

2017 Sport Marketing Association Conference (SMA XV)

A Conceptual Framework of Emotional Labor in Participant Sport Service

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Friday, November 3, 2017

8:00-8:50 AM, Washington Ballroom

50-minute poster presentation

(including questions)

According to PricewaterhouseCoopers (2011), global sports revenues were valued at \$121.4 billion in 2010, with a projected annual growth rate of 3.7% to \$145.3 billion by 2015. Specifically, global mega events (e.g., the Olympic and the World Cup) generated more than \$38.8 billion while sponsorship had an estimated revenue of \$33 billion, followed by \$25.4 billion of media rights and \$17.3 billion of merchandising. Although these optimistic numbers mostly represent the size of “spectator” sports which have received the most attention from sport researchers (Rowe, Shilbury, Ferkins, & Hinkson, 2013), it is the “participant” sport segment which makes up a larger portion of the industry (Milano & Chlledurai, 2011). As people enjoyed more free time and concerns with obesity and healthy aging, they tend to participate more in sport activities, which in turn created a favorable market for the sport industry (Mintel, 2007). Following this trend, Eime et al. (2015) call for research integrating physical activity and sport management to get more people, more active, more often, leading to a healthier society.

Sport has been notified as an emotion-laden context (Kang, Bagozzi, & Oh, 2011) and emotion is one of the critical factors which makes sport industry unique (Swanson & Kent, 2016; Taylor, Doherty, & McGraw, 2008). Notably, those emotions have been found to influence employees’ attitudes and behavior, which in turn affect organizational performance in various organizational settings (see Ashkanasy & Humphrey, 2011; Elfenbein, 2007) including sport organizations (Swanson & Kent, 2016). Thus, it is important for sport service employees to manage their emotions to maintain their work attitudes and productivity, as well as to develop relationships with customers. In this process, sport service employees are expected to perform *emotional labor*, defined as the purposeful efforts to express certain emotions that are socially accepted while suppressing others (Hochschild, 1983), in their direct interactions with customers. Ample empirical evidence has shown that emotional labor was closely associated with individual well-being of employees, such as job satisfaction and job burnout (see Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011), and organizational outcomes, such as perceived service quality and customer satisfaction (Groth, Hennig-Thurau, & Walsh, 2009).

Despite the obvious evidence regarding the important consequences of emotional labor in other service domains, to date, there has been little research exploring this relationship in sport management literature, particularly in the participant sport domain. To fill this void, as an initial step, the primary purpose of this study is to introduce the role of emotional labor in the participant sport industry and develop a conceptual model that allows us to test the differential effects of employee’s emotional labor strategies individual outcomes and organizational outcomes. In this study, we first identify the three different emotional labor strategies (surface acting, deep acting, and genuine expression) participant sport employees can adopt. Emotional labor involves either *surface acting* (the process of modifying one’s outward expressions such as smiling without changing inner feelings; Hochschild, 1983), *deep acting* (the process of actually trying to feel the appropriate emotions to display them; Hochschild, 1983), or *genuine expression* (the process of experiencing and displaying appropriate emotions spontaneously and genuinely; Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993). Second, we discuss the intrapersonal consequences of emotional labor for participant sport employees (e.g., job burnout, job satisfaction, and turnover intention). Third, we also review the interpersonal consequences of emotional labor (e.g., customer satisfaction, perceived service quality, and customer retention). A key mechanism in this relationship is thought to be the authenticity of employees’ emotional displays. Past literatures suggest that authenticity is important from a consumer perspective. For example, more authentic positive emotional expressions were found to be associated with desirable outcomes, such as higher customer satisfaction (Hulsheger & Schewe, 2011) and perceived service quality (Groth et al., 2009). This is because a high level of authenticity of the employee’s emotional labor display makes customers feel that they are being treated in an honest and authentic way (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2009). Fourth, we identify several moderators in the relationship between emotional labor and individual outcomes (e.g., gender, perceived organizational support, and perceived autonomy), and emotional labor and organizational outcomes (e.g., detection ability and relationship strength). Finally, we introduce emotional

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intelligence and affectivity as key antecedents of emotional labor. The theoretical framework which can support these relationships are also proposed.

The current paper has significant implications for scholars and practitioners in several ways. First, the current study adds to existing knowledge in sport management by demonstrating that the unexplored construct, emotional labor, has a potential to influence key customer outcomes. For employees, such service employees as personal trainers may acknowledge the importance of their emotional expressions, appearance, and personalities. Solomon (1998) found that a frontline service provider's technical skills and certification was typically important, yet their communication skills, appearance, and body type were often more important than those of attributes in fitness clubs (Solomon, 1998). That is because frontline service which involves a direct interaction generally concerns with relational skills and appearance management (Maguire, 2001). For managers, service managers should encourage employees to use deep acting and genuine positive expressions. They may implement emotional labor training program to help employees minimize the utilization of surface acting and engage in deep acting and genuine positive expressions. Additionally, during hiring, managers might focus on individual differences which indicate that some people are more effective at, and more likely to engage in, deep acting and genuine positive expressions (Grandey & Gabriel, 2015). Detailed description of emotional labor theory, further implication of the results for scholars, and future research directions will be discussed in the presentation.

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