

Hotel employees' uniform and their self-perceptions in Southern California[☆]

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 14 September 2012

Accepted 16 October 2012

Keywords:

Hotel employee uniform

Hotel employee satisfaction

Hotel employee job performance

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the study was to investigate how different styles of employee uniforms affect employees' self-perceptions and hotel image. The results of the study indicated a significant relationship between uniforms and employee perceptions of job performance. Significance also existed between employees' job satisfaction and styles of uniforms.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

1. Introduction

With so many choices in the hospitality industry, customers are more critical and sensitive to what they are paying for. Ambience and corporate image play an essential role in affecting a customer's satisfaction, but employee uniforms are also a significant factor in the overall impression of an establishment.

Customers judge intangible experiences to rate service quality and make a final judgment about a hospitality organization. The hotel 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.

2. Literature review

2.1. Company image

A hotel's image includes both tangible and intangible factors, both are important to a hotel's image. Customers use different ways to estimate the service quality and to make a final decision about the hospitality organization. Employee uniforms give one of the first impressions that customers see when they visit a hotel; therefore, uniforms are not just working suits, but they also influence the look of the entire hotel setting. 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. Uniforms of today are used to brand a

property and set the tone of a guest's expectation (O'Connor, 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).

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 the 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).

Being a part of a hotel's image, uniforms identify employees for customers. Uniforms communicate a business as professional, reliable, consistent, and detail oriented (Barr, 2007).

2.2. 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).

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, Fussell (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

[☆] Special appreciation is extended to Bonnie Rice at California State University, Long Beach for her professional editorial work.

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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.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

This research was conducted in 2009. The participants of this study were only the employees working in the front office department. Convenience sampling was used in the study and a total of 85 employees at four hotels in Southern California were surveyed. These hotels have limited service provided to their guests, and their managers were wearing formal uniforms and their employees were wearing casual uniforms. These four hotels agreed to use their employee meetings for data collection, which only managers and employees from the front office department attended.

3.2. Research instrument

A six-point Likert-type scale questionnaire was used in studying employees' self-perception of uniforms. The survey of employees' self-perception was divided into two sections. The first section listed statements relating to employees' perception of their uniforms. The second section consisted of demographic profile questions including age, gender, employment status, education level, and work experience. An informed consent form was conducted separately from the survey itself to maintain anonymity and confidentiality.

3.3. Data collection

The researcher explained to the participants the purpose and a synopsis of this study. An informed consent and the employee self-perception survey were only distributed to front office staff during a hotel general meeting.

Front office staff were instructed to deposit their answered survey in the box located in front of the meeting room if they chose to participate. Those who chose not to participate were instructed to leave at any time or deposit the blank survey in the designated box. The survey took approximately 10 min to complete.

3.4. Data analyses

The SPSS Incorporated (2007) was used. Standard statistical procedures, such as frequency, mean, and standard deviation, were used for analysis of relationship among study variables. A significant level of $p \leq .05$ was employed.

4. Findings

4.1. Characteristics of respondents

Demographic findings and characteristics of the respondents were discussed first. Among the demographic characteristics used in this study were gender, age, ethnicity, employment status, current work experience, and experience in the industry. Administrative positions were also surveyed. Second, employees' self-perceptions of attire were reported including employees' preference of uniforms, job satisfaction, self-confidence, professionalism, credibility, and overall attitudes when wearing formal style uniforms.

A total of 85 employee self-perception surveys were distributed with 65 usable surveys obtained, there was a response rate of 77%.

The demographic characteristics of the employee respondents are summarized in Table 1.

Table 2 indicates the mean and standard deviation of eight statements in the questionnaire. The statement "I am very satisfied with my uniform at the present time" had the highest mean of 4.54 followed by the statement "I think the uniform I wear affects my overall attitude toward my job," which had a mean of 4.37.

5. Conclusions and implications

The following implications and recommendations may be helpful for the lodging industry based on the findings of this research.

In summary, this study suggests that employee uniforms play an important role in enhancing an employee's perception of job satisfaction and performance. Also research showed that employee uniforms will affect customer perceptions of a hotel's image. The suggestions of this study show us that employees' uniforms may affect a hotel's long-term business profit. In addition, employees believe that their credibility and professionalism increase when they are wearing a formal style uniform. We suggest that hotels should have employees wear formal style uniforms because employees feel confident and professional in them while interacting with customers.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of employee respondents.

Variable	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	30	46.2
Female	35	53.8
Age		
18–21	4	6.2
21–30	15	23.1
31–40	25	38.5
41–50	15	23.1
51–60	5	7.7
Above 60	1	1.5
Employment status		
Full time	43	66.2
Part time	22	33.8
Ethnicity		
Caucasian	6	9.2
African American	9	13.8
Native American	4	6.2
Hispanic/Latino	27	41.5
Asian/Pacific Islander	19	23.1
Others	4	6.2
Education level		
High school degree	20	30.8
Associate's degree	11	16.9
Bachelor's degree	25	38.5
Master's degree	9	13.8
Doctorate degree	0	0.0
Experience in current organization		
Less than 1 year	11	16.9
1–5 years	31	47.7
5–10 years	18	27.7
More than 10 years	5	7.7
Experience in the hospitality industry		
Less than 1 year	11	16.9
1–5 years	33	50.8
5–10 years	15	23.1
More than 10 years	6	9.2
Holding an administrative position		
Yes	15	23.1
No	50	76.9

Note. $N = 65$.

Table 2
Perceptions of employees regarding different styles of uniform.

	Mean ^a	SD
1. I prefer to wear a formal style uniform (e.g. jacket and shirt/blouse) more than a casual style (e.g. polo shirt) at work.	3.63	1.56
2. I think wearing a formal style uniform (e.g., jacket and shirt/blouse) helps me portray the role that I play while performing my job more than wearing a casual style uniform (e.g., polo shirt).	4.03	1.54
3. I think wearing a formal style uniform (e.g. jacket and shirt/blouse) increases my level of satisfaction towards my job more than wearing a casual style (e.g. polo shirt).	4.00	1.62
4. I think wearing a formal style uniform (e.g. jacket and shirt/blouse) increases my level of self-confidence while performing my job more than wearing a casual style (e.g. polo shirt).	3.95	1.69
5. I think wearing a formal style uniform (e.g. jacket and shirt/blouse) enhances my professionalism with customers more than wearing a casual style (e.g. polo shirt).	4.11	1.56
6. I think wearing a formal style uniform (e.g. jacket and shirt/blouse) enhances my credibility with customers more than wearing a casual style (e.g. polo shirt).	4.28	1.60
7. I am very satisfied with my uniform at the present time.	4.54	1.20
8. I think the uniform I wear affects my overall attitude towards my job.	4.37	1.40
Grand mean	4.11	1.52

Note. $N = 65$. SD = standard deviation.

^a 1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree.

6. Recommendations

1. Formal style uniforms should be required by hotels to increase their employees' job performance.
2. Uniforms should be considered an element affecting employees' satisfaction and job performance.
3. Formal style uniforms should be required by hotels that want high-end service for their customers.

7. 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.

The researcher can increase the sample size and widen the geographic areas for a higher research validity and reliability. The researcher can also consider expanding the survey to more departments in a hotel to see if different hotel departments perceive the same research differently. Also investigating whether hospitality students' perceptions are different compared to employees who are already in the industry would be interesting and helpful.

Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2012.10.004>.

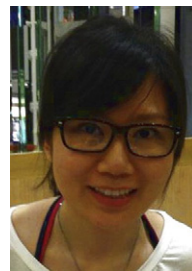
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