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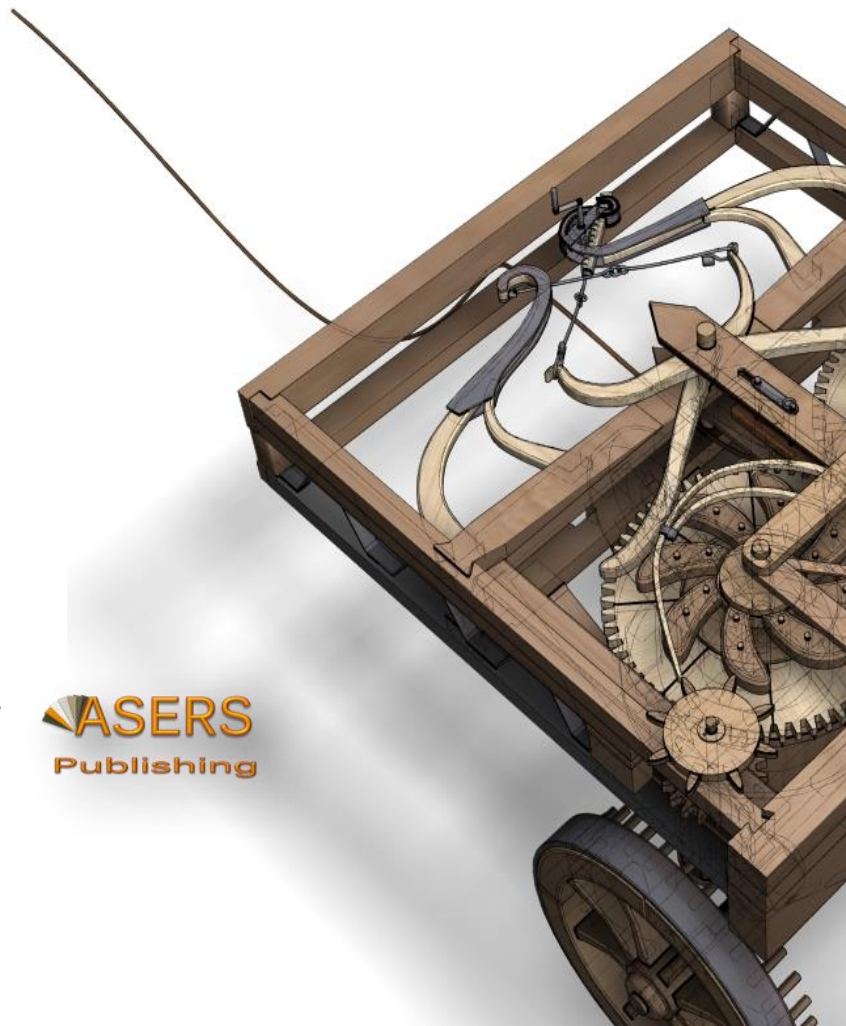
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Service Employees' Expressions of Emotions in Restaurants: A Transcendental Phenomenology Study

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Abstract:

As a topic, nonverbal communication (*e.g.*, expressions of emotions) remains inadequately focused on tourism and hospitality research. Its qualitative significance in service encounters is also virtually unexplored. Given the importance of employees' display of affective characteristics as vivid outcomes of nonverbal communication, *i.e.*, responsiveness, friendliness, trustworthiness, competence, and compassion toward customers, the current study aims to explore customers' experiences toward nonverbal communication of employees during service encounters. By using transcendental phenomenology as a methodological framework, the study resorted to in-depth interviews with 13 customers, representing different nationalities, with whom the study found nonverbal communication as expressions of "body signal, mood, icon, marketing aids, mind changer and anything unspoken" that are conceived quickly and make customers feel welcome and

comfortable. The study also found realistic experiences that customers could take their meals at home; they visited the restaurant for having different experiences: refreshment and relaxation while dining. In that emotional situation, they expected favourable nonverbal behaviour instead of a worried face, ignorance, mouse on the floor. The discussion of results is carried out concerning the characteristics of nonverbal communication and the theory of emotional contagion.

Keywords: nonverbal communication; service person; service encounter; theory of emotional contagion.

JEL Classification: Z31; Z39; D91.

Introduction

In reality, almost half of responding variations in interpersonal communication can be understood by nonverbal matters (Mehrabian 1981). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that customers' overall assessment of service consumption experience and service quality perception is mostly influenced by service persons' favourable characteristics, for instance, their quick response, friendly behaviour, and willingness to serve. This human attitudinal behaviour is primarily related to nonverbal communication (Elizur 1987). Barnum and Wolniansky (1989); Burgoon *et al.* (1990) noted nonverbal communication skill of employees, in the ground of a successful communication scheme, plays a vital role in a significant interaction between employees and customers.

According to the theory of emotional contagion, during interpersonal interaction, the projection of nonverbal cues from service employees drives an impact on customers' emotions. Based on the nature of signals, e.g. favourable or unfavourable, customers promote their feeling. Employees' optimistic cues can stimulate customers to experience positive emotions at service points (Pugh 2001; Verbeke 1997). In the same connection, the premises of the experience economy can also add to its importance. It discusses that through having favourable experiences; customers recognize values towards their participation in service (Boswijk *et al.* 2013).

Once a value is created, the service company finds the increase of customer loyalty, relationship, and word of mouth leverage (Bendapudi and Leone 2003; Zupok 2018). The previous goods-nexus paradigm has been replaced by service-dominant logic for recognizing economic exchange and value creation (Chomać-Pierzecka *et al.* 2022). Creating and placing the space for the customer to feel themselves personalized and distinctive experiences are essential for value co-creation (Echeverri and Skålen 2011). The view of the service-nexus portfolio depends on the concept that, company/product service, characterized as the action of benefiting/performing for others (such as communication, utilities, food, and accommodation), by the application of skills and systems ('resources') (Vargo and Lusch 2008), boosts economic and social exchanges. This process initiates opportunities to create esteem as well as meaningful experiences for customers. The hospitality industry aims to keep customers as comfortable as possible, no matter where they are on holiday, doing business, and dining. In every itinerary of guests, all company resources should attempt to produce/innovate a better service consumption experience for guests (Boswijk *et al.* 2013).

