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Radulović, Anđela

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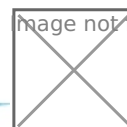
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The Influence of Professional Attire on the overall Success of the Business

CAST-HSPT-490: Senior Capstone Project

Student: Anđela Radulović

Mentor: Professor Zrinka Friganović Sain

Course Instructor: Professor Rebecca Charry Roje

Rochester Institute of Technology, Dubrovnik

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ABSTRACT

Human beings send important information about our identity by the way we dress, often announcing who we believe we are, or, who we hope to become, sending in this way a specific message to the world around us. While it is true that with our daily attire, we send a specific message to the world around us about our inner being and our personal aspirations, it is also true that dressing in proper business attire demonstrates another important aspect of our identity and sends another important message. Sending that message is equally important in a professional world, since dressing properly, in accordance with the expectations of the job we do or the company we work for, announces a certain visual image which is accepted and expected in a professional environment. This paper explores the impact of professional attire on overall success of a restaurant by analyzing perceptions of students of American and Croatian origin enrolled in two institutions of higher education. The findings show the significance of establishing a balance between projecting a professional image and enabling employees to express their uniqueness and personalities. Service personnel are more likely to provide a favorable image to consumers and deliver high-quality service if they are at ease in their clothing. The survey's findings also indicate that professional dress, especially the wearing of a uniform, significantly affects employer's opinions of the level of service quality and satisfaction at a bar or restaurant.

Keywords: wearing uniforms in hospitality, successful restaurants, professional environment, high quality service in restaurants

INTRODUCTION

The clothes someone wears very often play a crucial role in that person's daily life. Based on what people wear and how they wear it, people can be judged and estimated either positively or negatively in their interpersonal relations, social situations, or professional environment. It is a common fact that the clothes we wear can affect our mood or invite other people's respect. Our choice of clothes can sometimes even influence the first impressions other people may have of us.

While it is true that through our personal interpretations of a certain fashion, we humans send important information about our identity and we announce who we believe we are (or, who we hope we might become), it is also true that dressing in proper business attire demonstrates another important aspect of our identity and sends another message. That message is equally important in a professional world, since dressing properly people announce a certain visual image which is accepted in a specific, professional environment. This image then sends a message to the outer world that they are professionals, and that they value their job..

In 2007, Peluchette and Karl conducted a study in which the authors examined employee preferences for different styles of formal attire in order to define how that choice affected their self-perceptions. Their findings showed that the participants in this study felt most authoritative, trustworthy, and competent while wearing formal (professional or business) attire, and more friendly when wearing casual or business casual attire. These findings also show that there is a correlation between a dress preference of an employee and type of clothing on self-perceptions of productivity, trustworthiness, creativity, and friendliness (Peluchette & Karl, 2007).

According to another research, the mode of clothing is also directly correlated with a person's success in a business world, since the findings showed that 41% of those who dress professionally have a better chance of succeeding (Cardon & Okoro, 2009). The same researchers also claim that certain businesses enforce a dress code to maintain a professional image in which well-dressed individuals leave a better impression not only on customers and clients but also on their coworkers. The authors also sought to distinguish between formal and casual attire to examine the company's success and operations. The results they obtained and presented show that 64% and 73% of

respondents preferred to dress business casual, and their ethnicity and gender had an impact on their preferences. The results also show that women were more likely to dress professionally than men as well as to favor having a dress code in the workplace. Their findings thus prove that workplace attire is extremely important to success. Another important finding of this research shows that most participants preferred business casual to business formal attire, and the authors explained their results connecting formal business attire with authority and competence, formal attire with productivity and trustworthiness, and casual attire with friendliness and creativity. This study also identified an important correlation between clothing and other employee-related factors such as ethnicity, race, and nationality. The authors finally conclude that before enforcing dress codes, HR department of each company should take different factors into account since not all cultures view attire in the same way (Cardon & Okoro, 2009).

