EFFECT OF UNETHICAL CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR ON RESTAURANT FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE’S PERCEIVED SERVICE QUALITY

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ABSTRACT
This paper investigates how unethical customer behavior affects restaurant service employee’s emotions and, in turn, how these emotions affect their desired service quality? The data from 247 restaurant frontline employees were collected through questionnaires to evaluate the effects of unethical customer behavior, emotional exhaustion and perceived service quality. Data were analyzed by using SPSS and mediation analysis was done to assess the overall relationship between unethical customer behavior, emotional exhaustion and perceived service quality dimensions. Five dimensional SERVQUAL model was used in the study which includes tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy to determine the employee perceived service quality in a restaurant setting. Findings suggest that unethical customer behavior significantly affects the emotional exhaustion which further leads to the reliability dimension of perceived service quality. The paper developed an instrument to measure all five dimensions of employee perceived service quality. Theoretical model used in this research contributes to the field in a way that it has not been previously studied, hence adding value to the growing body of knowledge. Based on the study findings, we provide recommendations to restaurant management in developing an ethical climate in service delivery processes in restaurants.

Key words – Restaurant frontline employees, Unethical Customer Behavior, Emotional Exhaustion, Employee Perceived Service Quality, Service Quality

INTRODUCTION
Restaurant frontline service employees are more prone to experience unethical customer behavior as compared to any other employee in the service industry (Cho, Bonn, Han & Lee, 2016). The unethical behaviors at the workplace such as rude, discourteous and offensive behaviors (Beattie & Griffin, 2014) have severe negative consequences on mental and physical health and job dissatisfaction of employees (Bunk & Magley, 2013). The unethical behavior often leads to emotional exhaustion which is a feeling of emotional depletion and fatigue from extreme stress (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). This is also a reality that restaurant frontline employees are necessitated to hide their true emotions in the event of facing unethical customer behavior. They manage their expressions, gestures and behaviors to meet their job demands. Nevertheless, prolonged emotional labor can cause stress and leads to mental as well as physical health issues for frontline employees (Humphrey et al., 2015). This state of emotional labor is directly linked to job outcomes (Slatten, 2009). Positive emotions develop productive work behaviors and negative emotions develop counterproductive work behaviors (Spector & Fox, 2002). However, earlier researchers in the hospitality industry have not explored the effects of emotions, which could be positive and negative, and how those emotions are associated to employees perceived service quality.
(Slatten, 2009). However, frontline restaurant employees who frequently face negative, discourteous and rude customer behaviors and are likely to suffer emotional detriment (Grandey et al., 2007) were rarely subject of inquiry. According to Cho et al., (2016) literature addressing the service employees and unethical work behavior is very limited. Jung and Yoon (2014) assert that restaurant frontline employees encounter taxing workplace conditions frequently and they are more prone to be exposed to unexpected circumstances involving serving unhappy customers. They are at a higher risk of being badly treated by restaurant managers or coworkers as well. This potentially causes harmful effects to the wellbeing of frontline service personnel and it also leads to counterproductive work behaviors (Sakurai & Jex, 2012).

Researchers have generally contributed to the field of unethical work environments that causes stress to employees in different service industries such as financial services, healthcare and retailing. Some noteworthy studies in unethical work environments include supervisor unethical behavior (Sliter et al., 2010), coworkers unethical behavior (Jung & Yoon, 2014), and customer unethical behavior (Schilpzand et al., 2014). The previous scholarly literature has rarely addressed customer unethical behavior and their effects towards restaurant’s frontline employees (Wilson & Holmval, 2013). Moreover, existing literature is not enough for addressing the actual service quality, specifically, being perceived by an employee perspective, except some notable contributions of (Ashill et al., 2006).

