



## Job-focused Emotional Labour and Service Performance: Evidence from Food Service Market in Owerri, Imo State

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### Abstract

This study determined the influence of job-focused emotional labour on service performance in the food service market in Owerri, Imo State. It was a survey that was guided by three objectives and three research hypotheses. Frontline service providers served as respondents while the sample size was 200. A 17-item questionnaire on a 4-point scale which a reliability test produced a coefficient of 0.79 served as the research instrument and an accessibility sampling technique was used in the administration of the instrument. Descriptive and inferential statistics on SPSS version 23 were used to analyze the data generated. Findings revealed that frequency of acting has a positive/insignificant association with service performance ( $R = 0.0135$ ;  $Pr = 0.4727$ ); strength of acting has a negative relationship with service performance ( $R = -0.0049$ ;  $Pr = 0.7629$ ) while the diversity of acting has a positive and significant association with service performance ( $R = 0.3699$ ;  $Pr = 0.0000$ ). On the strength of the findings, it was concluded that frequency of acting and diversity of acting are positively associated with service performance while the strength of acting is negatively related to service performance in the study area, therefore, it is recommended that operators of food service companies must among others ensure that would-be service providers with appropriate emotional quotient and passion for the job are recruited, trained regularly on emotion management skills, and promote policies that make service providers take pride in their jobs while making the work more flexible.

**Keywords; Emotion, Labour, Skills, Service delivery, Performance, and Service providers**

### Introduction

The food service sector is human-based thus little or no automation is needed to drive the operations. It therefore follows that the service providers are the most valuable assets of food service companies. Service providers are professionals whose mandate involves interaction with customers and it demands great emotional efforts for them to succeed. Consumers of food services come from different backgrounds with varied needs ranging from physiological to psychological, the latter being the main motivation for patronage, particularly for hedonistic consumers. Hedonistic consumers are fun seekers and thus expect something different from the service providers in terms of performance. Hence services rendered are therefore not only denoted by intellectual and physical labour but also by emotional labour (Jung and Yoon, 2014).

The job of a service provider in a food service setting is a tasking one such that some form of emotional acting or display is demanded by the job from time to time. Workers in food service companies are required to show

emotions different from theirs even in the face of customer aggression. Recent changes in the labour market and the perceived rapid development in the service sector are indications that the emotional aspect of service jobs has become significant not only as an outcome but also as a job demand (Emanuel, Colombo, Santoro, Cortese, & Ghislieri, 2020). The concept of emotional labour was introduced in 1979 by an American sociologist, Arlie Russell Hochschild in research carried out in the airline industry which focused on the emotional work of flight attendants. The concept has since then gained global acceptance as scientists, researchers and practitioners have found it increasingly important in service organizations in particular where customer relations are needed to attain or gain a competitive edge or position (Wong and Wang, 2009; Lam and Chen, 2012; Jung and Yoon, 2014).

Emotional labour refers to the regulation of one's emotions to comply with occupational or organizational norms and includes the management of feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display

(Hochschild, 1983 cited in Lam and Chen, 2012). In the words of Jung and Yoon (2014), emotional labour is the representative form of labour in the modern era. Other perspectives on the subject matter can be identified in the literature, for instance, Chu and Murrmann (2006); and Chu, Baker, and Murrmann (2012) see emotional labour as the management of feelings that create nice and friendly attitude towards the customer which is strongly related to customer satisfaction and simultaneously increasing customer commitment and loyalty. Similarly, Austin, Dore, and O'Donovan (2008) refer to emotional labour as the process whereby employees display appropriate emotional behaviour that might or might not correspond to the employee's true emotions. Generally speaking, emotional labour is a form of managing emotions to display expected interpersonal interactions to create customer satisfaction, loyalty and positive word of mouth (Van Dijk, Smith, and Cooper, 2011; Shani, Uriely, Reichel, and Ginsburg 2014). This definition explicitly delineates that service providers are required to regulate or manage their emotions (feelings) and display those emotions for commercial purposes. This "display" of emotions has economic value, which can be transformed into salaries, wages, or tips. Hence, emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has exchange. This follows therefore that the term emotional labor is appropriate only when emotional work is exchanged for something such as wage or some other type of valued compensation.