Another source identifies the fact that we like to wear the same clothes to the job that we usually wear at home (CareerBuilder Hiring Solutions, 2008). It has been discovered that people who dress more professionally are 55% more likely to be promoted. "Even though we are seeing a trend of more relaxed dress codes in the office, especially in the summer, it doesn't mean that professionalism should go out the window," said Rosemary Haefner the vice president of human resources said for CareerBuilder.com (CareerBuilder Hiring Solutions, 2008). The research shows that Since the Covid 19, people have become more relaxed in recent years, but it is also true that the dress code in businesses has changed significantly. According to an interesting survey that was conducted by employers, 64% of employers outlawed flip-flops, 49% outlawed miniskirts, and 28% outlawed jeans. The research also identifies those employers paid attention not only to the type of attire (casual vs business) but also to the level of politeness of their employees. Therefore, defining a proper way to dress has become one of the main factors of success in many companies (CareerBuilder Hiring Solutions, 2008).

According to Karch & Peters (2017), uniforms serve a variety of purposes at various levels in every service industry. Uniforms have become an essential component of many people's service expectations. To achieve the results that management wants, a variety of measures need to be put into action. Things that can be felt are thus also very important and those "moments of truth" ought to receive more attention. The customer experience can be impacted by these moments of truth

and the success of every business according to this research will depend on it. The first impression is most important when dealing directly with customers and, on a different level, the management's goal should be to improve design elements' functionality, which has an impact on health and safety (Karch and Peters, 2017).

Karch and Peters (2017) have also identified in the same research that uniforms play a significant role in providing tangible service. Employees' behavior is largely influenced by their uniforms and attire. This demonstrates the employee's behavior as perceived from their perspective. Wearing uniforms according to the findings affects therefore also job satisfaction. Since it is essential that employees feel good at work, this becomes a factor that needs to be taken into consideration. Similarly, the authors also state that clothing is another way for service industry to show its value to the customers (Karch & Peters, 2017)

In 2019, Wang and Lang defined that the dress is a form of nonverbal communication, since when someone is seen, that person's attire is one of the first things that people notice. In the service industry, the first impression is everything. Customers may develop a social identity with the service company because of interactions between employees and customers during service experiences, which leads to customer loyalty and an increase in the company's financial segment. The restaurant's dress code is one of the first things customers see when they enter. During their dining experience, customers judge restaurants primarily based on employee attire. The appealing aspects of an employee's professional appearance are referred to as employee aesthetic traits. Customers are captivated by these "A & F look" service employees' strong employee brand congruence and are more likely to pay attention to the specifics of the employee's aesthetic trait (Wang & Lang, 2019). Customers' loyalty to a salesperson is found to be stronger: When an employee joins a loyalty program, this act also displays the previous preferences of customers (Wang & Lang, 2019). It has similarly a potential to extend relationships.

Many researchers have claimed that customers' expectations are directly influenced by a service worker's attire (Kim and Baker, 2017; Pounds and a Half, 2015). The relationship that has been established between employees and customers is another factor that is being influenced by dress.

Service encounter performance could enhance their positive effect, which could later improve their satisfaction with the restaurant (Tsaour et al 2015). Some employers allow their employees to choose what kind of clothes they should wear on the job. If there is a customer who is more toward fashion, it is concluded that the person will be more sensitive toward dress-related issues (Ko et al, 2006).

Peluchette et al. (2006) discuss in their paper how employees' beliefs and attitudes about the workplace affect the success of the business as a whole. Some businesses' outcomes are largely determined by the overall impression of the workplace and, therefore, self-monitoring is significantly influenced by one's attire and appearance. Numerous books have been written about this topic and the difficulties that women in the United States faced when it came to business attire, as well as how people in the business world perceive attire. Researchers claim that the way how people are dressed affects the quality of the performance of the job and the way how they feel (Solomon and Schopler 1982, as cited in Peluchette et al. (2006). This research has seen the topic from the perspective of the employee. The authors have concluded that if attire is appreciated at a workplace, then more people will believe that it has an overall positive impact on their work. (Peluchette et al., 2006). Another researcher, Tseelon (1992) interestingly mentions the importance of appearance claiming that it is the highest among the people we do not know. Additionally, ~~the~~ this (!) researcher mentions that dressing takes a lot of energy from individuals, particularly those who care about it. clearly, self-perceptions are impacted when people dress to impress others and the feeling of productivity is raising. Otherwise, people believe that their appearance influences how others perceive them and their views. (Peluchette et al., 2006).

