

“Emotional Labor in Customer Service Professionals: Validation in the Indian Context.”

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ABSTRACT

Rationale: Modulating Emotional Reactions to suit the work requirements is a common phenomenon in customer service work. The concept has been termed Emotional Labor by Hochschild (1983). The construct has evolved through the years, and many versions have been proposed (Bono & Vey, 2005). Different approaches to the concept have been generated by various researchers (Asforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1996) which differ from each other in multiple aspects. Therefore, validating the Emotional Labor measurement scales proposed earlier is essential to check their suitability in the Indian Context.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study was to investigate the adequacy of the original factor model of the Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) proposed by Brotheridge and Lee (2003), which assesses the frequency of emotional display, the intensity of emotional display, variety of emotional display, surface acting and deep acting as major contributors leading to Emotional Labor at the workplace.

Methods: The study was conducted on 600 customer service professionals who were Doctors, Teachers, Marketing Professionals, and Hospitality Executives working at Indore, M.P. A questionnaire comprising basic Demographic Information and ELS was exercised on the sample. Data collected was then subjected to Reliability Test and Confirmatory Factor Analysis to explore whether the resulting structure was valid for the data collected from Indian Customer Service Professionals.

Findings and Results: Cronbach's Alpha value for ELS was found to be 0.89. The values from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis on Emotional Labor Scale revealed that the model was acceptable as all the critical values (*CMIN*, *CFI*, *AGFI*, *RMSEA*) fall within the acceptable ranges and was finalized to be included in the final model. Out of the fourteen items, all items were statistically significant with high factor loadings (>0.50) and therefore item discrimination was found acceptable for each item.

Conclusions: The results regarding reliability and CFA Model fit were found to be satisfactory. Thus, the instrument is suitable for the assessment of emotional labor even in the Indian Context specifically with reference to the customer service sector.

Keywords: Emotional Labor, ELS, CFA, Surface Acting, Deep Acting

1. INTRODUCTION

The performance of work responsibilities and duties perfectly is not just a matter of competence. To be an outperformer in an occupation it is essential to regulate the displays of moods and emotions of self with almost every other individual who is a part of one's professional journey. There are jobs that demand particular emotional displays. Medical professionals are expected to display caring and kindness, Hospitality Executives to show friendliness and cheerfulness; bill collectors need to be forceful and angry; Teachers are expected to be calm and cool, similarly, Sales Professionals need to be courteous and patient. One attribute that the above job categories have in common is that they all are service occupations, in which face-to-face or voice-to-voice interactions with customers, clients, or the public constitute a major part of the work. It is therefore essential to measure the congruency between the expected emotional displays and emotions experienced by the service professionals during the performance of their job. The degree of incongruence is reflected in their Emotional Labor levels.

There are various authors who have developed different models and scales to measure the Emotional Labor levels of employees. As most of these have been developed with respect to western countries it is essential to validate their suitability for the Indian context. The current paper focuses on checking the robustness of the Emotional Labor Scale to ensure its applicability to the Indian Service Sector.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of emotional labor was introduced by Hochschild, but the actual definition of the construct has evolved through the years, and many versions have been proposed. Different approaches to the concept have been generated by various researchers (Asforth & Humphrey, 1993; Grandey, 2000; Morris & Feldman, 1996). Hochschild (1983) referred to emotional labor as the purposeful control of feelings in order to outwardly demonstrate an appropriate facial and body display. According to him this control could be managed by using either surface acting, in which the outward expression was altered, or deep acting in which the actual emotion felt was altered through re-appraisal or directly conjuring the appropriate feeling.

Latter Morris and Feldman (1996) attempted to further specify the concept by delineating its dimensions. They explicitly defined emotional labor as the “effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions to display appropriate emotions” (p. 987).

By reorganizing the concepts of the different models of emotional labor with theories on emotional regulation, Grandey crafted a definition of emotional labor which proposed that it was not simply the outward expression presented by an employee, as mentioned by Ashforth and Humphrey (1993), nor was it the combination of characteristics of the job, as concluded by Morris and Feldman (1996). Instead, she argued that emotional labor involved the regulation of feeling and expression in order to meet organizational goals.

Morris and Feldman defined emotional labor as the effort, planning, and control required for displaying organizationally desired emotions during service interactions (p. 987). Morris and Feldman proposed that emotional labor has four dimensions that are interrelated. These are; *frequency of appropriate emotional display*, *attentiveness to required display rules*, *variety of emotions to be displayed*, and *emotional dissonance* which occurs when expressing fake emotions.