Based on the above mentioned discussion, the present research study aims to fill the void, by addressing the unethical customer’s behavior affecting emotional exhaustion and their effects on restaurant frontline employee’s perceived service quality. The study is expected to be a valuable contribution to the field as the conceptual model encompasses employee perceived service quality having all five dimensions of SERVQUAL Model of (Parasuraman et al., 1988) for the first time by adapting the instrument of perceived service quality. Hence contributing to the theoretical body of knowledge. The study can be presented in threefold. First, the study investigates the relationship between unethical customer behavior and emotional exhaustion as emotions and sentiments of service employees are usually unaddressed in a developing country context like Pakistan. Second, the investigation between emotional exhaustion and employee perceived service quality and third, the association among unethical customer behavior and employees perceived service quality.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Unethical Behavior

We lack a commonly agreed definition of ethics, but (Larry & Sam 2010) according to Henderson’s definition (1982), ethics are “a set of principles describing a behavior code that explains what is good and right or bad and wrong” (p. 38). Combining Lacey (1996) and Wiley’s (1995) findings, ethics are the moral principles and ideas on which people act as justice, fairness and trust. These principles are shared and common, surpassing variances in culture, ethnicity, age, religion and socio-economic status (Vitell & Davis, 1990). Bommer et al. (1987) document the ethical behavior as morally and objectively correct. So by contrasting ethics we can state that unethical behaviors are those behaviors that are morally and empirically incorrect and that verves in contradiction of ethics.

Unethical Customer Behavior Affecting Perceived Service Quality

Hospitality industry’s management is often challenged with ethical dilemmas (Hall & Enghagen, 1991). It has been reported that most unethical behavior in the service industry involves acts marking three entities (Soutar et al., 1994) that include organizations, co-workers and customers. Sliter et al. (2012) articulated that in-civil customer behavior is rude and dis-courteous customer behavior. Fullerton and Punj (1993) demarcated the customer’s unethical behavior as the un-accepted and ab-normal behavior during a common exchange setting between customers and service personnel, a state of misconduct and behavior diverging the norms of mutual respect (Pearson et al., 2000) that further results in ineffective exchange between service providers and customers (Morgan & Hunt, 1994; Fukukawa, 2003).

Harris and Reynolds (2004) states that the unethical customer behaviors are the arrangements and actions whether these are openly and secretly, intentionally and unintentionally held, will affect the overall service exchange between customers and service personnel. This can be in the form of tangible and in-tangible attacks on employees from the customer's side. Customers take advantage of axioms like “customer is king” and “customer is always right” and make unrealistic demands during service encounters (Berry & Seiders, 2008). Smith (2013) asserts that in those situations where customers are prioritized and privileged over service employees, they tend to behave unethically resulting in value co-
Hypotheses

H-1: The unethical customer behavior has a significant relationship with perceived service quality.

H-2: Unethical customer behavior has a significant relationship with tangibility.

H-3: Unethical customer behavior has a significant relationship with reliability.

H-4: Unethical customer behavior has a significant relationship with responsiveness.

H-5: Unethical customer behavior has a significant relationship with empathy.

Unethical Customer Behavior Effecting Emotional Exhaustion

Unethical customer behavior incidents reported as the experience of suffering intensified emotions (Bunk & Magley, 2013), and depression (Miner et al., 2012). These negative psychological situations damage the individual’s emotions (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). According to Sliter et al., (2011, 2012), unethical customer behavior reduces service personnel's emotional resources resulting in emotional exhaustion. Leiter and Maslach (1988) document that the patience which is required by service personnel to lever their customers and co-workers strongly results in emotional exhaustion (Boles et al., 1997).

Izard (1977) defined emotions as those feelings that motivates, organizes, and guides perception, thought, and action. Oatley and Jenkins (1996) states that emotions are those mental states that influences human behavior and causes bodily changes, vocal and facial gestures which are followed by human actions and (Lazarus, 1991) defined emotions as a reflection of a person’s appraisal of their environment.

Emotional exhaustion is one of the dimensions of burnout (Maslach &Jackson, 1986) and defined by (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998) as the tired and fatigued feelings at work and emotional depletion from extreme stress and subjective demands. According to Grandey et al. (2004), those service employees who regularly face un-ethical attitude and in-civil behavior from customers have a higher chance of feeling emotionally drained and exhausted because they are more open to stressful situations. These stressful conditions result in suffering from emotional exhaustion (Dormann & Zapf, 2004). Service employees during service encounters have to deal with discourteous customers. This disastrous interaction makes employees find causes of their difficulty and ways to replace their exhausted emotions (Halbesleben & Bowler, 2007; Hobfoll, 2001). According to Jung and Yoon (2014), the restaurant frontline employees are more prone to face traumatic workplace behaviors and situations. It is because the restaurant industry employees have to regularly encounter unethical customers as well as their behaviors (Karatepe, 2015) resulting in employees mentally fatigued hence they feel emotionally exhausted (Sliter et al., 2012). In the light of the above mentioned studies, we can develop the following hypothesis:

H6: Unethical customer behavior has a significant relationship with emotional exhaustion.