According to Hochschild (1983) cited in Lam and Chen (2012) jobs with emotional labour have three criteria; they require face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with the public; they require the worker to produce an emotional state in the client or customer, and they allow the employer through training and supervision, to exercise a degree of control over the emotional activities of employees. The dramaturgical perspective on behaviour in organizations focuses on customer interactions as providing the performance stage for employees' impression management skills. Employees' efforts to manage their emotions appropriately for their respective organizational roles are seen as performances on the organizational stage. This emotion management is seen as a central part of the employee's job performance and leans toward meeting organizational goals.

In food service operations, service providers are expected to manage their emotions as part of their jobs to adequately carry out the job, gain emotional intelligence, develop customer relationships, and increase overall effectiveness/performance. This is the main thrust of the process view of service that emphasizes employee-customer interactions for improved organizational performance. Lam and Chen (2012) maintain that studies geared towards improving the job performance of service providers have become imperative because they have become the source of competitive advantages for companies. Service performance relates to how well a service company has

done in terms of service delivery. It is an index for measuring the competitiveness of service companies as it relates to repeat patronage and achievement of organizational goals. Food service companies are concerned about service performance and this is understandable.

The performance of service providers is pivotal in achieving the organizational goal in terms of guaranteeing continued patronage of the customers. Performance is an indication of how well an employee has done. Ashkanasy, Härtel, and Daus (2012) defined performance as the achievement of specific tasks measured against predetermined or identified standards of accuracy, completeness, cost and speed. Employee performance is defined as the outcome or contribution of employees towards the attainment of goals and indicates the effectiveness of employee's specific actions that contribute towards the attainment of organizational goals (Harris, 2017). Employee service performance can be manifested in improvement in production, speed at which service is delivered, quality of service delivery, easiness in using a new technology, and highly motivated workers. We therefore see employee service performance as the successful completion of tasks, responsibilities or assignments by a selected employee or group of employees based on set performance objectives and indicators of efficiency and effective utilization of available resources. Measures of employee performance may include quantity, quality, timeliness, cost-effectiveness, absenteeism/tardiness, creativity, zero defect, and adherence to policy.

Researchers have used different approaches to explain the dimensionality of emotional labour. Some see emotional labour as a two-dimensional construct solely concerned with the intensity and frequency of emotional displays (Hochschild, 1983; Wharton 1993; cited in Lam & Chen, 2012), while others see emotional labour as a multi-dimensional construct (Grandey (2010); Morris & Feldman, 2016). To integrate previous perspectives, Grandey (2010) restructured emotional labour into two categories. One focuses on the characteristics of the job and the other emphasizes employees' emotional management process. The former is called "job-focused emotional labour" which includes the frequency, duration, variety, and intensity of emotional labour and display rules. The latter is called "employee-focused emotional labour" which includes surface acting and deep acting. However, among the researchers who assert that emotional labour is a multi-dimensional construct, there are different opinions about the number of dimensions of emotional labour as different dimensions capture different facets of emotional labour. Morris & Feldman (2016) conceptualized emotional labor in terms of four distinct facets: the frequency of appropriate display; attentiveness to required display rules; a variety of emotions required to be displayed, and the emotional dissonance generated as a result of having to express organizationally desired emotions that are not genuinely felt. In a later study on the antecedents and

consequences of emotional labour, Morris and Feldman (2016) identified three dimensions: frequency; duration; and emotional dissonance. However, other researchers have criticized Morris & and Feldman's approach and raised some conceptual and methodological concerns regarding these dimensions and how they were identified. Grandey (2010) argued that frequency, duration and variety of emotional labour provide information about the job demands on employees' emotional displays. These three factors capture only the presence of emotional labour but fail to further explain the emotion management process of the employee. Similarly, Berry and Cassidy (2013) developed a six-faceted Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) based on the theories of Hochschild (1983) and Morris & Feldman (1996). ELS measures the intensity; frequency; variety of emotional displays; surface acting; deep acting; and duration of interaction. Although plenty of research on emotional labour dimensions is presently being conducted, no agreement has been brought about yet. Many of the studies have dealt with emotional labour dimensions by using surface acting and deep acting that only focus on emotional expressions, and the results are also limited. However, in this present study, the focus is on the job-focused aspect of emotional labour with an emphasis on frequency, strength, and diversity.

