

**FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE PERSONALITY TRAITS AND
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION: EVIDENCE FROM
SELECTED HOTELS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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Abstract

Hotels have been seeking ways to effectively manage their frontline employees to help ensure that their attitudes, behaviours and personality meet or exceed the customers' expectations of service delivery. This study examined the effect of frontline personality traits on customer satisfaction in selected hotels in the United Kingdom. Primary data was collected through 150 structured questionnaires which were completed by customers who have had a hotel visit experience over the past twelve months in the United Kingdom. The questionnaire designed was based on the Ten Item Personality Instrument (TIPI), and the modified SERVQUAL Scale. The study revealed that there were significant relationships between frontline employee personality and customer satisfaction in the hotel industry in UK. Among the five dimensions of personality, it was found that extraversion, openness to new experience, and conscientiousness have more effects on service quality than emotional stability and agreeableness in the hotel industry. Therefore, it could be inferred that these personality traits have positive influence on customer satisfaction in the UK hotel industry.

Key Words: Personality Traits, customer, frontline employee, satisfaction, hotels, service quality

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Introduction

In marketing research, personality traits have been adopted to study a variety of behaviour from two perspectives: personality psychology and social psychology. In the personality psychology perspective, personality traits are used to predict various employee and consumer behaviours such as service orientation consumer emotions, consumer satisfaction, and behavioural intentions (Brown *et al.*, 2002). It is self-evident that people differ in ability and temperament, and indeed the speed at which they acquire skills; yet it is equally obvious that these traits cannot totally predict work behaviour. However, there is now cross-national meta-analytic results that suggest quite clearly that are logically, consistently and powerfully related to personality traits (Mount and Barrick, 2002; Barrick *et al.*, 2002; Furnham, 2005). Furthermore, the influence of perceived employee behaviour and personality on consumer evaluation of services (e.g., service quality and consumer satisfaction) takes on additional importance when one considers social perception, wherein observers (e.g., customers) judge others (e.g., frontline employees) on dimensions that are relevant to themselves.

Hurley (1998a) indicates that services often involve employees interacting with customers. Personality, which represents those characteristics of the person that account for consistent patterns of feeling, thinking and behaviour (Pervin and John, 1997), is considered as an important determinant in this personal contact. It determines how employees trade customers, and may directly affect the results of service delivery, customer satisfaction and their future behavioural intentions. Generally speaking, the employees, who are enthusiastic, careful, patient and conscientious, are considered as being good at providing high quality services to customers. Customers today expect high and good service quality from companies (Kotler, 2000). Reichheld and Sasser (1990) specifically indicated that companies could increase profits by 25% to 85% just by achieving a 5% reduction in customer defections. Therefore, hotels have been seeking ways to effectively manage their frontline employees to help ensure that their attitudes, behaviours and personality meet or exceed the customers' expectations of service delivery. Thus, the study of customer satisfaction can be of use in establishing the requirements needed to improve the popularity of hotels in the UK.

Research Hypothesis

Four hypotheses were formulated to find out if employee personality is able to predict tangibles and intangibles of service quality in the hotel industry, to predict behavioural intentions of customers, and to identify whether there are significant differences in terms of customer satisfaction among different demographics.

H1: The employee's personality is able to predict tangibles of service quality in the hotel industry.

H2: The employee's personality is able to predict intangibles of service quality in the hotel industry

H3: The employee's personality is able to predict behavioural intentions of customers

H4: There are significant differences in satisfaction among different age group.

Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. A closed-ended questionnaire was used as the data collection instrument. The questionnaire designed was based on the Ten Item Personality Instrument (TIPI), and the modified SERVQUAL Scale. The first part of the study involves a pilot test where the content of the initial questionnaire was pre-tested on 10 respondents at the Royal National Hotel, London. Consequently, a few minor alterations were made to improve the instrument. The revised questionnaire was then administered to 150 respondents at London Euston train station and some Commercial Banks. In order to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire, Cronbach's alpha method was used. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 15 software programme was adopted for data analysis and to test the research hypotheses. Multiple regression analysis was used to test hypotheses 1, 2, 3. Additionally ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) testing was used to test hypothesis 4.

