and showing emotions as appropriate for the job. But it doesn't mean the displayed emotions must be positive (e.g. Nurses, hotel employees), it can be negative as well (e.g. Funeral workers). This study includes only those jobs which require to exhibit positive emotions, which is again a limitation of this research. Though, this study attempted to use mixed model method, comprising of exploratory as well as survey methods, the fact that our data obtained using non-experimental, cross-sectional study do not permit us to infer any causal relationships among the study variables.

Irrespective of these limitations, this study has many managerial and theoretical implication. This is the first study in Asian context to examine how mode of interaction has effect on dimensions of Emotional labour and citizenship behaviour. Also this study examined the positive consequence of emotional labour. Few studies in literature have examined the antecedents and consequences of emotional labour in service jobs based on mode of interaction. The research study will help training designers to design the training program analyzing the training needs of the individuals based on the strategies of emotional labour. One such implication is to select employees who don't deep act and train them on how to deep act so that they can be kept safe from detrimental effects. Researcher like Grandey (2000) has suggested few psychological techniques namely cognitive change and attentional deployment as ways to make a person deep act. Training programs can include these cognitive strategies in their training methods to increase the awareness of the possible adverse health effects associated with surface acting. This may help to reduce the emotional fatigue of service employees and encourages them to engage in more OCBs.

Recruiters must be very keen in selecting candidates who will be fit for service jobs. They may have to look in for specific skills which make them employable. Since OCB is a factor which aids in improved performance in service jobs, this can be included one such criteria for selection. Another skill which recruiters can possibly look in the candidates is the ability to manage the emotions. Work

re-design at the job level like job rotation, job enrichment, job enlargement could have an effect on the performance of service employees directly or indirectly, through increased citizenship behaviors. One of the suggestions of this study is more of research must be conducted to explore the various contexts of emotional labor. Future research must take into consideration to incorporate multiple data sources similar to 360 degree feedback to reduce the biasness in the data results. Further research in the same area can be done by controlling demographic variables which could have inflated the results.

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