The Role of Professionality of Employee Uniform in Creating Customer Satisfaction and Loyalty in the Restaurant Context

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A thesis submitted to

Auckland University of Technology

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of International Hospitality Management (MIHM)

2021

School of Hospitality and Tourism

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Abstract

As a loyal customer can be the brand ambassador of an organisation, service organisations strive to enhance customer loyalty. Customer loyalty in the hospitality context does not only depend on service quality and food quality. There are many other underlying factors which need to be considered by hospitality professionals for building customer loyalty.

The primary purpose of this research is to examine the influence of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and loyalty. In addition, two boundary conditions (service employees' gender and branded service encounter) were considered to understand the direct and indirect effect of uniform professionality.

An online survey was administered for this study with 451 participants recruited from the crowd sourcing platform, Amazon Mturk. Participants were randomly assigned to six different scenarios, in which service employees' uniform, gender and branded service encounter were manipulated to suit each scenario. Data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 27 and the Hayes process macro 3.5.

The findings of the study show that the professionality of uniform has a strong impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. In addition, service employees' perceived competency was found to mediate the effect of uniform professionality on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Service employees' gender was found to moderate the effect of service employees' perceived competency on customer satisfaction, while branded service encounters were found to moderate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

The results of the study supplement existing theories on building perception and SERVQUAL. The study has also filled a major gap in the literature on employee uniform and highlighted its importance in creating customer satisfaction and loyalty. The results can be used by hospitality managers as a reference in designing employee uniform and prioritising training employees to provide branded service encounters, by developing standard phrases to communicate brand value to customers.

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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgement), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted to the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

Signed _____

Date ____20 January 2021___

Acknowledgements

Chapter 1. Introduction

The first chapter of the study begins with the background of the study, reviewing the key drivers that instigated this research. After arriving at the problem statement which covers the important gaps addressed in this study, the following section discusses the objective, with the research questions developed for the study. The significance of this study's findings to literature and industry practitioners is then explained. The next section gives a detailed overview of how the thesis is structured and presents the points discussed in each chapter of the study. The final section of this chapter provides definitions of the key terms used in this study.

1.1 Background of the study

Hospitality is all about meeting new people and providing a homely atmosphere away from home to all its service seekers. This industry has become one of the most thriving sectors worldwide, with many countries becoming economically dependent on the sector. The hospitality sector encompasses a wide variety of activities within the service sector and is a major job provider both direct and indirectly (Suhag, 2015). The current economic crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic is a clear example of the influence of the hospitality industry on the world economy. Due to on-going travel bans, tourists are unable to visit places, affecting the economies of many nations.

Customer loyalty is the key to the success of the industry. Hospitality establishments are doing their best to keep their customers loyal to the brand. Researchers have defined customer loyalty in many ways, but most of them fail to find its relation with emotion (Griffin, 2002). Continuous and positive emotional involvement to the product and service values along with satisfaction based on products' features help achieve loyalty (Rahim et al., 2012).

In the hospitality industry, most customer interaction happens through frontline employees' service encounters, which contribute towards building customer loyalty, hence it is important for organisations to focus on factors such as employee uniforms

(Baharuddin & Jamaluddin, 2020). An employee's physical appeal reflects the image of an organisation, meaning that uniforms play an important role in hospitality organisations by helping to build an image of the organisation in customers' minds (Nelson & Bowen, 2000). Different establishments have different themes to project, which are mainly expressed through their employees' attire (Karch & Peters, 2017). For example, the Japanese restaurant Shiosai, in the Mercure Convention Centre in Jakarta, welcomes guests with women in kimonos (Japanese traditional dress), by which the hotel is demonstrating its authenticity in Japanese culture and tradition. Similarly, the Intercontinental New York, a luxury business class hotel, welcomes its guests with a male employee in a tuxedo suit. Employee uniform also helps reflect the location of the establishment and enhances its atmosphere. Destination branding is a current trend in hospitality marketing. A synthesised impression of a destination brand and the surrounding atmosphere and services are provided by employee uniforms through their style, material, and colour (Tasci Asli et al., 2014). Uniforms can be designed for many purposes, according to their intended use. They can be for safety purposes, to attract customers, or protect employees from extreme weather conditions. Unlike fashion, a uniform has limitations relating to style, colours, and materials, in consideration of its intended job environment (Liu et al., 2018).

Clothing is considered a powerful tool in the process of building perception, and acts as a mental shortcut to judge a person's social status, occupation, authority, and acceptability (Johnson et al., 2002). Thus, a professionally dressed employee is judged as more competent than is an employee who is not professionally dressed. Uniform also significantly influences subconscious factors such as trustworthiness, intelligence, honesty, and the confidence of a person. Clothing acts as a symbol to display the status of an unknown person (Nelson & Bowen, 2000). Since it is often true that people are judged by their outward appearances, many employers make it mandatory for their employees who have direct contact with customers and public, to meet minimum grooming standards (Robinson et al., 2007). A previous study by Jacob and Guéguen (2014) found that service employees dressed in a two-piece suit were tipped more than were employees wearing casual uniforms, suggesting that employees with a well-groomed uniform could generate greater customer satisfaction.

Interaction between the customer and the service employee will lead to an impression which creates satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the customer. Branded service encounters are service interactions in which employee behaviour is deliberately associated with brand positioning (Sirianni et al., 2013). Personal interactions between employees and customers communicate a brand's meaning more efficiently than does a marketing promotion (Cialdini, 2014). Thus, personal interaction between the frontline employee and customer will be more effective by sharing the brand values and what the brand communicates to a customer who comes to experience brand values that reflect their own personal values (Punjaisri et al., 2008). As service is the major product in a service organisation, employees' behaviour while providing a service determines the brand promises of the company (Khatchko, 2008). A branded service encounter of an employee acts as a high-level stimulus which helps a customer understand the brand meaning better (Schwarz, 2006). Thus, when an employee's behaviour is brand-aligned, the customer will experience the brand as reliable and will evaluate the overall brand positively. Creating brand value in customers' minds is key to customer loyalty. If an organisation is successful in projecting its brand value to the customer, then the customer will be loyal to the brand.

Gender has been always a controversial topic of discussion in social research. In service encounters, the interaction between an employee and the customer is considered as a service from the customer's perspective (Mohr & Henson, 1996). Even though many governments' laws prohibit gender-based discrimination on hiring (New Zealand Human Rights Act, 1993), in reality, many organisations prefer to have males and females to handle different jobs, which they believe will enhance the brand image and customer satisfaction.

Many studies have found that women are more approachable when handling emotional communications, which results in women often filling the role of a frontline employee to assist customers (Mattila et al., 2003). On the other hand, men are more muscular and strong, which makes them preferable for jobs which involve physical work (Lacuone, 2005). Earlier researchers have also discussed the physical attractiveness and tipping culture in hospitality, and consider female servers more attractive than males (Rind & Bordia, 1996). While males were once the predominant customers who rated their

servers, in the contemporary world, there are as many female customers as there are males. Thus, male and female attractiveness is an important part of front-line employee selection. This study looks at the moderation effect of gender on a service employee's perceived competency.

An organisation needs to achieve a high level of customer satisfaction to stay in business and make a profit (Defranco et al., 2005). A dissatisfied customer will never return to a restaurant and will spread negative word of mouth about the service (Lam & Tang, 2003). Customer satisfaction is the core of hospitality and identified as the fundamental factor in marketing by many experts (Saad & Conway, 2006). Customer turnover will bring more financial crises to an organisation than a failed customer acquisition programme (Wangenheim & Bayón, 2007). Since satisfaction is the result of various attributes, it is often considered as a border theory (Jones & Suh, 2000).

1.2 Research gap

Very few researchers have examined the importance of uniforms on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality industry. Previous research on employee uniform has focused on its effect on employee satisfaction (Nelson & Bowen, 2000). This research mainly focused on a uniform's appearance, function, character and comfort. Researchers proved that functionality, nicely fitted uniform, and the design, make the employee feel good about the job. The authors also pointed out the indirect effect of uniform on customer satisfaction, as loyalty is also derived from satisfaction. This clearly shows the importance of conducting a study on a uniform's direct and indirect effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

Another study was conducted on uniforms' effect on job satisfaction (Karch & Peters, 2017). The result of this research showed that staff wearing uniforms found their jobs pleasant, the uniform communicated a sense of belonging to the organisation, and finally, the employees' satisfaction with their current job was influenced by the uniform. A further study on the uniform was on changes in customers' tipping behaviour (Jacob & Guéguen, 2014). As mentioned previously, this study found that employees wearing a two-piece suit were tipped more than were employees wearing a casual uniform. The authors of this study mentioned in the limitations the importance of including gender

difference in testing the effect of a uniform. Another empirical study on uniforms in hospitality focused on branding, first impressions created by the uniform, and the team spirit created at work (Suhag, 2015). This author mentioned that a smartly dressed employee can affect the overall operation of a restaurant. The study stressed that uniform is an important element creating the atmosphere of a restaurant to suit its brand, and branding plays a major role in the success of the business. Carefully designed uniforms will create a positive impression on the customers who dine in a restaurant. The author also stated that a professionally designed uniform style is very important for a restaurant as it helps in reinforcing the branding and image of the outlet. This study was conducted from the management's perspective and not from the perspective of the customer. Thus, all the foregoing factors give a solid reason for conducting a study on employee uniform and its impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Gender is known to be a less discussed factor in the literature of hospitality. In a study by Rafaeli (1989), the author identified that clerks wearing a uniform were more likely to display positive emotions, showing the importance of uniform in conveying emotion between employees and customers. The author also stated that both male and female employees attributed higher status to men. Fischer et al. (1997) mentioned in their study, that people stereotype the service quality of males and females. Males and females tend to favour their in-group (i.e. males favour males, and females favour females). Other studies on gender have focused on tipping (Lynn & Simons, 2000; Rind & Bordia, 1996). There is evidence that male customers tend to tip female employees more to show their wealth and power in society (Lynn & Simons, 2000). This makes it clear that male customers are attracted to female servers. An attractive female also tends to earn more tips (Lynn & Simons, 2000). These arguments create a need for adding gender as a moderator of this study.

This discussion shows a clear gap in the literature on whether or not professionality of uniform has any effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty in the hospitality industry. To meet this literature gap, this research determines the relationships among employees' uniform and customer satisfaction and loyalty, and how service employees' gender and branded service encounter moderates the effect of an employee's perceived

competence and professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

1.3 The objective of the study

The purpose of this study was to understand the effect of professionality of uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This study also aimed at investigating the involvement of other factors such as service employees' gender and branded service encounter in building customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry.

To fulfil this objective, the following research questions are answered:

1. How does the professionality of the uniform of a service employee directly influence customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, while perceived competency of the employee mediates the effect of professionality of a uniform?
2. How does service employees' gender moderate the effect of perceived competency on customer satisfaction and loyalty?
3. How does branded service encounter of the employee moderate the effect of professionality of uniform on customer satisfaction and loyalty?

1.4 Significance of the study

This study delivers several potential contributions to the literature on hospitality management in different ways. The research also opens the scope for new research conducted with a focus on the different variables used in this study.

1. This study fills the gap in the literature on the importance of uniform in improving the physical appearance of the server, by adding to the study by Lennon (1990) on the importance of clothing in improving physical attractiveness. Previous studies identified that appropriate employee dress improve customer interaction and customer brand relation (Wang & Lang, 2019). Wang and Lang (2019) defined *dress* as a modification and supplement to an individual body, including attributes such as nail, hair, muscular structure and hand-held objects. The research also further contributes to the literature

on the importance of uniform in improving the perceived competence of employees (Douglas & Solomon, 1983) and promotion of brand and customer confidence (Barr, 2007).

2. This study also contributes to the uniform literature by stressing its effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty, by adding to the work of Tsaur et al. (2015). These authors found that aesthetic labour (which included a uniform) creates a positive behaviour intention and emotion in a customer of a full-service restaurant. There are very few studies examining the direct and indirect effects of employee uniform in improving customer satisfaction and loyalty. This study shows clear evidence that uniform plays an important role in creating customer satisfaction and loyalty, directly and indirectly, which will help hospitality management to consider uniforms as an important factor while designing and creating the theme and marketing strategy of a restaurant.

3. The study supports the literature on DINESCAPE (Ryu & Jang, 2008), in which the researchers included neat and well-dressed employees as an item to measure the contribution made by service staff in improving the physical environment of the restaurant. In this study, it was found that having a professionally dressed employee will add to improving the professional look of a restaurant's environment. Previous studies have referred to furniture, wall painting, and floor tiles of a restaurant in contributing to the physical environment, but there is no mention of the term "professionality of employee uniform" in any of these studies.

4. This research provides evidence of how the gender of the server moderates the effect of perceived competence on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Gender stereotyping being a controversial topic, this study identifies the importance of service employees' gender in the hospitality industry. The results of this study will help industry practitioners re-evaluate the stereotypes they currently follow in the recruiting process. This research also contributes to the literature on employee gender in the hospitality industry.

5. Examining the importance of internal branding and branded service encounters along with identifying its importance in building customer satisfaction and customer loyalty will help industry practitioners choose the right branding tool which can be delivered by the server. This research also contributes to the literature on branded service encounters, looking at the role of service employee within the hospitality industry. Very few studies to date have focused on the importance of service providers'

behaviours during the process of service and how it helps improve the loyalty of customers.

1.5 Structure of the thesis

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 1 has provided an introduction of the thesis, which includes a background of the study, problem statement, research objectives, and the significance of the study.

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature and how each hypothesis of the study was developed. The review starts with a brief explanation of the term "uniform," followed by a detailed overview of the uniform's role in the hospitality industry. It then identifies the construct of the uniform's professionality and its importance. The next section discusses the importance of customer satisfaction in an organisation and elements of satisfaction. The importance of customer loyalty in a hospitality organisation and how loyal customers help in developing a successful business is then reviewed. This is followed by a detailed overview of the literature on the perceived competence of the employee, gender, and branded service encounter.

Chapter 3 discusses the methodology used for the collection of data and its analysis. This chapter begins with the rationale for the positivist research method employed in the study. This section also elaborates on the quantitative method and confirmatory approach used in the research. An explanation of the experimental method and the scenario used in the experiment is detailed, followed by the pilot study, and then the development and refinement of the scale used in the study. Importance of the manipulation check and an initial manipulation check for the success of the manipulated scenario is also explained. This is then followed by the details of demographic data collected and an explanation of the ethical considerations made while designing and undertaking the study.

Chapter 4 explains all three experiments that were conducted, starting with details of the survey design and manipulation used in the survey, and followed by details of the sample and research participants. The data collection and methods used to analyse the data are then explained. This is then followed by the results of the study beginning with

the profile of the participants, reliability of the scale, and the hypothesis testing, followed by a discussion and key findings of each study individually.

Chapter 5 discusses the summary of the findings from each study and the discussion of all the findings. The section then gives detailed theoretical and managerial implications of the study based on the results discussed from all three experiments. After this, the limitations of the study and future directions of the current study are presented. Finally, general conclusions from the research are provided.

1.6 Definitions of key terms

Uniform

A uniform is the attire used to identify the wearers' status, group membership, legitimacy and authority (Bickman, 1974).

Professional appearance

A professional appearance is the impression of a person who engages in an activity with great competence (Williams et al., 2014).

Formal

Formal can be referred to as something that follows the rule, which can be a dress for an important occasion or something that has a sanction or approval officially (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008).

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be defined as a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product and/or service (Pizam et al., 2016).

Customer loyalty

Customer loyalty is defined as consumer behaviour, built on positive experience and value, which leads to buying products, even when that may not appear to be the most rational decision (Kincaid, 2003).

Competence

Competence is defined as a combination of interpersonal competencies and professional competencies required to successfully carry out tasks when serving customers (Wu et al., 2015).

Service employees' perceived competency

This relates to the level of service quality perceived from a service employee through his or her attributes and service skills.

Brand

A *brand* is a name, symbol, design, or some combination which identifies the product of a particular organisation as having a substantial, differentiated advantage (O'Malley, 1991).

Branding

Branding is a technique used to build sustainable, differential advantage by playing on the nature of human beings (O'Malley, 1991).

Internal branding

Companies' efforts to help employees understand and live the values of the organisation while treating them as internal customers, is referred to as *internal branding* (Foster et al., 2010)

Branded customer service

Branded customer service is the process of strategic alignment of customers' experiences with brand promises (Barlow & Stewart, 2004)

Chapter 2. Literature review

The objective of this literature review is to understand the importance of professionality of employee uniform in the hospitality industry and its role in building customer satisfaction and loyalty. The review begins with a brief explanation of the term "uniform" followed by a detailed overview of the uniform's role in the hospitality industry. It then identifies the construct of a uniform's professionality and importance. The next section of the review discusses the importance of customer satisfaction in an organisation and the elements of satisfaction. The importance of customer loyalty in a hospitality organisation and how loyal customers help in developing a successful business is then explained. It was considered important to identify the importance of customer satisfaction in creating loyalty, which was made clear from the literature.

In the next section of the literature review, the mediator of the study, service employees' perceived competency, is discussed. A definition of service employees' perceived competency is suggested here, along with the importance of competency and how physical attractiveness contributes to competence. Then the review focuses on the moderators in Study 2 and Study 3 of gender discrimination, and how each gender has its advantage and disadvantage in holding different job titles. After this, the importance of branded service encounters, which is the moderator in Study 3, is discussed in detail.

2.1 Uniforms

Uniforms have been part of humanity for a long time. One of the first classifications made within humans were those of gender, with a different style of clothing for males and females. Uniforms are sometimes viewed as a device to define boundaries, eliminate conflicts, and provide an assurance to members conforming to their role in an organisation (Joseph & Alex, 1972). Uniforms produce a sense of community within the group of people wearing the same uniform. Historically, uniforms have been used to distinguish the wearer according to hierarchy and prestige, but also to create a sense of togetherness between the wearers.

2.1.1 Uniforms in hospitality

Uniforms in service industries meet a diverse range of needs at different stages, such as creating a desirable environment, optimising service interaction, reflecting an organisation's culture, and generating an optimistic impression on staff behaviour and their performance that can influence customer experience (Karch & Peters, 2017).

Uniforms communicate the identity of the establishment the employee works for rather than just being the attire they wear to work. Well-designed uniforms can be an important factor in effective communication between customers and an organisation (Burns & Lennon, 1993). Frontline employees are the direct connection of an establishment with its customers, and the employee uniform can boost interpersonal conversations between the employees and the customers (Karch & Peters, 2017). Customers often view employees as representatives of the organisation, so the perception they generate about the employees are most likely to carry forward to their observations about the organisation. If the hotel employees' uniforms narrate the customers' anticipation of services, inspiration to visit that hotel will increase (Yan et al., 2011). Thus, the employee's uniform generates an interpretation of service quality the customer expects from the service establishment and formulates an image of the establishment. Hence hospitality organisations spend a lot of money and time on designing their employee uniforms to standardise their brand image and service (Suhag, 2015).

There are many aspects of a uniform which have been considered in previous studies as important factors influencing employee perceptions, which in turn affect the customers' perceptions. A uniform's appearance, function, character, and comfort were discussed by Nelson and Bowen (2000) in their study, while Karch and Peters (2017) looked at style, material, colour, and comfort. Jobs performed by an employee determine whether the uniform they wear is appropriate or inappropriate in terms of its functionality. Such aspects have been found to contribute to a customer's overall judgment of an employee according to the uniform they wear.

2.1.2 Professionality of uniforms

The aspect of uniforms considered in this study is "professionality." *Professionality of uniform* is derived from factors such as professional appearance, attractiveness, and formality of the employee uniform. Organisations create uniforms to create a professional workforce, as employees wearing a well-designed uniform are thought to form better impressions with customers (Cardon & Okoro, 2009). Customers can base their purchase intentions and perceptions of service quality on employees' clothing when they lack complete information about a product's quality or service quality (Baker et al., 1994). Furthermore, uniforms are also considered to display employees' designations and professionalism (Robinson et al., 2007). A professional uniform not only earns a positive impression but also respect at a workplace. A consumer's perception of an employee based on his or her style can impact their beliefs about the features of the establishment (Yan et al., 2011). Employees dressed in a casual uniform can be perceived as less trustworthy, less professional, and with less knowledge (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2005). Figure 1 illustrates the formation of professionality of uniform from its constructs.

