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**EXPLORING HOTEL EMPLOYEES' INDIVIDUAL AND
WORK-RELATED OUTCOMES FROM THE ASPECT OF CUSTOMER
ONLINE REVIEWS: A QUALITATIVE APPROACH****Abstract:**

The purpose of this study is to determine hotel employees individual traits and work-related attitudes and behaviors based on customer e-reviews. Qualitative research methods were used to analyze the data gathered from 522 foreign customers e-comments in English for three resort hotels (high scored in top-3 on an international online commercial travel platform, dated to the year 2013) located in Antalya Region, southern coast of Turkey. Firstly, results indicated that customers have generally evaluated hotel all employees as highly friendly, helpful, hard-working, polite, lovely, amazing, smiling, efficient and attentive persons. Secondly, they evaluated individual traits of the only certain departments staff; Entertainment Staff as highly entertaining, hard-working, and friendly persons; Food and Beverage (service) Staff as highly friendly and smiling persons; Front-Office Staff as highly friendly and helpful persons, and Housekeeping Staff as neat, smiling and brilliant persons. Finally, customers evaluated employees work-related attitudes and behaviors as the aspect of interaction, relationship, service performance, extra-roles and service/customer orientation. A discussion of the findings, implications, and recommendations for future research were all presented.

Keywords:

Employee outcomes; customer reviews; human capital; E-WOW; decision making

JEL Classification: J24, J29, J89

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INTRODUCTION

In today's world, customers' online reviews for tourism industry have been increased dramatically especially for hotels due to the rapid customer adoption of information technology (Yu, 2013). Many researchers argue that customers' e-reviews are important sources of information for travelers, and play a pivotal role in their holiday planning and decision-making and purchasing process (Mauri and Minazzi, 2013). Additionally, in the hospitality industry, the most powerful form of communication is word of mouth due to its impact on decision-making (Kim, Han, and Lee, 2001, 276). Encouraging positive customer word-of-mouth behaviors may be provided through the fostering of interpersonal relationships between employees and customers (Gremler, Gwinner, and Brown, 2001), which emphasis the importance of relationship quality for service settings. Relationship quality refers to customer perceptions and evaluations of individual service employees' communication and behavior, such as respect, courtesy, warmth, empathy, and helpfulness (Kim and Cha, 2002, 322). This involves inducing feelings and emotional states through customer-employee interactions (Kim, Han, and Lee, 2001, 273). The increasing of this quality make customers have positive word-of-mouth behaviors, and make them come back again (Kim, Han, and Lee, 2001). From this aspect, it appears that especially frontline-employees are a crucial element for service firms to enhance customer loyalty.

From the comprehensive perspective, many researchers state that there are close relationships between human capital stock (e.g., personality, knowledge, skills, ability, relationships, emotional intelligence, etc), work-related employees attitudes and behaviors (e.g., service orientation, job performance, job satisfaction, motivation, employess turnover, role clarity, organizational commitment, etc), customer-related outcomes (e.g., customer value, customer satisfaction, service quality), and organizational-related outcomes (e.g., competitive advantage, profitability, productivity, positive word-of-mouth, etc.) in service settings (Kusluvan, Kusluvan, İlhan, and Buyruk, 2010). From this point, in this research, individual traits, and work-related outcomes of service workers in the lodging industry are taken into consideration. Furthermore, personality traits and work-related attitudes and behaviors of hotel employees are explored with deep approach based on customer's' own evaluations.