Results and Discussions

Assessing goodness of data

Reliability of Scales

The most commonly used indicator of internal consistency is Cronbach’s alpha coefficient. This figure should be above 0.70, otherwise, the scale will be considered as unreliable (DeVellis, 2003; Sekaran, 2003). The reliability of the scales is shown in Tables 1 and 2 respectively.

Table 1
Reliability of the Service Quality Instrument (SERVQUAL)

<i>Item No</i>	<i>STATEMENTS</i>	<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	<i>Item-to-total Correlation</i>
	TANGIBLES	.83	
Q.1	The hotel was clean		1.00
Q.3	The hotel had modern looking equipment		.55
Q.4	The hotel interior in keeping with its image and price range		.70
Q.6	The physical facilities of the hotel were visually appealing		.51
	INTANGIBLES	.89	
Q.2	Employees of the hotel were always willing to help		1.00
Q.5	Employees of the hotel gave you prompt service		.60
Q.7	Employees of the hotel were consistently courteous with you		.67
Q.8	Employees of the hotel were competent in doing their job		.60
Q.9	The hotel had your best interest at heart		.71
	CUSTOMER SATISFACTION	.87	
Q.2	Overall impression of service quality Extremely satisfied---Extremely dissatisfied		.72

From Table 1, Cronbach’s alpha scores of the ‘tangibles’, ‘intangibles’ and ‘customer satisfaction’ dimensions are (0.83, 0.89 and 0.87). The minimum score recommended by Churchill (1979) is 0.70. Consequently, the scales are considered reliable. The results of the item-to-total correlation coefficient for the scales were found to range from 0.51 to 1.0 for

tangibles dimension and 0.60 to 1.0 for intangibles dimension. Customer satisfaction had a figure of 0.72.

Table 2

Reliability of the Ten Item Personality Instrument (TIPI)

<i>Item No.</i>	<i>STATEMENT</i>	<i>Cronbach Alpha</i>	<i>Item-to-total Correlation</i>
	EXTRAVERSION	.90	
Q.1	Extraverted(enthusiastic)		.82
Q.9	Reserved, quiet		.82
	AGREEABLENESS	.82	
Q.2	Critical		.76
Q.3	Quarrelsome		.73
Q.10	Sympathetic, warm		.55
	CONSCIENTIOUSNESS	.76	
Q.4	Dependable		.60
Q.11	Disorganized		.67
Q.12	Careless		.53
Q.14	Self-disciplined		.76
	EMOTIONAL STABILITY	.87	
Q.5	Anxious		.83
Q.6	Easily Upset		.78
Q.13	Calm (emotionally stable)		.63
	OPENNESS TO NEW EXPERIENCE	.72	
Q.7	Open to new experiences		.61
Q.8	Complex		.35
Q.15	Uncreative, conventional		.60

In this tool there are five dimensions which are namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Emotional Stability, and Openness to Experience. Cronbach's Alpha figures are 0.90, 0.82, 0.76, 0.87, 0.72 respectively and are above the recommended 0.70 value. Therefore, the instrument in this study is considered reliable (Pallant, 2007).

Validity

According to Sekaran (2003) there are three fundamental forms of validity: content validity, criterion validity and construct validity. In order to evaluate validity of a scale and in particular to establish the strength of the relationship among variables of interest, it is wished-for to employ the rules of thumb for the strength of correlation proposed by Hair *et al.* (2000). To assess criterion-related validity Pearson correlation test was used.

Table 3
Pearson Correlation matrix of the TIPI personality instrument (n=150)

	<i>Extraver sion</i>	<i>Agreeable ness</i>	<i>Conscient iousness</i>	<i>Emotional Stability</i>	<i>Openness Experience</i>
Extraversion	1				
Agreeableness	0.37*	1			
Conscientiousness	0.48	0.25	1		
Emotional Stability	0.23*	0.46	0.47	1	
Openness to Experience	-.004	0.23	0.04	-0.13*	1

*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)

Table 3, indicates that the values of the TIPI scales are less than 0.48 so the relationship among them can be described as moderate, weak or none. Therefore, it is considered that the discriminant validity of this scale is moderate to strong.