2.1.2.1 Professional appearance
Professional appearance is understood as the impression of a person who engages in an activity with great competence (Williams et al., 2014). Studies have proven that a person's attire influences others' impressions of their professionalism and credibility (Kwon, 1994; O'Neal & Lapitsky, 1991). Many businesses have seen the connection between workplace attire and other outcomes, such as profitability (Karl et al., 2013). Organisations also believe the professionality of their employee uniform can attract more customers, which will lead to the success of the business. A professionally appearing service employee has a significant role in driving the way a customer evaluates a business's services (Easterling et al., 1992). Thus, it is important to examine the professional appearance of a uniform while studying the effect of employee uniform.
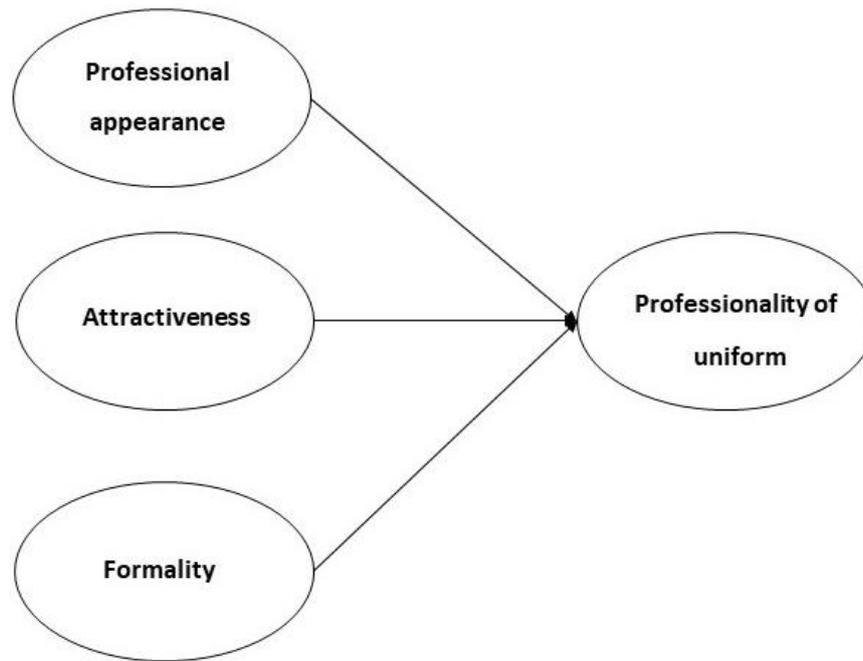
Figure 1 *Constructs of Professionality of Uniform*

2.1.2.2 Attractiveness

The appearance of people and favouritism towards attractive people are highly researched topics in the literature. A person who appears more attractive to others is thought to have a more desirable character and have improved chances of being recognised (Creekmore, 1980). People's behaviour changes toward others according to the attractiveness of those people (Villi & Koc, 2018). The attractiveness of clothing is an appealing image created by the wearer as judged by the observers (Creekmore, 1980). Parasuraman et al. (1988) suggested that clothing of an employee that affects their appearance is an expository component persuading consumers' service quality expectations. For example, people will remember a comment, as the comment made by an attractively dressed person or unattractively dressed person and not as the comment made by which person (Lennon, 1990), which makes it clear that people attractively dressed are remembered for the way they dress and not for who they are. As the attractiveness of uniform has an important role to play in judging an employee, a detailed investigation of the role of the attractiveness of uniform in building professionality is necessary.

2.1.2.3 Formality

Formality can refer to something that follows a rule, such as a dress code for an important occasion, or it can be or something that has a sanction or official approval (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008). Customers already have certain expectations about employee uniforms in a fine dining restaurant based on their previous experience. These expectations can include the design of the uniform, neatness, or colour of the uniform, all of which are used as criteria to judge the formality of the employee uniform. Just as marketing employees use formal business attire consciously to increase their status and admiration (Rucker et al., 1999), customers also consider an employee in formal clothing to be more qualified than one dressed in less formal clothing. This forces businesses to discourage casual clothing in the workplace (Cardon & Okoro, 2009; Peluchette & Karl, 2007). Cho (2001) found that the clothing style of an employee in a department store influences customers' behaviour towards them. A salesperson with a formal uniform was approached with a more positive attitude than a salesperson in informal clothing (Cho, 2001). In previous studies on shopping behaviour, an employee wearing an apron was considered to be providing higher quality of service (Turley & Milliman, 2000). Thus, the formality of employee uniform is an important determinant of the professionalism of a uniform.

2.2 Customer satisfaction

Customers are regarded as the most important part of a business, as they engage in business by purchasing goods or by availing themselves of services provided by the business (Basari & Shamsudin, 2020). Customers are a revenue source for business (Shamsudin et al., 2019). The profit generated by customers is important for a business's sustainability, daily operations, and long-term development. It is likely that no business could exist without the presence of customers (Defranco et al., 2005). Hence businesses need to focus on the satisfaction of their customers to retain them and generate more revenue. However, satisfaction is highly personal to a customer according to his or her expectations, which can be experienced in situations related to product or service satisfaction. A satisfied customer is usually identified as a customer who receives substantial added value to his or her expectations (Cengiz, 2010).

Satisfaction is derived from the Latin word "*satis*" meaning "enough," and "*facere*" meaning to "do" or "make" (Oliver, 2010). Thus, a satisfying product should have the capability of providing the customer with service to a level which can be said to be enough. Satisfaction usually is intellectualised as an instant judgment succeeding an act of purchase or built on a sequence of customer-product/service interactions (Yi, 1990). According to Fournier and Mick (1999), many researchers have investigated the elements of satisfaction, the most interesting ones being Oliver and De Sarbo (1989). According to these researchers, there are five different elements of satisfaction (Table 1): 1) *contentment*, the primary effect of acceptance or tolerance after the purchase/service experience; 2) *pleasure*, a positive strengthening which enhances the experience and the initial effect of happiness; 3) *relief,* the positive boost occurring when an unpleasant state is removed; 4) *novelty,* expectations of the unusual that creates the initial effect of interest or excitation; and 5) *surprise*, which is a primary pleasure or disapproval created when the product or service exceeds expectations. These five elements were considered in developing a scale to measure customer satisfaction for this study.

Table 1 *Elements of Satisfaction (Oliver & De Sarbo, 1989)*

Elements of satisfaction	Meaning
Contentment	Primary effect acceptance or tolerance
Pleasure	A primary effect of happiness
Relief	Negative reinforcement state
Novelty	Expectations of the unexpected that yield excitation
Surprise	Effect of either delight or outrage when the product performs outside the range of expectations

Customer satisfaction is explained by the widely accepted expectancy-disconfirmation theory proposed by Lewin (1938). Customer satisfaction is measured in two parts: expectation and satisfaction or performance (Hill et al. 2003). According to Oliver (1993) *customer satisfaction* is the emotional response from a customer to the most recent business experience with a provider, which is called the "transaction-specific approach." In this approach, factors like situations play an important role in the intensity of the response from the customer.

Customer satisfaction can also be defined as a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product and/or service (Pizam et al., 2016). Customer satisfaction ratings are used as a profit indicator by many organisations. Researchers have identified that keeping customers satisfied decreases the selling cost of a product (Lim et al., 2020). Researchers such as Cronin Jr. and Taylor (1992) and Parasuraman et al (1988) argued that perceived service quality is the primary cause of overall customer satisfaction.

The satisfaction of a customer is completely dependent on the expectation he or she has of a product or service before obtaining it. Parker and Mathews (2001) contended that customers compare their expectations and performance of the service, before and after purchase, and compare these to determine their level of customer satisfaction. The same product or level of service could provide a different level of satisfaction to customers with different expectations. For example, a customer dining in a high-end restaurant expecting the prices to be reasonable will be highly dissatisfied even if the service provided is of high quality. On the other hand, if the customer is expecting the menu to be priced high, he or she will have more satisfaction after experiencing good service.

Two other popular approaches to customer satisfaction analysis are transaction-specific and cumulative or overall satisfaction (Rahim et al., 2012). In these approaches, customer satisfaction is viewed as an evaluation which requires the inclusion of satisfaction associated with specific products and various other characters of a firm (Rahim et al., 2012). According to Mattila and O'Neill (2003) the price of a room has a significant effect on the level of customer satisfaction in hotels. The expectation of a customer can be on both the tangible and intangible aspects of product and service. The same factors have a crucial role in influencing the judgment of service experienced by a customer.

2.2.1 Expectations in the hospitality industry

There is evidence that ambience elements have a positive influence on customer satisfaction (Ha & Jang, 2010), for example, customer expectations will be higher when

the restaurant or store has luxurious ambience. A restaurant that has a pleasing ambience is expected to attract more customers to spend more time and money (Omar et al., 2015). According to Rande (1996), the ambience of a restaurant encompasses everything that creates an impression on the customer who dines there. Employee uniform is also an important element in creating a positive restaurant ambience (Wahyuningtyas & Widyakususmastuti, 2015). When an employee is wearing appropriate clothing and possesses a positive character, the customer will assume that the organisation will provide a high level of service quality, and gain a positive image. On the other hand, an employee in a casual uniform is regarded by the customer as less professional and with less or no knowledge, which will affect their expectations about service quality (Adomaitis & Johnson, 2005). Research on factors influencing customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction in the restaurant business using answer tree methodology (Hwang & Zhao, 2010), has included employee uniforms as one of the items used to measure the restaurant atmospherics in relation to customer satisfaction. However, there has not been any significant research to test the direct relationship between service employee uniform and customer satisfaction within the hospitality context. Considering the influence of restaurant ambience on customer satisfaction, and the role of employee uniforms as an important element in creating restaurant ambience, it is hypothesised as follows:

H1a. *The level of customer satisfaction will increase when the service employee is wearing a professional uniform.*

2.3 Customer loyalty

If customer satisfaction is a short-term goal of an establishment, customer loyalty has to be the long-term goal. *Customer loyalty* is the probability of future repurchase from or revisit to a specific service provider (Lee et al., 2008). Customer acquisition is one of the highest costs in a business (Livne et al., 2011), so retaining a customer saves a lot of money to an organisation in the long term. Customers' variation of support affects the long-term revenue of a company (Schweizer, 2008). A business is generally promoted by word of mouth recommendations from loyal customers. The profit of the service provider is increased when a loyal customer buys more products and more services than

a non-loyal customer. *Customer loyalty* can be defined as the adherence of customers to a company, which makes the customer stay even if businesses make mistakes (Rahim et al., 2012). Kincaid (2003) defined *customer loyalty* as consumer behaviour, built on positive experience and value, which leads to buying products, even when that may not appear to be the most rational decision. *Loyalty* refers to when a consumer generally buys the product or service of the same brand frequently over time rather than buying from different providers within a similar category (Moisescu & Vu, 2011).

Customers can be loyal to a brand due to many reasons. They may be loyal due to complicated processes involved in finding a new brand or the absence of real replacements. However, loyalty is much more than just repurchasing, as a consumer who keeps buying a certain brand may be doing so because of lethargy, insignificance, swapping barriers and other motives, rather than actual loyalty (Reichheld & Detrick, 2003). As mentioned by Moisescu (2014), brand loyalty approaches were classified into three categories by Jacoby (1978): behavioural, psychological commitment, and composite. From these categories, a definition of *brand loyalty* was derived as the biased behavioural response expressed over time by some decision-making unit concerning one or more alternative brands out of a set of brands and is a function of psychological processes (Jacoby, 1978). Customer loyalty literature has always focused on brand loyalty and not service loyalty; as hospitality is a service, it is also important to explore service loyalty.

2.3.1 Service loyalty

Service loyalty is different from brand loyalty. A consumer can have loyalty towards the service provider, without being loyal to the brand they sell or supply (Salegna & Goodwin, 2005). Salegna and Goodwin(2005) proposed a definition of *service loyalty* as the consumer's desire to frequent a particular service provider, resulting from high customer satisfaction, high emotional commitment, and sustained repeat purchase behaviour. Studies have shown that customer loyalty is a two-dimensional concept which involves behavioural and attitudinal elements (Baloglu, 2002). Customer loyalty towards the service provider was explained by Dick and Basu (1994) in their studies. The authors stated that loyalty is multi-dimensional with relative attitude and repeat patronage behaviour as its elements. The repeat patronage behaviour of loyal

customers was explained by factors such as habitual purchase, monetary enticements, suitability, and lack of alternatives (Baloglu, 2002). Four loyalty categories (Figure 2) were identified by Dick and Basu (1994): 1) no loyalty (low on behaviour and attitude); 2) spurious loyalty (high behaviour and low attitude); 3) latent loyalty (low behaviour and high attitude); and 4) loyalty (high on behaviour and attitude).
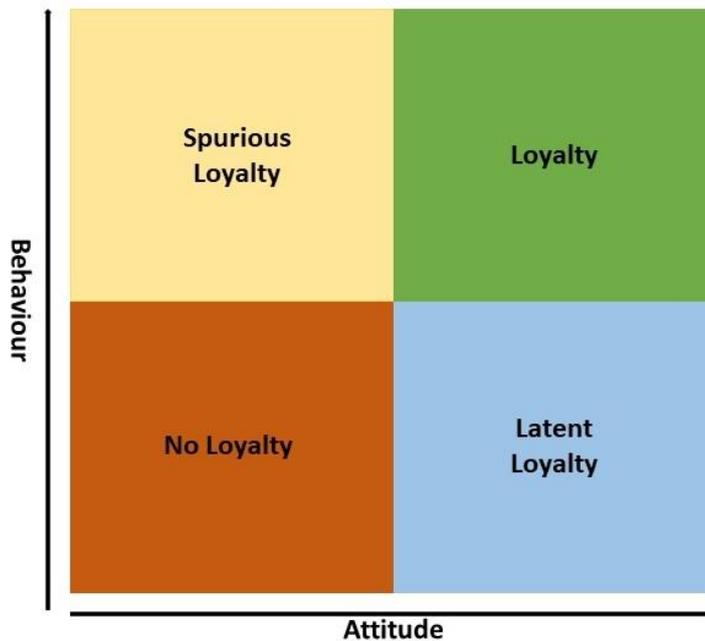
Figure 2 *Loyalty Categories (Baloglu, 2002; Dick & Basu, 1994)*

Customers' motivations to stay in relation with service providers can be divided into two categories: constraint-based and dedication based (Bendapudi & Berry, 1997). According to Bendapudi and Berry (1997), in a constraint-based relationship, the customers think they cannot break the relationship due to various influences such as economic, social or sociological factors. However, in a dedication-based relationship, the customers want to stay in a relationship with the service provider due to growing trust from non-exploitability and genuine appreciation. Factors that influence customer loyalty were categorised as internal and external (Yoo & Bai, 2013). According to Yoo & Bai (2013), internal factors are those controlled by the organisation, such as product service quality and cost. In contrast, external factors relate to how consumers distinguish the brand with reference to the brand competition.

Researchers have reported that the longer a customer stays loyal, the more the organisation profits. By increasing customer retention by as little as five percent, an

organisation can boost its profit from 25% to 80% (Griffin, 2002). Many companies have started loyalty programmes to retain their customers. The very first loyalty programme was started by American Airlines, which offered free travel in exchange for a specific level of loyalty in 1981 (Duffy, 1998). Some researchers have stressed service quality as the sole reason for loyalty (e.g. Gefen, 2002), but loyalty is not just the product of service quality. There are many underlying factors that trigger customer loyalty. Customers can be loyal to a service establishment due to barriers such as high switching cost (Kandampully, 1998). Overall satisfaction of the customer in relation to atmosphere, quality of food, value for money and service quality, can be considered as the major determinant of customer loyalty in hospitality.

2.3.2 Customer loyalty in hospitality

The existence and growth of hospitality companies rests on their capability to create exclusive, memorable, and positive experiences for customers (Walls et al., 2011). Loyalty in hospitality is focused more on attitudinal elements, whereas general business loyalty is evenly distributed among behavioural attitudinal factors (Yoo & Bai, 2013). Attitudinal loyalty in hospitality is focused on customers' perceived value, repurchase intention, and satisfaction (Bowen & Chen, 2001; Gupta et al., 2007; Hanai et al., 2008; Skogland & Siguaw, 2004), brand image and brand perception (Back, 2005; Hsu, 2000), emotional long-term relationships (Hendler & Latour, 2008; Mattila, 2006; Scanlan & McPhail, 2000) and their emotional perceptions and attitudes (Mason et al., 2006; Ryu & Jang, 2007). A long-term relationship is key to loyalty in the hospitality industry (Bowen & Shoemaker, 2003). Connecting like-minded customers of a company by developing a well-designed experience will create brand ambassadors and co-creators of brand value, which will ultimately develop loyalty and profitability of the organisation (Kandampully, 1998).

Kandampully et al. (2015) proposed a loyalty pyramid (Figure 3) which illustrates the step by step process of creating an emotionally dedicated lifetime customer base and producing brand ambassadors for service establishments. This pyramid shows how the strategic value of the customer increases with the implementation of the personally crafted loyalty programme and how customer behaviours change through the course of their journeys.
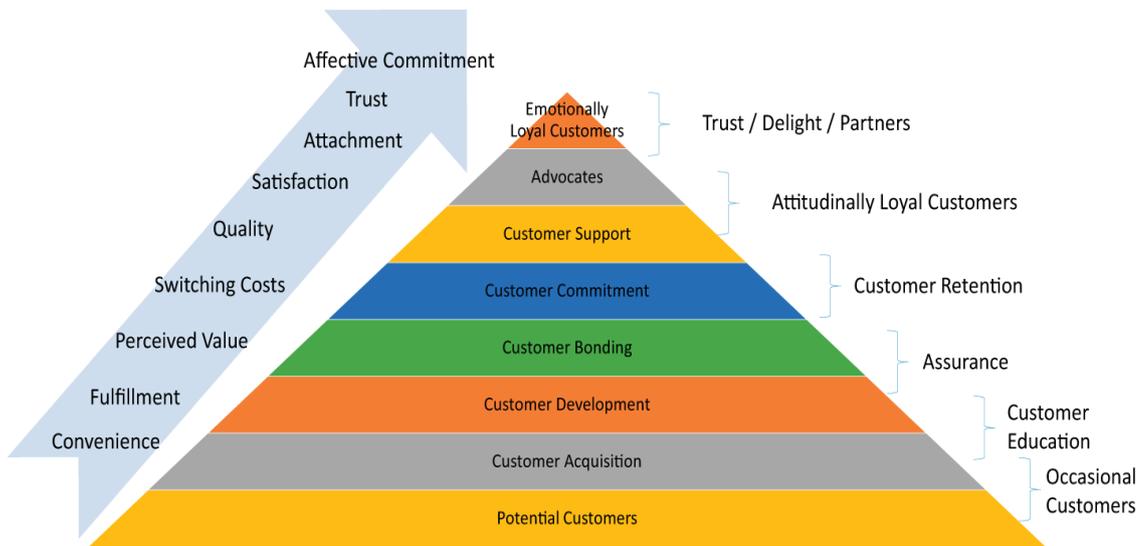
Figure 3 *Customer Loyalty Pyramid*

From "Customer loyalty: a review and future directions with a special focus on the hospitality industry," by J. Kandampully et al., 2015, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, 27(3), 381. https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-03-2014-0151. Copyright 2014 by Jay Kandampully.

Salanova et al. (2005) found that service climate had a strong influence on customer loyalty in hospitality. *Service climate* is described as the way employees are engaged and share a common perception about the quality of service in their unit (Salanova et al., 2005). Hence, service climate is a communal and shared phenomenon. This finding links loyalty with uniform, as the uniform is known to develop community and strengthen the relationship between community members. Han and Ryu (2009) discussed the effect of the physical environment on customer loyalty in the restaurant industry. The authors mentioned in their study, that factors such as colour, theme, wall art, tableware, linen (table cloths and napkins), floor mats, and furniture, can play an important part in conveying an image and in generating an overall appealing restaurant ambience. They also noted the role played by cloth materials such as table cloths and napkins, but the importance of employee uniform in creating the restaurant ambience was omitted. To fill this gap in the literature and link the service climate to employee uniform, it was hypothesised as follows:

H1b. The level of customer loyalty will increase when the service employee is wearing a professional uniform.

2.4 Customer satisfaction and customer loyalty

Customer satisfaction is the stepping stone to loyalty, and true loyalty does not exist unless satisfaction and emotional promises are present (Salegna & Goodwin, 2005). A satisfied customer will use a service more often, which eventually makes them loyal to the establishment. Usage levels of satisfied customers will be higher than those of customers who are not satisfied (Bolton & Lemon, 1999; Ram & Jung, 1991). Repurchasing tendency and recommendations of products and services to their social circle will be more from satisfied customers (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Previous literature has found that satisfaction positively affects the loyalty of customers (Bloemer et al., 1999; Oliver, 1993; Zeithaml et al., 1996). Once customers are brand loyal, they indulge in repurchase even though they are already satisfied (Back & Parks, 2003). Customer satisfaction is the best strategy for retaining existing customers. It is clear from the research, that the chances of a customer exiting from being loyal to an organisation reduces with time (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). Previous studies have identified the positive correlation between satisfaction and loyalty (Bolton & Drew, 1991; Fornell, 1992; Teel et al., 1980). According to Bitner (1990), customer satisfaction has an indirect effect on brand loyalty. Hence it is clear from this literature, that customer satisfaction has a strong effect on customer loyalty. Thus, it is important to find out if customer satisfaction mediates the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer loyalty. Hence, it is hypothesised as follows:

H1c. Customer satisfaction will mediate the effect of professionality of uniform on customer loyalty.

2.5 Perceived competence of service employee

Many researchers have proposed a definition of *competence*. From an industry perspective, competence is an underlying personal characteristic of the individual that leads to superior performance in a given situation (Spencer & Spencer, 2008), and for front-line employees, *service competence* is defined as the combination of interpersonal competencies and professional competencies required to successfully carry out their tasks when serving customers (Wu et al., 2015).

Birkett (1993) portrayed *competence* as an individual's knowledge and skills that are focused on executing a task in a particular work framework. According to Coulter and Coulter (2002), *competence* is the degree to which customers perceive that the service representative possesses the required skills and knowledge to supply the basic service and product. From a hospitality perspective, a definition of *service employee's perceived competency* is proposed as the level of service quality perceived from a service employee through his or her attributes and service skills. These attributes can be physical appearance or interpersonal interaction.