Personality is one of important individual traits, and defined as "those characteristics of the person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving" (Pervin and John, 1997, 4). Researchers state that employee personality traits are significant predictors of their customer service attitudes and behaviors (Kusluvan et al., 2010). Kusluvan et al. (2010) also underline that at the individual level, personality traits that are match with providing good service are called several terms such as "service orientation" (Hogan, Hogan, and Busch, 1984), "service predisposition" (Lee-Ross, 2000), or "customer (service) orientation" (Brown, Mowen, Donovan and Licata, 2002; Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Service orientation is defined as "a disposition to be helpful, thoughtful, considerate and cooperative" (Hogan et al., 1984, 167). Customer orientation is defined as "employee's tendency or predisposition to meet customer needs in an on-the-job context" (Brown et al., 2002, 111). The last term, service predisposition, is defined as "personal satisfaction with service provided" (Lee-Ross, 2000, 149). Many prior researches empirically indicate that employees' personality traits affect their customer service behaviors (Kusluvan et al., 2010). However, there is a big gap in the relevant literature, examining individual traits and customer service behaviors from the aspect of customers by using qualitative approaches is limited and

neglected. Based on this gap, the objectives of this study are to determine firstly “Which and how individual traits of hotel employees are evaluated by customers?” and “Which and how customer service attitudes and behaviors of hotel employees are evaluated by customers?” in an international online travel platform, and secondly “What does these traits, attitudes, and behaviors means based on the relevant literature?”.

METHOD

Data were gathered from 522 foreign customers’ positive e-comments written in English for three resort hotels (high scored in top-3 on an international online commercial travel platform (TripAdvisor), dated to the year 2013) located in Antalya Region, southern coast of Turkey. In this study, customers’ perceptions for hotel employees’ individual and work-related outcomes were determined through the qualitative methods, basis on discourse analysis (Parker, 2002) and the approach of grounded theory (Locke, Silverman, and Spirduso, 2004; Papathanassis and Knolle, 2011; Veal, 1997). The traits and statements were processed by discourse analysis, and the frequencies of these traits were calculated by SPSS, by assigning them certain codes (E.g. for friendly, code is *F*). Therefore, all positive e-reviews were analyzed individually and deeply, and the most commonly used traits and statements were determined, which were showed in table 1, and table 2.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Customer Evaluation of Employees’ Individual Traits

On the e-comments, customers evaluated hotel employees’ individual traits personally. Based on these e-reviews collected from the online travel platform, it is understood that hotel customers carefully observed employees’ individual traits. Results of discourse analysis indicated that customers evaluated employees’ individual traits as friendly (n=121), helpful (n=77), hard-working (n=42), smiling (n=35), entertaining (n=31), welcoming (n=29), fantastic (n=26), lovely (n=25), efficient (n=25), brilliant (n=23), amazing (n=22), nice (n=21), polite (n=18), professional (n=17), attentive (n=16), neat (n=12), courteous (n=11), kind (n=11), pleasant (n=10), fabulous (n=8), knowledge (n=5), interactive (n=5), honest (n=4), outstanding (n=4), sweet (n=3), charming (n=3), informative (n=3), energetic (n=3), not pushy (n=3), enthusiastic (n=2), thoughtful (n=2), vibrant (n=2), discreet (n=1), active (n=1), gleeful (n=1), astounding (n=1), considerate (n=1) and understanding (n=1) (see table 1). From these traits, *friendly*, *helpful*, *hard-working*, *smiling*, *entertaining*, *welcoming*, *fantastic*, *lovely*, *efficient*, *brilliant*, *amazing* and *nice* are the most commonly used traits by customers in their e-reviews. The traits of *friendly*, *helpful*, *hard-working*, *smiling* and *entertaining* have the highest score at the trait list.

In the e-comments, customers evaluated the traits of specific staff, such as all staff, and certain departments staff. Firstly, customers identified generally all employees as friendly (n=82), helpful (n=51), hard-working (n=16), polite (n=13), lovely (n=12), amazing (n=12), smiling (n=11), efficient (n=11), attentive (n=11), fantastic (n=11), nice (n=10), welcoming (n=8), brilliant (n=7), courteous (n=6), professional (n=5), pleasant (n=5), honest (n=4), knowledge (3), entertaining (n=2), fabulous (n=2), neat (n=2), kind (n=2), and other traits (each one, n=1) such as interactive, sweet, not pushy, thoughtful and discreet persons (see table-1). As seen in table 1, results show

that major of customers primarily most used traits – *friendly, helpful, hardworking, polite, lovely, amazing, smiling, efficient, attentive, and fantastic* - for all employees in their e-comments. Off the all traits, the most commonly used traits by customers for all employees are respectively *friendly* and *helpful*.