Mediating role of Emotional Exhaustion

According to a recent research study held on restaurant industry, service employees are more prone to face stressful situations and suffer from emotional exhaustion as they have to deal with unhappy, discourteous and rude customers often (Jung & Yoon, 2014) which leads to effect their service performance and service quality (Sliter et al., 2010, 2012; Ferguson, 2012; Maslach et al., 1986). Another study documents that suffering from emotional exhaustion leads to serious negative consequences, essentially service quality and organizational performances (Ferguson, 2012). In this study, emotional exhaustion mediates the connection amongst unethical customer behavior and perceived service quality. So we can further hypothesize the study as:

H7: Emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between Unethical customer behavior and tangibility.
Emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between Unethical customer behavior and reliability.

Emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between Unethical customer behavior and responsiveness.

Emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between Unethical customer behavior and assurance.

Emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between Unethical customer behavior and empathy.

Emotional Exhaustion effecting Perceived Service Quality

According to Mayer (2002), the emotional, physical and psychological state of employees are the most important determinants to deliver a higher level of service quality to the customers in a service setting. Many researchers identified the negative impacts and outcomes of emotional exhaustion on service performances of employees and organizations (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Grandey et al., 2004; Cortina et al., 2001). Earlier literature reveals that higher level of emotional exhaustion leads to damaging and harmful effects on both employees and the organization’s outcomes, which can include lower level of employee performance, lower levels of job satisfaction, less organizational commitment, and higher turnover intentions (Singh et al., 1994; Boles et al., 1997; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2009). According to Dormann and Zapf (2004), increased levels of stress and emotional exhaustion badly affects service quality of employees, organizational outcomes and also affects employee job satisfaction. Spector and Fox (2002) study illustrates that the negative emotions are associated with counterproductive work behavior while on the other side, positive emotions are more linked with the productive work behaviors including organizational citizenship.

According to Slatten (2008), employee perceived service quality is the actual self-evaluation of employees that he or she delivers to its customers during the service encounter. This study focused on the employee perceived service quality in which the employee himself evaluates the service interaction process that he delivers to the customers. The emphasis of employees in evaluating their own service is very significant in providing customers with good service quality. Service quality is the process which is the output of satisfying customers and meeting customer’s expectations and demands (Duffy et al., 1997).

Service quality has different dimensions (Grönroos, 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1985; Haywood-Farmer, 1988; Parasuraman et al., 1988; Brogowiec et al., 1990; Babakus & Mangold, 1992; Mattsson, 1992; Teas, 1993; Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Philip & Hazlett, 1997. In restaurant services, dimensions of service quality can include meeting customer’s expectations, genuineness in the interaction, mutual understanding, recovery after failure, competency of service provider, service settings, price and performance discernment (Mattila & Enz, 2002; Gilbert et al., 2004; Hoffman et al., 1995; Voss et al., 1998). Therefore, the common attributes of service quality are features, performance, aesthetics, reliability, durability, conformance and perceived quality. Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1988) investigated different dimensions of service quality and presented the five dimensional model of service quality. According to Parasuraman et al. (1988, 1991, 1994), service quality can be measured as tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table No. 1 SERVQUAL Model Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Lee et al. (2011)
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Tangibility:
According to Parasuraman et al., (1991), tangibles refer to the visual look, form and appearance of the physical amenities, equipment, facilities, personnel, and communication constituents. Tangibles have higher importance in the service industry (Parasuraman et al. 1991) where the facilities and services are abstract and non-concrete hence difficult to evaluate. The physical look and service firm’s overall design and layout constitutes the dimensions of perceived service quality (Dabholkar et al., 1996). Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) defined the tangibles as the physical aspects of services being delivered. 