Several studies have been carried out in different sectors and climes with a focus on emotional labour. For instance, Kim (2010) carried out research on the effect of emotional labour on employee performance in private and public institutions in Macedonia in which 265 employees served as respondents. Data collected through the questionnaire was analyzed using regression analysis. Findings revealed that there is a positive relationship between emotional labour and employee performance. Similarly, Nykiel (2013) researched the influence of emotional labour on job performance and job satisfaction among the administrative employees of the University of Jordan. The sample consisted of 354 employees of the University who completed the self-report questionnaire and structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to analyze the data generated and test the hypotheses. Results revealed that emotional labour is positively correlated with job performance and job satisfaction. Findings of similar anterior studies indicate that emotional labour can influence job performance (Bartlett & Tepeci, 2012; Kim, Yoo, Lee, & Kim, 2012; Berry & Cassidy, 2013; Mc Carty 2013; Liu & Zhang, 2014; Nykiel 2013).

The job of a service provider in a food service company is tasking and requires great emotional effort which might influence the quality of service provider-customer interactions and then service performance. Service providers are policy-bound to display appropriate emotions suitable in given circumstances irrespective of their state of mind/emotions to achieve organizational goals. In some instances, these displays of emotions are done in the face of highly challenging circumstances; customer aggression (Goussinsky, 2015), situational

demands, and work-family conflict. Despite all these, the service provider must manage his or her emotions to conform to established organizational norms/principles and perform the dramaturgical demands of the job to satisfy customers and achieve set goals. These present researchers are worried that the actions and inactions of service providers in carrying out the dramaturgical aspect of the job might influence service performance since the service providers are humans. Furthermore, there is a dearth of direct empirical evidence to demonstrate how job-focused emotional labour influences service performance, particularly in food service companies. These are the gaps that motivated this study. The main objective of this study is to determine the influence of job-focused emotional labour on service performance in food service companies in Owerri, Imo State. The specific objectives sought to determine;

- (i) The extent to which the frequency of acting can influence service performance in the study area.
- (ii) The influence of strength of acting on service performance in the study area.
- (iii) The effect of diversity of acting on service performance in the study area.

#### ***Hypotheses of the Study***

The following hypotheses formulated were tested at a 0.05% level of significance:

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** Frequency of acting is not significantly associated with service performance in the study area.

**H<sub>0</sub>2:** The strength of acting is not positively related to service performance in the study area. **H<sub>0</sub>3:** Diversity of acting is not positively and significantly associated with service performance in the study area.

#### ***Methodology***

##### ***Research Design***

This study was a descriptive survey and it was considered appropriate on account of having been used successfully in previous studies: (Brotheridge, 2006); Bartlett and Tepeci (2012). These anterior studies adopted this design and were able to achieve the specified objectives of the study.

##### ***Area of Study***

The study was carried out in Owerri, the capital of Imo State. The city is notable for having many food service companies in operation and has been profiled as the relaxation and recreation rendezvous in South East Nigeria on account of the perceived number of travellers/visitors witnessed in the city. The food service market in Owerri is huge and is estimated that over thirty (30) major and notable food service companies and chains operate in Owerri. However, the geographical scope of this study was limited to Owerri metropolis as only registered food companies in operation within this area were used for the study.

##### ***Population for the Study***

The population for the study included all customers of food service companies in Owerri metropolis who

visited these food service companies during the period of this study between November and December 2022.

### ***Sample, Sampling Technique, and Data Collection***

The researchers purposively used twenty major food service companies for data generation for the study. 200 frontline service providers (10 per company) were purposively drawn from each company as a sample size. The breakdown of the establishments and the copies of the research instrument administered are presented as follows; Crunchies -10, Ibari Ogwa-10, De Choice-10, Mii Mii-10, Country style chicken -10, Mr Fans- 10, Kilimanjaro -10, Renny's-10, Sunic foods-10, Tasty flavours-10, KFC foods-10, AU's Dinning-10, Jevnik-10, Calabash-10, The Hive-10, Giffano-10, Chukas place-10, Hungry man-10, Dawble portion-10, and Tropical village-10. The convenience (accessibility) sampling technique was used as only accessible Customers filled copies of the research instrument administered for the study which was subsequently collected on the spot to increase the return rate using five research assistants. The instrument for data collection was a 17-item questionnaire designed on a four-point scale of; Strongly Agree (SA) = 4 points, Agree = (A) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2, and Strongly Disagree (D) = 1, with a value of 2.5. The instrument was subjected to the Crombach Alpha reliability test and a reliability coefficient of 0.79 was obtained confirming the internal consistency and usability of the instrument.