Zeithaml and Bitner (2003) noted that in the hospitality industry, there are three necessary service encounters, like (1) remote encounters, (2) phone encounters, and (3) face-to-face encounters. In each meeting, especially face-to-face encounters, nonverbal communication has a vital role to play in the business interaction. As discussed above, nonverbal behaviour is an essential determinant of tangible cues in service perception where service persons' signals from attitude, eye contact, nodding head, smile, shaking hand, distance, tone of voice, attractive look, grooming, hairstyle, and so forth do matter for creating and controlling guests' positive feelings.

Even though the exploration of service employees' nonverbal communication is still widely untapped even though its significance is connected to significant service encounters (Sundaram and Webster 2000). However, some works (e.g. Gabbott and Hogg 2001; Jung and Yoon 2011) were carried out on quantitative and experimental approaches instead of real-life experiences. Though these approaches allow testing relations of variables and hypotheses among different cues of nonverbal communication, everyday observation or people's lived experiences on nonverbal behaviour were not carried out. Hence, an exploration study on understanding natural and existing experiences of employees' nonverbal behaviour during service encounters has become necessary. Besides, the knowledge/experience and perception towards nonverbal communication attributes of employees can bring widespread attention to restaurant operators for initiating strategies to improve and manage nonverbal communication method or style, which is self-empowered to trigger the perception of service quality, customer loyalty satisfaction at the end. Besides, it is such a communication method, which imparts animation to co-communicator for a vivid and significant relationship (Jung and Yoon 2011).

Based on in-depth interviews with 13 customers, who visit restaurants a minimum of 3 times weekly, the current study attempts to reveal critical features of customers' experience and perception of nonverbal

communication from service employees. It should be noted that the focus of restaurant service and service quality is not the purpose of this study; instead, the research aims to explore customers' experiences and perceptions of nonverbal communication as affixed to various nationalities and not influenced by well-informed knowhow to nonverbal communication. Therefore, natural experiences and perceptions of nonverbal communication are understood by customers' natural impulses, which is the unique production of data of the study. Understanding the data from customers' experiences makes it possible to improve service persons' nonverbal communication skills in the reciprocal relationship with customers, as well as to make the nonverbal cues better in practice through training and mentoring. Utilizing transcendental phenomenology as a methodological framework, this study seeks to answer the following research question: (1) how customers experience nonverbal communication of service employees during service encounters in restaurants. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) explore the organic interpretation and perception of nonverbal communication of service employees, (2) understand how service persons should display nonverbal cues (e.g., kinesics, proxemics, paralanguage, and physical appearance) to customers during the service encounter.

1. Research Background

1.1. Nonverbal Communication

Scholars' definitions of nonverbal communication sometimes differ. Still, a wide section of scholars agrees that nonverbal communication is a kind of visual and wordless interaction that is sent by cues between people (Nonverbal Communication Theories, 2009). Hickson and Stacks (1993) said nonverbal communication is a behaviour, which happens intentionally or unintentionally under prescriptive actions and expectations other than words. This behaviour displays feelings and attitudes relate to the environment. According to Argyle (1975), nonverbal communication is the summation of emotions and postures that are expressed without language association. It is formed with stimuli containing messages without wordy language in communication (Miller *et al.* 1967). During communication in the service condition, nonverbal communication contributes in no small part because the communicator cannot precisely articulate what he or she means to deliver with verbal communication (Jung and Yoon 2011). Human interaction in the form of communication mostly occurs nonverbally. It covers 65%, and the rest 35% occurs in verbal communication (Birdwhistell 1952). In general, the explicit meaning of a message comes out in nonverbal ways (Delmonte 1991). There are three elements of nonverbal communication, *i.e.*, (1) symbol, (2) action, and (3) object-based language (Ruesch and Kees 1956); the other way (1) performance-focused, (2) non-natural, (3) contextual and mediatory codes (Harrison 1974). In the studies of Sundaram and Webster (2000); Gabbott and Hogg (2001), the attributes of nonverbal communication include kinesics such as body movement/gesture; proxemics means distance/space during communication; paralanguage narrates voice intonation/speed during conversation and physical appearance, such as personal grooming/dress/hair look. Kinesics, first developed by Birdwhistell (1952), has another name as 'body language and occupies the most prime traits of nonverbal communication, such as nonverbal expressions and opinions by the application of symbols of eyesight, smiling, gesture and posture. In the service setting, the customer imagines the service person, whether caring/sincere by their application of motion and posture (Sundaram and Webster 2000). Service persons' maintenance of favourable space while approaching the customer is also evaluated positively by the customer; too far, too close give different judgment. The customer expects a balance distance between him/her and the service person (Jung and Yoon 2011; Burgoon *et al.* 1990). The narrative of paralanguage is about the direction of human sound other than the formal sound he/she carries. The artificial, meaningful, gentle, rude, angry, honest, sincere and caring intonation of a human being can be measured by the pitch/speed/up and down of vocal sound. Such usage of service persons' paralanguage/vocal behaviour affects customers' understanding regarding their intension (Burgoon 1979; Argyle 1983). The aesthetic look of service persons influences customers' impressions. The customer expects his/her service person should look attractive, well-dressed, neat, and tidy. While they encounter service persons with these attributes, they tend to perceive service quality and experience better service consumption (Koernig and Page, 2002).

A study by Elizur (1987) shows customers become impressed by pleasant and friendly eye contact and smile. Jung and Yoon (2011) find eye contact and smile have a positive impact on a guest's positive emotion and thus factor in guest satisfaction. For influencing perception and interpersonal relations, literature shows, eye-contact is particularly important in the service sector. Though for a short while, repeatedly, people look each other in eye during social/official/service interaction. It is assumed that people mostly look in mutual eyes when they listen to each other and make glances every 3-10 seconds. If glances run longer than 3-10 seconds uncertainty and anxiety are provoked. In the decrease of eye contact, people go disconnected with communication (Argyle and Dean 1965). Eye contact is the most influential reciprocity in the whole sphere of human relationships

(Simmel 1921). Previous research (Elizur 1987) in the banking sector reveals, often eye contact with customer meetings affects customer satisfaction. It has a link with increasing trustworthiness and friendliness. The decoding of eye-contact in-service presentation and customer reception is always positive. Eye contact between service person and customer makes them obligatory to connect themselves in service sequences that are taking place (Argyle and Dean 1965).