The importance of physical appearance is a widely discussed topic in service literature. The role of front-line employees' physical attractiveness, facial hair and smile, in driving guest perception was discussed by Magnini et al. (2013). The role of a service employee's dress in relation to customer interactions and brand relationship was discussed by Wang and Lang (2019). A person's physical appearance is the only feature available to gather any information about their personality in the first meeting (Lee et al., 2008). The uniform is therefore one of the most important physical factors that will be noticed in a service employee. Customers are under the impression that employees with a professional uniform are more qualified than are employees wearing a less professional uniform (Yan et al., 2011). The majority of customers see service employees in professional uniforms as well trained and more conversant about their organisation's products and services (Barr, 2007). Shao et al. (2004) mentioned that service personnel's appropriate attire led to higher expectations of service quality, which resulted in customers' intentions to patronise a service establishment. Individuals are considered to be more competent and friendly when dressed attractively compared to those dressed unattractively (Lennon, 1990). Suitability and appeal of attire have been found to set a benchmark in the perception of employees' competence (Douglas & Solomon, 1983). Considering that a server's clothing is one of the tangible cues used by consumers in the establishment of their service quality anticipations (Boulding et al., 1993) it was hypothesised as follows:

H2a. *The level of a service employee's perceived competency will increase when the employee is wearing a professional uniform.*

Product and service value of an establishment is directly related to the customer's perception of service quality (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992). Frontline employees' service competence affects the perception of service quality of the organisation (Wu et al., 2015). Thus, the perceived competence of the service employee will allow the customer to judge the quality of a service establishment. A workforce that is equipped to satisfy the clientele is the key driving force in attracting and retaining upscale consumers (Jin & Merkebu, 2015). (Parasuraman et al. (1994) reported in his study, that service quality is the gap between the expectation a customer had before experiencing the service and the actual service experience. *Service quality* is defined as the consumer's evaluation of the level of service provided in a retail store (Parasuraman et al., 1991). From these definitions it is clear that the quality of service provided by the employee or the ability to serve better, is an employee's competency. Hence, the well-known and discussed scale SERVQUAL was taken into consideration to measure service employees' perceived competency. SERVQUAL is a 22-item instrument used to measure customers' perceptions of service quality in service and retail organisations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). These 22 items were briefly summarised into five factors. Wu et al. (2015) considered four factors from Parasuraman's work to measure employees' competency in their study, "Linkage between frontline employee service competence scale and customer perceptions of service quality." The authors omitted the tangible factors of employees' neat and professional appearance to measure the competency of the employees, and validated front line employees' competency through interactive communication skills as well as a willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Hence, it is important to understand if there is a relation between the tangible factor of service quality and employee competency in creating overall customer satisfaction.

Even though service quality and employees' perceived competence seem similar, there is a substantial difference between them. According to Lacobucci et al. (1995), *service quality* is the managerial delivery of a service, and *customer satisfaction* is the customer's experience of that service. An improvement in managerial service quality will not make any changes in the way customers experience the service, nor have any effect on customers' ratings of service quality and satisfaction (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). However, *perceived competency* is the customer's perceptions of service quality in an

employee. Thus, the perceived competency of a service employee is a derivative of service quality, which is non-managerial and directly influences customer satisfaction. The perceived competency of an employee is based on the level of service quality that a customer perceives and judges, based on his or her needs from a service encounter. To test this theory, it is hypothesised as follows:

H2b. *Employees' perceived competence will mediate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction.*

H2c. *Employees' perceived competence will mediate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer loyalty.*

2.6 Employee gender

In hospitality organisations, frontline employees have often been considered as the image of the organisation (Slåtten & Mehmetoglu, 2011), while other studies have also suggested that employers regard the visual appearance of frontline workers as an important element in attracting customers (Foster, 2004). Historically, in terms of visual appearance, gender was viewed as the most prominent and visible traits of one's outward appearance in society (Reid & Comas-Diaz, 1990). In the hospitality industry, despite the substantial changes in employment standards, there is still a visible pattern of so-called "employment ghettos," wherein certain departments are predominantly occupied by female employees and others by male employees (Pinar et al., 2011). This trend may be due to the fact that female employees are considered more attractive for interacting with customers, which drives employers to hire fewer male employees for front-line jobs (Mattila et al., 2003). Past literature has discussed the different contributions made by gender qualities. For example, a common contrast lies in the notion of female employees giving more importance to relations, whilst male employees are more focused on the task at hand (Karatepe et al., 2006). Other comparisons include that females are more inclined to focus on the detail of the task they complete, than are males (Yavas et al., 2008), enabling them to take up jobs which require precision and attention to details. Occupation segregation by gender is also considered one of the reasons to expect different service from different genders (Anker, 1997). According to Anker (1997), people prefer to see female employees in a cosmetic shop and male

employees in a hardware shop. They feel the knowledge about the product they sell will provide a better quality of service when selling a product. Knowledge of the product is an important factor in providing a better service.

Although gender has been examined within the employment literature, there is a scarcity of studies examining the effect of service employees' gender on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Studies so far have discovered that female servers are tipped more than are male servers (Lynn & Simons, 2000), with the tendency of male customers making use of tips to show their wealth and status to female servers being identified as the cause. Despite such findings, there are no in-depth perspectives on whether female servers will create more satisfaction and loyalty for customers within the hospitality context. Customers may expect better service from an employee if they feel they are more comfortable interacting with them (Fischer et al., 1997). This is attributed to *homophily*, which is the degree to which pairs of individuals who interact have similar attributes, such as beliefs, values, education, social status, etc (Cooper, 1997). The social relation is stronger among the people from, same group. This theory suggests that male customers tend to interact more with servers of the same gender and perceive better service quality from them. Hence, from the literature, it is evident that tipping favours servers of the opposite gender, while service quality favours servers of the same gender. As a service quality scale is used to measure the perceived competency of the server in this study, the findings could add to the literature provided by Fischer et al. (1997). Thus, it seems worthwhile exploring whether employee gender will moderate the effect of perceived competence on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This was hypothesised as:

H3a*. Service employees' gender will moderate the effect of the service employees' perceived competence on customer satisfaction.*

H3b*. Service employees' gender will moderate the effect of the service employees' perceived competence on customer loyalty.*

2.7 Branded service encounter

2.7.1 Branding

Branding is considered an important factor playing a critical role in developing brand relationships with customers (Kotler & Armstrong, 2012). Branding helps hospitality organisations to go through the hurdle of commoditisation by creating a tangible clue for customers (O'Neill & Mattila, 2004). A brand is thought of as a hallmark of quality, a promise or assurance to buyers, a set of associations or expectations, a perception or an image that persuades customers to purchase a brand's products (Dev & Withiam, 2012).

The brand name is an important element for a customer when choosing to stay or dine at an organisation (Dev & Withiam, 2012), and helps the organisation to be set apart from other competitors by reflecting the perception regarding the company and its service (Prasad & Dev, 2000). A customer who chooses a well-recognised brand for their stay eliminates the chances of getting poor service from an unfamiliar unbranded organisation(O'Neill & Xiao, 2006). Different brands are developed by hospitality companies to cater to the different needs of customers (O'Neill & Mattila, 2010). Many companies have a budget segment, luxury segment and also a boutique segment. The main aim of this brand strategy is to be present in all the market segments and increase brand presence in the customer's view. Compared to product brands, service brands such as hospitality organisations, have very limited tangible clues to show their values to customers, as service is an intangible transaction (Berry, 2000). Whatever branding strategy an organisation plans, it can be challenging for a hospitality company to communicate the brand value to the customers, as the final brand experience is co-created by customers and employees, making brand communication more enjoyable than tangible goods transactions (Brodie et al., 2009). Brand trust and customer satisfaction are often the results of successful branding in hospitality (Dev & Withiam, 2012).

2.7.2 Internal branding

Most organisations are successful in marketing and advertising their brand to a potential customer but they struggle when it comes to delivering the promise, as they put less

effort and money into training and developing employees to transform brand values into reality during the actual customer service (Dechawatanapaisal, 2018). The majority of the literature on brands and brand management has been preoccupied with the customer's viewpoint (Santos-Vijande et al., 2013), while there has been a moderate amount of researchers that have paid attention to the organisation's viewpoint of brand management (Baumgarth & Schmidt, 2010; Merz et al., 2009; Santos-Vijande et al., 2013). Efforts to help employees to understand and live the values of the organisation while treating them as internal customers, are referred to as "internal branding" (Foster et al., 2010). *Internal branding* creates a mutual understanding of the brand across the organisation to deliver a clear standard and pathway to employees on how to engage in appropriate customer service by delivering the brand message (Burmann & Zeplin, 2005; Punjaisri et al., 2008). This also reminds employees. that the organisation they work for is the best workplace where they commit to and involve themselves in company values (Barrow & Mosley, 2006). Workforces are also treated as brand ambassadors and internal participants, whose activities are crucial for delivering brand values (Iyer et al., 2018). Hence internal branding delivers a tailored work model which gives the employee directions to deliver brand values and meaning to customers (Tsang et al., 2011; Yang et al., 2015).

The foundation of internal branding consists of edification of and communication to the workforce about the brand value, to develop emotional and rational interaction with the brand (Aurand et al., 2005; de Chernatony & Segal-Horn, 2003; King & Grace, 2008). Internal branding has gained popularity in hospitality to align employees' attitudes and behaviour with brand values and promises, as the role played by employees is crucial due to the interactive nature of hospitality service (Xiong et al., 2013). The idea of internal branding in hospitality is to enhance brand performance so that the customer experience of the brand is the same as what is advertised externally (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015). As the customer-employee contact contributes largely towards the success of the brand for hospitality organisations (Simões & Dibb, 2001), managing employee attitudes and behaviours has become very critical (King, 2010; Tsang et al., 2011; Xiong et al., 2013).

2.7.3 Branded customer service

In restaurants, exceptional service is defined before the dining even happens, through a personalised welcome from a restaurant host (Arora, 2012). Personal interactions between the employees and the customers are a more powerful way of communicating the brand meaning than a marketing strategy of mass communication through advertisements (Sirianni et al., 2013). Communicating brand value to the guest on a one-to-one basis is referred to as "branded customer service," which is the process of strategic alignment of customers' experiences with brand promises (Barlow & Stewart, 2004). All customers have a brand expectation before the experience, and these expectations are usually built from the external promises communicated through mass media communication and marketing. When an employee delivers a service aligned with the guest's expectation, they feel a consistency between externally communicated brand promise and their brand experience. Usually, this experience enables the customers to maintain their positive attitude towards the brand (Henkel et al., 2007).

Service employees are major factors in creating and maintaining brand-customer relationships, hence managing the behaviour of employees while provding service, is the pathway to successful brand management (Harris & de Chernatony, 2001). Hospitality brands need capable and self-driven employees who can perform in a brand-aligned manner, to project the organisation's unique brand value to their customers (Hartline et al., 2000). Brand supporting behaviour of the employees is used as physical evidence to measure the hospitality service by customers (King, 2010). There are two types of employees' brand supporting behaviour: role brand behaviour and extra-role brand behaviour (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015). *Role brand behaviour* is delivery of an organisation's brand values by performing the described role of the employee (Kimpakorn & Tocquer, 2009; King & Grace, 2008). *Extra-role brand behaviour* is delivery of an organisation's brand values by performing above and beyond the described role of the employee (Burmann et al., 2009; Morhart et al., 2009).

It is clear from the literature, that a branded service encounter is an important factor in delivering brand value to a customer in a hospitality setting. Researchers have found that branded service encounters affect customer trust and commitment towards the brand (Erkmen & Hancer, 2015). Therefore, to understand if branded service encounters

moderate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, it is hypothesised as follows:

H4a. *A branded service encounter will moderate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction.*

H4b. *A branded service encounter will moderate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer loyalty.*

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter explains the methods used to investigate the proposed hypotheses and test the conceptual model developed. The positivist paradigm is discussed first, followed by the presentation of the pilot study, after which the results of the manipulation check is detailed. The next section elaborates on the scale used in this study along with its reliability and correlation tests of the scale items. Then a short overview of the demographic profiles of the participants is given, and finally, a detailed explanation of ethical factors considered while conducting this study is provided.

3.1 Positivism

Positivists believe that only "realistic" knowledge obtained through observation, including measurement, is reliable (Ladyman, 2007). In this view, the role of the investigator is restricted to data collection and interpretation in an objective way, and the research findings are usually visible and computable. Studies with the positivist paradigm are created only on facts and consider the world to be external and neutral.

There is usually an emphasis on recognising explanatory associations or causal relationships through quantitative approaches, where findings from large sample sizes are preferred (Park et al., 2020). As discussed, this study hypothesised that professionality of employee uniform and competency perceived from the professionality of uniform, determine customer satisfaction and loyalty. To test the hypotheses, this research used a positivist paradigm positivism to explore the truth of the study based on the evidence, which was measured using a logical and mathematical analysis (Yosef, 2009).

3.2 Quantitative methodology

Following the positivist paradigm, a quantitative research method was adopted in this study. A quantitative methodology sets out to compute or find the degree of a phenomenon, in contrast to a qualitative methodology, which is usually more concerned with telling experiences, highlighting logic, and finding the nature of a matter (Coolican,

2018). A quantitative method often involves a survey instrument, and the data collected are then analysed to see if they uphold the hypothesis. Researchers using a quantitative methodological approach usually (but not always) adopt a confirmatory approach (Farrant & Zubrick, 2013).

3.3 Confirmatory approach

In a confirmatory approach, a researcher starts with a theory about a particular phenomenon. And develops a hypothesis based on the theory (Saracho, 2014). This approach is also known as the "deductive method." The *deductive approach* is a theory-testing process which commences with a recognised theory or generalisation and pursues this to see if the theory can be applied to specific occasions by testing the hypothesis (Hyde, 2000). The literature review identified that external environment and expectations have a strong role in building customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. Hypotheses were developed and tested to see if the data would uphold the theories on employee uniform, perceived competency, gender, and branded service encounter. This study used an online survey to collect data and analysed the data to test the hypotheses.

3.4 Experimental method

The confirmatory approach involves the testing of a hypothesis, which is an examination of the root cause. One way of doing this is by experimenting. An experiment is defined as a study in which an intervention is deliberately introduced to observe its effects (Julnes, 2004). In an experiment, an independent variable (the cause) is manipulated, and the dependent variable (the effect) is measured, while any inessential variables are controlled. In this study, the independent variable, "service employees' uniform" was manipulated to measure the dependent variables of "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty." In the third and fourth section of the study, the independent variables of "service employees' gender" and "branded service encounter" were manipulated as well, to measure the dependent variables.

3.5 Scenario

The experimental scenario method, which overcomes the limitations of other methods, is widely used in the hospitality industry now, as it is more cost-effective than experimenting in a real hospitality service environment (Kim & Jang, 2014). This method also allows tight control of the study environment, which improves its internal validity. This study consists of multiple experiments, so different scenarios were developed for each experiment. A texted fine-dining restaurant scenario containing communication between a service employee and the customer was developed with an image of an employee and a restaurant. The image and the content of the text were manipulated according to the study requirements, as mentioned in different studies conducted in this research. All other factors in the scenario such as, restaurant environment & employee face were kept identical through out the study.

3.6 The pilot study

A pilot study was conducted within the researcher's social circle. The purpose of conducting a pilot study, is to inspect the possibility of the method proposed to be used on a greater scale for the study (Leon et al., 2011). In this pilot study, 76 participants took part in completing the survey. The survey link was distributed using a randomisation technique in Qualtrics. Out of the 76 completed, only 36 samples were considered, as the rest failed to clear the screening test or had incomplete data.

3.6.1 Manipulation check

The pilot study allowed an initial manipulation test of the manipulated variables of "employee uniform and branded service encounter. An independent sample T-test was used to check the manipulation. Manipulation was found to be successful for professionality of uniform, where the mean score of professionality of employee uniform was found to be significantly greater than the mean score of unprofessional uniform ($M_{Professional\ uniform}$ = 4.07, $M_{Unprofessional\ uniform}$ =2.2), with conditions; t =3.74, p = 0.002. The mean score of sophisticated branded service encounter was found to be significantly greater than the mean score of unsophisticated branded service encounter ($M_{Sophisticated\ encounter}$ = 4.15, $M_{UNsophisticated\ encounter}$ =3.19),

with conditions t =1.61, p = .130. As the p-value was above .05, manipulation of "branded service encounter" had to be redesigned for the final study.

Table 2 *Independent Sample T-test with Levene's Test*

		N	Mean	St. Deviation	t	p
Professionality of employee uniform	Professional uniform	11	4.07	.87	3.74	.002
	Unprofessional uniform	8	2.2	1.31		
Branded service encounter	Sophisticated encounter	9	4.15	1.0	1.61	.130
	Unsophisticated encounter	8	3.19	1.56		

3.7 Measurement of variables

3.7.1 Measurement of professionality of employee uniform

The scale for "professionality of employee uniform," (Table 3) was extracted from a study on consumer preference of hospitality uniform for destination brands (Tasci et al., 2014). Five Items were adapted and evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree).

In the pilot study, a reliability check was conducted on the scale and two items, "exciting" and "reliable" from the uniform scale had a correlation of .248 and were removed from the scale. Inter-item correlation between 0 and 0.3 indicates a weak relationship between the item in the scale (Ratner, 2009). Cronbach's alpha of the scale after removing the two items was α=0.825. Cronbach alpha values of 0.7 or higher indicate acceptable internal consistency (Taber, 2018).

Table 3 Measurement of Professionality of Employee Uniform

On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the employee's uniform?	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
Professional	1	2	3	4	5
Exciting	1	2	3	4	5
Reliable	1	2	3	4	5
Attractive	1	2	3	4	5
Formal	1	2	3	4	5

3.7.2 Measurement of service employee's perceived competence

The scale of the employee's perceived competence, (Table 4) was extracted from a study by Wu et al. (2015) on employee service competence scales, and Saad and Conway's (2006) study of customer satisfaction in the restaurant industry. Seven Items from both studies were extracted and evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). In the pilot study, a reliability check was conducted on the scale and inter-item correlation was found to be above 0.3, which indicated a strong relationship between the items in the scale. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was α=0.870.

Table 4 *Measurement of Service Employees' Perceived Competence*

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
The employee was very attentive	1	2	3	4	5
The employee was friendly and helpful	1	2	3	4	5
The employee was able to adapt to the situation	1	2	3	4	5
The employee was credible	1	2	3	4	5
The employee was reliable	1	2	3	4	5
The employee was concerned about my needs	1	2	3	4	5
The employee responded promptly to me	1	2	3	4	5

3.7.3 Measurement of branded service encounter

The scale of branded service encounter (Table 5) was developed by referring to the work of Sirianni et al. (2013) on branded service encounters. Three items were developed and

evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree) to test the manipulation of the scenario. In the pilot study, a reliability check was conducted on the scale and inter-item correlation was found to be above 0.3, which indicated a strong relationship between the items in the scale. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was $\alpha=0.731$.

Table 5 *Measurement of Branded Service Encounter*

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
The employee clearly communicated what these restaurants brands stand for	1	2	3	4	5
The employee's communication made it easy for me to create an impression about the brand	1	2	3	4	5
The employee's communication made it easy for me to understand what this restaurant brand represents to customers	1	2	3	4	5

3.7.4 Measurement of customer satisfaction

The scale of customer satisfaction (Table 6) was borrowed from Saad and Conway's (2006) study of customer satisfaction in restaurants. A four item scale was developed and evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). In the pilot study, a reliability check was conducted on the scale and inter-item correlation was found to be above 0.3, which indicated a strong relationship between the items in the scale. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was $\alpha=0.808$.

Table 6 *Measurement of Customer Satisfaction*

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I was happy with the dining experience in this restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
I found the restaurant pleasurable	1	2	3	4	5
Considering the type of restaurant, the quality of service was excellent	1	2	3	4	5
Dining here gave me a strong sense of accomplishment	1	2	3	4	5

3.7.5 Measurement of customer loyalty

The scale of customer loyalty (Table 7) was developed and inspired by the work of Lee et al. (2008) on the moderating role of attractiveness. Five Items were developed and evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 5= strongly agree). In the pilot study, a reliability check was conducted on the scale and inter-item correlation was found to be above 0.3, which indicated a strong relationship between the items in the scale. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was α=0.849.

Table 7 *Measurement of Customer Loyalty*

	Strongly disagree				Strongly agree
I will come back to this restaurant next time	1	2	3	4	5
I will postpone my plans if I find that there are no spaces available at this restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
I would choose to dine at this restaurant over a less costly restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
I will patronise this restaurant	1	2	3	4	5
I will recommend this restaurant to a friend or colleague	1	2	3	4	5

3.8 Demographic data

Demographic information of the participants was also collected in this study. Participants were asked to declare their gender, year of birth, ethnicity, educational qualifications, and occupation. Apart from demographic questions, there were also some general questions which could be used as variables in the study. Participants were asked how frequently they dined in a fine dining restaurant, on what occasions the participants dined in a fine dining restaurant, and what factors of the restaurant the participants valued most.

3.9 Ethical considerations

As this study involved human subjects, ethical issues were considered. The Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) gave ethical approval on 9th July

2020 (see Appendix A). A detailed step by step procedure of the study was submitted for review by AUTEC, and only after the approval of the procedure was granted, were any data collected from participants. The survey started with a welcome note by the researcher and the information sheet (see Appendix B.e   Participant   information sheet), which covered topics described by AUTEC. These were: the purpose of the research, benefits from the research, privacy protection, discomfort and risk if any, and contact details of the supervisor and ethics committee. The participants were informed clearly of the purpose of the study and why they were selected to participate in the study. It was also made clear that they could withdraw from the survey at any point in time until the data were completed, but once data were completed their answers could be neither identified nor withdrawn. Participants were also informed that they could view the result of the research on the New Zealand Tourism Research Institute website, later that year.