Brotheridge and Lee described Emotional labor as “actions undertaken as a means of addressing role demands” (1998, p.7) or the effort involved when employees “regulate their emotional display in an attempt to meet organizationally-based expectations specific to their roles” (2003, p. 365). Based on the theories of Hochschild (1983) and Morris and Feldman (1996), they developed an Emotional labor Scale with 6 dimensions that measure the intensity of interaction, frequency of interaction, variety of emotional display, Surface acting, Deep acting and the duration of the interaction.

Zapf (2002) used the term Emotion work and he defined the concept as “the psychological processes necessary to regulate organizationally desired emotions” (p. 239). Zapf’s (2002) perspective of Emotional labor is based on the action theory (Frese & Zapf, 1994) which explained the active coping of individuals with the environment. Zapf, Vogt, Seifert, Mertini, and Isic (1999) developed Frankfurt Emotion Work Scale of emotion work that include emotional regulation requirements (sub-scales: the requirement to express positive emotions; the requirement to express and handle negative emotions, the requirement to be sensitive to clients’ emotions, and the requirement to show sympathy), emotional regulation possibilities (control), and emotional regulation problems (Emotional dissonance). Zapf et al. (1999) measured emotion work as a job characteristic and treated Emotional dissonance as a stressor or emotional regulation problem.

Diefendorff and Gosserand (2003) defined Emotional labor as the process of regulating emotional expressions of individuals in response to the display rules. The Emotional labor Strategy Scale developed by them has three dimensions and they are Deep acting, Surface acting and Expression of naturally felt emotions. Also, Diefendorff et al. (2005) measured display rules as positive display rule perceptions and negative display rule perceptions using the scale developed for measuring Emotional display rules.

The current study tries to understand the suitability of Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) developed by Brotheridge and Lee in the Indian Context.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The primary purpose of the study was to explore the appropriateness of the measurement model of Emotional Labor in the Indian Service Sector. The study was carried out to validate the robustness of ELS developed by Brotheridge and Lee with 6 dimensions which measure the intensity of interaction, frequency of interaction, variety of emotional display, Surface acting, Deep acting, and the duration of the interaction.

4. DATA COLLECTION

Primary Data for the study was collected via a self-administered survey. The respondents were also asked to fill in some necessary personal information. The questionnaire was divided into two parts accessing:

Personal Information: Demographic Questionnaire of the researcher’s design was used to collect information about Gender, Age, Education Level, Occupation, Monthly Income, Current Role, Current organization, and

Tenure. Participants responded to the demographic questions by selecting one answer from the available options or filling in the blank.

Emotional Labor: The study considered that Emotional Labor can be described as degree of manipulation of one's inner feelings or outward behavior to display the appropriate emotion in response to display rules or occupational norms. While conducting of the literature review, it was found that several studies utilized the ELS (Brotheridge & Lee, 2003) to measure emotional labor. The current research used the self-administered revised version of Brotheridge and Lee's (2003) ELS (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006) to measure the six subscales of emotional labor in order to assess several dimensions of emotional labor.

5. MEASUREMENT TOOL

The Emotional Labor Scale (ELS) was developed and validated by Brotheridge and Lee (2003). The ELS is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 15 items that measure six dimensions of EL (frequency of emotional display, the intensity of emotional display, variety of emotional display, surface acting, and deep acting). This scale is comprised of subscales that measure the six dimensions of emotional labor. The duration of customer interaction is assessed with a single free-response question, which asks respondents to identify the actual duration of average customer interaction. The remaining dimensions are measured on a five-point Likert response scale where Individuals are required to state how frequently they engage in a certain action on an average day at work, ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (5). Participants are asked to answer items in response to the stem question, "On a normal routine day at work, how frequently do you perform the below-mentioned activities when interacting with Customers/ Patients/ Students." Brotheridge and Lee (2002) report well-combined coefficient alpha for the role characteristics (frequency, intensity, and variety) subscales ($\alpha = 0.71$), as well as for the deep-acting and surface-acting subscales ($\alpha = 0.89$, $\alpha = .86$).

6. SAMPLE DESIGN

The boundary of this study was limited to the customer service industry at Indore, MP, and the target population was employees who work as customer interface. As this study focused on emotional labor, the sampling frame was narrowed to focus on those professions which have major face-to-face or voice-to-voice contact with their customers and therefore should be experiencing emotional labor on a daily basis. The professions which were used for the study were: Doctors, Teachers, Sales Professionals, and Hospitality Executives. Entry-level employees and Middle-Level Employees between the age group of 20 to 40 years were considered to fit the study.