“The staff were helpful and very friendly.”

“I must write that the staff at the hotel are amazing so nice, smiling and helpful.”

“All members of staff were extremely friendly including bar staff, waiters, and reception staff together with a very helpful guest relations team that provided a valuable and courteous service”

“All the staff are so nice and serve with a smile”

“All the staff seemed to make you feel very welcome and served you very well., and all worked very hard.”

“I found all the staff to be very pleasant and polite”

“All the staff were lovely and always made you feel welcome”

“The hotel staff are courteous and very efficient.”

“As others have said all staff were very helpful and attentive.”

“The staff were friendly and welcoming”

From the different perspective, some customers evaluated individual traits of certain departments' staff. These departments are Entertainment, Food and Beverage, Front-Office and Housekeeping Staff. In table 1, results show that hotel customers evaluated Entertainment Staff as entertaining (n=28), hard-working (n=18), friendly (n=17), helpful (n=9), smiling (n=9), amazing (n=9), fantastic (n=9), brilliant (n=8), lovely (n=8), welcoming (n=7), professional (n=7), nice (n=5), fabulous (n=5), efficient (n=3), polite (n=3), pleasant (n=3), charming (n=3), interactive (3), outstanding (n=3), energetic (n=3), courteous (n=2), sweet (n=2), kind (n=2), not pushy (n=2) and other traits (each one, n=1) such as enthusiastic, vibrant, active, gleeful, astounding and attentive persons (see table-1). These results mean that customers identified Entertainment Staff respectively as highly *entertaining, hard-working, and friendly* persons.

“The animation staff work really hard and are very entertaining.”

“The people from the entertainment team are lovely, interactive and a joy to be around. My favourites were Ezgi and Nuri (darts with Nuri is very fun and such a laugh).”

“Amazing service, lovely polite staff, friendly animation team”

“The Entertainment Team is amazing, at all times from morning to evening they give you 100%,they are so hard working and must have so much energy”

“Fantastic entertainment staff”

“And not to forget, the entertainment team. They were awesome, this team is a team were I want to work with. They worked hard, they were always smiling and you could see that they had fun while working, what's really important”

“The entertainment team seemed brilliant doing different activities through the day.”

For Food and Beverage Staff, customers evaluated this staff as friendly (n=11), smiling (n=6), welcoming (n=6), kind (n=6), helpful (n=5), efficient (n=5), hard-working (n=5), fantastic (n=5), attentive (n=4), brilliant (n=3), lovely (n=3), nice (n=3), Professional (n=3), neat (n=3), polite (n=2), and other traits (each one, n=1), such as entertaining, courteous, fabulous, interactive, understanding, outstanding, informative, vibrant and considerate persons (see table 1). As seen in table 1, customers evaluated Food and Beverage Staff respectively as highly *friendly, smiling, welcoming* and *kind* persons. On the other and, customers evaluated Front Office Staff as friendly

(n=10), helpful (n=10), welcoming (n=8), efficient (n=6), smiling (n=5), brilliant (n=4), hard-working (n=2), pleasant (n=2), lovely (n=2), knowledge (n=2), informative (n=2), nice (n=2), professional (n=2), courteous (n=2) and, other traits (each n=1) such as fantastic, kind and enthusiastic persons. These results demonstrate that customers evaluated Front-Office Staff as highly *friendly, helpful, welcoming* and *efficient* persons. The last step, customers evaluated Housekeeping Staff as *neat* (n=7), smiling (n=4), helpful (n=2), and other traits (each n=1) such as friendly, hard-working, brilliant, amazing, nice and thoughtful persons (see table 1). As can be understood, customers evaluated Housekeeping Staff as highly *neat, smiling* and *helpful* persons.