Studies in clinical psychology discussed that eye contact and smiling are two nonverbal cues that tend higher to arouse warmth in communicators. In an exploration of different nonverbal cues, smiling is found more effective in a reciprocal relationship (Gladstone and Parker 2002). Further, the study shows, smiling people get a more positive perception than those who are not smiling. Though smiling as the cue is culturally biased (*i.e.*, Japanese and Russian people are vulnerable to smile) in general service, the industry encourages smiling and warm interaction (Kerrow and Perkins 1986). Smiles may make memories between communicators. Smile and eye contact are considered courtesy cues. Health sector research shows that, while physician/nurse makes eye contact and smiles, patients become cheered (Bayes 1972). Additionally, in the case of child patients, if the physician/nurse does not smile and make eye contact, children are seen as reluctant to be close to them. In the hospitality industry, greeting along with all other social skills are mandatory. Without eye contact and a smile, the application of greetings and social skills go fruitless to customers (Hemsley and Doob 1978).

1.2 Theory of Emotional Contagion and Nonverbal Communication

The literature of emotional contagion is not scarce (Pugh 2001; Verbeke 1997; Barsade 2002; Hashim *et al.* 2008; Lundqvist 2008). But what is an emotion; its exact definition is not agreed yet by existing literature. It is noted that it is a kind of conscious experience (Cabanac 2002). Another thought is, emotion has been being considered for a long time as contagious (Darwin 1965; Jung 1968). Some scholars said, it is a mental phenomenon to orphic process, projection and desire and (Deutsch & Madle 1975), learning (Aronfreed 1970), other scholars proposed emotion as individuals' self-perception that is exposed in their emotional expressions and behaviours inculcated from the expressions and actions of other individuals (Laird & Bresler 1990). However, "the term is taken for granted in itself and, most often, emotion is defined concerning a list: anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, and surprise." (Cabanac 2002, 1). Hatfield *et al.* (1992, 1994) noted that the process of emotional contagion runs automatically, fast and momentaneous, and at the same time, it spreads widely into individuals. Furthermore, Hatfield *et al.* (1993, 96) referred to emotional contagion as "the tendency to automatically mimic and synchronize expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person's, and consequently, to converge emotionally". In the same direction, Schoenewolf, (1990, 50) said as "a process in which a person or group influences the emotions or behaviour of another person or group through the conscious or unconscious induction of emotion states and behavioural attitudes."

However, the theory of emotional contagion is useful to understand communicational issues; especially interpersonal communication. In service encounters, face-to-face interaction between employee and customer informs emotional contagion on a critical scale. More precisely, the theory of emotional contagion is predominantly valuable in the case of dynamic responses of customers towards the display of nonverbal attributes of service people.

The experiment of Dimberg, *et al.* (2000) found that positive and negative emotional responses are educed unconsciously according to facial expressions during face-to-face interaction. In the study of Hess and Blairy (2001), imitative behaviour was understood in the display of attributes, *e.g.* happiness, sadness, worries, and annoyance. In the same study, it was also found that emotions between two communicators are complementary. Sonnby-Borgström, *et al.* (2003) revealed that with encountering empathetic behaviour, participants present a significant imitative reaction, which is demonstrated very quickly and occurred naturally and automatically. By using video-based stimuli, Du *et al.* (2011) found higher levels of employees' both negative and positive emotional displays increase and decrease customers' negative emotions through the process of emotional contagion during service failure and service recovery.

In the acquisition of customers' lived experience, Kim *et al.* (2009) looked that there is a relationship between salespersons' appearance and customers' emotions, store image, and purchases in case of shopping garments, shoes, or other accessories in departmental stores and so forth. Contrary to the above studies, the study of Hennig-Thurau *et al.* (2006) is different. In their study, employee' smile has not been found to influence the customer's emotion in service encounter in the context of emotional contagion theory.

Pugh (2001); Lin and Lin (2011); Yuksel *et al.* (2007) studied how nonverbal communication of service persons can drive and direct customers' emotions for perceived service quality. Koernig and Page (2002); Gabott and Hogg (2000) studied the role of nonverbal communication and service evaluation. Pugh (2001) researched

the banking sector regarding servicing with a smile in the service encounter. He found that customer' positive emotion is related to employees' positive emotional display, and this leads customers to evaluate service quality positively. A study by Yuksel *et al.* (2007) reported that eye contact and impressive body movement of service employees inform customers to perceive positive emotions and employees with favourable judgments. The study again found that customers evaluate employees' positive nonverbal cues as feelings of trustworthiness, competence, transference, and courtesy. Lin and Lin (2011) endorsed that the emotions of customers depend on service persons' affective delivery during the service encounter.

There are also some studies on nonverbal communication concerning customer satisfaction. Jung and Yoon (2011); Söderlund and Rosengren (2008) noted nonverbal communication of employees influences customer satisfaction, but its preliminary step is emotionally led. Jung and Yoon (2011) found that employees' kinesics and proxemics of employees have a significant role in determining customers' positive emotions. They also reported customer satisfaction is determined based on their positive and negative emotions aroused from service employees' nonverbal cues. On the other hand, smiling service employees can produce a higher level of satisfaction of customers that is not available with non-smiling service employees; whatever sex of workers and customers is; smile gets a smile back. It is emotionally contagious (Söderlund and Rosengren 2008).