The sample size used for the study was 600, which was gathered using Stratified Random Sampling. To gather a sample of 600 more than 950 individuals were approached by the researcher. It was made sure to receive 150 completely filled questionnaires from each stratum. The participants from different professions were selected as per the convenience and judgment of their suitability for the study.

7. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Content Validity and Face Validity of the instrument was ensured by extensive review of literature done for the study. The instruments used in the current research have been reviewed and analyzed by the experts numerous times, and their wide usage showed their relevance for measuring the constructs. For conduction of statistical test Primary Data collected through structured questionnaire were entered with excel and then analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM SPSS).

Reliability analysis was done using internal consistency analysis and was measured using a reliability coefficient called Cronbach's alpha on the data collected. The researcher conducted a pilot study to check the robustness of the data collection instrument with 100 respondents which comprised of 25 Teachers, 25, Doctors, 25 Sales Professionals, and 25 Hospitality Executives. The scale used in the questionnaire was found to have reliability statistics of 0.92. The reliability statistics were checked again for the final study with sample size of 600 respondents before conducting further analysis. Cronbach's Alpha values was found to be 0.89.

The factor structure of ELS was confirmed using Structural Equation Modeling, which was employed for conducting confirmatory factor analysis which helped access the dimensionality and validity of the measurement model. If there is a high degree of correspondence between the specified relationships and those indicated by the data, the model exhibits a "good fit" to the data. The indices used in the study are chi-square, goodness-of-fit index (GFI), adjusted goodness-of-fit index (AGFI), comparative fit index (CFI), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA).

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to confirm the factor structure of a set of the Emotional Labor Scale developed by Brothridge and Lee. CFA helped the researcher to test that a relationship between observed variables and their underlying latent constructs exists. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to understand the indicators that load on each factor and whether factors were correlated to each other. Although model identification is the requirement of CFA, modification and standardized loadings (standardized regression weights) in AMOS output were the options to verify the dimensionality of the measurement or to verify the model fit.

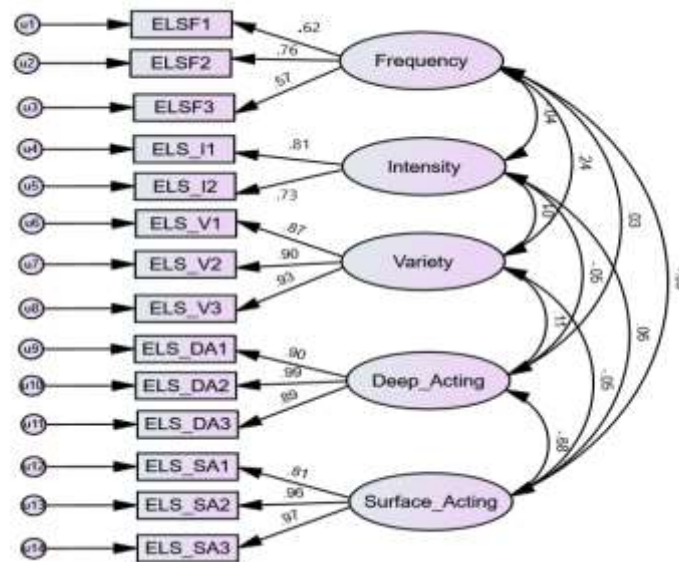
Confirmatory Factor Analysis was done on the Emotional Labor Scale with five dimensions: Frequency, Intensity, Variety, Deep Acting, and Surface Acting. Frequency consisted of three questions, Intensity consisted of two questions, Variety had three questions, Deep Acting consisted of three questions and Surface Acting consisted of three questions. Table 4.1 shows the details of measurement items of Emotional Labor.