Chapter 4. Experimental studies

This chapter elaborates on the three experiment studies conducted to test the hypotheses. Each study starts with the design of the scenario and the data analysis method. This is followed by the hypothesis testing and discussion of the results. A detailed and collective discussion on the results and implications is provided in the final chapter.

4.1 Study 1

Study 1 is focused on testing the impact of professionality of a service employee's uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, and also, the mediation effect of a service employee's perceived competence. In this section of the thesis, the first six hypotheses developed from the literature were tested.
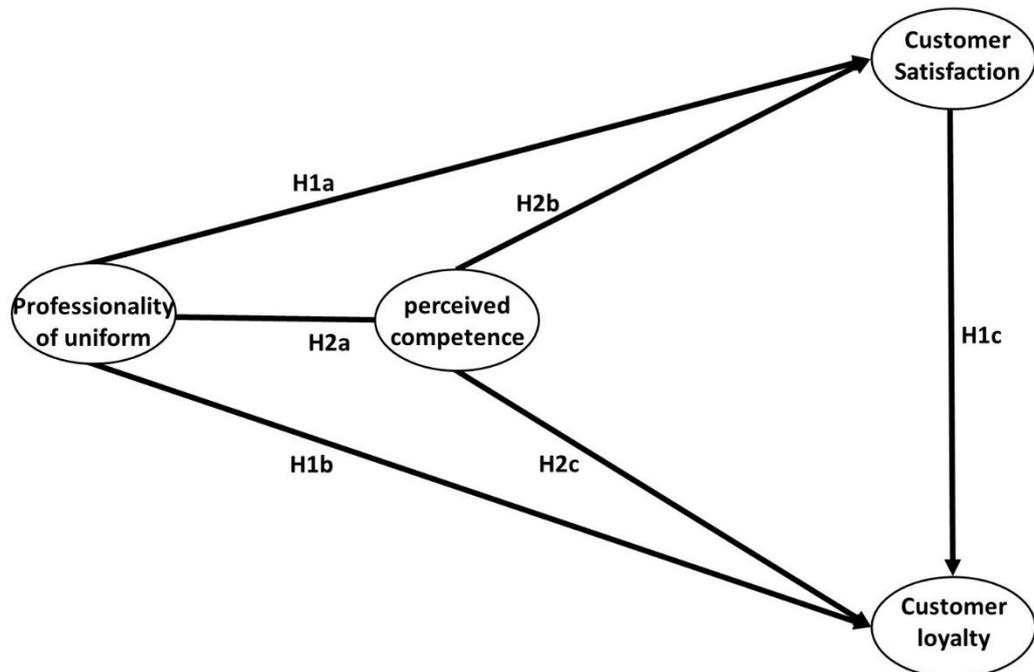
Figure 4 *Conceptual Model - Study 1*

4.1.1 Design

A scenario-based experiment was conducted to test the research hypotheses. Four variables were considered for the first study. "Professionality of service employee uniform" served as the independent variable, while "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty" were the dependent variables; "service employee's perceived competence" was the mediating variable. Two different scenarios were created for this study where the independent variable, "professionality of employee uniform" was manipulated. In both scenarios, the employee and restaurant image remained the same, with the only difference being in the type of uniform. All the dialogues in the conversation were kept the same in each scenario.

The modified scale to measure service employees' perceived competence (Table 5) was used for the mediation analysis of hypotheses H2b and H2c.

Scenario 1 - Fine dining restaurant with an employee wearing a professional uniform

In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a service employee wearing a professional uniform was provided, along with a written description of a conversation between the employee and customer. Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to visualise themselves dining in a fine-dining restaurant environment (see below). After the participants were presented with the image and conversation they were asked to answer a set of questions (see Appendix B.a Survey questions).

Figure 5 *Fine-dining restaurant environment, Palme-dor restaurant Miami From"https://www.miaminewtimes.com/location/palme-dor-6406621. Copyright 2020 by Biltmore.*

"You are walking into a newly opened fine-dining restaurant. A server with a professional uniform welcomes you."

"Welcome to The Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation with us?"
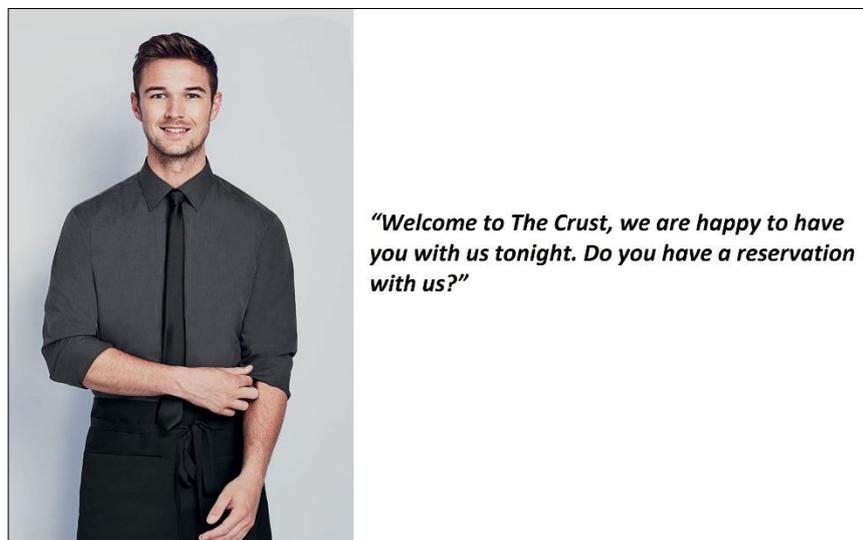
Figure 6 *Welcoming of the employee in a professional uniform, hypothetically generated image of employee*

"After checking the reservation, you are escorted to your table. The server helps you to be seated in your chair and water of your choice is served immediately without any prompt. Within 10 minutes of ordering the same server comes with your soup, along with a bread roll and a cube of butter cut with a knife (not individually wrapped). You

are disappointed in seeing the butter that isn't individually wrapped and feel that it is unhygienic. You mention your concern to the server and the server responded politely."

Figure 7 Conversation of the employee in professional uniform, hypothetically generated image of employee

Scenario 2 - Fine dining restaurant with an employee wearing an unprofessional uniform

In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a service employee wearing an unprofessional uniform was provided, along with a written description of the conversation between the employee and customer (see below). Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to visualise themselves dining in that restaurant   environment (See figure 5).

"You are walking into a newly opened fine-dining restaurant. A server with unprofessional uniform welcomes you."
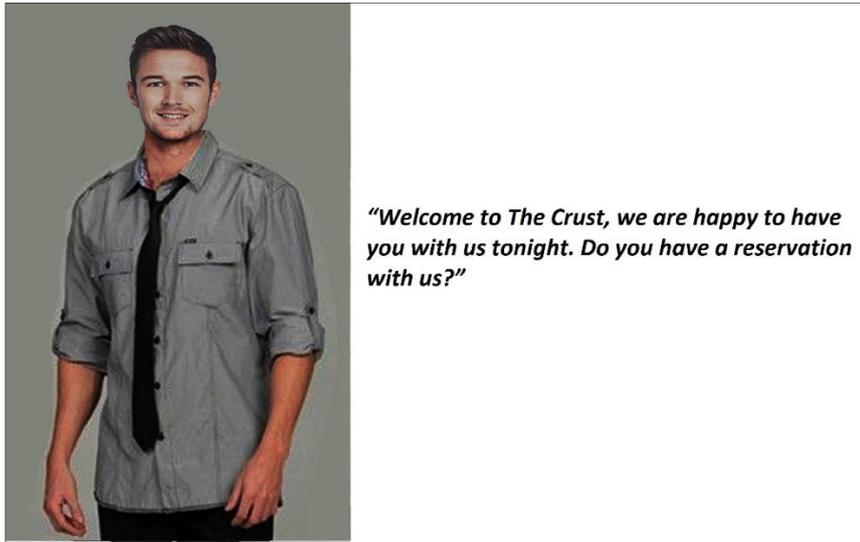
Figure 8 *Welcoming of the employee in a professional uniform, hypothetically generated image of employee*

After checking the reservation, you are escorted to your table. The server helps you to be seated in your chair and water of your choice is served immediately without any prompt. Within 10 minutes of ordering the same server comes with your soup, along with a bread roll and a cube of butter cut with a knife (not individually wrapped). You are disappointed in seeing the butter that isn't individually wrapped and feel that it is unhygienic. You mention your concern to the server and the server responded politely.
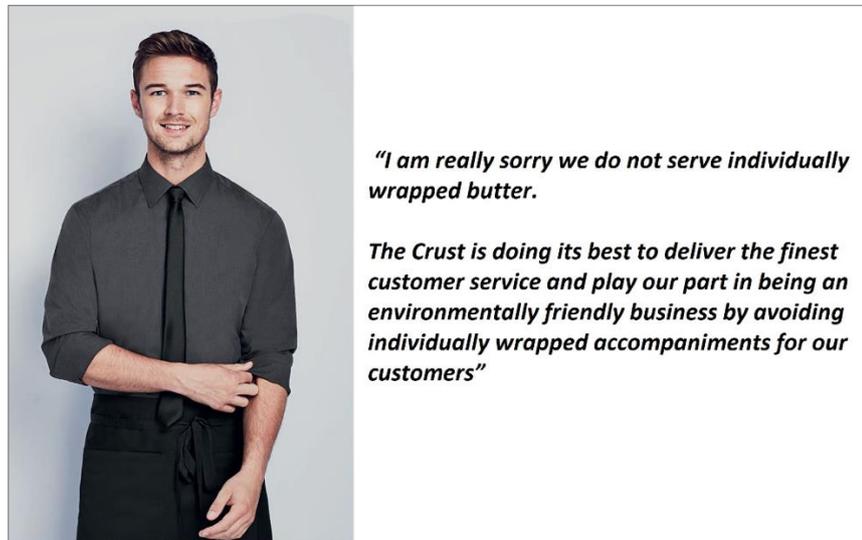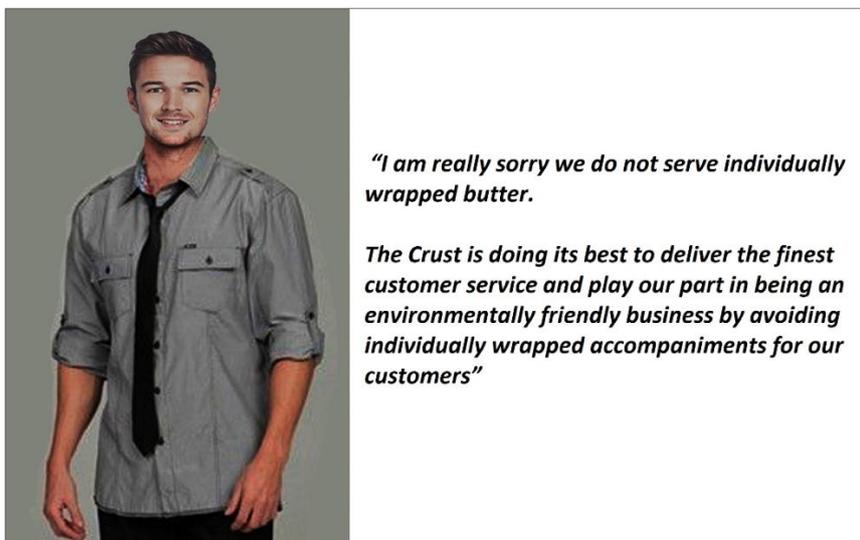

Figure 9 *Conversation of the employee in unprofessional uniform, hypothetically generated image of employee*

4.1.2 Targeted population and sample size

Data collection is a crucial step in supporting and understanding the theoretical framework. It is very important to select the right method for data collection, acquired from the right data source, especially since no amount of scrutiny can make up for inappropriately collected data (Tongco, 2007). As the study was focused on collecting data from customers of a fine dining restaurant, purposive sampling was used. A purposive sampling technique is used to select an unpredicted sample that is chosen depending on the features of the population and the topic of the study (Guarte & Barrios, 2006). The purposive sampling technique, also called "judgment sampling," is the deliberate choice of a participant due to the qualities the participant possesses (Nechval, 2016). Purposive sampling is typically used in qualitative research to classify and select information-rich cases for the greatest exploitation of the existing resources (Patton, 2002). However, it is also the researcher who chooses what needs to be identified and explored to find a population that is ready to deliver the information (Bernard, 2011).

One hundred and fifty four adult participants in the United States of America (USA) were recruited using an online panel from Amazon Mechanical Turk for this experiment. Even though many researchers challenge the quality of Amazon Mechanical Turk data (Goodman et al., 2013; W. Wu & Jia, 2013), referring to issues such as not enough attention being given to survey questions or materials, and language barriers from international participants, there were valid reasons for using this platform for collecting data for this study.

Firstly, to eliminate such issues of concern, the scenario was presented with a combination of the written text in simple, plain English, and a supporting image to make it more interesting to read. Secondly, an attention check question such as: "what gender did you recognise the employee as?" was asked after the scenario was presented, so participants who provided the wrong response could be screened out. Attention check questions in an experiment help ensure participants' consciousness, as they may be unsure about how to answer other questions during the progression of the experiment (Kung et al., 2018). To eliminate the language barrier issue, only participants residing in the USA were selected to participate in the experimental study. Finally, Amazon

Mechanical Turk allows the researcher to reject any inappropriate data with bad quality (Peer et al., 2014), hence only quality data were selected.

The survey link was created using Qualtrics, and became available for participants to view according to the filter that was set to a minimum 5000 hits and 100% approval rating to ensure the quality of the data received.

4.1.3 Data collection

As noted, purposive sampling was used to select the participants. The subject "survey of dining experience" was provided to attract the targeted customer. The survey link was available to the participants for seven days, and one hour was allotted for each participant to complete the survey once started. Two screening questions were provided before displaying the scenario, to screen out participants below the age of 18 and those who had not dined in a fine dining restaurant in the previous six months. A timeframe of six months was selected considering the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. As a result of the screening process, 45 participants that had not dined in a fine dining restaurant were excluded from the 154 participants that were considered for the final analysis.

4.1.4 Data analysis method

This study used SPSS (27th version) and Hayes' process version 3.5. These analysis techniques were used to run various tests such as descriptive analysis, frequency tabulations, correlations, multiple regressions, independent sample T-tests, moderation analysis, and mediation analysis. Initially, a frequency test was conducted to analyse the demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by a Pearson correlation analysis to test the relationship between the independent variables, dependent variables and the mediating variables of the study.

Hypotheses 1a and 1b were tested using an independent sample T-test. Independent sample T-Tests are used to compare the means of two independent groups for determining whether the means of the population are statistically different or not (Kim, 2015). Hayes' process model 4 (Figure 11) was used in testing the hypotheses 2a and 2b.
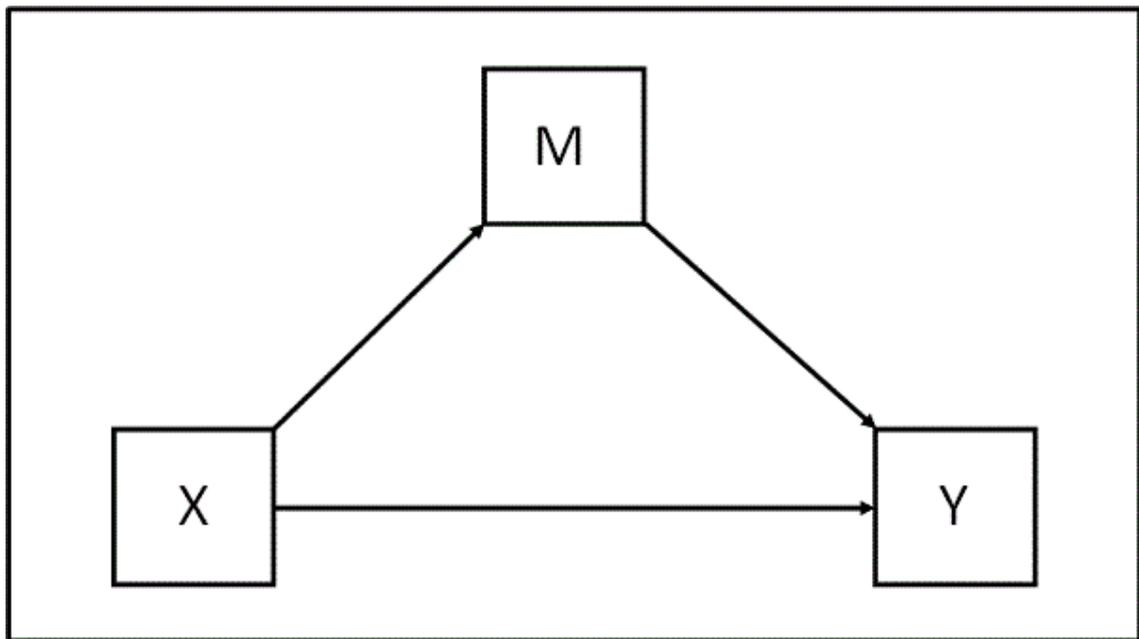
Figure 10 *Hayes' Process Model 4 (Bolin, 2014; Hayes, 2017)*

Hayes' process model 4 is a simple mediation analysis in which X is the independent variable, Y the dependent variable, and M the mediation variable. Process macro 3.5 was used in SPSS to run the mediation effect using process model 4.

4.1.5 Profile of the participants

Of 154 respondents participated in the survey conducted using Amazon Mechanical Turk, only 109 participants qualified for the study (see Table 8). Due to various reasons such as failing to pass the screening test, and survey incompletion, 45 responses were disqualified automatically and their data were not analysed. Only a time frame of one hour was provided for the participants to complete the survey, to ensure the quality of data was good and was not completed while participants were involved in other activities.

Of the 109 participants, 67 were male and 42 were female. The largest age group of participants was those between 31-45 (N=49, %=45), and 66.1% of the participants were occupied in the private sector(N=72). More than half the participants were qualified with a bachelor's degree (N=64, %= 58.7) while only 11 had education level from below college. The largest ethnic group of the participants was that of Whites (N=72, %=66.1) followed by African American (N=19, %=17.4) and Asian (N=11, %=10.1).

Participants were asked about how often they visited a fine dining restaurant, the occasion on which they visited a fine dining restaurant, and the most important factor they valued of the restaurant. The majority of participants went to a fine dining restaurant only sometimes (N=45, 41.3%), 14.1% of the participants (N=16) reported visiting a fine dining restaurant very often, and 38 participants (34.9%) visited a fine dining restaurant often; the remaining 9.2% visited fine dining restaurants very rarely. Of all 109 valid participants, the majority visited a fine dining restaurant for a romantic date (N=47, %=43.1%). Service quality and food quality were considered important factors when visiting a fine dining restaurant and an equal number of the participants (N= 42, %=38.5% and N= 42, %=38.5%). 22.9% said they valued service quality more than other attributes (N=25).

Table 8 *Participants' Profile - Study 1*

Age (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
18-30	42	38.5%
31-45	49	45%
46-60	14	12.8%
61 and above	04	3.7%
Gender (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Male	67	61.5%
Female	42	38.5%
Other	0	0%
Occupation (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Self-employed	26	23.9%
Private sector	72	66.1%
Government sector	5	4.6%
Unemployed	5	4.6%
Student	1	0.9%
Education level (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
High school graduate	10	9.2%
Vocational / Trade / Technical school	01	0.9%
Some college	17	15.6%
Bachelor's degree	64	58.7%
Graduate degree	17	15.6%
Ethnicity (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
White	72	66.1%
Asian	11	10.1%
African American	19	17.4%
Hispanic	1	0.9%
Other	6	5.5%
Dining frequency (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Very often	16	14.7%
Often	38	34.9%
Sometimes	45	41.3%
Rarely	10	9.2%
Dining occasion (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Social gathering	34	31.2%
Official meeting	28	25.7%
Romantic date	47	43.1%
Value factor (Total =109 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Service quality	42	38.5%
Restaurant ambience	25	22.9%
Food quality	42	38.5%

4.1.6 Reliability of measurements

Even though the reliability score of the scale was measured after running the pilot test, it was necessary to conduct the reliability check of the measurement used in the final study. Internal consistency of a Likert scale is mostly indicated by the Cronbach alpha coefficient (Gliem & Gliem, 2003). Cronbach's alpha is expressed as a number between 0 and 1 which describes the internal consistency, that is, the extent to which all the items in a scale measure the same concept and therefore are connected to the inter-relationality of the items within the scale (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011). Alpha value has to be equal to or above 0.7 to be considered acceptable (Connelly, 2011). Table 9 shows that the scale for "professionality of service employees' uniform" had an alpha score of α=0.846, the scale for "service employee's perceived competence" had an alpha score of α=0.898, the scale for "customer satisfaction" had an alpha score of α=0.848, and the scale for "customer loyalty" had an alpha score of α=0.885. This indicated a good internal consistency for all the scales.