Many studies dispute that the success of businesses where customer service is the primary aspect, such as in restaurants, depends on the quality of their services. When considering a

restaurant today, physical space, staff, and food are its three key assets. One of the key elements that alters the whole dining experience of a restaurant is the appearance of the staff. People look for social connection while going to a restaurant, and for customers to be satisfied, this should become an experience. One of the most important components of success is service quality, which clearly results from customer happiness (Slack et al., 2021). In addition to location, outside, and exterior, one of the most significant considerations to customers is how personnel are dressed. Customers' expectations about that particular company's fashion must be met in order for this to happen, and since customers are given the possibility to physically access the items that are important to them companies can in this way satisfy their clients with successful concrete evidence (Rahman et al., 2019).

There is evidence to support the idea that a person's physical attributes, including their attire, influence how others view their level of intelligence, expertise, and ability. A well-known phrase that indicates that one should "dress for success" in order to land the ideal job is a cliché, but it is also evident that particularly for the students in the hospitality business, "professional dress" is recognized as being crucial. The research shows that having higher levels of physical attractiveness is one of the most valuable qualities in practically every part of the profession. Although intangible components are essential to hospitality, tangible components are where it all begins. Physical attractiveness was highlighted as the most crucial factor for those who engage with the public. It plays a crucial part in choosing who gets hired. It is advised to wear "business" attire rather than casual. Additionally, a person's appearance can leave an impression, imply personality traits, and influence a hiring choice (Ruetzler et al., 2012).

There is evidence to support the claim that customers tend to view stores run by persons in the front rows of sales as less successful, which negatively impacts the company's reputation. One important factor that influences the level of service is the attire chosen. As has been noted, salesperson attire does impact customers' opinions of a store. Morris et al. (1996) stated that "Clothing generally provided protection, comfort, and modesty." One of the forces that can help with representation is clothing. The way a person dresses can influence their results both personally and professionally. Even in the human resources division, it may still be affectionate. Customers have been observed to behave more favourably toward those who dress more formally. Most individuals view employees as the store's ambassadors. In the end, it was discovered that the way employees dress can alter how people perceive a company (Yan et al., 2011).

The perception of the restaurant staff and the image they project has emerged as one of the factors that have been essential to the establishment's success. In order to constantly represent their culture to customers in every facet of business, McDonald's and many other well-known restaurants have regulations about employee wear. One of the most important aspects determining customer happiness has been identified as the style of the employee's clothes. Higher service quality expectations are correlated with better professional attire. The way a customer is dressed can affect their decision. They make judgments on a customer's first impression based on how they appear. On the basis of the staff members' dress, customers can get a sense of the restaurant. The quality of the restaurants depends on it; thus, dress is essential for success. It may alter a customer's desire and readiness to return to that specific location (Chen & Lee, 2018).

Restaurants should have a dress code for numerous reasons, including its significance. Sometimes the personnel are unable to see them. The first impressions are one of the reasons why uniforms are being used. Moments of truth in the service industry are critical, especially the first impression. Ripped pants may not be permitted at fine dining establishments, and staff members must conceal tattoos and remove body piercings, since this evidently has an impact on the business's branding. Every business should be true to the image it presents and maintain it. The outfit itself should coordinate with the restaurant's design and employees should have power and pride in representing their employer through their uniforms (Nnaemezie, n.d.).

