



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Identifying the Factors Affecting the Entry of Athletes into the World of Politics

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KEY WORDS

Emotional Labor;
Customer-Oriented
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between emotional labor and customer-oriented behavior among employees of the General Directorate of Sports and Youth Affairs in Razavi Khorasan Province. The research was applied in terms of purpose and employed a correlational research strategy, conducted through a field study. The statistical population consisted of all employees of the Directorate (130 individuals), and a census sampling method was used, whereby all members of the population were included as the sample. To collect the data, Grandey's (2000) Emotional Labor Questionnaire and Brown *et al.*'s (2002) Customer-Oriented Behavior Questionnaire were utilized. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics for data classification and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, Pearson correlation coefficient, and linear regression to test the research hypotheses. The findings indicated a significant positive relationship between emotional labor and its dimensions (surface acting and deep acting) with employees' customer-oriented behavior. Moreover, emotional labor accounted for 3.77 percent of the total variance in customer-oriented behavior among employees. Ultimately, based on the results, it can be concluded that providing sufficient autonomy to employees and managerial support play a vital role in fostering genuine behaviors and promoting a customer-oriented approach among staff.

Introduction

The globalization of trade and the intensification of competition have transformed the role of customers within organizations. In modern organizations, customers actively participate in the production of goods and delivery of services, the operational processes, knowledge development, and the competitive capabilities alongside organizational members. Consequently, customer satisfaction has become the most critical objective for organizations. Therefore, effective customer relationship management, or customer orientation, is regarded as a key area of interest for researchers and managers (Abbasi & Torkmani, 2010).

Customer-oriented behavior is a concept that has emerged in management literature in response to this challenge. In today's constantly changing and competitive environment, most organizations seek ways to enhance their competitive advantage, one of which is improving the quality of service delivery to customers. Hence, organizations generally strive to provide more facilities for customers and address their needs promptly (KhodaBakhsh Gorgani, 2010). Service marketing encompasses all activities related to understanding the audience, customers, competitors, and environmental factors affecting services, and aligning services with the needs,

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expectations, and preferences of the market. In essence, service marketing forms a part of the overall service system in organizations that maintain the most direct contact with customers (Jamal & Kamal, 2002). Customer-oriented behavior is one of the key concepts in the field of service marketing. In practice, customer orientation, by emphasizing the understanding of customer needs and benefits, aims to establish long-term relationships that ultimately result in competitive advantage for the organization. According to Fraser and Winstead (2000), "Customer-oriented behavior refers to those service employees' behaviors during service delivery that lead to customer satisfaction." However, today, intelligent and forward-looking organizations first reconsider how they interact with their employees and prioritize employee satisfaction (KhodaBakhsh Gorgani, 2010).

Employees are the most valuable asset of an organization. The absence of competent and motivated staff in delivering goods and services can pose significant challenges to organizations in today's competitive environment. This issue is particularly pronounced in service organizations. Studies indicate that employee satisfaction is directly linked to customer satisfaction (KhodaBakhsh Gorgani, 2010). Factors influencing employees' behaviors in customer interactions include attention to the emotional and affective dimensions of work and their impact on employees' attitudes and job behaviors. When employees' emotions align with organizational display rules, they experience positive feelings and tend to maintain a positive emotional state. Individuals with positive affect are often sociable and active, which increases their willingness to help others (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). Employees, in their interactions with customers, strive to express the emotions expected by the organization. Emotional labor differs from intellectual or physical work, and managers must explore ways to engage employees in displaying emotions (Morris & Feldman, 1996; Lin, 2000).

Emotional labor refers to expressing emotions and generating feelings as an expected part of one's work role. It requires face-to-face interaction with others and compels employees to evoke a certain emotional state in others, while also enabling employers to exert a degree of control over the emotional activities of frontline employees (Hochschild, 1983). Emotional labor serves as a mechanism for conveying organizationally desired emotions throughout service transactions (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Numerous studies, both domestically and internationally, have examined the variables and relationships associated with this construct.

Research Findings

Research has shown that emotional labor also has a positive relationship with employees' customer orientation (Afroozan, 2016; Noor Zaleeta Abdul Aziz *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, it is essential to examine the domestic and international research background.

Bani Khalil *et al.* (2017) in a study titled "Investigating the Impact of Internal Marketing on Customer-Oriented Behavior through the Mediating Role of Emotional Labor in 'Police +10' Offices in Mashhad" found that attention to the value of needs and authorized autonomy has a significant positive effect on surface and deep acting. Moreover, attention to the value of needs, surface, and deep acting had a significant and positive impact on employees' customer-oriented behavior. On the other hand, it was observed that authorized autonomy did not have an impact on customer-oriented behavior. Finally, it was concluded that surface and deep acting mediate the relationship between attention to the value of needs, authorized autonomy, and customer-oriented behavior.