Table 9 *Reliability Score of Scales for Study 1*

	Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Professionality of service employees' uniform	.846
2	Service employee's perceived competence	.898
3	Customer Satisfaction	.848
4	Customer loyalty	.885

4.1.7 Pearson correlation

Pearson correlation coefficient is a model metrics that measures the strength and track of a linear relationship between two variables (Nahler, 2009). The mean scores for all variables were calculated using the average sum scores. For example, the mean score of "professionality of service employees' uniform" was calculated using the average sum scores for corresponding measurements that were developed to measure the overall attribute of "professionality of service employees' uniform" (professional, attractive, formal). Table 10 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlations that were found between the study variables.

Table 10 *Pearson Correlation - Study 1*

		M	SD	1	2	3
1	PSEU	3.62	1.18			
2	SEPC	3.99	0.83	.496**		
3	Customer satisfaction	3.78	0.88	.641**	.80**	
4	Customer loyalty	3.62	0.94	.641**	.682**	.909**

Note: **= significant at p<.01, PSEU= Professionality of service employees' uniform, SEPC= Service employees perceived competence.

The mean score of the study variables was found to be within the range of 3.5 and 4.0, with the highest mean score noted for "service employees' perceived competency." Correlation between all the variables was found to be strong with all having a p<.01, and the correlation between "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty" was found to be strongest (r=.909**), which indicated a strong relationship between the variables. "Service employees' perceived competence" and "customer satisfaction" (r=.80**) was the other strong correlation found between the study variables.

4.1.8 Hypothesis testing

In this study, a total of five hypotheses was tested, using different methods. Initially, an independent sample T-test was used to understand the relation between the professionality of service employees' uniform and customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Then the Andrew Hayes process model was executed in SPSS using process macro to test the mediation effect of service employees' perceived competence on the effect of professionality of service employees' uniforms.

4.1.8.1 Independent sample T-test

The independent samples T-Test is used to compare the means of two independent groups, so the researcher can find out if there is statistical evidence that means the associated population is significantly different (Kim, 2015). In this case, the two independent sample groups were participants exposed to a scenario with a) a service employee wearing a professional uniform, and b) a service employee wearing an unprofessional uniform. The means of "customer satisfaction" were compared to see if they were statistically different. It is always important to conduct a Levene's test for equality of variance. Levene's test for quality of variance is used to measure the equality of variance for a variable calculated for two groups. According to Levene's test, if the p-value is less than the significance level (0.05), the chance of equal variance between the

population is rejected and it is concluded that there is a difference in the variance of the population (Gastwirth et al., 2009). An independent sample T-test in SPSS is always accompanied by a Levene's test for equality. Two scenarios were considered as the two samples to compare for the study. Scales developed for customer satisfaction (α=0.848) and customer loyalty (α=0.885) was compared between the groups.

An independent sample T-test was conducted to compare customer satisfaction between the conditions where the service employee was wearing the professional uniform and unprofessional uniform. There was a significant difference in the scores for customer satisfaction. ($M_{professional\ uniform}$=4.06, $SD_{professional\ uniform}$=0.56) ($M_{un\ professional\ uniform}$=3.49, $SD_{un\ professional\ uniform}$=1.05) conditions: t (78.4) =3.53, p = 0.001. These results suggest that the professionality of service employees' uniform does affect customer satisfaction. Specifically, the results suggest that when an employee wears a professional uniform, the satisfaction level of customers increases. This proves the first hypothesis true. That is:

H1a. Level of customer satisfaction will increase when the service employee is wearing a professional uniform.

To test the second hypothesis, a similar test was conducted. In this case, two independent population sets were exposed to different scenarios with an employee wearing a professional uniform and an employee wearing an unprofessional uniform. The means of "customer loyalty" were compared to see if they were statistically different.

The results of independent sample T-tests showed that there was a significant difference in the scores for "customer loyalty," ($M_{professional\ uniform}$=3.88, $SD_{professional\ uniform}$=0.66) ($M_{un\ professional\ uniform}$=3.36, $SD_{un\ professional\ uniform}$=1.11) conditions: t (84.07) =2.90, p = 0.005. These results suggest that the professionality of service employees' uniform does affect customer loyalty. Specifically, the results suggest that when an employee wears a professional uniform, loyalty levels of customers increase. This proves the second hypothesis true. That is:

H1b. Level of customer loyalty will increase when the service employee is wearing a professional uniform.

To test the third hypothesis, a similar T-test was conducted. In this case, two independent population sets were exposed to different scenarios with an employee wearing a professional uniform and an employee wearing an unprofessional uniform. The means of "service employee's perceived competency" were compared to see if they were statistically different.

The results of independent samples T-test showed there was a significant difference in the scores for perceived competency ($M_{professional\ uniform}$=4.17, $SD_{professional\ uniform}$=0.68) ($M_{un\ professional\ uniform}$=3.81, $SD_{un\ professional\ uniform}$=.93) conditions: t (94.52) =2.28, p = 0.025. These results suggest that the professionality of service employees' uniform does affect the service employee's perceived competency. Specifically, the results suggest that when an employee wears a professional uniform, service employees' perceived competency increases. This proves the third hypothesis true. That is:

H2a. Level of service employees' perceived competency will increase when the employee is wearing a professional uniform.

Table 11 *Independent Sample T-test with Levene's Test – Study 1*

		N	Mean	St. Deviation	t	p
Customer satisfaction	Professional uniform	56	4.06	.56	3.53	.001
	Unprofessional uniform	53	3.49	1.05		
Customer Loyalty	Professional uniform	56	3.88	.66	2.90	.005
	Unprofessional uniform	53	3.36	1.11		
Perceived competency	Professional uniform	56	4.17	.68	2.28	.025
	Unprofessional uniform	53	3.81	.93		

4.1.8.2 Mediation analysis

A mediating variable corresponds to the effect an independent variable has on a dependent variable. Mediation analysis is the method that a researcher uses to explain the process by which one variable affects another variable (Parker & Mathews, 2001). Even though there are many methods used to test the indirect effect of an independent

variable on the dependent variable, bootstrapping is considered one of the best options available for scholars (Wu & Jia, 2013).

4.1.8.2 Bootstrapping

Bootstrapping generates an observed illustration of the sample distribution of the indirect effect by treating the obtained sample size as a representation of the population in miniature (Hayes, 2017). One of the interesting facts about bootstrapping is that the interpretations are based on an estimate of the indirect effect itself. The bootstrapping procedure starts with picturing a large number of samples from the same sample size as the original data, with replacement, assuming that the original sample is the population (Wu & Jia, 2013). A percentage-based bootstrap confidence interval is generated by sorting the estimated sample values of the indirect effect from smallest to largest, and if zero is not between the lower and upper bound, then the researcher can claim that the indirect effect is not zero (Hayes, 2012). This study uses a bootstrapping technique using Haye's process model 4.

The following hypotheses were tested using Haye's process in SPSS.

H1c. Customer satisfaction will mediate the effect of professionality of uniform on customer loyalty.

H2b. Employees perceived competence will mediate the effect of professionality of uniform on customer satisfaction.

H2c. Employees perceived competence will mediate the effect of professionality of uniform on customer loyalty.

To test hypothesis H1c, a mediation analysis was conducted using 5000 bootstrap samples with "professionality of service employees' uniform" as an independent variable, "customer loyalty" as the dependent variable, and "customer satisfaction" as a mediator (See Table 12). This study used the scale developed for "professionality of employee uniform," "customer loyalty," and "customer satisfaction," which had Cronbach's alpha values of 0.846, 0.885, 0.848 respectively (Table 9). The direct effect of the independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" on dependent variable "customer loyalty," was found to be significant without the presence of

"customer satisfaction" as the mediator, with b = .51, t = 6.7, p =.00 (p<.05). The direct effect of the independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" on dependent variable "customer loyalty" was found to be insignificant in the presence of "customer satisfaction" as the mediator, with b = .08, t = 1.69, p =.09 (p>.05). The effect of the independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" on dependent variable "customer loyalty" was found to be significant in the presence of a mediator, "customer satisfaction," with indirect effect of b=0.43 and value zero was outside the coefficient of interval (95% CI = 0.29,0.56). These results provided evidence of successful mediation, thus hypothesis H1c was proved correct.

Hypothesis H2b was tested using a mediation analysis with 5000 bootstrap samples. "Professionality of service employees' uniform" was used as the independent variable, "customer satisfaction" as the dependent variable, and "service employees' perceived competence" as the mediator (See Table 13). The direct effect of the independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" with dependent variable "customer satisfaction" was found to be significant without the presence of a mediator "employees' perceived competence," with b = .49, t = 6.07, p =.00 (p<.05). The direct effect of the independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" with dependent variable "customer satisfaction" was also found to be significant in the presence of "employees' perceived competence" as a mediator, with b = .24, t = 5.23, p =.00 (p>.05). The indirect effect of the independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" with dependent variable "customer satisfaction" was also found to be significant with the presence of mediator "employees' perceived competence " as b=0.24 and value zero was outside the coefficient of interval (95% CI = 0.11,0.37). These results provided evidence of partial mediation, thus hypothesis H2a was partially proven.

To test hypothesis H2c, a mediation analysis was conducted using 5000 bootstrap samples with "professionality of service employees' uniform" as a dependent variable, "customer loyalty" as the dependent variable, and "service employees perceived competence" as a mediator (See Table 14). The direct effect of independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" with dependent variable "customer loyalty" without the presence of mediator "employees' perceived competence," was found to

be significant, at b = .51, t = 6.7, p =.00 (p<.05). The direct effect of independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" with dependent variable "customer loyalty" in the presence of mediator "employees' perceived competence" was found to be significant as well, at b = .32, t = 4.73, p =.00 (p>.05). The indirect effect of independent variable "professionality of employee uniform" with dependent variable "customer loyalty" with the presence of mediator "employees' perceived competence" was also found to be significant with indirect effect of b=0.19, and value zero was outside the coefficient of interval (95% CI = 0.08,0.33). These results provide evidence of partial mediation, thus hypothesis H2b is partially proven.

Table 12 *Mediation Analysis Haye's Process - H1c*

	β	SE	*T*	P	LLXI	ULCI
X=PSEU						
Y=CL						
M=CS						
Total effect of PSEU on CL	.51	.059	8.64	.00	.39	.63
Direct effect of PSEU on CL	.08	.041	1.92	.057	-.002	.161
Indirect effect of PSEU on CL	.43	.07*			.29*	.57*

*= Boot, PSEU=Professionality of service employees' uniform, CS=Customer satisfaction, CL= Customer loyalty.

Table 13 *Mediation Analysis Haye's Process - H2a*

	β	SE	*T*	P	LLXI	ULCI
X=PSEU						
Y=CS						
M=SEPC						
Total effect of PSEU on CS	.476	.055	8.63	.00	.37	.59
Direct effect of PSEU on CS	.241	.044	5.44	.00	.15	.33
Indirect effect of PSEU on CS	.237	.665*			.12*	.37*

*= Boot, PSEU=Professionality of service employees' uniform, CS=Customer satisfaction, SEPC= Service employees perceived competence.

Table 14 *Mediation Analysis Haye's Process - H2b*

	β	SE	*T*	P	LLXI	ULCI
X=PSEU						
Y=CL						
M=SEPC						
Total effect of PSEU on CL	.510	.059	8.64	.00	.39	.63
Direct effect of PSEU on CL	.319	.057	5.58	.00	.21	.43
Indirect effect of PSEU on CL	.190	.064*			.08*	.33*

*= Boot, PSEU=Professionality of service employees' uniform, CL= Customer loyalty, SEPC= Service employees perceived competence.

4.1.9 Discussion

This experiment was to determine whether there was a direct or indirect effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and loyalty. Many previous studies on employee uniforms focused on factors such as employee satisfaction, improving communication with the customers, and creating an overall impression of the organisation. These studies found that uniforms are an important element in the hospitality industry, but many failed to discover its direct relation with customer satisfaction and loyalty which are the core determinants of the success of organisations. Hence, the experiments in this study aimed to identify the effect of professionally of uniform on employees' perceived competence, and whether the perceived competence of the employee mediates the effect of professionality of uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Six hypotheses were developed and tested for this purpose.

4.1.10 Summary of key findings

The findings of the study supported the hypotheses tested and all six hypotheses were proven right. To test the hypotheses of the first experiment, only the "employee's uniform" was manipulated in the scenario, and the remaining variables were kept constant. The first hypothesis tested proved that customer satisfaction will be greater when the employee wears a professional uniform, compared to when an employee wears an unprofessional uniform. A similar result was obtained from the testing of the second hypothesis. Wearing a professional uniform created more customer loyalty compared to a situation in which an employee was wearing an unprofessional uniform. These findings support existing theories that organisations create uniforms to gain a

competitive advantage, as employees with a more polished appearance are thought to form better impressions for customers (Cardon & Okoro, 2009), as customers base their perceptions about purchase intentions and service quality on employees' attire when they lack complete information about product or service quality (Baker et al., 1994). The results have contributed to the literature that professionality of employee uniform will have a positive effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

The third hypothesis tested, proved that employees wearing a professional uniform will increase the level of competence perceived by the customer. There was a statistically significant increase in perceived competency when employees were wearing a professional uniform, compared to when they were wearing an unprofessional uniform. This supports theory around the aphorism about judging a book by its cover (see Robinson et al., 2007), along with other studies that state that clothing is considered a powerful tool in the process of building perception (Johnson et al., 2002) and acting as a symbol to display the status of an unknown person (Nelson & Bowen, 2000).

The fourth hypothesis tested, proved the mediation of customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction positively mediates the effect of professionality of uniform on customer loyalty. This supports the theory that true loyalty does not exist unless satisfaction and emotional promises are present (Salegna & Goodwin, 2005) and repurchasing tendency and recommendations of products and services will be greater for satisfied customers (Zeithaml et al., 1996). Further, the results have filled the gap in the literature (see Wu et al., 2015), where the tangible factor of SERVQUAL was omitted in measuring the perceived competency of a front-line employee. The results also stressed the importance of professionality of employee uniform in building customer satisfaction and loyalty, which was neglected in many previous studies.

The final two hypotheses tested, proved that the perceived competency of the employee successfully mediates the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The results support the idea that an improvement in managerial service quality will not impact the actual customer experience of the service and a customer's rating of service quality and satisfaction (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). Instead, the results suggest that an improvement in the

perceived competency of the employee will create changes in the way customers experience the service.

In summary, an employee wearing a professional uniform will add to the atmosphere of a restaurant and create a positive impression on the customer, which will in turn increase the competency perceived by the customer. Overall, this will positively affect the overall satisfaction of the customers and their loyalty towards the establishment.

4.2 Study 2

Study 2 tested the moderation effect of service employees' gender on the impact of service employees' perceived competence on customer satisfaction and loyalty. The following sections will present the test and findings from the 3rd hypothesis developed from the literature. To test the moderation effect of service employees' gender, "service employees' perceived competence" was the independent variable, and the dependent variables were "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty." As competence is perceived from employees' uniform, both the "employee uniform" and moderator required manipulation. Accordingly, four scenarios were developed for this study.
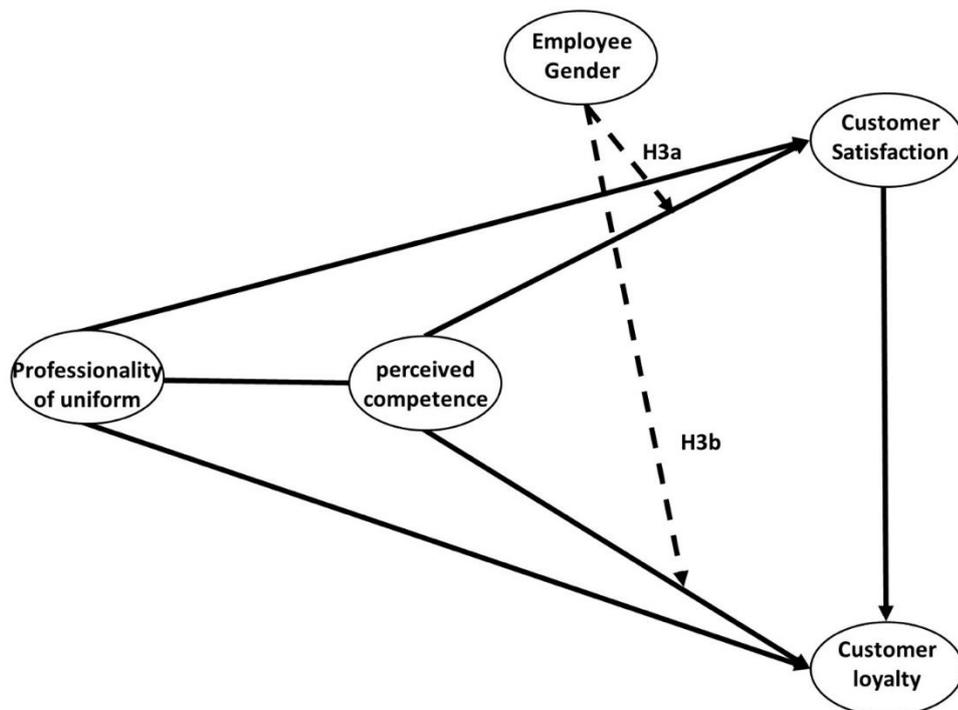
Figure 11 *Conceptual Model - Study 2*

4.2.1 Design

A scenario-based experiment was conducted to test the hypothesis. Four variables were considered: "service employees' perceived competence" as the independent variable, "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty" as the dependent variables, and "service employees' gender" as the moderator. Four different scenarios were created for this study. As the independent variable ''service employees' perceived competence" derived from the professionality of uniform, "professionality of employee uniform" and the moderator "service employees' gender," were manipulated for this study. The scale developed for "service employees' perceived competence "(α=.898), along with the scale for "customer satisfaction" (α=.808) and "customer loyalty" (α=.849) was used for the experiments. Scenarios were recoded (0=female server,1=Male server) to test gender moderation.

Scenario 1: Fine dining restaurant with a male employee wearing an professional uniform
In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a male service employee wearing a professional uniform was provided, along with a text representation of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.c.a. **Scenario 1**.

Scenario 2: Fine dining restaurant with a male employee wearing an unprofessional uniform
In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a male service employee wearing an unprofessional uniform was provided, along with a text description of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.c.b. **Scenario 2**).

Scenario 3: Fine dining restaurant with a female employee wearing a professional uniform
In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a female service employee wearing a professional uniform was provided, along with a text description of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided

with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.c.c. **Scenario 3**)**.**

Scenario 4: Fine dining restaurant with a female employee wearing the unprofessional uniform

In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a female service employee wearing an unprofessional uniform was provided, along with a text description of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.c.d.).

In all the scenarios restaurant images were same, but "uniform" and "gender" were manipulated. The dialogues were kept the same for each scenario.

After examining the image and reading the conversation texts, participants are asked to answer questions (See Appendix B.a.).

4.2.2 Targeted population and sample size

For this experiment, 319 adults in the USA were recruited using the online panel Amazon Mechanical Turk. An attention check question was asked after the scenario was presented to the participants, (what gender did you recognise the employee as?), and participants who gave an incorrect response were screened out. The same question was used for the manipulation check of the gender as well.

Again, the survey link was created using Qualtrics, and made available for participants to view according to the set filters of a minimum of 5000 hits and 100% approval rating to ensure the quality of the data received.

4.2.3 Data collection

A similar data collection method to Study 1 was used for Study 2. Out of 319, 115 participants were screened out as they had not dined in a fine dining restaurant or failed to pass the manipulation check question; a total of 204 completed responses were considered for the analysis.

4.2.4 Data analysis method

This study used SPSS (27th version) and Hayes process version 3.5. These analysis techniques were used to run various tests such as descriptive analysis, frequency tabulations, and correlations. Initially, a frequency test was conducted to analyse the demographic characteristics of the participants, followed by a Pearson correlation analysis to test the relationship between the independent variable, dependent variables, and the moderating variable of each scenario.

A manipulation check was not required as participants who failed to give a correct answer to the manipulation check question had been screened out.

Hypotheses 3a and 3b were tested using Hayes process model 1 (Figure 13).
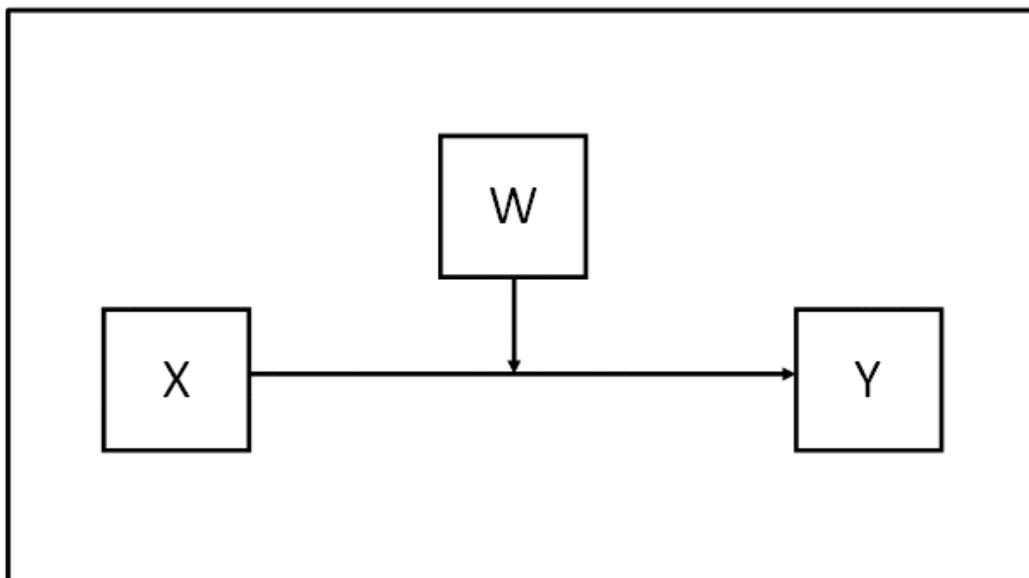
Figure 12 *Hayes Process Model 1 (Bolin, 2014; Hayes, 2012)*

The Hayes process model 1 is a simple moderation analysis in which X is independent variable, Y the dependent variable, and W the moderation variable. Process macro 3.5 was used in SPSS to run the mediation effect using process model 1.