Table 4
Pearson Correlation matrix of the SERVQUAL instrument (n=150)

	<i>Tangibles</i>	<i>Intangibles</i>	<i>Intention to Return</i>	<i>Recommend Hotel</i>	<i>Service Quality</i>
Tangibles	1				
Intangibles	0.82**	1			
Overall Quality	-0.64	-0.68	1		

Recommend	-0.68**	-0.71	0.76**	1	
Hotel					
Intention to	-0.45	-0.53	0.43**	0.45**	1
Return					

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2- tailed)

In Table 4, it can be seen that the values of the intention to return line correlates with the above dimensions (tangibles and intangibles) to evaluate concurrent validity. According to the results of the correlation test, the Pearson correlation values between each two dimensions and intention to return is 0.64 which means there is a strong relationship between them. Therefore, it can be concluded that concurrent validity is established.

The predictive validity is checked through the intention to recommend and intention to return line with two dimensions in table 4. All the dimensions have a moderate to strong relationship with these future objectives, especially as the Pearson correlation values between intention to recommend and tangibles is the highest indicating -0.68. Thus, it can be concluded that predictive validity is established.

Employee Personality and Service Quality

Testing of Hypothesis 1

H1₀: the employee's personality is not able to predict tangibles of service quality in the hotel industry.

H1₁: the employee's personality is able to predict tangibles of service Quality in the hotel industry.

Table 5

Estimating the predictability of personality to tangibles of service quality: standard multiple regression analysis (n=150)

Variable	B	Beta	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Constant	15.5	3.18	---	4.89	0.000
Extraversion	-0.902	0.203	-0.345	-4.43	0.000
Agreeableness	-0.113	0.150	-0.059	-0.754	0.452
Conscientiousness	0.141	0.187	0.056	0.751	0.454
Emotional stability	-0.048	0.166	-0.022	-0.289	0.773
Openness to experience	0.434	0.141	0.232	3.081	0.002

Multiple R =0.444^a
R Square = 0.197
F (7.076)

P = 0.000
Adjusted R Square = 0.169
Standard Error = 2.29

As can be seen from table 5, the regression model is statistically significant ($p = 0.000$) in estimating the predictability of personality to tangibles. The model explains 19% of the variance in overall personality traits as R square value. If the sig. value is less than 0.05, then the variable is making a significant unique contribution to the prediction of the dependent variable (Pallant, 2007). Hence, it can be said that two factors make significant contributions in predicting the overall service quality with 0.000 for 'extraversion' and 0.002 for 'openness to experience'.

Testing of Hypothesis 2

H₂₀ the employee's personality is not able to predict intangibles of service quality in the hotel industry.

H₂₁: the employee's personality is able to predict intangibles of Service Quality in the hotel industry.

Table 6

Estimating the predictability of personality to intangibles of service quality: Standard multiple regression analysis (n=150)

Variable	B	Beta	Std. Error	t	Sig.
Constant	18.7	4.44	----	4.217	0.000
Extraversion	-0.1.2	0.284	0.331	-4.339	0.000
Agreeableness	-0.396	0.210	-0.145	-1.890	0.061
Conscientiousness	0.258	0.262	0.073	0.985	0.326
Emotional stability	0.012	0.231	0.004	0.052	0.958
Openness to experience	0.718	0.197	0.269	3.647	0.000

Multiple R =0.479
R Square = 0.229
F (8.558)

P = 0.000
Adjusted R Square = 0.202
Standard Error = 3.20

Table 6 shows that the p-value for this model is less than 0.05 and R square is 0.22 meaning employee personality is able to predict intangibles of service quality in the hotel industry and 22% of the variance can be explained as significant. Therefore, H2₁ is accepted. Additionally, sig. values for ‘extraversion’, openness to experience are less than 0.05 so these dimensions of personality have significant relationship with intangibles.

Testing of Hypothesis 3

- H3₀ The employee’s personality is not able to predict behavioural intentions of customers in the hotel industry.
- H3₁: The employee’s personality is able to predict behavioural intentions of customers in the hotel industry.