Table 1. Measurement items of Emotional Labor

Dimensions		Measurement Items
ELS Frequency	ELS_F1	Interact with customers/students/patients.
	ELS_F2	Adopt certain emotions as part of your job.
	ELS_F3	Express particular emotions needed for your job.
ELS Intensity	ELS_I1	Express Intense Emotions.
	ELS_I2	Show Some Strong Emotions.
ELS Variety	ELS_V1	Display many different kinds of emotions.
	ELS_V2	Express many different emotions.
	ELS_V3	Display many different emotions when interacting with others.
Deep Acting	DA1	Make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others.
	DA2	Try to actually experience the emotions that I must show.
	DA3	Really try to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job.
Surface Acting	SA1	Resist expressing my true feelings.
	SA2	Pretend to have emotions that I don't really have.
	SA3	Hide my true feelings about a situation

These items of the Emotional Labor construct to measure Frequency, Variety, Intensity, Deep Acting and Surface Acting were subjected to confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). In CFA, measurement items with good measurement properties should exhibit factor loadings greater than 0.45 on their corresponding factors. The elimination of incompatible measurement items is done if the item shows a factor loading less than 0.45 (Comprey, 1973). The Confirmatory factor analysis helped in understanding whether the hypothesized factor structure was providing a good fit to data. The model diagram extracted from CFA is shown in Figure 1. Examination of the loadings indicated that the standardized regression weights for all the factors in the model extracted were satisfactory. The model extracted from CFA is shown in Figure 1

Figure 1. Model extracted from CFA



In order to check whether the test statistic is within accepted thresholds and the model shows a good fit, the threshold values of measures were observed. In order to determine the goodness of fit, specific measures were calculated. The metrics listed in Table 2 show that the values observed were within the threshold limit.

Table 2. Threshold values of measures in CFA –Emotional Labor strategies

Measured Values	Threshold Values	Observed Values
CMIN/DF	<3 Ideal; The values between 3 to 5 are acceptable	3.83
CFI	>0.95	0.967
GFI	>0.95	0.953
AGFI	>0.80	0.910

RMSEA	<0.05 good and 0.05 to 0.10 Moderate	0.041
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CMIN - Minimum Value of the Discrepancy between the Model and the Data, CFI - Comparative Fit Index, GFI - Goodness of Fit Index, AGFI - Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index, RMSEA - Root Mean Squared Error of Approximation

The observed value of CMIN/DF was 3.83 which was less than the ideal threshold value of <3. The observed value for CFI was 0.967, which was more than the ideal threshold value of > 0.95. The observed value of GFI was 0.953 which was more than the ideal threshold value of > 0.95. The observed value of AGFI was 0.910 which was more than the ideal threshold value of > 0.80. The observed value of RMSEA was 0.041 which was less than the ideal threshold value of < 0.05. All the observed values were within the limits of ideal threshold values and thus provided the best fit for the proposed extraction of variables.

Table 3. Measurement items of Emotional Labor Scale after CFA

Dimensions		Measurement Items	Remark
ELS Frequency	ELS_F1	Interact with customers/students/patients.	0.62
	ELS_F2	Adopt certain emotions as part of your job.	0.76
	ELS_F3	Express particular emotions needed for your job.	0.57
ELS Intensity	ELS_I1	Express Intense Emotions.	0.81
	ELS_I2	Show Some Strong Emotions.	0.73
ELS Variety	ELS_V1	Display many different kinds of emotions.	0.87
	ELS_V2	Express many different emotions.	0.90
	ELS_V3	Display many different emotions when interacting with others.	0.93
Deep Acting	DA1	Make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I need to display to others.	0.90
	DA2	Try to actually experience the emotions that I must show.	0.99
	DA3	Really try to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job.	0.89
Surface Acting	SA1	Resist expressing my true feelings.	0.81
	SA2	Pretend to have emotions that I don't really have.	0.96
	SA3	Hide my true feelings about a situation	0.97

Out of the fourteen items, all items were statistically significant with high factor loadings (>0.50) and therefore all were retained in the final measurement model which is summarized in Table 3.

The values from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis on the Emotional labor Scale revealed that the model was acceptable as all the critical values fall within the acceptable ranges and was finalized to be included in the final model. The results confirm that ELS developed by Brotheridge and Lee is acceptable for the Indian Service Professionals and therefore can be used for measuring their Emotional Labor Levels during the performance of their job responsibilities.

8. CONCLUSION

The study carried out a thorough investigation to ensure the reliability and validity of the Emotional Labor Scale developed by Brotheridge and Lee in 2003 with context to the Indian Customer Service Sector. Results were helpful to prove to construct validity, internal consistency, and criterion-related validity of ELS. Confirmatory Factor Analysis revealed that the five dimensions model of Emotional Labor which includes Frequency, Intensity, Variety, Deep Acting, and Surface Acting is fit for measurement use. The overall study reveals that Emotional Labor should be considered a Multidimensional Construct. As the model was tested fit for use in the Indian Service Industry it would stimulate more researches to be conducted in the area of Emotional Labor, especially for occupations that involve adherence to expected emotional display norms.

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