The use of uniforms makes it simple for visitors to recognize who is employed there. There are many different types of clothing, including formal business, casual business, and casual days. People in higher positions who conduct formal business typically dress in suits. Most of the time, business casual is still considered to be formal clothing, but more relaxed for wait staff. Employees can dress whichever they wish on casual days. While restaurants with lax dress codes may call for more informal clothes, uniform policies are stricter in upscale restaurants (Supplies, 2021).

Customers have grown more critical about everything at restaurants because of the abundance of options available nowadays. Therefore, eateries and restaurants must always work to succeed. Company uniforms serve as a means of brand representation and communication between the business and the services, standards of quality, and culture. There are some causes that have an impact on perception: wearing uniforms fosters confidence. When an employee wears a uniform, it fosters trust, which makes them feel better and more useful. In doing so, they produce work of

a better caliber and demonstrate the restaurants' beliefs at the same time, raising also brand awareness as a result. Another positive outcome may also be higher sales. If people are wearing uniforms that have slogans or logo of a particular restaurant and they wear it after they are going home, this will also be noted and remembered, and it makes it easier for the customers to spot employees (Total Food Service, 2022).

One of the most important factors is how consumers view the restaurant's brand and what actions businesses should take to attain it. The greatest benefits of giving the staff uniforms are as follows. In workplaces where serving customers is prioritized, uniforms are highly prevalent. Having uniforms has advantages for both employees and customers, such as increasing satisfaction. This will guarantee that the first impression is properly satisfied and accounted for and will also involve the staff in the business in addition to presenting a professional image. Customers will feel more valued if the staff is engaged. The most crucial aspect is that, from the customer's perspective, the employee appears to have received proper training. The personnel will be more helpful when wearing it since they feel more accountable for their conduct (Custom Planet, n.d.).

The purpose of this research was to investigate further about the influence of the professional attire in hospitality business by examining customers' perceptions regarding professional attire and its influence on the overall success of the service quality.

Method

The main goal of the research was to find a gap between expectations of the customers and the quality of the service provided when wearing uniform or not. The research instrument chosen was an electronic survey that was distributed via email to the students at RIT and professors and as well students in North America.

The aim of research was to investigate how different professions, gender and age have impact on the viewpoint of this topic with a specific focus on the country of origin of participants, not on their profession. There were 164 respondents to the questionnaire, 53,9% female and 44,9% male, and the rest choose not to identify themselves.

All 12 questions used a Likert scale type of question, on the scale from 1 to 5, from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The questionnaire consists of three groups of questions. The questionnaire also included one open-ended question, where participants were given an opportunity to comment about the topic.

The questionnaire was adapted from a different survey used in the research paper by Karch and Peters (2017) *The Impact of Employee Uniforms on Job Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry*.

Results

The descriptive analysis shows the essential demographic attributes of the sample. The variable for the age included five items, with the most frequent item being the group 18-24 (74,3%), followed by 25-29 (13,8%). Regarding gender, most participants were female (53,9%), while the

minority were males (44.9%) and the rest choose to not identify themselves. The sector of profession showed that most participants were students (67,1%), followed by those fully employed (29,3%) and the rest were non employed people. The participants examined in this survey were Croatians and Americans.

Some of 164 participants left blank in the open-ended question so their response was not included in the overall explanation of the results.–Out of the total of 164 participants, 49 participants (29,88%) were Americans, and 115 (70,12%) Croatian, and M= and SD= were calculated for two groups.