4.2.5 Profile of the participants

A total of 319 respondents participated in the survey. Only 204 participants qualified for the study (see Table 15); 115 were disqualified by Amazon Turk, so their data were not analysed due to various reasons such as failing to pass the screening test, incomplete

survey, or missing data. Only one hour was provided for participants to complete the survey, to make sure the quality of data was good and it was not completed while participants were involved in other activities.

Of the 204 participants 140 were male, 63 female, and one participant marked their gender as "other." The largest age group of participants was that aged between 31 and 45 (N=103, %=50.5). Of all participants, 64.2% were engaged in the private sector (N=131) and 46 were self-employed (%=22.1). More than half of the participants were qualified with a bachelor's degree (N=116, %= 56.9), and just 16 stated "high school graduate" as their highest education level (%= 7.8). As the survey was conducted in the USA, most were White (N=128, %=62.7), followed by Asians (N=26, %=12.7) and African American (N=22, %=10.8). Just 20 participants were Hispanic (%= 9.8), and 6 participants were categorised as "other" (%=0.9).

Participants were asked how often they visited a fine dining restaurant, an occasion they would visit a fine dining restaurant for and the most important factor they valued of the restaurant. Most went to a fine dining restaurant only sometimes (N=109, 53.4%), 10.3% (N=21) reported going very often, 49 participants (24%) visited often, and 12.3% (N=25) visited rarely. Out of 204, the majority of the respondents visited a fine dining restaurant for a romantic date (N=106, %=52.0), followed by those who visited for a social gathering (N= 66, %=32.4%) or official meeting (N= 32, %=15.7%). Surprisingly, a large majority stated that food quality was the most important factor they valued of the restaurant (N=113, %= 55.4), but 48 participants valued service quality (23.5%) and 43 valued restaurant ambience (21.01%) most.

Table 15 *Participants' Profile - Study 2*

Age (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
18-30	69	33.8%
31-45	103	50.5%
46-60	25	12.3%
61 and above	07	3.4%
Gender (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Male	140	68.6%
Female	63	30.9%
Other	1	0.5%
Occupation (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Self-employed	45	22.1%
Private sector	131	64.2%
Government sector	14	6.9%
Unemployed	13	6.4%
Student	1	0.5%
Education level (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Less than high school	01	0.5%
High school graduate	16	7.8%
Vocational / Trade / Technical school	09	4.4%
Some college	36	17.6%
Bachelor's degree	116	56.9%
Graduate degree	26	12.7%
Ethnicity (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
White	128	62.7%
Asian	26	12.7%
African American	22	10.8%
Native Indian	02	1.0%
Hispanic	20	9.8%
Other	06	2.9%
Dining frequency (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Very often	21	10.3%
Often	49	24.0%
Sometimes	109	53.4%
Rarely	25	12.3%
Dining occasion (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Social gathering	66	32.4%
Official meeting	32	15.7%
Romantic date	106	52.0%
Value factor (Total =204 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Service quality	48	23.5%
Restaurant ambience	43	21.1%
Food quality	113	55.4%

4.2.6 Reliability of measurements

Even though the reliability score of the scale was measured after running the pilot test, it was necessary to conduct a reliability check of the measurement used in the final study. The alpha value had to be equal to or above 0.7 to be considered acceptable, which was achieved for all the scales used in this study. Table 16 presents the scale for "service employee's perceived competence" with an alpha score of α=0.898, the scale for "customer satisfaction" with an alpha score of α=0.866, and the scale for" customer loyalty" with an alpha score of α=0.876. This indicates good internal consistency of all the scales.

Table 16 *Reliability Score*

	Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Service employees' perceived competence	.898
2	Customer satisfaction	.866
3	Customer loyalty	.876

4.2.7 Pearson correlation

The Pearson correlation coefficient is a model metrics that measures the strength and track of a linear relationship between two variables (Nahler, 2009). The mean scores for all variables were calculated using the average sum scores. For example, the mean score of "professionality of service employees' uniform" was calculated using the average sum scores for corresponding measurements that were developed to measure the overall attribute of "professionality of service employees' uniform" (professional, attractive, formal). Table 17 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlations found between the study variables.

Table 17 *Pearson Correlation*

		M	SD	1	2
1	SEPC	4.18	0.71		
2	Customer satisfaction	3.90	0.89	.789**	
3	Customer loyalty	3.62	0.90	.596**	.850**

Note: **$p<.01$, SEPC= Service employees perceived competence

The mean score of the study variables was found to be within the range of 3.5 and 4.5, with the highest mean score noted for "service employees' perceived competency." Correlations between all the variables were found to be strong with all having a p<.01 and the correlation between "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty" was found to be strongest (r=.850**), indicating a strong relationship between the variables. "Service employees' perceived competence" and "customer satisfaction" (r=.789**) were also strongly correlated.

4.2.8 Hypothesis testing

Two hypotheses were tested. The Andrew Hayes process model was executed in SPSS using process macro to test the moderation effect of "service employees' gender" on the effect of "service employees' perceived competence" on "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty."

4.2.8.1 Moderation analysis

A moderating variable is a variable that affects the direction or strength between the independent variable and dependent variable. A relation between two variables is said to be moderated when its strength or quality depends on a third variable or set of variables (Hayes, 2017). *Moderation* is otherwise known as "interaction."

The following hypothesis was tested using Haye's process in SPSS.

H3a. *Service employees' gender will moderate the effect of service employees' perceived competence on customer satisfaction.*

H3b. *Service employees' gender will moderate the effect of service employees' perceived competence on customer Loyalty.*

To test hypothesis H3a, a moderation analysis was conducted using 5000 bootstrap samples with "service employees' perceived competence" as an independent variable, "customer satisfaction" as dependent variable, and "service employees' gender" as a moderator.

Table 18 *H3a- Moderation Analysis*

	β	SE	*T*	P	LLCI	ULCI
X=SEPC **Y**=CS **W**=SEG						
R² = 0.64						
F = 100.2						
DF = 3,200						
P =.00						
SEPC	1.45	.191	7.57	.000	1.07	1.82
SEG	.172	.078	2.20	.029	.017	.33
SEPC X SEG	-.28	.13	-2.15	0.03	-.535	-.02
When SEG=0	1.17	.08	14.42	.000	1.01	1.32
When SEG=1	.89	.10	8.78	.000	.69	1.09

SEPC= Service employees perceived competence, CS=Customer Satisfaction, SEG=Service employees' gender

The overall model was found to be significant, with F (3,200) =100.2, P<0.001, R2=.64. The independent variable (predictor) of "service employees' perceived competence" (β=1.45, t [200] =7.57, P=.000) was found to be significant, which means for every unit increase in "service employees' perceived competence," there was an increase of 1.45 units in "customer satisfaction." The moderator "service employees' gender" (β=.172, t [200] =2.20, P=.029) was found to be significant, and the interaction effect of interaction variable "service employees' perceived competence X service employees' gender' was found to be significant at β=-.28, t (200) =-2.15, P=.030.

The conditional effect of "service employees' perceived competence" at a different level of "service employees' gender" was tested. When the value of gender was low (0), the effect of "service employees' perceived competence" of β=1.17, t (200) =14.42, P=.000 is found to be significant. That is, when "service employees' gender" is 0, every unit of "service employees' perceived competence" will have the 1.17-unit effect of "customer satisfaction." When the value of "gender" is high (1), the effect of "service employees' perceived competence" of β=.89, t (200) =8.78, P=.000 was found to be significant. Hence, when a "service employees' gender" is 1, every unit of "service employees' perceived competence" will have a .89-unit effect on "customer satisfaction." This result shows that when "service employees' gender" is female, the effect of 1 unit of "service employees' perceived competence" will be a .28 unit higher than when the "employees'

gender" is male. Hence, hypothesis 3a was proven. This is further explained with the slope presented in Figure 14.
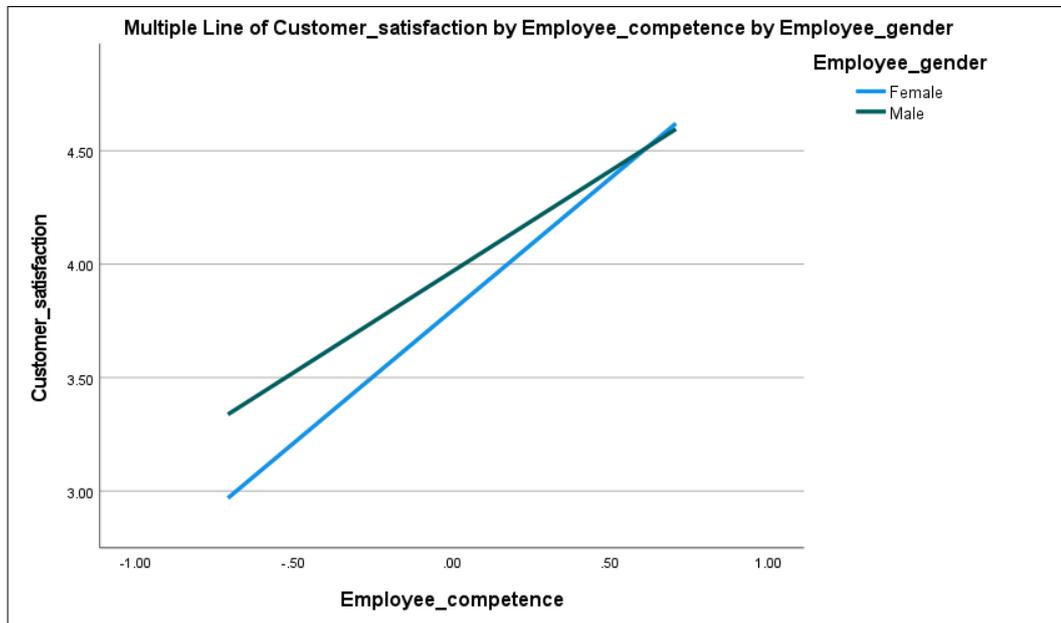
Figure 13 *H3a Slope - Gender Moderation, Competence-Satisfaction*

To test hypothesis H3b, a moderation analysis was conducted using 5000 bootstrap samples with "service employees' perceived competence" as an independent variable, "customer loyalty" as dependent variable, and "service employees' gender" as a moderator.

Table 19 *H3b -Moderation Analysis*

	β	SE	*T*	P	LLCI	ULCI
X=SEPC **Y**=CL **W**=SEG						
R² = 0.40						
F = 30.59						
DF = 3,200						
P =.00						
SEPC	1.03	.269	3.83	.000	.499	1.56
SEG	.387	.105	3.69	.000	.180	.59
SEPC X SEG	-.14	.176	-.77	0.44	-.482	.210

SEPC= Service employees' perceived competence, CL= Customer loyalty, SEG= Service employees' gender

The overall model was found to be significant, with $F_{(3,200)} = 30.59$, $P<0.001$, $R^2 = .40$. The independent variable (predictor) of "service employees' perceived competence" ($\beta=1.03$, t [200] =3.83, P=.000) is found to be significant, which means for every one unit increase in "service employees' perceived competence," there was an increase of 1.03 units in "customer loyalty." The moderator, "service employees' gender" ($\beta=.387$, t [200] =3.69, P=.000) was found to be significant. The interaction effect of interaction variable "Service employees' perceived competence X service employees' gender" was not significant with $\beta=-.14$, t (200) =-.77, P=.44. Since the interaction effect of the interaction variable was not significant, there was no requirement for further analysis. Hence hypothesis 3b was not supported, as explained with the slopes in Figure 15.
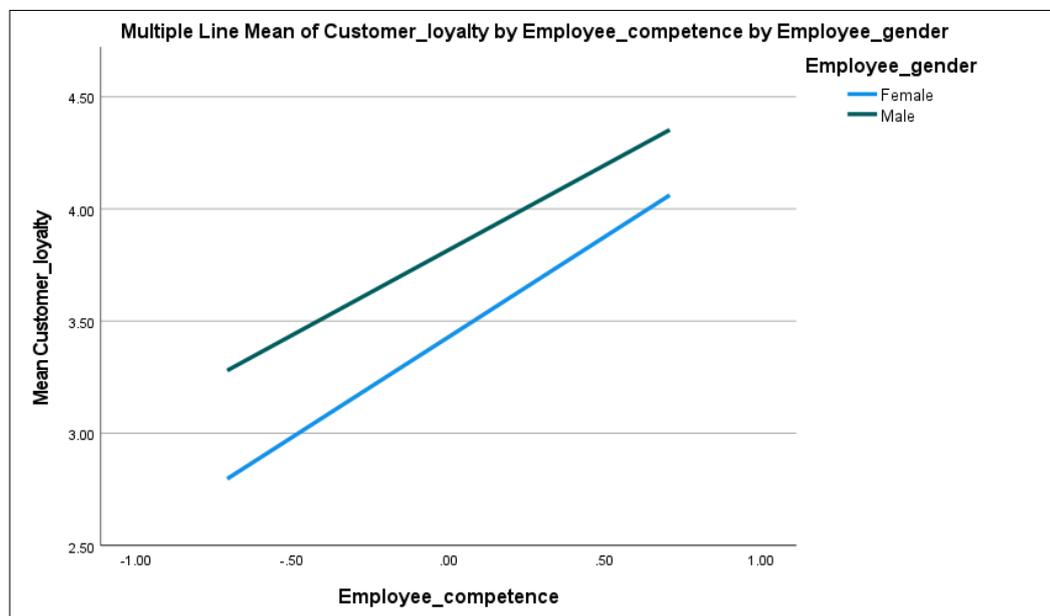
Figure 14 *H3b Slope- Gender Moderation, Competence-Loyalty*

4.2.9 Discussion

The purpose of this experiment was to identify the role of gender in moderating the effect of perceived competency of the employee, which will improve the overall satisfaction of the customer and increase the customer's loyalty towards the organisation. Previous research on gender in the hospitality industry focused on the customers' gender and the effect of employee gender on tipping. Many scholars have discussed occupation segregation by gender and problems faced by female employees in the industry. However, many failed to focus on the effect of gender on customer

satisfaction and loyalty. Two hypotheses were developed to fill this gap in the literature and were tested for moderation effect using Haye's process in SPSS.

4.2.10 Summary of key findings

Of the two hypotheses tested, one was proven statistically significant. Hypothesis H3b, which was developed and tested to identify the moderation effect of "employee gender" on "customer loyalty" was found to be statistically insignificant, whereas hypothesis H3a, which was developed and tested to identify the moderation effect of "employee gender" on "customer satisfaction," was found to be statistically significant. This fills the gap in the literature on how the gender of the server affects the overall satisfaction of the customer. Even though it was not statistically proven, the results can serve to disregard the theory of homophily (Cooper, 1997), as 68.6% of the participants were male and 30.9% were female. Even though there were fewer female participants, female servers created more perceived competency, as shown in the results of the hypothesis test. Hence this is consistent with findings from previous research, that found female servers were tipped more than were male servers (Lynn & Simons, 2000) due to their physical attractiveness, and the phenomenon of male customers tipping to show their social and economic status (Lynn & Simons, 2000).

The results suggest that physical attractiveness of female employees will help organisations satisfy customers in the short term, but will not serve as a long-term success plan for organisations where loyalty is important. Loyalty is the result of repeated positive experiences which lead customers back to organisations to repurchase products or services. However, it can be also noted that loyalty is the outcome of satisfaction, which is proven from the previous study (Study 1) in this research. Hence, there are chances that employee gender could have a positive effect on customer loyalty in the long term, although the results of this study showed otherwise. This can also be visible in the slope illustrated from the results (Figure 9), as the lines representing male and female are not exactly parallel, meaning they may meet at some point. This provides a reason for further study to be conducted on employee gender and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry.

4.3 Study 3

Study 3 is focused on testing the moderation effect of branded service encounters in relation to the impact of service employees' professionality of uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The 4th hypothesis developed from the literature is tested in Study 3. To test the moderation effect of the branded service encounter, "service employees' professionality of uniform" is the independent variable, and the dependent variables are "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty." The "professionality of employees' uniform" and the moderator required manipulation; hence 4 scenarios were developed for this study.
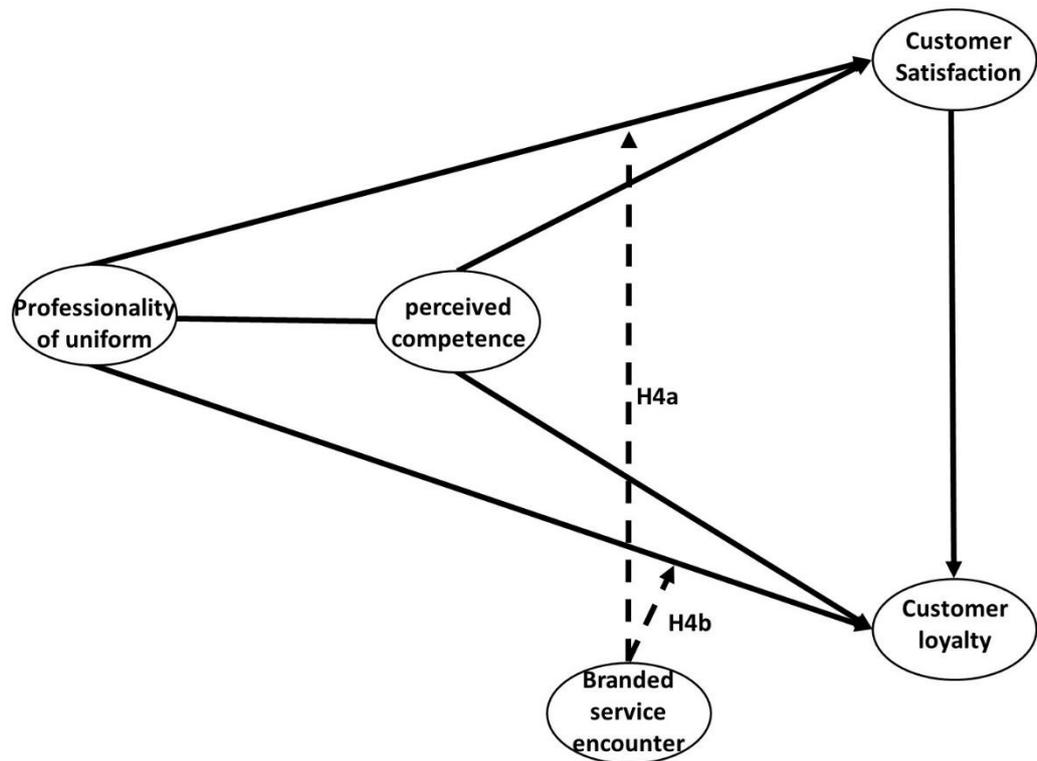

Figure 15 Conceptual Model - Study 3

4.3.1 Design

A scenario-based experiment was conducted to test the hypothesis, and four variables were considered: "professionality of employee uniform" was the independent variable, "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty" were the dependent variables, and "branded service encounter" was the moderator. Four different scenarios were created for this study, in which independent variables "professionality of employee uniform" and moderator "service employees' gender" were manipulated. The scale developed for "professionality of employee uniform" (α=.825), along with the scale for "customer satisfaction" (α=.808) and "customer loyalty" (α=.849) was used for the experiment. Scenarios were dummy coded into 0 and 1, where 0 was an "unsophisticated branded service encounter" and 1 was a "sophisticated branded service encounter," to test the moderation effect.

Scenario 1: Fine dining restaurant with an employee wearing a professional uniform in a sophisticated branded service encounter
In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a male service employee wearing a professional uniform was provided, along with a written description of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.d.a. **Scenario 1**).

Scenario 2: Fine dining restaurant with an employee wearing an unprofessional uniform in a sophisticated branded service encounter
In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a male service employee wearing an unprofessional uniform was provided, along with a text representation of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.d.b.).

Scenario 3: Fine dining restaurant with an employee wearing a professional uniform in an unsophisticated branded service encounter
In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a female service employee wearing a professional uniform was provided, along with a text representation of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided

with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.d.c.).

Scenario 4: Fine dining restaurant with an employee wearing an unprofessional uniform in an unsophisticated branded service encounter
In this scenario, a hypothetically generated picture of a female service employee wearing an unprofessional uniform was provided, along with a text representation of the conversation between the employee and a customer. Participants were also provided with an image of the restaurant to help them visualise themselves dining in that environment (See Appendix B.d.d.).

In all the scenarios, the employee and the restaurant in the images were the same, and only the "uniform" was manipulated. The dialogues in the conversations were kept the same for each scenario. After examining the images and reading the conversation text, participants are asked to answer questions (see Appendix B.a.).

4.3.2 Targeted population and sample size

For this experiment, 286 adults in the USA were recruited using the online panel Amazon Mechanical Turk. An attention check question was asked after the scenario was presented to the participants (what gender did you recognise the employee as?), and participants have gave incorrect responses were screened out. Amazon Turk allowed for uploading the survey link using Qualtrics, which was available for participants to view according to the filter setting set by the researcher. Filters of a minimum of 5000 hits and 100% approval rating were used to ensure the quality of data received.