### ***Data Presentation, Analysis, and Discussion***

Data generated for this study was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive analysis is featured as a way of describing the properties of the data to show the variations in responses and opinions using frequencies and percentage denotations as well as other descriptive items. The parametric inferential analysis was done with the use of regression analysis on SPSS version 23 to determine the relationship between the independent variables (frequency, strength, and diversity) and the dependent variable as can be seen in the hypotheses formulated for the study. Out of the 200 copies of the questionnaire administered, only 193 copies representing 96.5% were used for the study.

## **Results and Discussion**

### ***Inferential Statistics and Test of Hypotheses***

#### ***H<sub>0</sub> 1: Frequency of acting is not significantly associated with service performance in the study area.***

The model estimate presented in Table 1 indicates that the coefficient of frequency of acting (Frequency) is 0.0135, implying that frequency of acting has a positive influence on service performance in food service companies in the study area. This means that an increase in the frequency of acting will lead to about a 0.0135 proportional increase in service performance. However, the t-statistic value of 0.7209 and the probability value of 0.4727 indicate that the positive influence of frequency of acting on service performance is not statistically significant at the 5% level, since the

probability value is greater than 0.05. This implies that the frequency of acting has a positive and insignificant relationship with service performance. Thus, the study accepted the null hypothesis that frequency of acting is not significantly associated with service performance in the study area although their association was found to be positive in food service companies in the study area. There is a dearth of direct research findings to either support or contradict this finding. Frequency relates to the rate of occurrence of the stipulated emotional displays required of a service provider in the light of situational demands which could be high or low (Brotheridge, 2006), and this may increase the amount of emotional labour effects including job attitude (Liu and Zhang (2014)). The positive association that frequency of acting has with service performance suggests that it can predict service performance. When situational demands make the acting more frequent, the tendency for the job to become monotonic arises. This situation ultimately leads to burnout which is the biggest occupational hazard within the domain of emotional labour (Lee & Ok. 2015). Burnout is linked to work stress as a psychological fatigue condition resulting in the accumulation of decreased physical energy (Shani & Pizam, 2009), lowered immunity, more work dissatisfaction, pessimism, work ineffectiveness, and ultimately job dissatisfaction (Lu & Gursoy, 2016). Burnout intensifies depression, and causes may include loss of mind, lack of energy, working conditions, an overwhelming amount of work, long working hours, low wages, and strict corporate policy. These could lead to unwanted outcomes such as lower organizational commitment and job performance (Khetjenkarn & Agmapisarn, 2020).

#### ***H<sub>0</sub> 2: Strength of acting is not positively related to service performance in the study area.***

The coefficient of the strength of acting (Strength) in the estimate is presented in Table -0.0049. The negative sign suggests that the strength of acting has a negative relationship with service performance in food service companies in the study area. This means that an increase in the strength of acting reduces service performance. The t-statistic value of -0.3025 and its associate probability value of 0.7629 indicate that a negative relationship exists between the strength of acting and service performance, implying that the strength of acting has a negative and insignificant relationship with service performance. Thus, this study accepted the null hypothesis that the strength of acting is not positively related to service performance in the study area. Again, there is a dearth of direct research findings to either support or contradict this finding. Strength relates to the efforts committed to displaying the stipulated socially acceptable emotions in service provider-customer interactions. The strength of emotional displays could be deep or otherwise depending on situational demands and the state of mind of the service provider. Hence, the efforts might not yield the desired results. Khetjenkarn & Agmapisarn (2020) argued that the negative results of emotional labour can lead to emotional exhaustion and reduce employee job satisfaction thus the progression of

emotional displays may be linked to employee stress and health as well as organizational well-being. The suppression of real emotions and expressing the appropriate (fake) emotions despite the strength of acting is a difficult task for individuals as it evokes stressful outcomes that can impact performance (Berry and Cassidy, 2013). Customers may perceive the strength of acting to be unnatural and mere manipulations by service providers when they feel insincerity in the service and thus assess the quality of service to be low and this is in contrast to when the strength of acting is perceived to be deep or strong. Brotheridge (2006) argued that one of the major reasons why surface acting is thought to be related to negative outcomes may be owing to its overlap with emotional dissonance because during surface acting service providers display feelings that are incongruent with what they internally feel. Proponents of emotional dissonance theory suggest that this can create a sense of alienation from oneself, and feelings of uncomfortable tension which can lead to negative outcomes that may impact performance.