The findings of Asadzadeh's research (2017) titled "The Impact of Customer Orientation on Job Satisfaction with the Mediating Role of Emotional Labor" indicated that customer orientation has a significant positive impact on job satisfaction, and the

effect of customer orientation through emotional labor on job satisfaction was also confirmed.

Fathi (2017) in their study found a significant positive relationship between each dimension of emotional labor and all dimensions of organizational commitment. Furthermore, the deep and superficial reviewing dimensions positively predicted organizational commitment.

Jang Hoan Lee *et al.* (2018) in a study titled "The Relationship between Emotional Labor and Customer Orientation among Airline Employees: The Mediating Role of Depersonalization" based on the views of 453 airline employees in South Korea using Structural Equation Modeling found that surface acting (superficial work) had a significant positive effect and deep acting (deep work) had a significant negative effect on employees' depersonalization, which in turn negatively affected customer orientation. In another part of the research, it was found that deep acting (deep work) had a significant positive effect on customer orientation, while surface acting (superficial work) did not have a significant effect.

Noor Zaleeta Abdul Aziz *et al.* (2016) in their study among employees of international airlines in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia found that deep emotional labor had a significant positive impact, while surface emotional labor had a significant negative impact on employees' customer orientation. Additionally, customer orientation and perceived service quality had a positive effect on customer loyalty.

Ging *et al.* (2014) in a study aimed at examining the effect of emotional labor (surface acting and deep acting) on the creativity of frontline employees, with the mediating role of various job stressors among employees of restaurants in China, found that both surface and deep acting had a significant positive effect on job stress. Moreover, the study revealed that surface acting had a significant negative effect, while deep acting had a significant positive effect on the creativity of employees.

Today, sports and physical activity are more valued by families compared to the past. The use of sports

services has become an integral part of individuals' lives. It is clear that the role of the General Department of Sports and Youth of provinces, as well as the sports departments, is crucial in the development of sports within society. On the other hand, the role and performance of employees who directly interact with customers (members of society) in these departments are undoubtedly one of the key factors in fostering a positive attitude towards sports and physical activities in the community. Therefore, employees' behavior can be one of the best and most influential factors in shaping a positive attitude towards society. Hence, efforts to identify factors affecting the behavior and performance of employees in the Sports and Youth Departments specifically, and sports organizations in general, can lead to the identification of key elements for improving their performance, which ultimately positively affects the growth and development of sports in society.

Thus, the present study aims to identify the impact of emotional labor on the customer-oriented behavior of employees at the General Department of Sports and Youth of Razavi Khorasan Province. Finally, based on the aforementioned points, the main research question is stated as follows: Is there a relationship between emotional labor and customer-oriented behavior among employees of the General Department of Sports and Youth of Razavi Khorasan Province?

Materials and Methods

The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between emotional labor and customer-oriented behavior of employees at the General Directorate of Sports and Youth in Khorasan Razavi Province. Considering the gaps in the existing literature, this research is applied in nature. In terms of research strategy, it is a correlational study conducted in a field setting. The research was carried out at the General Directorate of Sports and Youth in Khorasan Razavi Province, and the statistical population of the study included all employees of this department. According to the obtained statistics, the

total number of employees was determined to be 130. For increasing the generalizability of the results, a census sampling method was applied, where all members of the population were selected as the research sample. Ultimately, after eliminating incomplete responses, 98 participants were selected.

The research tools were questionnaires on emotional labor and customer-oriented behavior. The emotional labor questionnaire by Grandey (2000) included 12 items and two dimensions: intrinsic role performance (questions 1-6) and extrinsic role performance (questions 7-13), using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was reported to be above 0.7 in the study by Porfadaarkari (2019). The customer-oriented behavior questionnaire by Brown *et al.* (2002) included 7 items with a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this questionnaire was estimated to be above 0.993 in the study by Afrouzan (2016).

For data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were employed. In the descriptive section, frequency distribution tables, central tendency indicators (mean), and dispersion (standard deviation) were used. In the inferential statistics section, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was applied to check the normality of the data distribution, Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between variables, and linear regression

analysis using the simultaneous method in SPSS version 24 was applied to predict the variables.

Findings of the research

In this study, the demographic data revealed that 39% of the participants were female and 61% were male. Age distribution was as follows: 8.2% were aged between 20 to 30 years, 45.9% were aged between 31 to 40 years, 39.8% were aged between 41 to 50 years, and 6.1% were above 50 years. Regarding educational qualifications, 3.3% had a high school diploma, 26.6% had an associate degree, 30.6% had a bachelor's degree, and 29.6% had a master's degree.