4.3.3 Data collection

A similar data collection method to those used in Studies 1 and 2 was used for Study 3. Of 286 responder, 85 participants were screened out as they had not dined in a fine dining restaurant or failed to pass the attention check question; a total of 201 completed responses were considered for analysis.

4.3.4 Data analysis method

This study used SPSS (27th version) and Hayes process macro 3.5. These analysis techniques were used to run various tests such as descriptive analysis, frequency tables,

correlations, and moderation analyses. Initially, a frequency test was conducted to analyse the demographic characteristics of the participants. A manipulation check was conducted using the branded service encounter scale, and a Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to test the relationship between the independent variables, dependent variables, and the moderation variables of the study.

Hypotheses 4a and 4b were tested using Hayes process model 1 (Figure 7). Hayes process model 1 is a simple moderation analysis in which X is the independent variable, Y is the dependent variable, and W is the moderation variable. Process macro 3.5 was used in SPSS to run the mediation effect using process model 1.

4.3.5 Profile of the participants

A total of 286 participants participated in the survey using Amazon Turk. Only 201 participants qualified for the study; 85 were disqualified by Amazon Turk and their data were not analysed due to various reasons such as failing to pass the screening test, incomplete survey, or missing data. Only one hour was provided for participants to complete the survey, to make sure the quality of data was good and the survey was not completed while participants were involved in other activities.

Of the 201 participants, 130 were male, and 71 were female. The largest age group of participants was equally distributed between 31 and 45 (N=81, %=40.3), 65.2% of the participants were engaged in the private sector (N=131), and 49 participants were self-employed (%=24.4). More than half of the participants were qualified with a bachelor's degree (N=112, %= 55.7), and 21 stated their highest education level as high school graduate (%= 10.4). As the survey was conducted in the USA, most of the participants were White (N=152, %=75.6).

Participants were asked about how often they visited a fine dining restaurant, what occasion they would visit fine dining restaurant for, and the most important factor they valued of the restaurant. Most participants went to a fine dining restaurant only sometimes (N=101, 50.2%), only 9.5% of the participants (N=19) reported going very often, 52 (25.9%) visited often, and 14.4% (N=29) visited fine dining restaurants rarely. Of 201, the majority visited a fine dining restaurant for a romantic date (N=80, %=39.8), followed by those who went a social gathering (N= 76, %=37.8%) or official meeting (N=

45, %=22.4%). Surprisingly, a large majority valued food quality when asked about the most important factor they valued about the restaurant (N=103, %= 51.2). Service quality and restaurant ambience were given equal importance by participants (N=49, %=24.2).

Table 20 *Participants' Profile*

Age (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
18-30	81	40.3%
31-45	81	40.3%
46-60	29	14.4%
61 and above	10	5.0%
Gender (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Male	130	64.7%
Female	71	35.3%
Other	0	0.5%
Occupation (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Self employed	49	24.4%
Private sector	131	65.2%
Government sector	10	5%
Unemployed	8	4%
Student	3	1.5%
Education level (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Less than high school	00	0.0%
High school graduate	21	10.4%
Vocational / Trade / Technical school	08	4%
Some college	33	16.4%
Bachelor's degree	112	55.7%
Graduate degree	27	13.4%
Ethnicity (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
White	152	75.6%
Asian	21	10.4%
African American	20	10%
Native Indian	00	0%
Hispanic	05	2.5%
Other	03	1.5%
Dining frequency (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Very often	19	9.5%
Often	52	25.9%
Sometimes	101	50.2%
Rarely	29	14.4%
Dining occasion (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Social gathering	76	37.8%
Official meeting	45	22.4%
Romantic date	80	39.8%
Value factor (Total =201 (%=100%), Missing=0 (%=0%)		
Service quality	49	24.4%
Restaurant ambience	49	24.4%
Food quality	103	51.2%

4.3.6 Manipulation check

Since the manipulation check of "branded service encounter" was not successful in the pilot test, it was necessary to conduct a manipulation check before proceeding with the final study. It was mainly the dialogue spoken by the service employee that was manipulated in the scenario. When this dialogue is presented in a paragraph format, the participants tended to skip when reading, and it was assumed that this was the cause of the manipulation failure. Therefore, before the final study, the survey was redesigned with dialogues separated with enough space for the participants to read them easily. Manipulation was found to be successful after the alteration was made in the scenario, as the mean score of "sophisticated branded service encounter" was found to be greater than the mean score of "unsophisticated branded service encounter"r ($M_{Sophisticated\ encounter}$ = 3.9, $M_{UNsophisticated\ encounter}$ =3.1), with conditions of t =-5.68, p = .000.

Table 21 *Independent sample T-test with Levene's test*

		N	Mean	St. Deviation	t	p
Branded service encounter	Sophisticated encounter	92	3.9	.84	-5.68	.000
	Unsophisticated encounter	109	3.1	1.12		

4.3.7 Reliability of measurements

Even though the reliability score of the scale was measured for the previous studies, it was considered necessary to conduct a reliability check of the measurement used in this study. The alpha value hds to be equal to or above 0.7 to be considered acceptable, which was achieved by all the scales used for this study. Table 22 shows that the scale for "professionality of service employees' uniform" had an alpha score of α=0.846, the scale for "customer satisfaction" had an alpha score of α=0.889, and the scale for "customer loyalty" had an alpha score of α=0.9.3. This indicated good internal consistency of all the scales.

Table 22 *Reliability Score*

	Scale	Cronbach's Alpha
1	Professionality of service employees' uniform	.846
2	Customer satisfaction	.889
3	Customer loyalty	.903

4.3.8 Pearson correlation

The Pearson correlation coefficient is a model metrics that measures the strength and track of a linear relationship between two variables (Nahler, 2009). The mean scores for all variables were calculated using the average sum scores. Table 8 shows the mean, standard deviation, and correlations found between the study variables.

Table 23 *Pearson Correlation*

		M	SD	1	2	3
1	PSEU	3.49	1.1			
2	Customer satisfaction	3.41	0.98	.490**		
3	Customer loyalty	3.22	1.00	.501**	.895**	

Note: **= significant at p<.01, PSEU= Professionality of service employees' uniform

The mean score of the study variables was found to be within the range of 3.2 and 3.5, with the highest mean score noted for "professionality of service employees' uniform." Correlations between all the variables were found to be strong with all having a p<.01. The correlation between "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty" was found to be strongest (r=.895**), which indicated a strong relationship between the variables. "Professionality of service employees' uniform" and "customer loyalty" (r=.501**) was the other strong correlation found between the study variables.

4.3.9 Hypothesis testing

Two hypotheses were tested. The Andrew Hayes process model was executed in SPSS using the process macro to test the moderation effect of "branded service encounter" on the effect of "professionality of service employees' uniform" on "customer satisfaction" and "customer loyalty."

4.3.9.1 Moderation analysis

A moderating variable is a variable which affects the direction or strength between the independent and dependent variable. A relation between two variables is said to be moderated when its strength or quality depends on a third variable or set of variables (Hayes, 2017).

The following hypotheses were tested using Haye's process in SPSS.

H4a. Branded service encounter will moderate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction.

H4b. Branded service encounter will moderate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer loyalty.

To test hypothesis H4a, a moderation analysis was conducted using 5000 bootstrap samples with "professionality of service employees' uniform" as the independent variable, "customer satisfaction" as the dependent variable, and "branded service encounter" as the moderator (Table 24).

Table 24 *H4a - Moderation Analysis*

	β	SE	*T*	P	LLCI	ULCI
X=PSEU **Y**=CS **W**=BSE						
R² = 0.32						
F = 35.55						
DF = 3,197						
P =.00						
PSEU	.29	.08	3.71	.000	.140	.457
BSE	.49	.121	4.09	.000	.257	.735
PSEU X BSE	.25	.130	1.90	.059	-.01	.505
BSE = 0	.298	.080	3.71	.000	.140	.457
BSE = 1	.547	.103	5.33	.000	.344	.749

PSEU= Professionality of service employees' uniform, CS=Customer Satisfaction, BSE= branded service encounter

The overall model was found to be significant with F (3,197) =35.55, P<0.01, R2=.32. The independent variable (predictor) "service employee's professionality of uniform" (β=.29, t [197] =3.71, P=.000) was found to be significant, which means for every unit

increase in "service employees' professionality of uniform," there was an increase of .29 units in "customer loyalty"; the "branded service encounter" as moderator (β=.49, t [197] =4.09, P=.00) was found to be significant. The interaction effect of interaction variable "Service employees' professionality of uniform X branded service encounter" was found to be significant at β=.25, t (197) =1.90, P=. 059.

Even though P was slightly above the required significance level of 0.05, the conditional effect of "service employees' professionality of uniform" at a different level of "branded service encounter" was found to be significant. When the value of "branded service encounter" was 0, the effect of "service employees' professionality of uniform" (β=.298, t [197] =3.71, P=.000) was found to be significant. That is, when the "branded service encounter" is 0, every unit of "service employees' professionality of uniform" will have a .298-unit effect on "customer satisfaction." When the value of "branded service encounter" is 1, the effect of "service employees' professionality of uniform" (β=.547, t [197] =5.33, P=.000) was found to be significant. When "branded service encounter" is 0, every unit of "service employee professionality of uniform" will have a .547-unit effect on "customer loyalty." Hence, hypothesis 4a was proven, as explained by the slope in Figure 17.
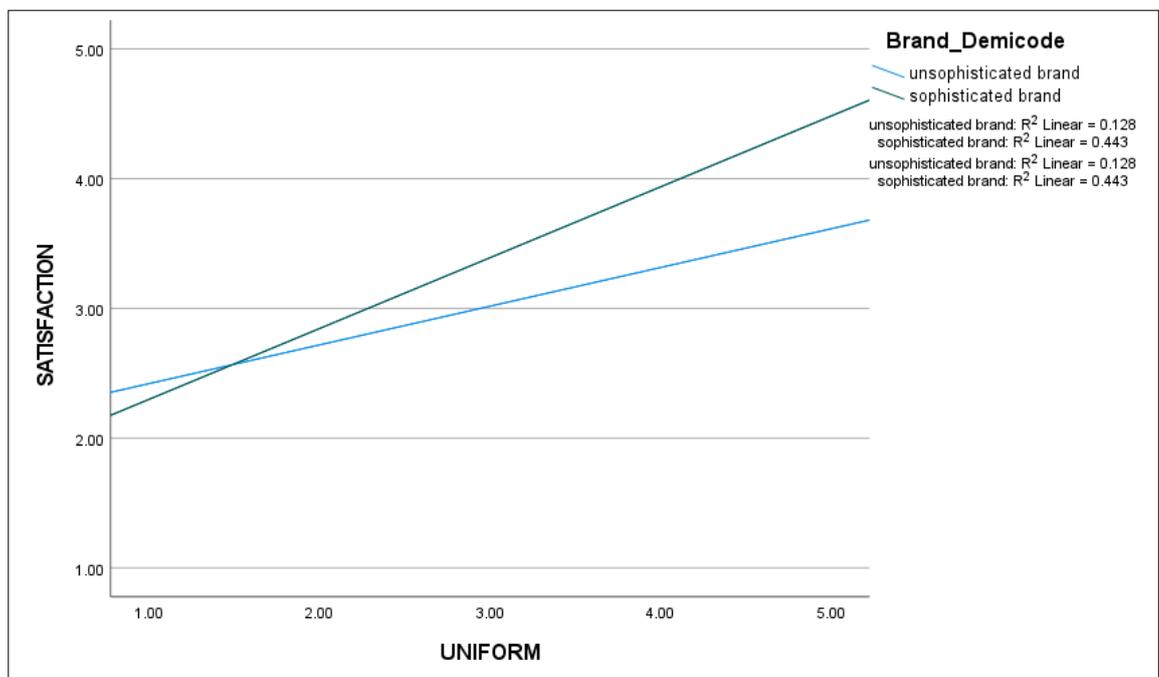

Figure 16 *H4a Slope - Branded Service Encounter, Uniform-Satisfaction*

To test hypothesis H4b, a moderation analysis was conducted using 5000 bootstrap samples with "service employees' professionality of uniform" as the independent variable, "customer loyalty" as the dependent variable, and "branded service encounter" as the moderator (Table 25).

Table 25 *H4b- Moderation Analysis*

	β	SE	*T*	P	LLCI	ULCI
X=PSEU						
Y=CL						
W=BSE						
R² = 0.36						
F = 39.83						
DF = 3,197						
P =.00						
PSEU	.31	.077	3.99	.000	.154	.456
BSE	.60	.118	5.04	.000	.363	.829
PSEU X BSE	.26	.123	2.17	.032	.024	.509
BSE = 0	.305	.076	3.99	.000	.154	.456
BSE = 1	.571	.096	5.93	.000	.381	.761

PSEU= Professionality of service employees' uniform, CL=Customer Loyalty, BSE= branded service encounter

The overall model was found to be significant with F (3,197) =39.83, P<0.01, R2=.36. The independent variable (predictor), "service employees' professionality of uniform" (β=.31, t [197] =3.99, P=.000) was found to be significant, which means for every unit increase in "service employees' professionality of uniform," there was an increase of .31 units in "customer loyalty." The moderator, "branded service encounter" (β=.60, t [197] =5.04, P=.00) was found to be significant. The interaction effect of interaction variable "service employees' professionality of uniform X branded service encounter" was found to be significant with β=-.26, t (197) =2.17, P=. 032.

The conditional effect of "service employee's professionality of uniform" at a different level of "branded service encounter" was found to be significant. When the value of "branded service encounter" was 0, the effect of "service employee's professionality of uniform" was β=.305, t (197) =3.99, P=.000. That is, when the "branded service encounter" is 0, every unit of "service employee professionality of uniform" will have

.305-unit effect on "customer satisfaction." When the value of "branded service encounter" was 1, the effect of "service employee's professionality of uniform" (β=.571, t [197] =5.93, P=.000) was found to be significant. When "branded service encounter" is 0, every unit of service employee professionality of uniform will have .571-unit effect on "customer loyalty." Hence, hypothesis 4a was not supported, as explained by the slope in Figure 18.
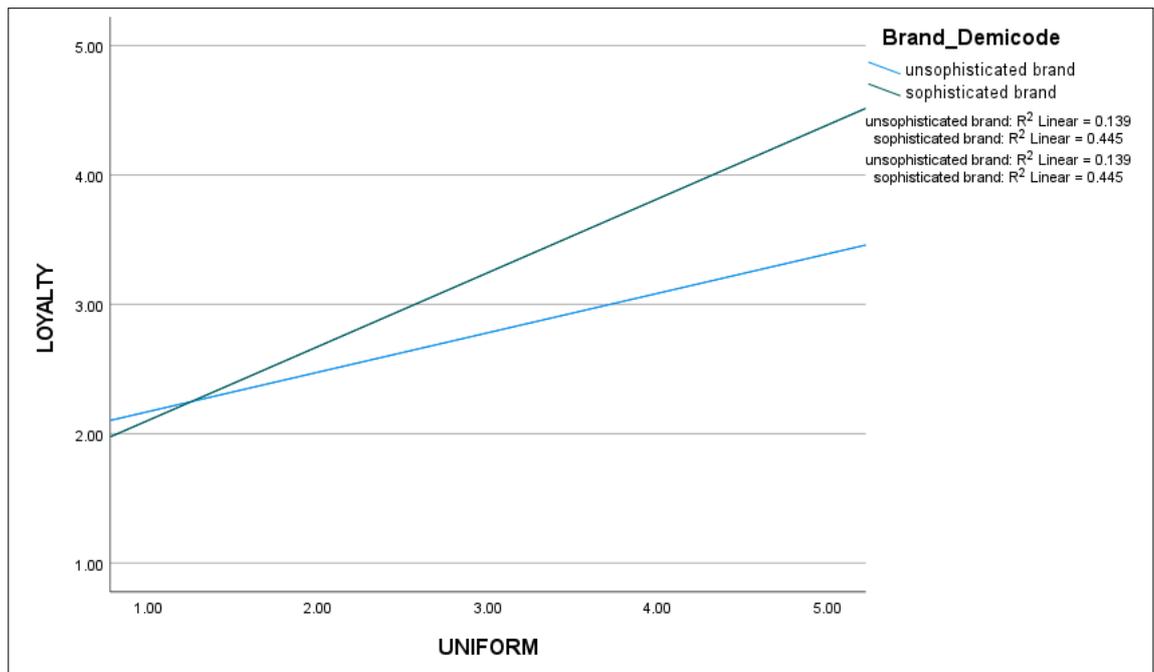

Figure 17 *H4b Slope - Branded Service Encounter, Uniform-Loyalty*

4.3.10 Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand if the branded service encounter of a service employee moderates the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The experiment was scenario-based within a fine dining restaurant environment. Four scenarios were developed, with the first two showing an employee delivering a sophisticated branded service encounter in both professional uniform and unprofessional uniform. The remaining two scenarios showed an employee delivering an unsophisticated branded service encounter in a professional uniform and unprofessional uniform. The "uniform" was also manipulated in the study in which the moderation of "professionality of employee uniform" was tested. Two hypotheses were developed from the literature to be tested for this study.

4.3.11 Summary of key findings

The first hypothesis tested if branded service encounters moderate the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction. The result showed that branded service encounters successfully moderate this path, revealing the importance of branding in a service encounter. This finding supports the existing literature that states that exceptional service begins well before the dining experience through a personalised welcome from a restaurant host (Arora, 2012). Branding in service encounter starts from the very first moment a customer is being welcomed in a restaurant. Personal interactions between an employee and customer are a more powerful way of communicating the brand meaning than a marketing strategy of mass communication through advertising (Sirianni et al., 2013). A similar result was obtained from the second hypothesis tested, as the branded service encounter successfully moderated the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer loyalty. Results of this study support the existing literature. When an employee delivers service aligned with guests' expectations, they feel the consistency between the externally communicated brand promise and their brand experience. Their experience will lead them to maintain a positive attitude towards the brand (Henkel et al., 2007).

Chapter 5. General discussion

This chapter discusses the overall results of the studies conducted in this research. This discussion is followed by an overview of the implications of the study with both theoretical and managerial implications explained in detail. The next section lists the limitations of the research and recommendations for future research before ending with the conclusion.

5.1 Overall summary of the results

A total of 10 hypotheses were developed from the literature and tested in this study. Of all the hypothesis tested, nine were supported and one was not proven. The results prove that the professionality of employee uniform has a major role in creating customer satisfaction in the hospitality industry. These results support all the literature discussed in the literature review. The findings also support many studies which discuss the ambience of the restaurant contributing to overall customer satisfaction, while also filling the gap in which researchers did not highlight the role of employee uniform in creating ambience.

The results of this study also identified that professionality of employee uniform creates a better perception of an employee's competency. A professionally dressed employee was judged to be more competent than was those unprofessionally dressed, supporting the idea that a book is judged by its cover (Robinson et al., 2007). The study also proved that customer satisfaction positively mediates the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer loyalty, which suggests that customer loyalty is the result of customer satisfaction. Further, it was proved that employee gender and branded service encounter have important roles in improving customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Employee gender moderated the effect of service employees' perceived competence on customer satisfaction, but did not have any moderation effect on customer loyalty, which is the long term effect of customer satisfaction, whereas branded service encounters successfully moderated both the paths tested and positively moderated the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and loyalty.
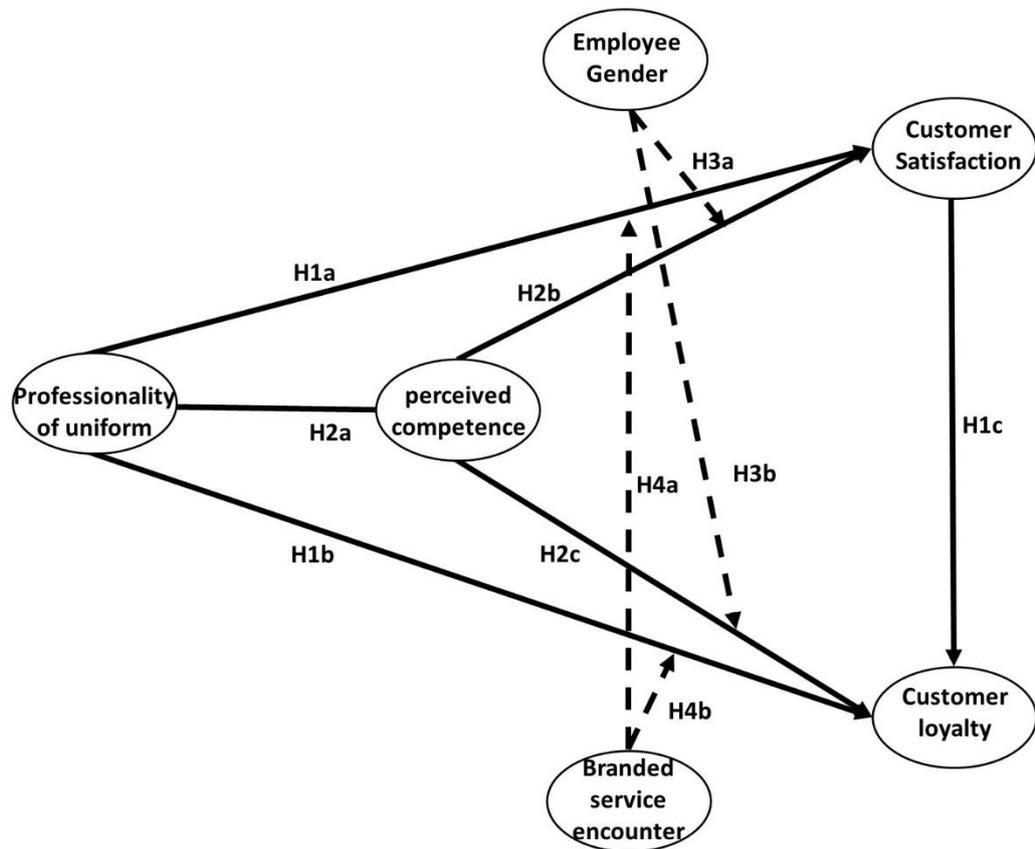
Figure 18 Overall Conceptual Model of the Research

5.2 Research Implications

It is expected that the results of this research will provide benefits to both hospitality practitioners and academics. Theoretical and practical implications are detailed in the following sections.