H12: Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with tangibility

Reliability:
It is the service provider’s ability to give and deliver the service accurately as promised to (Parasuraman et al. 1991). According to Berry et al., (1990), reliability is the vital dimension of service quality among all of the five dimensions. It is the timely and accurate service delivery which is being promised by the service providing firm to its customers (Wu et al., 2004; Markovic, 2006; Siu et al., 2001; Al-Tamimi and Al-Amiri, 2003). According to Huang (2009), customers perceive the quality of service which is being delivered to them as higher, when the service is delivered timely and reliably to the customers by the service personnel. Arthur and Bennett (1995) identified the customer’s perception of getting high quality service when the service personnel communicate with respect to listen to their demands by possessing strong communication skills. It in effect, builds a stronger relationship between service employees and customers. Bennett (1995) also believed that when service personnel communicate to customers with strong interpersonal skills, customers perceive the service as being delivered dependably and accurately hence recognize the service as high reliability service quality.

H13: Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with reliability

Responsiveness:
Responsiveness refers to the willingness of the service employees to respond to the customer’s inquiries promptly and efficiently and help the customers (Parasuraman et al. 1991). According to many researchers and theorists, responsiveness is the service personnel’s willingness to help their customers and solve their problems and queries in a more efficient way in order to deliver higher quality to services (Markovic, 2006; Sahu, 2006; Wu et al., 2004; Siu et al., 2001; Al-Tamimi & Al-Amiri, 2003).

According to Huang (2009), employees must be willing to respond to their customer’s requests and help them promptly and timely.

H14: Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with responsiveness

Assurance:
Assurance is the “knowledge and courtesy” of service employees. It is the capability of service employees to take trust and confidence of customers in the service transaction held between customers and service employees (Parasuraman et al. 1991). It is the ability of service employees to attract the customer’s trust and confidence in a service exchange so they feel satisfied while transacting with the service firm and their employees (Markovic, 2006; Al-Tamimi & Al-Amiri, 2003; Sahu, 2006; Siu et al., 2001). Parasuraman et al. (1988) defined the assurance as the ability of a service provider to deliver the trust and confidence as well as the service personnel’s knowledge and ability to deliver the high perceived quality of services to the customers.

H15: Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with assurance

Empathy:
It is the personal attention given to the customers by service providers by understanding their specific needs and wants, and escalating customer’s best interests (Parasuraman et al. 1991). Empathy, according to Ickes (1993), is the ability to presume another person’s feelings and emotions. It also refers to displaying compassion for the suffering in others. Empathy also refers to the “caring and individualized attention” given by service personnel to the customers (Markovic, 2006; Sahu, 2006; Wu et al., 2004; Siu et al. 2001; Al-Tamimi & Al-Amiri, 2003).

H16: Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with empathy.

Schlesinger and Zornitsky (1991) identified the service quality capability as the degree of service quality delivered by service provider to customers. The antecedent literature on perceived service quality from employee perspective is very limited (except a few important exceptions, Ashill et al., 2006; Chebat et al., 2003; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996).
METHODOLOGY

Data Collection and Sampling
The data were gathered from the frontline employees of the restaurants employees serving the customers in the vicinity of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The restaurant setting was chosen as failures mostly happen in this setting (Bitner et al., 1990; Hoffman et al., 1995). Non-probability convenience sampling technique was employed (Hair et al., 2000). Managers of restaurants are personally visited and take legal permission to collect data from their employees. Respondents are guaranteed that the survey is being performed under strict privacy and confidentiality and their identity and restaurants will remain confidential.

Measurements
Deductive approach has been used for this quantitative research study. The survey has been done using questionnaires as a survey tool. All variables were measured on a five-point likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree where 1 - strongly agree, 2 - agree, 3 - neutral, 4 - disagree, and 5 - strongly disagree. To measure the constructs of the variables, the items are both adapted and adopted from different research studies. Questionnaires consisting of 31 items have been given to the sample group and are instructed to give the response against each item. Unethical consumer behavior is measured by adopting the 8-item questionnaire of Sliter et al. (2012) in the study. In order to measure emotional exhaustion, 6 item instrument of Maslach and Jackson (1986) is adopted and for measuring perceived service quality, 12 item instrument of Parasuraman et al., (1988) which measures it on 5 dimensions in which tangibles are measured by adapting 3-item, reliability by 3 item, responsiveness by 4-item, assurance by 4-item and empathy by 3-item instrument. Survey respondents were asked to self-evaluate their perceived service quality and asked to evaluate their emotional reactions whenever the customers behave unethically with them. The ultimate survey instrument contained 8 parts. First part consisted of demographics section, next two parts consisted of Unethical customer Behavior and Emotional Exhaustion, while last five parts consisted of Employee Perceived Service Quality’s 5 dimensions that are Tangibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. 247 out of 250 surveys were gathered. Out of 250, three survey instruments were incomplete. So data tests were conducted on 247 of sample size.