In the same line, according to Atkinson (1988), satisfaction can also be formed by users' needs, emotional state, and characteristics of a product or service. Features of service products and the personality of service employees are significant for customer satisfaction (Azizzadeh and Pourranjbar 2021). Friendly staff, along with safety, security, and credibility during service consumption can determine the level of satisfaction of customers. Prompt service management, employees' gestural behaviour, timely delivery, convenience, and comfort of customer's arrival affect guest satisfaction.

2. Methodology

The current study takes a constructivist approach, while post-positivism is a general approach in tourism research (Pritchard *et al.* 2011). The constructivist approach plays a vital role to focus on "beauty on the beholder side" (Chen *et al.* 2011, 130). It gives locus on psychological learning through a cognitive process that happens due to interactions with others (Young and Collin 2004). Besides, the current study understands that phenomenology does not entail scientific research approach; instead, it is a philosophical method, and its value in human research remains in the difference between natural and social sciences (Krillova 2018). Phenomenology aims to explore a better understanding of the lived experiences of individuals (Starks and Trinidad 2007). Other than the saturated position of phenomenology, Husserl's transcendental phenomenology emphasizes the validity of the 'life-world' of instantaneous experiences (Moss 2001). It makes premises of careful, meditative, and direct reflection on the presence of experience as an experience that is independent of natural expectations or prejudices of the individual (Edie 1964).

Nonverbal communication takes place intentionally and unintentionally in each interaction between one person to another. The interpretation of nonverbal communication depends on the effect of individuals' perception (Gabbott and Hogg 2000) and is broadly studied in the psychology and psychotherapy disciplines (see, for example, Argyle 1994; Delmonte 1991; Giles and Robinson 1990; Vogelaar and Silverman 1984, Hargie *et al.* 1987). Therefore, participants are predominantly responsible for their shared experiences through their perceptions and how emotionally they are evoked by sensory perception of the attributes of nonverbal communication. Husserl argued that expectation, assumptions, anticipations, and sensory input bring effect on individuals' perceptions. Thus transcendental phenomenology should permit researchers to move beyond their 'natural attitude' through which they can perceive reality objectively and achieve that reality through bracketing (Rennie 1999, Azizzadeh *et al.* 2022).

Transcendental phenomenology as the methodological framework is contrasted to hermeneutic phenomenology with which the researcher possesses an effect on the result, ultimately that effect runs unresolved, in case, the impact could be removed, the outcome should not be released. What is observed should have a tune with the observer, which is considered a necessary element of the analysis (Van Manen 1990). On the other hand, in the spirit of transcendental phenomenology, the researcher's effect on the study can be removed or at least can be lessened or reduced (Moustakas 1994). The reduction process of influence is called bracketing (Levasseur 2003; Rennie 1999; Moustakas 1994). Because of the advantages of bracketing, as empirical or psychological phenomenology, transcendental phenomenology is practised by the researcher (Moustakas 1994).

The current study utilizes transcendental phenomenology on the above grounds along with the author's purpose of the research as set to explore the experiences of others, which are away from his perceptions. If the

'bracketing' process is perfect, the author reduces the effects of his participation, and thus transcendental phenomenology defends validity and turns a rigorous research methodology (Schutz 1970).

The analysis of interviews was employed in this research. Interviewees were selected utilizing a purposive sampling technique. Babbie (2010) noted that research on the phenomenological framework does not need to be generalized, and a non-probability sampling technique is justified. Instances of phenomenological study can be mentioned with Wilcke (2006) in social science; Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) in business, and Smith (1998) in nursing. Wilcke (2006) interviewed ten participants to explore the experience of refugee women from then Yugoslavia. Hansemark and Albinsson (2004) examined how the employees of a company experience the concepts of customer satisfaction and retention by interviewing eleven professionals. Smith (1998) explored the experience of six problem drinkers with interviews. This study by recruiting 13 interviewees generated data that is unique and natural experiences of nonverbal communication attributes of service employees. All the interviewees were living in Hong Kong but representing different nationalities; Pakistan (four), Ghana (one), Bangladesh (two), China (three), Hungary (one), Nigeria (one), and Indonesia (one). The interviewees were politely asked whether they used to go to the restaurant a minimum of three times a week. The interviewees were approached by utilizing the personal ties of the author. The data collection process took place from November 20th - December 20th, 2016.

The sample included different professionals such as teachers, research consultants, engineers, physicians, and singers. In the study, three interviewees were women, and 10 were men. All interviewees were highly educated, and their age range was 22-43 (median age 30). Seven were married, and six were single. The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes and were not recorded because the first four interviewees did not give consent to the researcher to record their words, and it was not attempted further. But, their experiences were written carefully, and the written notes were presented to them, whether notes reflect actual experiences and words they shared (McIntosh 2010). One interviewee revised his/her perception, while two interviewees added some observations regarding their experiences. The rest consented that the written notes exactly reflected their experiences and perceptions of nonverbal communication attributes of service employees. In the written notes, grammatical correction or other furnishings of text was not approached (Ratneshwar 1999). The interviewees agreed on the location and time of the interviews. Four interviews were taken on the university campus, 2 in the park, 2 in the office, and the rest were taken in residence. All locations were in Kowloon, Hong Kong.

Based on transcendental phenomenology's ideals, the researcher engaged in epoché (bracketing) to minimize and remove authors' prejudice or probable biases during interviews. The epoché process reflected on questioning along with co-construction of connotation and conversational interaction between interviewee and researcher; consequently, questions were modified to explore sensory perception towards the experience of the phenomenon objectively. This process singled out the understandings of each interviewee. There were some opening questions to the interviewees as generic interview protocol to engage them into characteristics of nonverbal communication (What does "nonverbal communication" mean to you?) before encouraging them to answer other questions on their experiences and perceptions regarding nonverbal communication of service employees: how do you see "nonverbal communication" with service employees at the restaurant? How do you see "nonverbal communication" with service employees' communication skills? What is your view about "nonverbal communication" and service business? When you go to a restaurant, what do you observe? What do you observe in in-service people's behaviour? What are your experiences and feelings about their nonverbal behaviour? What are else you would like to add? They were reminded of answers they made by the above questions so that they could link their knowledge and experience. Basing their answers where different nonverbal cues, e.g. smile, eye contact, facial expression, gesture, dress, the setting of the restaurant, and so forth were revealed (mentioned in the findings), the researcher encouraged them to share their perception and feelings on different cues they had during service encounters with "why" to go deep to more in-depth of their experience. The researcher remained uninterrupted to the interviewees when they continued their expressions of experience. All interview questions were drawn out in open-ended answers.