Regarding the type of contract, 52% had a permanent contract, 10.2% had a contractual contract, 30.6% had a temporary contract, 1% had a company contract, and 6.1% had other types of contracts.

The work experience of the respondents was distributed as follows: 5.1% had 1-5 years of experience, 17.3% had 6-10 years, 14.3% had 11-15 years, 39.8% had 16-20 years, 2% had 21-25 years, and 21.4% had over 25 years of experience.

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test results for checking the normality of the main variables of the study, namely emotional labor and its dimensions, as well as customer-oriented behavior.

As shown in Table 1, all research variables follow a normal distribution.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test.

Variable	Dimension	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis	K-S Stat	Sig.
Emotional labor dimensions	Surface Acting	3.367	0.557	-0.428	0.108	0.161	0.064
Emotional labor dimensions	Deep Acting	3.816	0.828	-0.751	-0.084	0.158	0.080
Emotional labor	—	3.592	0.658	-0.713	0.113	0.138	0.094
Customer-oriented behavior	—	3.779	0.784	-0.366	-0.914	0.183	0.059

Table 2. Pearson Correlation Matrix

Variable	N	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Surface acting	98	0.707	0.001
Deep acting	98	0.879	0.001
Emotional labor	98	0.852	0.001

To examine the relationship between emotional labor and its dimensions with employees' customer-oriented behavior, the Pearson correlation test was applied. The results indicated a significant positive relationship between emotional labor and customer-

oriented behavior ($r = 0.852$, $p = 0.001$). Furthermore, both surface acting ($r = 0.707$, $p = 0.001$) and deep acting ($r = 0.879$, $p = 0.001$), as dimensions of emotional labor, showed significant positive correlations with customer-oriented behavior.

Table 3. Regression model summary.

R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Sig.	Durbin-Watson
0.879	0.773	0.768	0.001	2.200

Given the Durbin-Watson value of 2.200, the residuals (errors) are considered independent. The correlation coefficient suggests that, overall; a significant relationship exists between the dimensions of emotional labor and employees' customer-oriented behavior. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 =$

0.773) indicates that 77.3% of the variance in customer-oriented behavior is explained by the variables of surface acting and deep acting, while the remaining 22.7% is attributed to factors outside the model.

Table 4. ANOVA analysis.

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	46.063	2	23.031	161.643	0.001
Residual	13.536	95	0.142	—	—
Total	59.599	97	—	—	—

Given the significant F-value ($F = 161.643$, $p = 0.001$), it can be concluded that the regression model

is well-fitted, and the dimensions of emotional labor are capable of explaining variations in employees' customer-oriented behavior.

Table 5. Regression coefficients

Variable	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.573	0.235	—	2.437	0.017
Surface acting	0.023	0.114	0.016	0.203	0.839
Deep acting	0.820	0.077	0.866	10.698	0.001

The findings reveal that deep acting has a significant positive effect on customer-oriented behavior ($B = 0.820$, $t = 10.698$, $p = 0.001$), whereas the effect of surface acting is not significant ($p = 0.839$, $t = 0.203$). According to the standardized coefficient (Beta), a one-standard deviation increase in deep acting results in a 0.866 standard deviation increase in employees' customer-oriented behavior.

Discussion and Conclusion

Employees are considered the most important asset of an organization. This concept is even more significant in service organizations, as all service delivery processes directly depend on the behavior and performance of employees. Customer-oriented behavior is one of the key concepts in the field of service marketing. In fact, customer orientation

behavior emphasizes understanding customer needs and benefits, striving to establish a long-term relationship, which ultimately leads to competitive advantage within the organization. According to Fraser and Winstead (2000), "customer-oriented behavior refers to those behaviors of service personnel during service delivery that lead to customer satisfaction." Factors influencing various employee behaviors when interacting with customers include the emotional and affective dimensions of work and the impact they have on employees' attitudes and job behaviors (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). Emotional labor is the tool through which organizationally expected emotions and feelings are expressed during service transactions (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine the relationship between emotional labor and customer-oriented behavior of employees at the General Department of Sports and Youth in Khorasan Razavi province.