“All the bar staff were so kind and helpful especially Yecica and Myre (not sure about the spellings) but they often worked in the Lobby Bar at night until midnight.”

“The waiters in all of the a la carte's were super efficient and polite”

“The vast majority of the restaurant staff were brilliant, especially at dinner time”

“Miray (lobby bar) was so attentive and smiley night after night”

“The staff are very hardworking, friendly and efficient, with a special thank you to Mehmet at the Yasemin bar.”

“We were upgraded on arrival to a junior suite by the very friendly and helpful reception staff.”

“Reception staff very welcoming and knowledgable and we upgraded room to a family room which went smoothly”

“On arriving, the Hotel looked the same, we were greeted by bell boys and reception staff who were very pleasant and efficient”

“The bellboys were also quick and very informative”

“Together with the ongoing good housekeeping, cleanliness and good service from smiling staff”

“The rooms were flawless with a free safe and minibar stocked everyday, the cleaners are brilliant”

Consequently, the author considers that these individual traits refer to “*personality traits*”. When we look into the most frequently used traits deeply, it is understood that these traits refer to certain personality types such as extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Based on the personality literature, entertaining persons refers to *extraverted* person (Mcrae and Costa, 1987), friendly, helpful, and smiling person refers to *agreeable* person (Costa and McCrae, 1992), and hard-working person refers to *conscientious* person (Barrick and Mount, 1991). The social aspect of extraverted persons makes them more contact others intensely and comfortably, and they establish long-term social networks with others inherently (Zimmerman, 2008). Brown et al (2002) state that conscientiousness may show an employee’s desire to get the job done accurately. Agreeableness is also related to self-directed behavior for hotel employees. Consequently, in service settings, employers prefer agreeable, extraverted and conscientious employees during hiring process for customer service positions because they tend to satisfy customers and establish long-term relationships with them (Costen and Barrash, 2006). On the other hand, extraverted, agreeable and conscientious employees are service/customer-oriented employees (Brown et al., 2002; Hogan et al., 1984).

Table-1: Frequency of Usage of Employees' Individual Traits by Customers on their E-Reviews on the Online Travel Platform

Generally assessments for all staff		Primarily most used trait for...		Secondary most used trait for...		Third most used trait for...		Forth most used trait for		Traits from most used to less used	TOTAL N
STAFF	N	STAFF	N	STAFF	N	STAFF	N	STAFF	N		
All	82	Entertainment	17	F&B	11	Front-Office	10	Housekeeping	1	Friendly	121
All	51	Front-Office	10	Entertainment	9	F&B	5	Housekeeping	2	Helpful	77
All	16	Entertainment	18	F&B	5	Front-Office	2	Housekeeping	1	Hard-Working	42
All	11	Entertainment	9	F&B	6	Front-Office	5	Housekeeping	4	Smiling	35
All	2	Entertainment	28	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	Entertaining	31
All	8	Front-Office	8	Entertainment	7	F&B	6	--	--	Welcoming	29
All	11	Entertainment	9	F&B	5	Front-Office	1	--	--	Fantastic	26
All	12	Entertainment	8	F&B	3	Front-Office	2	--	--	Lovely	25
All	11	Front-Office	6	F&B	5	Entertainment	3	--	--	Efficient	25
All	7	Entertainment	8	Front-Office	4	F&B	3	Housekeeping	1	Brilliant	23
All	12	Entertainment	9	Housekeeping	1	--	--	--	--	Amazing	22
All	10	Entertainment	5	F&B	3	Front-Office	2	Housekeeping	1	Nice	21
All	13	Entertainment	3	F&B	2	--	--	--	--	Polite	18
All	5	Entertainment	7	F&B	3	Front-Office	2	--	--	Professional	17
All	11	F&B	4	Entertainment	1	--	--	--	--	Attentive	16
All	2	Housekeeping	7	F&B	3	--	--	--	--	Neat	12
All	6	Entertainment	2	Front-Office	2	F&B	1	--	--	Courteous	11
All	2	F&B	6	Entertainment	2	Front-Office	1	--	--	Kind	11
All	5	Entertainment	3	Front-Office	2	--	--	--	--	Pleasant	10
All	2	Entertainment	5	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	Fabulous	8
All	3	Front-Office	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	Knowledge	5
All	1	Entertainment	3	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	Interactive	5
All	4	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	Honest	4
All	--	Entertainment	3	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	Outstanding	4
All	1	Entertainment	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	Sweet	3
All	--	Entertainment	3	--	--	--	--	--	--	Charming	3
All	--	Front-Office	2	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	Informative	3
All	--	Entertainment	3	--	--	--	--	--	--	Energetic	3
All	1	Entertainment	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	Not pushy	3
All	--	Entertainment	1	Front-Office	1	--	--	--	--	Enthusiastic	2
All	1	Housekeeping	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	Thoughtful	2
All	--	Entertainment	1	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	Vibrant	2
All	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	Discreet	1
All	--	Entertainment	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	Active	1
All	--	Entertainment	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	Gleeful	1
All	--	Entertainment	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	Astounding	1
All	--	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	Considerate	1
All	--	F&B	1	--	--	--	--	--	--	Understanding	1