3. Data Analysis

To shed light on the critical identities of the researcher, social status, ethical potentialities (Feighery 2006) and capacity of investigation (Hertz 1997) permits to explore existing insights, tools for thought or new direction of further research and to rest this research to a secured position in hospitality academia (McIntosh 2010).

However, questions: Do I understand interviewees' ways of perceiving nonverbal cues during service encounters? Do interviewees catch my professional wording? Could I be able to create a pitch image of the

phenomenon requirements? (Moustakas 1994), were considered when it was to capture the reflective, attentive, meditative approach in this study (Edie 1964).

This research dismantled data without coding because it benefits the researcher to put locus on ideas instead of the analytical procedure. Besides, this artistic attempt adds to the weightage of this research, and space is created to analyze unique ideas that are pointed to view (see Kirillova 2018; Yin 2011). Data analysis went through the researcher's self-reflexivity, interpretation of each interview's written note, and then started to oversee the findings. Series of introductory notes were made (Smagorinsky 2008), modified and developed, and compared between messages and data. Thus the core of the data emerged. Through this profound method of meaning, resources are reliable according to theory as it nets data collection, analysis, results, and conclusion into a significant whole (McIntosh 2010).

4. Findings

4.1. Interview Analysis

Thirteen interviewees, whose characteristics are presented in the method part, were interviewed in this research. The line of epistemological assumption of transcendental phenomenology is not generalized, which indicates each interviewee's lived experience should be counted. Here the researcher presented and discussed selected but informational interviews because of words limitation (Kirillova 2018).

4.2. Experiences of Nonverbal Communication

All the interviews started with a question: what does "nonverbal communication" mean to you? The interviewees were asked to give their views on it. Here 13 interviewees are indicated as M for male and F female interviewees with numbers of interviews, e.g. M1, M2, F6.

M1 thinks nonverbal communication is a kind of passing message quickly. Opening eye behaviour and eye contact make people feel acceptable and comfortable.

M2 views nonverbal communication as different types of hand movements and eye-work. It helps us understand others better.

M3 comments, "It is body language, but I think it is more than that, say flat face, perfumes, shoes they make some sense".

M4 says, smiling, emotion, and face contrast are nonverbal communication. Any language which does not require words is nonverbal communication.

M5 regards nonverbal communication as wordless communication, expression of face, and he thinks it is "marketing aids".

F6 views, nonverbal communication is some signs, icons, and moods of people.

M7 says, bow, thumps up, victory signs, body language, the action of hands, hand indication is considered as nonverbal communication.

M8 describes, "Basically it is a medium of communication by body signals, like, showing the size of something by hands, moving head for saying yes or no."

F9 says it is a tool of communication, for example, eye contact, smiling face.

M10 thinks, "Anything unspoken is nonverbal communication. Attitude is also nonverbal communication. Sound, smell, colour, and environment can also be nonverbal communication."

To F11, nonverbal communication is signal communication, for example, gesture, smile, eye contact, hand posture. It means all body manners, which are not from the mouth, are nonverbal communication.

M12 says eye-contact, smile, attitude, expression, and cheerful faces are nonverbal communication.

M13 describes nonverbal communication as exclusive communication, work speed, speaking style, and facial expression. "I think it is more important than words".

In summary, all interviewees moved into the main flow of the conversation by holding their concepts of what nonverbal communication means to them. In this regard, some significant definitions/ideas, which are academically sound as well as nonverbal communication, come out. According to most interviewees thought, nonverbal communication is a reflection of eye contact, smile, and facial expression, which are predominantly important cues for service employees (Jung and Yoon 2011). Some phrases, which are rarely available in the existing literature of nonverbal communication, from interviewees regarding nonverbal communication, have been potentially valuable for enriching current literature of nonverbal communication. These words include "passing message fast", "opening eye behaviour," "eye-works", "face contrast", "marketing aids" "body manners" "icons", "moods of people", "action of hands", "anything unspoken", "flat face", "perfumes", shoes" "work speed", "speaking style".

From their viewpoints, the researcher started to ask interviewees the following questions conveniently and sequentially, how do you see “nonverbal communication” with service employees at the restaurant? How do you see “nonverbal communication” with service employees’ communication skills? What is your view about “nonverbal communication” and service business? When you go to a restaurant, what do you observe? What do you observe in in-service people’s behaviour? What are your experiences and feelings about their nonverbal behaviour? What are else you would like to add? In the interview, a questioning ‘probe’ was used to obtain greater details from the interviewees (King 2004). The above-mentioned questions summed up the storage of customers’ experience towards nonverbal communication of service employees.

The study reveals that customers are fully aware of service employees’ nonverbal communication. Their sensory perception regarding different attributes of service employees and restaurant characteristics is comprehensive. They observe the full session of their stay with the restaurant. They find times to follow before and in between placing the order, menu selection, bill payment, and even using the washroom. They observe body movements, the reactions of employees. The study found that service persons’ nonverbal attributes influence customers’ emotions. They do not only interact with employees but virtually they also interact with restaurant settings and other related accessories, e.g. dress, furniture, smell, paintings, and all other interior decorations. In the study of nonverbal communication, artifacts include a person’s usable accessories, ring, watch, pen, perfumes, shirts, trousers, and shoes.