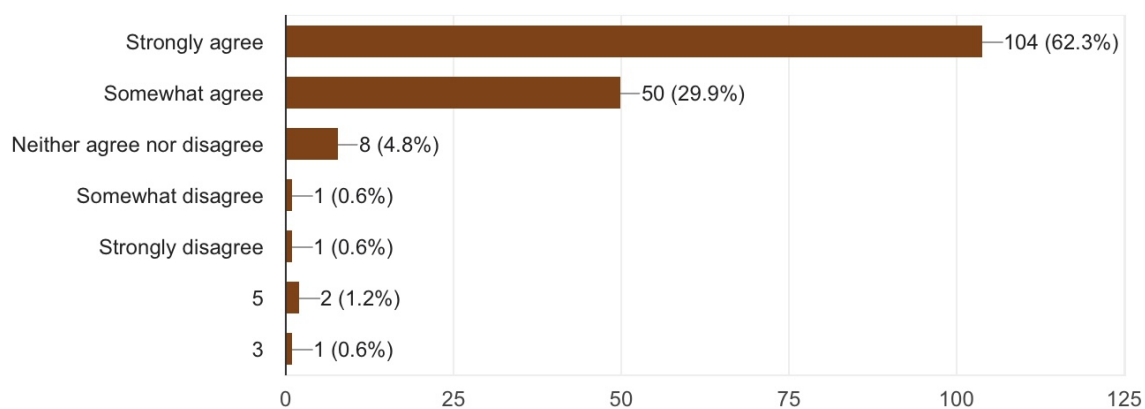
Variables	Mean	Std
Role of the service	1.54	0.65
Connectivity with organization	1.25	0.60
Attitude towards restaurant	1.79	0.92
Identity lost	3.31	1.42
Viewing customers-as professional	1.54	0.77
Communication	2.98	1.14
Service quality	2.15	1.05
Respect	2.42	1.20
Welcomness	2.88	1.08
Communication-without uniforms	3.38	1.14
Message-expectations	2.27	1.11
Motivation	2.13	0.91

Figure 1. Average and standard deviation of USA participants

Variables	Mean	Std
Role of the service	1.41	0.68
Connectivity with organization	1.27	0.58
Attitude towards restaurant	1.63	0.88
Identity lost	3.55	1.29
Viewing customers-as professional	1.75	1.28
Communication	3.19	0.99
Service quality	2.26	1.08
Respect	2.72	1.26
Welcomness	3.14	0.98
Communication-without uniforms	3.35	0.93
Message-expectations	2.24	0.97
Motivation	2.01	0.95

Figure 2. Average and standard deviation for the Croatian participants

“A uniform supports the role of service staff and employees in a restaurant.”



Based on these results, it showed that 62.3%+ 29.9%, agree on questions.

The responses to this set of inquiries were favorable.

- When employees wear a uniform, they send a message that they are connected to the organization and a part of a team.
- When I see an employee wearing a uniform, it affects positively my attitude towards a restaurant/bar.
- I perceive employees wearing a uniform as more professional.
- Being serviced by an employee wearing a uniform increases my overall experience of service quality in a restaurant/bar.

A question may have confused the respondents or made them uninterested in the subject at hand.” I communicate more easily with employees who do not wear a strict uniform but are dressed in a more casual way”. The highest response percentage (48.5%) to this question was "neither agree nor disagree." It is assumed that individuals were perplexed and unable to respond in a way that made sense.

“Employees wearing a more casual outfit make me feel more welcome”. With a proportion of 46.1%, this question had the most responses that were neither agreeable nor disagreeable. Some of these questions caused the responders to get perplexed.

Customers' evaluations of several aspects of service quality in a restaurant were compared between Americans and Croatians in the study. The following table shows the means and standard deviations of each variable for the two groups.

Customers from the United States reported a mean score of 1.54 with a standard deviation of 0.65 for the function of the service, whereas customers from Croatia reported a lower mean of 1.41 with a standard deviation of 0.68. The mean score for connectedness with organization was higher for American consumers (1.25, SD=0.60) than for Croatian customers (1.27, SD=0.58).

American customers gave a mean score of 1.79 with a standard deviation of 0.92 on their opinions about the restaurant, whereas Croatian diners reported a lower mean of 1.63 with a standard deviation of 0.88.

Consumers from Croatia reported a higher mean score (3.55, SD=1.29) for identity loss than did consumers from the United States (3.31, SD=1.42). However, compared to Croatian consumers (1.75, SD=1.28), American customers reported a better mean score for rating customers as professional (1.54, SD=0.77).