Customer Evaluation of Employees' Work-Related Outcomes

The author also explored hotel employees' work-related outcomes from the aspect of customers' e-comments. From this point, it is observed that customers evaluated hotel employees' work-related attitudes and behaviors in many ways such as (1) how employees interacted with them? (e.g., length of interaction, and how employees were chatting, greeting, meeting, welcoming and seeing off customers, etc.), (2) how employees were building relationship with them on-the-job context? (e.g., emotions for meeting customers' needs, how handling compliments, individual approach, special interests), (3) how employees were pampering customers? (e.g., making the customer feel special, etc.), (4) how employees were working? (e.g., job performance, knowledge about service, punctuality, focusing on job details, carefulness, working regularly, responsiveness, etc.), and (5) what were the extra-roles? (e.g., employees' discretionary behaviors, etc.) (see table 2). Consequently, according to the author, these attitudes and behaviors can be grouped under a single dimension, "*Service/Customer-Oriented Attitudes and Behaviors*". From this point, it may be divided these attitudes and behaviors into certain facets; need to pamper, need to read customers' needs, need to deliver, and need for personal relationship. All of these facets refer to service/customer orientation (Donavan, Brown, and Mowen, 2004).

Employees' need to pamper the customer represents the degree to which service employees desire to make customers believe they are special, that is, individually important to the service provider. The service provider's need to read the customer reflects the employee's desire to pick up on customers' verbal and nonverbal communication. The service employee's need for personal relationship captures the employee's desire to know or connect with the customer on a personal level. Customer-oriented employees' need to deliver reflects their desire to perform the service successfully (Donavan, Brown, and Mowen, 2004, 132), to perform the service task correctly, and to make the customer feel comfortable (Donavan and Hocutt, 2001, 296). Examples on e-comments;

Need to pamper: "Everyone (all employees) make you feel extra special"

Need to read customers' needs: "Employees know what you want to drink"

Need to deliver: "They seem to enjoy serving you."

Need for personal relationship: "He welcomed us personally when we arrived"

Exploring e-comments, it may be easily understood that customers judged deeply the relationship between employees and them. Kim and Cha (2002) founded that customer orientation was positively related to relationship quality. Based on this finding, it may be underlined that customer-oriented employees can satisfy customers' needs well and provide a long-term relationship between customers and hotels, which may contribute to the success of hotel businesses. Additionally, due to the intangible and interactive nature of services, customers frequently trust in service employees behaviors when evaluating the quality of a service (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). Customer-oriented employees are predisposed to have empathy for a customer's needs and concerns coupled with the desire to meet those needs (Costen and Barrash, 2006). From this point, for enhancing service quality, service-oriented persons may be hired for customer service positions by employers (Costen and Barrash, 2006).