Moreover, the feature of background during a person’s positioning is also a matter of artifacts. Artifacts have the effect of arousing customers’ emotions (Malandro *et al.* 1989). Jung and Yoon (2011) found that the positive emotion of customers is positively related to customer satisfaction, and the negative emotion of customers is negatively associated with customer satisfaction. In the interview, M12 and M5 said:

I found the smell of mutton at that restaurant; it annoyed me; it gave me an understanding of non-hygiene restaurants. In another restaurant I found a nice smell that kept me feeling high. I felt better. I stayed there for a long time. I frequently visit a restaurant because of their decoration on food, spices, and colour of food. It was green and red. The waiter’s dress was a light blue shirt and grey trousers; these colours were in their interior, sofa, wall. Dress colours also show different positions of their work responsibility like manager, waiter, door keeper; it is easy to communicate them. They are served on warm plates. I like it; it gives intense hunger (M12).

In that restaurant, there were some paintings, a beautiful girl behind the desk, and she was a humble proper dress. I feel that I am in the right place. The food was not good; even I think it suitable (M5).

The tone of voice and sound are part of paralanguage in the study of nonverbal communication. From the speed of the voice, volume, pitch, service persons’ attitude is reflected. A polite voice and slow tone are favourable to customers. They play useful roles in influencing customers’ positive emotions. In service encounters, if employees cannot use a complimentary voice, it elicits a customer’s negative emotions. Customers estimate employees’ loud and speedy voices negatively. The voice can make emotions up and down. Physical attractiveness with gentle and low-pitched voice brings customers’ positive recognition towards employees (Kim 2007; Ryu and Jang 2007). For example, M1 said:

I see the first cleanliness and workers’ politeness. Politeness is listening to me, showing respect. It gives me a feeling. In another restaurant I go for their courtesy, friendly, they speak well, slowly. I understand better and think that I am special. Maybe they have training for speaking. In another restaurant, I visit for background music. This restaurant is spotless and tidy, table and chairs are arranged, the fantastic smell inside, I feel romantic and relaxed. I miss my previous visit with my girlfriend (M1).

According to the theory of emotional contagion, open body language, including welcoming facial expressions, eye contact, and smile stimulates customers’ feelings of favourable judgments about service staff. Positive nonverbal cues, e.g. willingness to service, enthusiasm towards customers, bring trustworthiness and friendliness. Negative nonverbal cues bring the opposite of them (Jacob *et al.* 2011; Yuksel *et al.* 2007). The current study found accounts from M13. He said:

A few days ago in one restaurant, I saw some people with worried faces; restaurant workers were looking anxious, nervous meaning not smiling, not interested in us, my friends and I felt neglected. We thought that we were wrong, they were also quick, pushed us to order, carelessly threw the plates, and showed that they have no time to serve us. We felt unwelcome (M7).

In service encounters, employees’ nonverbal cues make an impact regarding employee-customer relationships (Burgoon *et al.* 1990). Employees’ nonverbal communication methods minimize problems and check the latent issues of conflicts during service delivery. Their appropriate service encounter with proper nonverbal communication methods affects customers’ emotions led to satisfaction (Anderson and Narus 1990). Besides,

proxemics matter is also significant, which means favourable/appropriate space/distance for communication between a service person and a customer. When customers think that distance is too close or too far, they make their ground of evaluation and perception regarding the service employee and restaurant. Burgoon *et al.* (1990)'s study explored that appropriate distance between a service person and a customer resulted in a favourable judgment of the company. F11 and M7 provided the following account:

I find rude behavior and ignorance. They don't care for me. They don't look at me. They were not coming to me. The service quality is not okay. I feel embarrassed. They came later, but stood far away. I did not hear them. I was disappointed to visit this restaurant. It was a high-end restaurant. I went there with my boyfriend. We have something to share (F11).

Raising a finger of waiters hurts me. They were not smiling. They were looking rude, if smiling, I could feel at home. When I check into a restaurant, I first see the environment, space of chairs and table. Ummm, I visit the restaurant with my girlfriend. If my table is very close to the other table, we cannot speak comfortably. We are afraid that some others will listen to our secret conversation (M7).

Nonverbal communication is a useful tool for human resource development (Mohaghegh and Valipour 2020). Its training is cost-effective in comparison to other training schemes related to social capital development—improper nonverbal communication of employees upsets customers' dining consumption experience. Maintaining the safety and hygiene of food, workers, and the workplace is also a significant indicator for successful management. Employees' grooming, physical appearance, and personal hygiene affect customer satisfaction, particularly in the restaurant (Hurley-Hanson and Giannantonio 2006). The following findings of this study have made thoughts about managerial implications in the hospitality business. M10 and M8 gave the subsequent interviews:

I think they were part-time waiters. They have a problem, lack of training. Apart from talking, they did not make eye contact. It is not a positive way of communication. I go to another restaurant; they are smiley; they know my prestige. Man, you see, I don't go to a restaurant only for eating, I can eat at my home. Why I go there, to feel different, but when I go to a restaurant, I see a dull environment, negligence. You know, we are human beings; we like recognition (M10).

I stopped visiting that restaurant because I saw a mouse and a bad smell from the waiter (M8).

4.3. Other Perceptions

In the interviews, along with experiences, interviewees expressed their perceptions and expectations on nonverbal cues that are presented in Table 1. From the standpoint of this study's objective, these perceptions will be useful for further investigation and managerial implication.

Table 1. Perception of nonverbal communication

Nonverbal Cues/Nonverbal Communication	Perceptions
Gesture (facial expression), attitude	<p>"Yeah, pleasant face to me is his happiness to receive me. I understand happiness by looking at his facial expression" (12M).</p> <p>"Waiters should not show that they are rush and unstable, have no patience for me" (12M).</p> <p>"I see first cleanliness and workers' politeness. Politeness is listening to me, showing respect. It gives me feeling"(M1).</p> <p>"Service people should look active. They must be prompt to give direction where to sit by hand gesture" (F6).</p> <p>"No respect, no patronize" (M10).</p>
Smile	<p>"Smile matters a lot to me; the human brain is active to detect the meaningful smile" (M12).</p> <p>"General smile is a kind of recognition. It is a service posture" (F6).</p> <p>"Smiling makes the environment hospitable, positive impression of the restaurant"(F6).</p> <p>"Smile is associated with good service. Smile indicates happiness. Guest is also happy when to see smiles. Smile can make him come back" (F11).</p> <p>"Smile reduces anxiety. Happy, impression, quiet, okay! Smile; right! Allow you forget about the situation you pass through" (M10).</p>
Physical appearance, dress, voice	<p>"If a waiter looks pleasant, wears clean dress; shows professional attitudes, customers find comfort, feel good. I see the environment is for me" (12M).</p> <p>"Decent dress influences hygiene. Decent dress is fresh and clean. Low</p>