RESULTS

Table No. 2 Statistical Analysis of Study Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>No. of items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
<th>Guttman</th>
<th>Skewness</th>
<th>Kurtosis</th>
<th>K-S</th>
<th>S-W</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unethical Customer Behavior</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.987</td>
<td>0.984</td>
<td>-0.109</td>
<td>-1.252</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>0.921</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.958</td>
<td>0.911</td>
<td>-0.422</td>
<td>-1.154</td>
<td>0.235</td>
<td>0.902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibility</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.843</td>
<td>0.618</td>
<td>-0.628</td>
<td>-0.519</td>
<td>0.138</td>
<td>0.891</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Demographic characteristics of the respondents showed the results as follows. 234 out of 247 of the respondents are male representing 94.7 percent of the population while 13 out of 247 were females representing 5.3 percent of the population. Majority of the respondents belonged to the age group of 26 to 30 years of age (45.7%), about 35.2% of the respondents were between 21 to 25 years, 13.4% belonged to the age group of 31 to 35 years with maximum education upto matriculation (61.1%). 29.1% of the respondents were having education up to Intermediate. The majority of the respondents earn between 10,000 to 15,000 PKR (32%) and 24.7% of the respondents earn between 21,000 to 25,000 PKR monthly by having the working experience of over 7 years (37.2%).

Validity, Reliability and Normality

In order to check the validity and reliability of variables, cronbach’s alpha and guttman coefficients are analyzed. The value of Cronbach’s alpha that lies between 0.60 – 1 is an acceptable value (Hair et al., 2006) and minimum value of Cronbach’s alpha should be between 0.70 – 1 (Nunnally, 1978). All Cronbach’s alpha values are between the acceptable ranges from 0.843 to 0.987. After that, the normality of data was analyzed by analyzing the values of Skewness and Kurtosis that lies between -3 to +3 (Geary, 1947).

Table No. 3 Correlation Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>St. Deviation</th>
<th>UNE</th>
<th>EE</th>
<th>TAN</th>
<th>REL</th>
<th>RES</th>
<th>ASS</th>
<th>EMP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unethical Customer Behavior (UNE)</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>1.25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Exhaustion (EE)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td></td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tangibility (TAN)</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-.38**</td>
<td></td>
<td>-.28**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reliability (REL)</td>
<td>4.18</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
<td>-.41**</td>
<td></td>
<td>.72**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsiveness (RES)</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>-.44**</td>
<td>-.36**</td>
<td>.84**</td>
<td>.80**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assurance (ASS)</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>0.82</td>
<td>-.37**</td>
<td>-.26**</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>.83**</td>
<td>.92**</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empathy (EMP)</td>
<td>4.3158</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>-.34**</td>
<td>-.25**</td>
<td>.76**</td>
<td>.91**</td>
<td>.81**</td>
<td>.87**</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001
Table No. 4 Hypothesis Testing (Regression Analysis)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hyp</th>
<th>Path</th>
<th>Beta</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Adj. R^2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H a-1</td>
<td>UNE → TAN</td>
<td>-0.380</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6</td>
<td>UNE → EE</td>
<td>0.807</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.649</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H12</td>
<td>EE → TAN</td>
<td>-0.285</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.078</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H a-2</td>
<td>UNE → REL</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H13</td>
<td>EE → REL</td>
<td>-0.41</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H a-3</td>
<td>UNE → RES</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H14</td>
<td>EE → RES</td>
<td>-0.36</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H a-4</td>
<td>UNE → ASS</td>
<td>-0.379</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H15</td>
<td>EE → ASS</td>
<td>-0.264</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.066</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H a-5</td>
<td>UNE → EMP</td>
<td>-0.341</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H16</td>
<td>EE → EMP</td>
<td>-0.259</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.063</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: *p˂ 0.05, **p˂ 0.01, ***p˂ 0.001

To test the proposed study’s hypothesis, linear regression has been run. Results showed that Unethical Customer Behavior with Tangibility (β= -0.380, p= 0.000), Reliability (β= -0.41, p= 0.000), Responsiveness (β= -0.44, p= 0.000), Assurance (β= -0.37, p= 0.000) and Empathy (β= -0.34, p= 0.000) has negative significant relationships, so H a1, H a2, H a3, H a4 and H a5 are supported. Results showed that Unethical Customer Behavior (β= 0.807, p=0.000) has a significant positive effect on Emotional Exhaustion, therefore H6 is accepted.