Customers from the United States reported an average communication score of 2.98 with a standard deviation of 1.14, while customers from Croatia reported a slightly higher average communication score of 3.19 with a standard deviation of 0.99. Customers from the United States gave the quality of the services they received an average rating of 2.15 with a standard deviation of 1.05, while those from Croatia gave a higher average rating of 2.26 with a standard deviation of 1.08.

American consumers reported mean ratings of 2.42 (SD=1.20) for respect and 2.88 (SD=1.08) for welcomeness, whereas Croatian customers reported mean scores of 2.72 (SD=1.26) for respect and 3.14 (SD=0.98) for welcomeness.

Both groups had equal mean scores for non-uniform communication and message expectations, with Croatian consumers reporting somewhat higher mean scores in comparison to American customers.

Finally, participants from the United States reported an average motivation score of 2.13 with a standard deviation of 0.91, while participants from Croatia reported an average motivation score that was slightly lower at 2.01 with a standard deviation of 0.95.

Overall, the study discovered some differences between American and Croatian customers' perceptions of various service quality factors in a restaurant setting, such as attitudes toward the restaurant, identity loss, and viewing customers as professionals, while other factors like communication and motivation were the same between the two groups.

Discussion

The results of the survey show that people have positive attitude towards professionals' attire and/or uniforms in restaurants or at the jobs in hospitality businesses. This can be proven by mostly positive feedback in the open-ended question. Interestingly, there seems to be very little difference between respondents from America and Croatia. Even though the primary assumption was that Americans would care less about the need to wear professional attire in restaurants, the results showed differently, and participants had very similar opinion regarding this issue.

The survey's findings suggest that the way people perceive the service workers at a restaurant or bar is significantly influenced by professional appearance, particularly by the wearing of a uniform. Most respondents agreed that wearing a uniform promotes the function of service workers and employees, communicates their connection to the business and sense of teamwork, and makes employees appear more professional. These results are in line with other studies that showed how important professional dress is in influencing how customers perceive the value and satisfaction of services.

The favorable effect of a uniform on customer views may be attributable to the way it fosters cohesion and uniformity among service personnel. Employees that wear uniforms are considered as a part of a broader team that is committed to offering consumers high-quality service. Additionally, wearing a uniform can be a visual indicator to customers that an employee is skilled and competent, which can improve their impressions of the level of service.

Although the impact of professional clothes has received largely positive feedback, opinions on whether the personality of the individual wearing the uniform is seen to be less significant were divided. The significance of establishing a balance between projecting a professional image and enabling employees to express their uniqueness and personalities is highlighted by this research. Service personnel are more likely to provide a favorable image to consumers and deliver high-quality service if they are at ease in their clothing.

At conclusion, the survey's findings indicate that professional dress, especially the wearing of a uniform, significantly affects customer's opinions of the level of service quality and satisfaction at a bar or restaurant. Employers, therefore, should think about offering uniforms that are cozy, practical, and representative of the company's image and principles if they want to receive the benefits of professional wear. Employees should also be given the chance to offer feedback on their clothing choices so that it is cozy and allows for personal expression while yet projecting a professional image.

Based on the 164 respondents' survey replies, wearing a uniform has a positive impact on how customers view the quality of service of employees at a restaurant or bar. Most respondents strongly or somewhat agreed that personnel wearing a uniform are seen as more professional, that it supports the function of service staff and employees at a restaurant or bar, and that it communicates that they are connected to the business and part of a team. Additionally, a sizable proportion of respondents said that seeing an employee in a uniform makes them feel better about a bar or restaurant. However, there were differing opinions on whether the personality of the person donning the uniform is viewed as less significant, with a sizable portion of respondents saying they are unsure of their position.

Limitations of the research:

The relatively small sample that was collected (164) is one of the study's limitations; in order to investigate and understand better the possibility of a correlation between various cultures and the specific characteristics of customers emotions, additional research should be conducted. Likewise, in order to provide more data that is relevant to hospitality professionals and their business success, future research need to be conducted.

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