Nonverbal Cues/Nonverbal Communication	Perceptions
	voice can solve problems, too low is not desired, the reason, it sounds they are hiding something” (F6). “Airlines staffs are better than restaurant staff in terms of nonverbal communication” (F6).
Nonverbal Communication	“Nonverbal communication is a mind changer. I think, these are marketing aids”. (M5) “Nonverbal communication changes verbal communication. It shows care and attitude” (F11). “Sometimes, nonverbal communication is a tricky part of service people’s behaviour, but it can be detected. The real nonverbal behaviour leads us to emotions, to interpret inner feelings, ignite communicator to imagine, to portray the situation” (F6).

5. Discussions

This study uncovers experiences of nonverbal communication. The findings reveal that nonverbal communication plays an essential role in the service encounter, through which customers find space to evaluate their emotions and judge service persons’ attitude. Interviewees expressed their concepts regarding nonverbal communication, which have been a resource in the nonverbal communication literature. (For examples) Nonverbal communication as “marketing aids”, “mind changer” “No respect, no patronize” added to the direction of future research. These are the new phrases as far as the literature of nonverbal communication and the service industry is concerned. Most of the interviewees showed emotional contagion from perceiving positive and negative nonverbal cues of employees/restaurants (For example) customers (interviewees) of this study are not willing to encounter service people without smiling and appropriate gestures. They said they go to the restaurant for having a pleasant environment that can make them feel personalized. Service people non-attention, ignorance makes them dissatisfied. When service people do not play proper nonverbal cues, customers inform their negative emotions, e.g. “disappointed” “embarrassed” “boring environment”.

The current study also depicts, the sequences from check-in to checkout, different nonverbal cues of service employees have different effects on positive and negative emotions of the customer. Reception, service delivery, space of furniture, environment, hygiene, physical appearance, tone of voice, and so forth are vulnerable to customer emotion. Eye contact, smile, gesture, posture as kenisics (body language) are important in the restaurant business (Jung and Yoon 2011). In this study, most interviewees expressed their concerns about the body language of employees along with associating other positive emotions.

The physical appearance and smiles of employees caught their positive emotion “a beautiful girl behind the desk, she was humble,” “they are smiley, they know my prestige” these findings of the current study show customers’ positive emotion. Appropriate body movements and facial expressions of employees help reduce the emotional gap, which was negative before for any other negative display of service persons (Yuksel *et al.* 2007). Enthusiastic body posture, including ‘eye-work’, lets the customer feel friendly and make a sound judgment about the service persons’ personality. It also found customers’ emotional responses can be drawn well in the service setting by nonverbal cues of employees. Because, smiling and facial expression and all other nonverbal attributes, according to the theory of emotional contagion, induce a similar emotional response to the other communicator (Barsade 2002; Hatfield *et al.* 1939). Physical appearance and professional attitude make an impact on the customer’s emotions. Employees’ grooming, personal hygiene, and dress are vital factors to draw customers’ positive emotions (Kim *et al.* 2009). Their hairstyle, decent look, and willing body posture attract customers’ positive perceptions (Koernig and Page 2002).

Customers expect that restaurant employees should serve them in a friendly and gentle way maintaining proper distance, paying much attention to the feelings of personalizing them. They want to interact with employees in a soft and clear voice. Always it is found that employees are not aware of their tone of voice, in case, the tone of voice loses proper volume and sounds harsh, mostly there is a possibility of service failure, which could be an expensive penalty for the restaurant business (Jung and Yoon 2011; Hazlett and Hoehn-Saric 2000; Sundaram and Webster 2000; Oliver-Rodriguez *et al.* 1999).

When service persons in a restaurant display a friendly attitude interact with good gestures and posture, for example, nodding head, symbolizes that they are paying attention to customers, the customer experiences positive emotions, if service persons display rude behaviour/attitude, do not pay attention and listen to them, it draws negative feelings for the customers. Previous research revealed that eye contact is particularly useful in perception and intrapersonal relationships with a customer. The absence of eye contact of service persons with

customers cuts customers' credibility off. Frequent and adequately prolonged eye contact regains customers' trustworthiness and favourable perception of service quality. Eye contact of employees brings sympathy of the customer, higher satisfaction customer satisfaction in a service business (Hemsley and Doob 1978; Beebe 1980; Ketrow and Perkins 1986).

A service-oriented company like a restaurant, interaction between employee and customer is significant. The appropriate display of nonverbal attributes hoards trust, courtesy, sincerity, and likeability (Sundaram and Webster 2000). "On the other hand, service employees should never use nonverbal cues that communicate dominance, unconcern, and superiority, such as scant or piercing eye contact, finger-pointing, and closed body posture" (Sundaram and Webster 2000, 382).

Conclusion

The current study explored the customers' experiences of nonverbal communication of service employees in the context of the service encounter. In the study, interviewees (customers) expressed their experiences and perception regarding different nonverbal cues what they received and rejected from both positive and negative emotional premises. Most of the existing literature studied nonverbal communication theoretically, experimentally, and quantitatively, there is a considerable gap of qualitative study (Azizzadeh 2019) in the service-focused business like a restaurant. Almost no real-life experience exploration of nonverbal communication has occurred in the restaurant business sector. Therefore, the present study has been one of the early attempts in this sector. The current research reiterated that appropriate use of nonverbal communication has a significant role in providing the customer with favourable emotion and satisfaction.