Table 7

Estimating the predictability of personality to Behavioural Intentions: standard multiple regression analysis (n=150)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>Std. Error</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Constant	14.1	3.04	---	4.64	0.000
Extraversion	0.758	0.19	0.29	3.89	0.000
Agreeableness	0.169	0.14	0.08	1.17	0.241
Conscientiousness	-0.32	0.18	-0.13	-1.82	0.071
Emotional stability	-0.18	0.15	0.08	-1.15	0.250
Openness to experience	0.67	0.13	-0.36	5.02	0.000
Multiple R =0.50			P = 0.000		
R Square = 0.25			Adjusted R Square = 0.23		
F (9.915)			Standard Error = 2.20		

Table 7 shows that the p-value for this model is less than 0.05 and R square is 0.25 implying that employee personality is able to predict behavioural intentions of customers in the hotel industry and 25% of the variance can be explained as significant. Therefore, H3₀ is rejected. Moreover, sig. values for ‘extraversion’, ‘openness to experience’ are less than 0.05. These dimensions of personality have significant relationship with behavioural intentions.

The results of the regression analysis from the three hypothesis demonstrated that the ‘big five factors’ are statistically significant in predicting tangibles, intangibles of service quality and

behavioural intentions ($R^2 = 0.19, 0.25, 0.22$ respectively with a p value of 0.000). However, the traits were known to be weaker factors in predicting customer satisfaction since the Beta values are weak. The results also confirms what Hurley (1998b) mentioned that, it seems reasonable to propose that if employees have certain personality traits (e.g., extraversion, conscientiousness), they will display the appropriate consumer service behaviour routines (e.g., smiling, friendliness) to develop successful service interactions with customers. Support for this view has provided a number of personality researchers who have made convincing arguments that personality traits can be useful in predicting employee performance (Barrick and Mount, 1991; Hogan and Nicholson, 1988). Importantly, these results confirmed the findings of the studies by Spreng *et al.* (1996), Lam and Heung (1998), and Heung *et al.* (2002) in which service quality factors were positively related to customer satisfaction. The results further confirms the study by Yoon and Ekinci (2003) in which expectation was shown to be an antecedent of customer satisfaction; and the study by Heskett *et al.* (1994), in which the customer satisfaction was shown to be influenced by customer value for money. Additionally, the findings also showed there was a significant cause and effect relationship between customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions as noted by Lam *et al.* (2004) and Reichheld and Sasser (1990).

Differences among Different Demographic Groups

Testing of Hypothesis 4

ANOVA testing, with a significant 95% level was performed to investigate if there are significant differences among different age groups in terms of satisfaction and intention to return. Table 8 shows the summary of ANOVA test results by age group. There are significant differences among age groups regarding overall satisfaction and intention to return with p-values of 0.04 and 0.01 respectively. It can be inferred that the age group 16-24 has a relatively higher perception on overall satisfaction. For intention to return, it is evident that the age group 25-34 has the highest perception indicating 2.69; whereas age group 55-64 has the lowest perception of 1.50. However, H5 is supported since there are statistically significant differences between the age groups and p-value of 0.04.

Table 8

ANOVA Test by Age Group (n=150)

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Dev.</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Overall	16-24	13	2.77	0.72	2.33	0.04
Satisfaction	25-34	61	2.66	1.01		
	35-44	32	2.03	0.89		
	45-54	24	2.29	0.90		
	55-64	8	2.38	1.06		
	>64	12	2.25	0.96		
Intention to Return	16-24	13	2.54	0.776	2.917	0.01
	25-34	61	2.69	0.941		
	35-44	32	2.28	1.19		
	45-54	24	2.58	0.974		
	55-64	8	1.50	0.535		
	>64	12	2.08	0.793		

Conclusion

The study revealed that there exist significant relations between frontline employee's personality traits and customer satisfaction in UK Hotels. Among the five dimensions of personality, it was found that extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness have more effects on service quality than emotional stability and agreeableness in the hotel industry. Therefore, it could be inferred that these personality traits have positive influence on customer satisfaction in UK hotel industry. It was found out that extraversion and openness to experience are the most essential personality traits in predicting service quality. Therefore, these may be considered as important traits for the hotel industry.

Following the above findings and adopting Brown *et al.* (2002) hierarchical model as a theoretical background, it can be concluded that five employee personality traits - extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability and openness to experience have positive impact on consumer satisfaction through interaction quality. Thus, the impact of personality traits on customer satisfaction is mediated by interaction quality; (a performance-oriented evaluation) in the type of services where customers have some degree of face-to-face interactions with employees. This seems particularly the case for three of the basic traits in this study (extraversion, openness to experience, and conscientiousness) because they have been found to be important predictors of job performance and customer satisfaction in numerous studies (e.g., Brown *et al.*, 2002).

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