**H<sub>0</sub> 3: Diversity of acting is not positively and significantly associated with service performance in the study area.**

Table 1. indicates that the coefficient of diversity of acting (Diversity) is 0.3699, meaning that there is a positive relationship between diversity of acting and service performance in food service companies in the study area. This implies that an increase in diversity of acting will lead to about 0.3699 increase in service performance. The t-statistic value of 5.0700 and the probability value of 0.0000 indicate that the positive relationship between the diversity of acting and service performance is statistically significant at a 5% significance level since the probability value is less than 0.05. Thus, the study rejected the null hypothesis and accepted the alternative that diversity of acting is positively and significantly associated with service performance in the study area. This finding is in line with the findings of Bartlett and Tepeci (2012). Diversity relates to variety (Ashkanasy, *et al.* 2012), and service providers are not insulated from desiring to display varieties of appropriate and socially acceptable emotions in service transactions as this correlates with job satisfaction (Lee & Ok, 2015). Proponents of the Process View of service argue that service employees should be empowered to solve customer problems, meet customer needs and achieve company-set goals. When service employees are empowered to diversify socially acceptable and appropriate emotional displays in service transactions, it will impact job satisfaction and organizational commitment leading to customer satisfaction and quality service performance (Mehra & Bedi, 2018).

There is no doubt that this present study has managerial implications for human resource management particularly as it concerns the need for operators of food service companies to focus on the emotional management component of their service delivery since

it impacts service performance. Food service companies now draw a major part of their competitiveness from the quality of service providers at their disposal. Operators of food service companies must see service performance as a potent strategic option given the intense competition that tends to define the present-day foodservice market and the need to improve the company's overall performance by consistently satisfying the customers. This present study however has some limitations. One limitation is that all measures used in the present study were self-reported measures. This may lead to the overstatement of the relationship between variables. Therefore, future research may improve the methods used in this study by including different sources such as supervisors and co-workers, perhaps during the performance of emotional labour. Another limitation is that this study focused on the influence of emotional labour on the service performance among service providers in food service companies in Owerri, Imo State. Other factors such as cultural competencies, work environment, training, management style, level of education, level of supervision, corporate policy, compensation package and indeed other contextual factors may buffer the positive/negative outcomes of emotional labour thereby predicting service performance. All these should be considered in future studies.

**Conclusion**

This current study has made contributions to emotional labour literature by exploring the relationship between job-focused emotional labour and service performance. The predictors of service performance under study have been found to have varying degrees of associations and relationships with service performance and it is therefore concluded that frequency of acting has a positive but insignificant association with service performance, strength of acting has a negative relationship with service performance, and diversity of acting has a positive and significant relationship with service performance in food service companies in the study area. It, therefore, follows that job-focused emotional labour can influence service performance in food service companies in the study area. It is recommended that operators of food service companies ensure that would-be service providers with appropriate emotional quotient and passion for the job are recruited, service providers must be encouraged to attend periodic seminars/workshops and other forms of training on emotion management skills through corporate sponsorships, and operators must promote policies that make service providers to take pride in their jobs while making the work more flexible.

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**Table 1: Regression Estimates for the Influence of Emotional labour on Service Performance in food service companies in Owerri**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coefficient</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>t-Statistic</b>	<b>Prob.</b>
Frequency	0.0135	0.0188	0.7209	0.4727
Strength	-0.0049	0.0162	-0.3025	0.7629
Diversity	0.3699	0.0730	5.0700	0.0000
C	12.0785	2.7314	4.4221	0.0000
R-squared	0.9807			
Adjusted R-squared	0.9797			
F-statistic	994.635			
Prob(F-statistic)	0.0000			