However, they (interviewees) endorsed nonverbal communication as a useful tool of communication. Even the perceived nonverbal communication is a marketing aid, mind changer, booster of verbal communication, and quick message provider. All these phrases regarding nonverbal communication are new discoveries in terms of wording and coinage. It has been possible because of the qualitative attempt of the study. On the other hand, interviewees expressed their emotions aroused from the encounters of service delivery. They showed their negative emotion when they encountered negative personal and impersonal nonverbal cues, e.g., not paying attention, worried face, unsmiling, too close furniture, mouse in the restaurant, raising fingers, odours of waiters and mutton smell, etc. They also showed their favourable evaluation and emotion in regards to having favourable nonverbal attributes from employees and restaurants, e.g. appropriate gestures and posture, smiles, pleasant environment, the lovely smell inside the restaurant, music, speaking style, fresh and clean uniform, and humble receptionist behind the desk. Interviewees expressed that they could take their meals at home, they visited the restaurant for have different experiences: refreshment and relaxation while dining. From the customers (interviewees) experiences of nonverbal communication, the study explored four significant visible findings, firstly, revisited concepts of nonverbal communication from definitional sense, which are an addition to the existing literature, secondly and thirdly nonverbal cues that arouse positive and negative emotions are again detected from the standpoint of characteristics of nonverbal communication found in the previous studies/literature and the theory of emotional contagion. Last but not least (fourthly), the study found pithy paying for restaurant business operators about service employees' nonverbal communication skills: "No respect, no patronize" (M10).

The study declares that the analysis of the nonverbal communication experience provided in this study is limited due to its investigated sample size. Besides, the cultural problem of nonverbal communication is theoretically connected to the three premises of symbolic interaction as explained by Blumer. In his meta-theory 'symbolic interactionism' he noted (First) "Humans act toward things based on the meanings they ascribe to those things"; (Second) "The meaning of such things is derived from or arises out of, the social interaction that one has with others and the society"; (Third) "These meanings are handled in, and modified through, an interpretative process used by the person in dealing with the things he/she encounters" (Blumer 1969, 2). The findings of the study make rooms for different facets of analysis. Nonverbal communication as personal outputs is undoubtedly meaningful to his/her intention; his/her motive of nonverbal interaction moves through his/her social rules about the relationship he/she intends to build. This kind of spirit of communication is essential as this is related to the impact of culture on nonverbal interaction. In this continuous context, between two communicators, the analysis of meaning invites mistakes, misunderstanding, confusion, and uncertainty because of cultural influence which is easy to note but difficult to denote (Ekman 1972). If these issues are not addressed and beaten with the directions of significant endeavours, the study of nonverbal communication remains ineffective and holds the constant gap in the future as the past.

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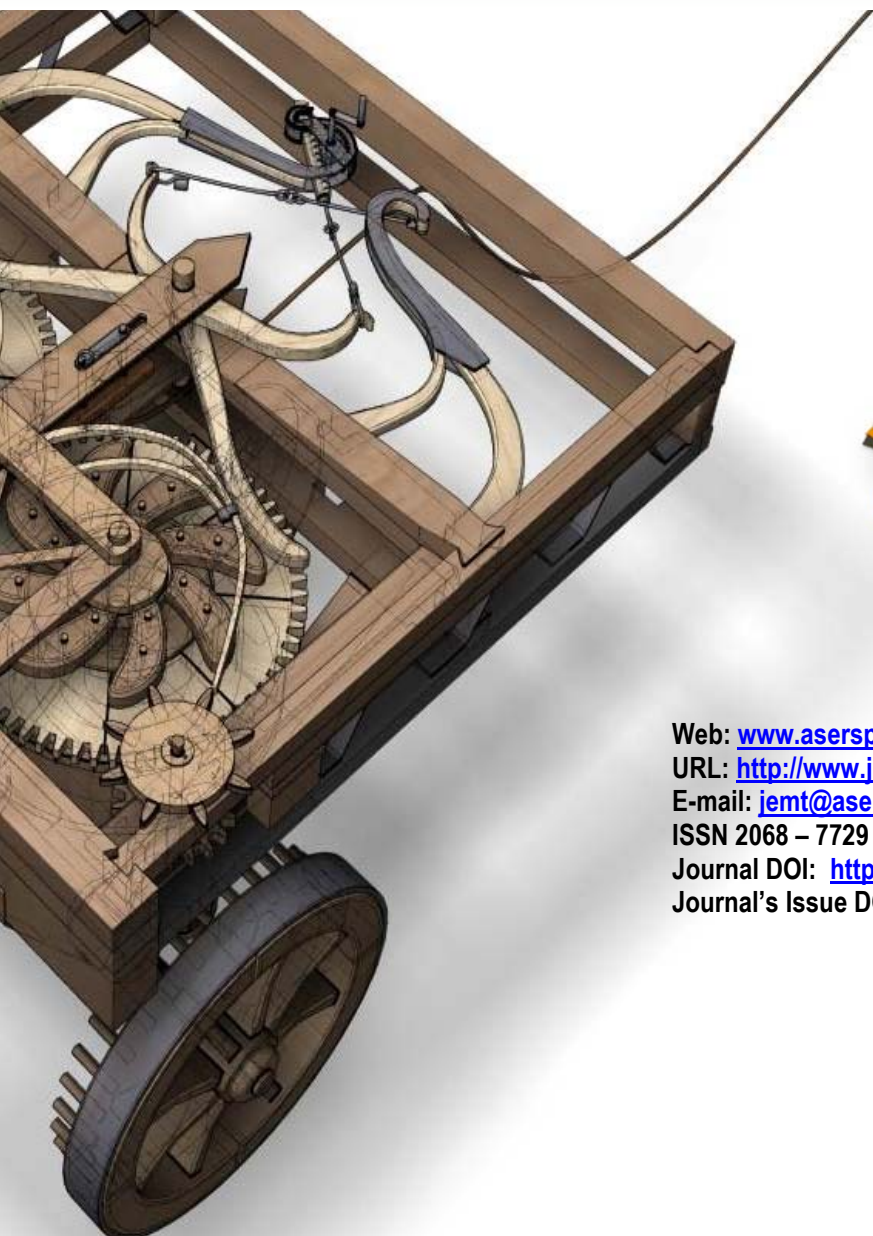
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