To test the research hypotheses, Pearson's correlation test was used. The results showed that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional labor and its dimensions (surface acting and deep acting) and customer-oriented behavior of employees. The findings of the multiple linear regression test using the simultaneous method also revealed that surface acting and deep acting can explain 77.3% of the total variance in the employees' customer-oriented behavior. Moreover, the results indicated that deep acting has a significant positive effect on customer-oriented behavior. These results are consistent with previous studies by Behzadi (2015), Afrouzan (2016), Bani Khalil *et al.* (2017), Yan-Kai Fu (2013), Shanky Bawersad *et al.* (2015), Esmaeili Farjam *et al.* (2016), and Jang Hong Lee *et al.* (2018).

In his study, Masoumi (2015) stated that emotional labor affects service quality and the customer-employee relationship from the perspective of employees in the Iranian University of Medical Sciences and Health Services. In another study, Fathi (2017) found that emotional labor dimensions (deep

acting and surface acting) significantly positively predict employees' organizational commitment at a bank in Naqdeh County. Asadzadeh (2017) also concluded that emotional labor plays a mediating role in the relationship between customer orientation and job satisfaction among administrative staff at the University of Tabriz. Igbojakwe (2017) in a study titled "Emotional labor, self-efficacy, and service-oriented behavior: A case study of different hotels in Southern Nigeria" found that there is a significant positive relationship between emotional labor dimensions (surface acting, deep acting) and employees' service-oriented behavior in 1 to 3-star hotels in Nigeria.

One of the main characteristics of service organizations is the high frequency of interactions between employees and customers. Having mutual interactions with service employees is an experience that customers vividly remember and can have positive or negative impacts on their perception of service quality (Schneider & Bowen, 1993; Solnet, 2006). Factors that contribute to creating and maintaining such behaviors include attention to emotional dimensions and the impact they have on employees' attitudes and job behaviors. Emotional labor in services is crucial because employees engaged in emotional work, such as greeting customers positively, need to manage their emotions effectively. If employees express positive emotions during customer interactions, customers are likely to recognize and reciprocate these emotions. Therefore, for the benefit of both employees and customers, employees should be able to successfully manage their emotions (Glomb & Tews, 2004).

Emotional labor refers to a situation where employees, especially those in customer-facing roles, must display behaviors that may differ from their actual feelings (Hochschild, 1991). When employees' emotions align with the emotional display rules set by the organization, it leads to a positive feeling for the individual, and they remain in a positive emotional state. People with positive moods tend to be social,

active, and are more likely to feel motivated to help (Staw, Sutton, & Pelled, 1994). Emotional labor is a tool for expressing organizationally expected emotions during service transactions (Morris & Feldman, 1996). Emotional labor becomes more apparent when a service is improperly performed, and customers are dissatisfied. In such situations, even if customers are likely to exhibit unpleasant behavior, employees respond with calmness and politeness. The emotional display rules are the reasons that motivate employees to behave politely. Alongside this, positive emotions expressed during the provision of services to customers are contagious, impacting customer satisfaction, purchase intentions, and the overall image of the organization (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005).

Based on the above, it can be stated that employees, when engaging in both surface acting and deep acting, are trying to align themselves with the existing emotional display rules. In fact, employees, in their interactions with customers, should show friendly behavior and strive to meet customer needs. However, when they engage in surface acting, they naturally face more challenges in meeting customer needs. The results show that deep acting has a significant positive effect on customer-oriented behavior. This is because when employees manage their reactions through deep acting to adhere to emotional display rules, they no longer need to suppress their emotions. They understand the reasons behind the rules and therefore express the emotions expected by the organization. Deep acting is experienced during employee-customer interactions and significantly influences employees, leading to greater engagement with other employees and customers, ultimately resulting in customer-oriented behaviors.

The findings of this research suggest that there is a positive relationship between emotional labor and its dimensions (surface acting and deep acting) with customer-oriented behavior of employees. Therefore, it is recommended that the management of the General Department of Sports and Youth in Khorasan

Razavi improve the emotional labor conditions, especially regarding deep acting. They should define and implement emotional display rules in such a way that employees clearly understand them and are motivated to internalize these rules. In such circumstances, managers will be able to develop customer-oriented behavior among their employees. Additionally, reviewing work processes and analyzing performance data related to employee behavior with customers, taking measures such as encouragement, appropriate motivational mechanisms, training, consultations, and providing proper compensation, will help improve employee performance. Regular measurement of job satisfaction and conducting training courses focusing on required employee behaviors with customers will also contribute to improving individual and social competencies, emotional regulation, effective listening skills, and evaluating others' emotions.

Since only the impact of emotional labor on customer-oriented behavior has been examined in this study, it is suggested that future research explore the relationship between other variables, such as job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and quality of work life, with customer-oriented behavior. In this context, structural equation modeling can be employed to examine the mediating role of these variables in the relationship between emotional labor and customer-oriented behavior.

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