To check the relationship of Mediator (as an independent variable) Emotional Exhaustion with Perceived Service Quality’s five dimensions, linear regression has been done. Results revealed that Emotional Exhaustion with Tangibility (β= -0.28, p= 0.000), Reliability (β= -0.41, p= 0.000), Responsiveness (β= -0.36, p= 0.000), Assurance (β= -0.26, p= 0.000) and Empathy (β= -0.25, p= 0.000) have negative significant relationship with each other so hypothesis H12, H13, H14, H15 and H16 are accepted.

Mediating Effect
According to following four steps as proposed by (Baron & Kenny, 1986), mediation analysis is done.

Mediating Effect

Figure 1. Step 1 of Mediation Analysis

Figure 2. Step 2 of Mediation Analysis
Table 5 shows that the only mediating hypothesis (H8) Emotional Exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between Unethical Customer Behavior and Reliability ($\beta = -0.23$, $p = 0.017$) significant at two levels (90% and 95%), is accepted. Moreover, Sobel test (Baron & Kenny, 1986) has also conducted the following results.

Indirect effect (a. b) = -6.907

Sobel’s S.E. = $\sqrt{(a. S.E. b)^2 + (b. S.E. a)^2} = 0.0371$

$Z = \text{Indirect Effect} / \text{Sobel’s S.E.} = -185.969$

$p = 0.000$

Standard Indirect Effect = ($\beta_a \times \beta_b) = -0.3381$

Results from Sobel’s test indicate that $p$ value is 0.000 which is significant at all three levels (90%, 95% and 99%), and 0.017 which is significant at two levels, so H8 is accepted. Whereas all the other four mediating hypothesis H7 ($\beta = 0.06$, $p = 0.55$), H9 ($\beta = -0.23$, $p = 0.85$), H10 ($\beta = 0.11$, $p = 0.23$) and H11 ($\beta = 0.04$, $p = 0.65$) are insignificant so the hypothesis are not accepted.
DISCUSSION
The present research makes a significant contribution to the field of services marketing by adapting the 5 dimensional SERVQUAL Model from the employee’s perspective. The objective of the research was to analyze how unethical customer behavior affects the restaurant frontline service employee’s emotions that will eventually lead to lower the level of perceived service quality (Slatten, 2008).

For this purpose, the study conducted on the restaurant’s frontline employees with the demographics of both male and female. Keeping in mind the scope of study, cost and time constraints, non-probability convenient sampling technique has been chosen in the vicinity of Rawalpindi and Islamabad. The subject of investigation was unethical consumer behavior practices which made service employees emotionally damaged and stressed, and they emotionally felt exhausted hence the level of service quality declined (Jung & Yoon, 2014; Sakurai & Jex, 2012). The data collected from service employees represent the 250 sample size but out of 250, three questionnaires were incomplete so the tests were run and conducted on 247 questionnaires.

Unethical customer behavior effecting Perceived Service Quality
The first dimension of SERVQUAL Model labeled as “Tangibles” consists of all the items related to restaurant’s physical appearance, overall design, layout and physical aspects of services being delivered (Parasuraman et al., 1991; Dabholkar et al., 1996; Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1982). Service quality is based on both employee perceived service quality and customer satisfaction by adorning the quality of services provided by service personnel (Schneider et al., 1998). This dimension comes from the significance of the physical amenities of the restaurant's overall physical environment. The second dimension of Service Quality was labelled as “Reliability” is the service provider’s ability to deliver the service accurately as promised (Parasuraman et al. 1991; Sahu, 2006; Wu et al., 2004; Markovic, 2006; Siu et al., 2001; Al-Tamimi & Al-Amiri, 2003). This dimension inculcates the interpersonal skills that are necessary to satisfy customers and deliver the service timely (Bennett, 1995).