From another aspect, as it is understood from customers' e-reviews, hotel customers evaluate employees service performance. Customers evaluated employees as having

high service performance. Donovan (1999) found that service orientation affected service performance positively. Therefore, it may be stated that service-oriented employees' service performance is higher than others. Additionally, Donovan et al. (2004) state that employees who have higher levels of customer orientation especially thrive in services settings that allow for a high degree of contact time with customers, in such a case, service environment should be taken into consideration severely by service managers as customer-oriented behaviors will exist in the combination of person (personality) and service environment. When looking for e-reviews, it is seen that customers evaluated employees as high-contact persons, which may mean that these persons were high service-oriented employees.

Table-2: The Most Commonly Used Work-Related Employees' Attitudes and Behaviors on E-Comments

Employees...		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide first class service at all times • provide a very professional level of service • enjoy serving you • know what you want to drink • have dedicated customer service • remember what you were drinking • remember your favorite drink • have a great sense of humor • pay attention to serve you • present very good performance to you • come out to serve drinks • take care of us enjoyable • deliver with a sense of humor • always there (duty place) to serve drinks and clean tables • pay attention to the details of their job • act together during working • take on a task carefully • have so much energy • work tirelessly • make their work enjoyable • handle compliments professionally and speedily • are good at their job and also social • serve us regularly • sort everything out quickly while serving • speak foreign language fluently and clearly • keep up the good work • obviously love their job • have high performance • are well trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • go out of their way to make your stay a great one • help to improve your stay • make your holiday as enjoyable • go out of their way to help you • make your stay more personal • make you lovely • make you feel extra special • make your holiday so special • make the hotel experience extra special • treat you like special guests • have family friendly face • make sure you are having a great time • make you feel at your home • pay very deference to the guests • make the guest happy • always happy to help you • eager to please you • make your holiday a real success by helping in any way possible • advise for the places you have definitely to visit • take a lot of time chatting with you • feel close to you • are pleasure to be with and related to all guests • are engaged in conversation • like meeting people • make themselves visible and greet the guests daily • round frequently in the seating and outside areas • patrol day and ask about your stay during their service • go out of their way to make you feel very welcome • welcome us with pleasure • welcome us personally when we arrived 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • seem genuinely please to see us again • hug us goodbye when leaving • make everyone laugh • create a lovely ambiance for activities • ask you to join activities • don't continually pester you to take part in activities • give positive energy while entertaining • ensure guests have a relaxing and fun stay

CONCLUSION

This research explored hotel employees' individual traits and work-related attitudes and behaviors from the aspect of customers' e-reviews. Results showed that hotel customers evaluated all service workers as highly friendly, helpful, smiling (agreeable), hard-working (conscientious), and entertaining (extraverted) persons. Customers also evaluated the employees of certain departments, such as entertainment, food and beverage, front-office, and housekeeping. It is seen that customers identified entertainment staff as highly entertaining (extraverted), hard-working (conscientious), and friendly (agreeable) persons. Furthermore, customers evaluated food and beverage staff (friendly, smiling) and front office staff (friendly, helpful) as highly agreeable persons. Finally, they evaluated housekeeping staff as highly neat, smiling, and brilliant persons. Additionally, results indicated that customers evaluated all hotel staff by good service performance, interaction, and relationship, which may refer to service/customer-oriented attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, it may be stated that customers evaluated hotel employees as highly service/customer-oriented employees. For future research, any kind of research on exploring employees various individual traits, attitudes, and behaviors may be conducted with advanced qualitative methods.

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