5.1.1 Theoretical contribution

Findings of Study 1 suggest that the professionality of an employee uniform has an important role in improving overall customer satisfaction and loyalty towards an organisation. A customer served by an employee wearing a professional uniform will be more satisfied and their loyalty to the organisation will be greater than that of a customer served by a server wearing an unprofessional uniform. This result supports studies that claimed organisations use uniforms to gain an advantage in the professional workforce, as employees with better attire are thought to form better impressions with customers (Cardon & Okoro, 2009). Customers base their perceptions about purchase

intention and service quality on employees' clothing when they lack complete information about product or service quality (Baker et al., 1994).

There was a statistically significant increase in perceived competency when the employee was wearing a professional uniform, compared to when the employee was wearing an unprofessional uniform. This also supports the idea of judging a book by its cover (Robinson et al., 2007), along with the idea that clothing is considered a powerful tool in the process of building perception (Johnson et al., 2002) and acts as a symbol to communicate the status of an unknown person (Nelson & Bowen, 2000).

The findings also proved that customer satisfaction positively mediates the effect of professionality of uniform on customer loyalty, supporting a study that found true loyalty does not exist unless satisfaction and emotional promises are present (see Salegna & Goodwin, 2005) and others that found repurchasing tendency and level of product and service recommendations to a social circle will be greater for satisfied customers (e.g. Zeithaml et al., 1996). Further, the results have filled the gap in a study by Wu et al. (2015), in which the authors omitted the tangible factor of SERVQUAL in measuring the perceived competency of front-line employees. The results also stressed the importance of professionality of employee uniform in building customer satisfaction loyalty, which was neglected in many previous studies. The results have contributed to the literature stating that professionality of employee uniform has a positive effect on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty.

The perceived competency of an employee mediates the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The perceived competency of an employee has an important role in creating customer satisfaction. Customers judge the competency of an employee through the quality of service they receive from that employee. The results prove that an improvement in managerial service quality will not make any changes to the way customers experience the service, nor have any effect on customers' rating of service quality and customer satisfaction (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000). Instead, an improvement in the perceived competency of the employee will create changes in the way customers experience the service. Managerial service quality and perceived competence of the employees are two facets of service quality. *Perceived competency* is the way the customer sees the quality of

service, and *managerial service quality* is the quality the management of the organisation set as a benchmark.

Even though it was not statistically proven, the results in Study 2 suggest academics can disregard the theory of homophily (see Cooper, 1997), as 68.6% of the participants in this study were male, and 30.9% were female. Even though there were fewer female participants, female servers created a greater moderation effect on perceived competency, as seen in the result of the hypothesis test. Hence, this is consistent with findings that female servers are tipped more than are male servers (e.g. Lynn & Simons, 2000) due to their physical attractiveness, and the phenomenon of male customers tipping to demonstrate their social and economic status. Service employees' gender only moderated the effect of perceived competence on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This supports the theory that loyalty is the result of repeated positive experience from a service establishment. The results of this study also fill a gap in the literature on employee gender in hospitality. Employee gender has been a topic of discussion only in terms of its effects on tipping and gender discrimination in the hiring process. The findings of this study show the effect of employee gender in creating satisfaction and loyalty in the customer. The results show that customers served by female employees had a more positive perception of the quality of service, which leads to more satisfaction, but the same was not identified while testing the moderation effect of gender on the effect of employees' perceived competency on customer loyalty. There was no significant moderation identified. It may therefore be concluded that service employees' gender moderates the effect on customer satisfaction but does not moderate the long term effect of customer satisfaction, which is loyalty.

The results of Study 3 reaffirmed the importance of professional employee uniforms in the hospitality industry. The study successfully proved that a branded service encounter moderates the effect of professionalism of the employee uniform on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The results make a positive contribution to the study by Sirianni et al., (2013), which was the first to discuss ways a firm could use employee behaviour to improve branding in the organisation. The results are also consistent with those in the literature stating that customer and employee contact in a hospitality organisation makes a significant contribution to the success of the brand (Simões &

Dibb, 2001), so managing employee attitudes and behaviours has become very critical (King, 2010; Tsang et al., 2011; Xiong et al., 2013). The results also contribute to theories on internal marketing in hospitality. Customers who experience the brand promise during actual service will be more satisfied and loyal to the brand compared to customers who do not see the brand values in the service.

5.1.2 Practical implications

The findings of this research have several contributions for the consideration of practitioners. The results provide a useful motive for hotel management to professionally design the service employees' uniforms. Three constructs of professional appearance, uniform attractiveness and formality can be used to measure the professionality of employee uniforms and develop new uniforms in an organisation. Management should also focus on ensuring the employee uniform is maintained and presented by employees in its professional form. Employees should be asked to keep their uniforms neat and tidy to maintain their formal appearance.

As the results of this study, in line with existing studies, suggest that loyalty is the long term effect of customer satisfaction, hospitality management should focus on producing more satisfied guests which in turn will increase the number of loyal customers. A loyal customer will save costs which could be wasted on customer acquisition and marketing. As service employees' perceived competency successfully mediates the effect of professionality of employee uniform on customer satisfaction and loyalty, service employees' perceived competency can be used by management to improve the quality of service rather than setting a management bench mark for the quality. Customers are the final judge of the service quality, so management should focus on the customers' perceptions.

The moderating effect of gender resulted in a mixed response. Attractiveness and professionality of the employees matter, but gender is less important in creating a loyal customer. Having a well trained professional-looking employee with outstanding skills should be the strategy to satisfy customers, regardless of gender. One thing to note, is that female employees were found to provide customer satisfaction in the short term.

However, hiring women is not a valid strategy for the long term as the effect of perceived competence on customer loyalty was not moderated by employees' gender.

Finally, branded service encounters are an important factor in creating customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry. Many organisations have moved away from a formal style of service to a more casual style. Based on the findings of this study, consideration should be given to reversing this change, as employees should be trained in terms of the appropriate tone and manner of language and phrases used when speaking to customers. For example, a significant increase in customer loyalty and satisfaction was identified when the server used the sophisticated phrase "welcome to the Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation?" instead of the casual phrase, "Hey buddy, how are you doing? Did you ring us before coming?" This is also, a reflection of a sustainable business model, in the actual service, an appropriate phrase, helped the customers to understand the brand values better. Employee service, including the types of greetings and phrases used while interacting with customers should reflect brand values which are marketed externally through mass communication. This will help organisations gain trust and will have a positive effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty.

5.3 Limitations

This research has some limitations which are discussed in this section. Firstly, the sample was recruited through an online crowdfunding platform with the majority of participants living in the United States of America. This means that the results of this study may not be generalisable to other parts of the world.

Secondly, as the survey was an online questionnaire which was based on the scenarios presented, the participants may not have been frequent visitors to fine dining restaurants. However, an attempt was made to avoid this limitation by the use of a screening question at the beginning of the survey.

A scenario-based experiment has limitations when compared to a real-world experimental study. For example, participants may not have fully understood the scenario while answering the questionnaire. To avoid this limitation, participants were

asked attention check questions in the middle of the survey. Also, the dialogues in the scenario were presented along with images to give more life to the scenarios.

5.4   Recommendations for future research

This research has statistically proven that professionality of employee uniform has a positive impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. A more detailed future study on the importance of the uniform is suggested. This could include not only professionality but other characteristics of uniforms mentioned in the literature such as the uniforms' appearance, function, character and comfort (Nelson & Bowen, 2000), or elements like style, material, colour, and comfort (Karch & Peters, 2017). As face masks have recently become a part of hospitality uniforms in different parts of the world, the importance of mask inclusion in the perceived safety of the establishment creates a scope for future study.

All the mediation and moderation variables used in this study made a strong contribution and qualify as independent variables in future research to test their direct effect on customer satisfaction and loyalty. As employee gender lacked theoretical support in previous research focusing on customer gender, research concentrating on the effect of customer and employee gender on the overall satisfaction of customers could make a worthwhile contribution to the literature on hospitality.

The results of the mediation analysis of service employees' perceived competence, along with the literature on managerial service quality (Sivadas & Baker-Prewitt, 2000) has created scope for future study. A study examining the difference in the effect of managerial service quality and service employees' perceived competence on customer satisfaction and loyalty could provide valuable insights for hospitality practitioners when designing their standard operating procedures.

A future study focusing on branded service encounters with "dining occasion" as a moderator could be an addition to the literature on branded service encounters in hospitality. This could also be a valuable contribution to the existing literature and findings of this research.

5.5   Conclusion

This study has laid a strong foundation for understanding the importance of employee uniforms in creating customer satisfaction and customer loyalty in the hospitality industry, which has also led the way for many promising future studies. Hospitality managers and uniform designers could focus on bringing professionality to uniforms when selecting and designing uniforms for their establishments. The importance of branded service encounters in hospitality was highlighted as a result of this study. This will allow industry practitioners to focus on improving service quality by using sophisticated conversations to convey brand values to the customers. This work has demonstrated that customer satisfaction and loyalty is dependent on many hidden factors which are yet to be discussed in greater detail in the hospitality literature.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethics approval
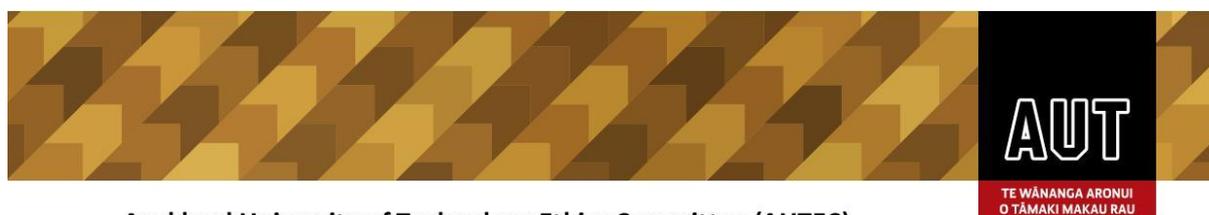
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

15 July 2020

BeomCheol (Peter) Kim
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear BeomCheol (Peter)

Re Ethics Application: **20/215 Impact of employee uniform and branded service encounters on customer's behaviour response: An experimental study in the hospitality context**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 15 July 2023.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: mbf4827@autuni.ac.nz; chloeskim60@gmail.com

Appendix B: Research tools

Appendix B.a Survey questions

1.1 *Dear Participant,* My *name is Francy John, I am doing my Master's in International Hospitality Management from AUT university in Auckland, New Zealand. As part of my curriculum, I am undertaking research on restaurant experience as a customer. This survey takes around 5 minutes to complete. By completing this survey, you are giving consent to be part of the study. The information sheet provided will give you more details.*

Page Break ————————————————————————————————

AUT
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI
O TĀMAKI MAKAU RAU

Participant Information Sheet

14 July 2020

Project Title
How employee uniform and branded service encounters affect customer's negative behaviour response

An Invitation
Dear Participant,
You are invited to participate in this research that examines the influence of employee uniforms and the moderating effect of branded service behaviours on the perceived competence of hospitality employees, and how this may eventually drive customers' negative behaviour responses in a hospitality context. This research will be contacted by Francy John, a student from the Department of Hospitality and Tourism, Auckland University of Technology.

What is the purpose of this research?
The purpose of this study is to understand the influence of uniform and branded service encounter in service quality. The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?
This study targets people
- Those who visited a fine dining restaurant within the last 3 months.
- People between the age of 18-65

How do I agree to participate in this research?
Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether or not you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. However, once the findings have been produced, the removal of your data may not be possible.

What will happen in this research?
You will be given a scenario, based on which a set of questions have to be answered.

What are the discomforts and risks?
You should not experience any discomfort or embarrassment by participating. You could withdraw from the study anytime if you feel so.

What are the benefits?
For the primary researcher, the potential benefits are getting a Master's degree by completing this research. Also, it provides an opportunity for the primary researcher to apply knowledge and gain a comprehensive understanding of the chosen topic. For the wider community such as the academic field, this research aims to add to the literature on influence on employee uniform on customer behaviour, and how brand-aligned behaviour will moderate the effect of uniform which has not been investigated in the current literature. In practice, this research helps to balance uniform with the brand and its employee behaviour. The research could also help practitioners better understand customers' behaviour, increasing customer's satisfaction

How will my privacy be protected?
This is an online survey, in which personal information and answers are confidential. You can withdraw from the study at any time until the responses are submitted. But once this has been done the data can neither be identified nor withdrawn. The result of this research will be available on the New Zealand tourism instate website: htts://www.nztri.org later this year. You are more than welcome to visit the website and view the findings.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?
You are invited to consider and respond to this invitation within one month.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?
Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, *Peter Kim,* pkim@aut.ac.nz
Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz,* (+649) 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Researcher Contact Details:
Primary researcher: Francy John, mbf4827@autuni.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *09-07-2020*, AUTEC Reference number *20/215*.

14 July 2020   page 1 of 1   This version was edited in November 2019

2.1 *Have you visited a fine dining restaurant within the last 6 months?*

◯ Yes

◯ No

End of Block: 2

Start of Block: 3

3.1 *Are you 18 years or above?*

◯ Yes

◯ No

End of Block: 3

Start of Block: 4

Please look at the image below of a restaurant and an employee, imagine that you are at this restaurant as a customer while you read the scenario provided in the next window.

Picture yourself as the customer and answer the questions that follow.

You are walking into a newly opened fine-dining restaurant. A server with well designed, neat and fitted uniform welcomes you.
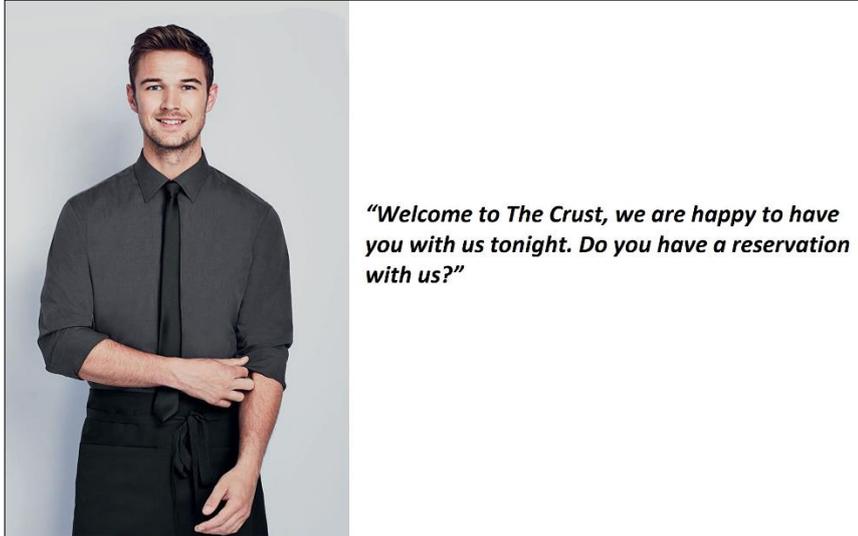
"Welcome to The Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation with us?"

After checking the reservation, you are escorted to your table.

The server helps you to be seated in your chair and water of your choice is served immediately without any prompt.

Within 10 minutes of ordering the same server comes with your soup, along with a bread roll and a cube of butter cut with a knife (not individually wrapped).

You are disappointed in seeing the butter that isn't individually wrapped and feels that it is unhygienic. You mention your concern to the server and the server responded politely,

"I am really sorry we do not serve individually wrapped butter.

The Crust is doing its best to deliver the finest customer service and play our part in being an environmentally friendly business by avoiding individually wrapped accompaniments for our customers"

Q4.2 What gender did you recognise the employee as?

○ *Female*

○ *Male*

Skip To: End of Survey If What gender did you recognise the employee as? = Female
----

4.5 *On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the employee's uniform?*

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
Professional	○	○	○	○	○
Attractive	○	○	○	○	○
Reliable	○	○	○	○	○
Formal	○	○	○	○	○
Exciting	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

4.6 *On a scale of 1-5, rate how likely you are to agree with the following*

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
The employee, clearly communicated what this restaurant brand stands for	○	○	○	○	○
The employee's communication made it easy for me to create an impression about the brand	○	○	○	○	○
The employee's communication made it easy for me to understand what this restaurant brand represents to customers	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

4.7 *On a scale of 1-5, how would you rate the employee*

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2 (27)	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4 (29)	Strongly Agree 5
The employee was very attentive	○	○	○	○	○
The employee was friendly and helpful	○	○	○	○	○
The employee was able to adapt to the situation	○	○	○	○	○
The employee was credible	○	○	○	○	○
The employee was reliable	○	○	○	○	○
The employee was concerned about my needs	○	○	○	○	○
The employee responded promptly to me	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

4.8 *On a scale of 1-5, rate how likely you are to agree with the following*

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
The employee's appearance seems to meet the necessary safety standard	○	○	○	○	○
The employee seems to follow safety practices	○	○	○	○	○
I feel safe to be served by the employee	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

4.9 *On a scale of 1-5, rate how likely you are to agree with the following*

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
I was happy with the dining experience in this restaurant	○	○	○	○	○
I find the restaurant pleasurable	○	○	○	○	○
Considering the type of restaurant, the quality of service was excellent	○	○	○	○	○
Dining here gave me a strong sense of accomplishment	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

4.10 *On a scale of 1-5, rate how likely you are to agree with the following*

	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Neither agree nor disagree 3	Agree 4	Strongly Agree 5
I will come back to this restaurant next time	○	○	○	○	○
I will postpone my plans if I find that, there are no spaces available at this restaurant	○	○	○	○	○
I would choose to dine at this restaurant over a less costly restaurant	○	○	○	○	○
I would patronise this restaurant	○	○	○	○	○
I will recommend this restaurant to a friend or colleague	○	○	○	○	○

Page Break

4.11 *How often do you visit a fine dining restaurant?*

○ Very often

○ Often

○ Sometimes

○ Rarely

4.12 *On what occasion do you visit a fine dining restaurant the most?*

○ Social Gathering

○ Official Meetings

○ Romantic Date

4.13 *What aspect of a restaurant do you value most?*

○ Service quality

○ Restaurant Ambience

○ Food Quality

Page Break

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4.14 *What is your gender?*

    ◯ Male

    ◯ Female

    ◯ Other

4.15 *Which year were you born? (1955 - 2002)*

    _____

4.16 *What is your ethnic group?*

    ◯ White

    ◯ Asian

    ◯ African American

    ◯ Hispanic

    ◯ Native Indian

    ◯ Other

4.17 *What is your highest educational qualification?*

○ Less than high school

○ High school graduate

○ Vocational / Trade / Technical school

○ Some college

○ Bachelor's degree

○ Graduate degree

4.18 *What is your occupation?*

○ Unemployed

○ Self Employed

○ Private Sector

○ Government sector

○ Student

End of Block: 4

Appendix B.b Study 1 manipulations

B.b.a. Scenario 1

"Welcome to The Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation with us?"

"I am really sorry we do not serve individually wrapped butter.

The Crust is doing its best to deliver the finest customer service and play our part in being an environmentally friendly business by avoiding individually wrapped accompaniments for our customers"

B.b.b. Scenario 2

"Welcome to The Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation with us?"

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Appendix B.c Study 2 manipulations

B.c.a. Scenario 1

"Welcome to The Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation with us?"

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B.c.c. Scenario 3

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B.c.d. Scenario 4

"Welcome to The Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation with us?".

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Appendix B.d Study 3 manipulations

B.d.a. Scenario 1

"Welcome to The Crust, we are happy to have you with us tonight. Do you have a reservation with us?"

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B.d.c Scenario 3

"Hey buddy, how are you doing? Did you ring us before coming?"

"We don't have individually wrapped butter, they stopped serving it last month.

I think because it has to do something with the environment. Most of the customers aren't really bothered about it and they don't complain.

If you have any concern, you could give your feedback to the staff at the counter on your way out.

B.d.d. Scenario 4

"Hey buddy, how are you doing? Did you ring us before coming?"

"We don't have individually wrapped butter, they stopped serving it last month.

I think because it has to do something with the environment. Most of the customers aren't really bothered about it and they don't complain.

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Appendix B.e Participant information sheet

Participant Information Sheet

14 July 2020

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How employee uniform and branded service encounters affect customer's negative behaviour response

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Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, *ethics@aut.ac.nz, (+649) 921 9999 ext. 6038.*

Researcher Contact Details:

Primary researcher: Francy John, mbf4827@autuni.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *09-07-2020*, AUTEC Reference number *20/215.*