The third dimension of Service quality labelled as “Responsiveness” is to respond to customer’s inquiry, willingness to help and solve their problems and all the items related to competence and ability of the service personnel (Parasuraman et al. 1991; Siu et al., 2001; Brady & Cronin, 2003; Sureshchandar et al., 2002; Wu et al., 2004; Markovic, 2006;).

Fourth dimension of Service Quality labelled as “Assurance” includes the knowledge and courtesy along with satisfying the customers with trust and confidence and the last dimension labelled as “Empathy” is understanding customer’s need, and paying individualized attention to customers (Parasuraman et al. 1991; Sahu, 2006; Wu et al., 2004; Markovic, 2006; Siu et al., 2001; Al-Tamimi & Al-Amiri, 2003).

The above discussion on the dimensions of service quality showed that there are some most important as well as less important dimensions in providing services and assuring quality. According to Grönroos and Voima (2013), service quality is dependent on three basic components that are customers, front-line employees and the organization that is providing the services. But according to the present research study, the customer’s unethical behavior often leads to lower the level of service quality. Customer’s unethical behavior to front-line employees destroy their ability to perform the desired tasks that may result in declined service performance of front-line service personnel. Isin et al. (2010); Harris and Daunt (2013) explained that the customers in the service interactions who take advantage of their positions, results in bullying, attacking and threatening front-line employees during the service encounters. So we can say that customers can be value co-creators as well as value co-destrokers during the service encounters (Echeverri et al., 2012).

Unethical Customer Behavior effecting Emotional Exhaustion
The literature provides a strong foundation that serving unhappy customers and having frequent contacts with unethical customers lead to effect the service personnel’s emotional exhaustion (Leiter & Maslach, 2009). The study of (Sliter et al., 2010) suggested the service employees to display the organization’s required emotions even dealing with unethical and in-civil customers. This displaying of false gestures and emotions is Emotional labor (Humphrey et al., 2015) employees go through, hence their level of service quality got effected (Wright & Cropanzano, 1998). The current study is in line with these previous research studies as the study of (Adams & Webster, 2013) that confirms that in restaurant setting, service personnel after dealing with unethical customer behavior might significantly felt emotional exhaustion.
The results of the Barron and Kenny mediation analysis revealed that H6 i.e; Un-ethical customer behavior has a significant relationship with emotional exhaustion is accepted as the p-value is significant at all three levels (90%, 95% and 99%). The result is harmonized with previous research studies as Grandey et al. (2004) researched that those service employees who regularly face un-ethical attitude and uncivil behavior from customers have a higher chance of feeling emotionally drained and exhausted because they are more open to stressful situations. These stressful conditions result in suffering from emotional exhaustion. According to Slitter et al., (2011, 2012), un-ethical customer’s behavior and treatment reduces service personnel emotional resources which further leads to emotional exhaustion. So the hypothesis is accepted in accordance with these theoretical foundations.

**Emotional Exhaustion as a Mediating Variable**

The emotional exhaustion is analyzed as a mediating variable by Baron and Kenny Mediation analysis presented by (Baron & Kenny, 1986). The regression analysis results revealed that the mediator (Emotional Exhaustion) is partially mediating the relationship between unethical consumer behavior and Reliability (one of the dimensions of Service Quality). Berry et al., (1990) documenting Reliability as the most significant dimension of Service Quality, hence H8 that is Emotional exhaustion significantly mediates the relationship between Unethical customer behavior and Reliability is accepted. The result is similar to the finding of an early study, conducted by (Becker et al., 1997). He has researched the perceptions and expectations of perceived service quality. The result of his study concluded that reliability is the most important dimension whereas the tangibility dimension is the least important of the five SERVQUAL dimensions of Perceived Service Quality.

**Emotional Exhaustion affecting Perceived Service Quality**

Emotions are believed to be the core aspect in determining service quality (Cronin, 2003; Slatten, 2008; Oliver, 1997). So the hypotheses are made in accordance with the literature foundations. According to the research study of Slatten (2008), emotional retorts that the employees experiences (i.e positive or negative), has directly influenced employees perceived service quality. Based on this research findings, we can direct our study into the following hypothesis that emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with Perceived Service Quality. Since the perceived service quality has five dimensions that are tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy (Parasuraman et al., 1985). So H12, that is, Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with tangibility is accepted.

According to Heskett’s et al. (1997) model, the model identified the relationship between employee’s service quality and emotional satisfaction, emotional exhaustion effects the service level of employees while interacting with customers (Bitner, 1992; Van Maanen & Kunda, 1989; Rafaeli & Sutton, 1990). According to Slatten (2008), employee perceived service quality is the actual self-evaluation of employees that he or she delivers to its customers during the service encounter. Similarly, H13 that is, Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with Reliability is also accepted. According to an early study, Becker et al. (1997) has researched on the perceptions and expectations of perceived service quality. The result of his study concluded that reliability is the most important dimension whereas the tangibility dimension is the least important of the five SERVQUAL dimensions of Perceived Service Quality. Also, Slatten (2008) investigated that the Emotional exhaustion has an effect on employees perceived service quality which is a further extension of Bagozzi’s (1992) attitude theory. H14 that is, Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with Responsiveness is also tested by regression analysis and the results of the p-value concluded that there is a significant relationship between emotional exhaustion and responsiveness, which is one of the dimension of perceived service quality, presented by (Parasuruman et al., 1985). H15 that is, Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with Assurance is accepted. And H16, that is Emotional exhaustion has a significant relationship with Empathy is also accepted as the results from the Baron and Kenny Mediation Analysis showed that their p-value 0.000 is significant at all three levels that are (90%, 95% and 99%).

**Managerial Implications**

Service environment is co-created during the service encounters between customers and service employees. Vargo and Lusch (2004) identified that customers and service providers are the key components of service interaction process thus the services being offered to the customer by the front-line employees characterizes the importance of service encounters. Service industry is concerned with human interaction during service encounters between customers and service personnel (King, 1995). The importance of service quality in today’s world has a great impact on service provider firm’s prestige.
and esteem so in order to cater the service environment effectively, the managers of restaurants firstly
should have all the information regarding the unethical behaviors and incidents from the customer’s
side. The managers should have interaction and communication with their employees on a regular basis
so that if any unusual encounter happens between service personnel and customers, they can easily
communicate to their manager or supervisor. Service firms should design and formulate the strategies
and policies that protect their employees. Top management should be easily accessible to all of the
employees so whenever they want to report something about any misconduct and delinquency, they can
easily have access to. Moreover, Training and development programs should be introduced for frontline
employees in order to attain maximum efficiency and to train their service employees to handle the
unaware and unusual situations effectively and efficiently without getting emotionally damaged. Further,
top level management should recruit highly qualified and expert employees as managers that
are skilled enough to deal with their frontline employees as well as customers to achieve higher levels
of satisfaction from both ends.

**Limitations and Future Research Guidelines of the Study**

Every research study has some limitations and constraints. Some of them are acknowledged here so that
they provide new points towards new ideas for further research. The limitation of the current study is
that the sampling technique used was non-probability convenience sampling so only the areas of
Rawalpindi and Islamabad are targeted and data collected from the casual dining-restaurants of
Rawalpindi and Islamabad vicinity hence the results of the current study cannot be generalized to the
total population. In future research, it is recommended that more areas are targeted to achieve the
maximum accuracy and generalizability in the results deduced. Moreover, in a country like Pakistan,
people are mostly introverts and are not as much expressive to provide all the required information to
complete the research. According to Simmons and Wilmot (2004), monetary incentives should be
provided in order to get the true response from the research topics involving extremely sensitive,
awkward and embarrassing situations. So it is recommended for the future research that monetary
incentives should be paid to the employees so that they can give the true information about their personal
experiences of being offended by their customers.

The future research can explore the different dimensions of unethical customer behaviors and
their precursors that affect the frontline employees perceived service quality. Other dimensions of
service quality can also be analyzed. As in restaurant services, dimensions of service quality can include
meeting customer’s expectations, genuineness in the interaction, mutual understanding, recovery after
failure, competency of service provider, service settings, price and performance discernment (Gilbert
et al., 2004; Hoffman et al., 1995; Mattila & Enz, 2002; Voss et al., 1998). Another major limitation is
that the service quality model does not take into account the tangible dimension in the service offering
(Philip and Hazlett, 2001). So other models like Grönroos (1982) 2 dimensional model of service quality
that is functional quality and technical quality can be analyzed. Moreover, the dependent variable that
is service quality can also be replaced and some other variables like employee satisfaction, turnover
intentions and employee productivity can be assessed and analyzed.

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