

## Behind a Professional Smile: The Influence of Perceived Organizational Support on Emotional Labor in Hospitality Industry

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### Abstract

*The hospitality industry in big cities faces tight competition in providing excellent service. As a part that is intense in serving guests, the front office is required to display emotions according to the company's display rules, this process is called emotional labor. However, it is not always easy to do, especially when there are events that disturb the mood. Perceived organizational support (POS) as one of the source affective events can affect employees' affective state at work. Based on the problem, this study intends to determine the influence of POS on emotional labor among front offices of 4- and 5-star hotels in Semarang. A total of 60 subjects were collected through purposive sampling. Data was analysed through instrument tests, classical assumption tests, and hypothesis test using simple linear regression analysis. The study showed that POS negatively influence emotional labor, with a p-value <0.05 and a contribution of 13.8%. The regression equation  $Y=27.96 -0.263X$ . This finding indicates that high POS can reduce the burden of emotional labor and affect the quality of service delivery to guests.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of guests service in the hospitality industry plays an important role in the growth of hotel companies. Providing quality service can increase customer satisfaction [1], customer loyalty [2], [3], and build a positive brand image [4]. Hotels that are known for their high quality service have higher competitive advantages [3] which can attract guests with higher expectation of a comfortable stay [5].

Hotel class is one of the attributes that can affect the level of guest expectations [6]. Upper classes such as 4- and 5- star hotels are known to provide more complete services with superior facilities (full-service hotels) compared to hotels with stars below [1]. The brand image and facilities provided by 4- and 5- star hotels also create high expectations for the quality of guest service.

As the part that consistently serves guests directly, the front office has a crucial role in creating the hotel's main impression [7]. They are responsible for being 'the first and the last image' for guests, starting from making reservations, welcoming at check-in, to checking out. They also act as a source of information and must be ready to handle various complaints [7]. Because their role is so important in creating the brand image of the hotel, therefore, they are required to always provide excellent service in front of guests, one of which is by expressing emotions according to the display rules expected by the organization, which are generally positive emotions. Displaying emotions according to

display rules involves the process of emotion management. This effort is referred to as emotional labor [8], [9].

However, displaying positive emotions is not always easy to do. Not only are they constantly interacting with guests, but front offices are also at risk of dealing with various unexpected situations that can disrupt their emotional state and even trigger physical fatigue. Example situations such as sudden or unreasonable requests from guests, complaints that must be handled, and technical problems like device or system malfunctions that can hinder their work [7]. Not only that, they may also be involved in interpersonal conflicts and feel injustice at work or have unclear job roles and responsibilities [3], [10]. Attempting to display positive emotions in difficult situations can be exhausting and uncomfortable [11], potentially triggering several employee well-being issues, such as emotional exhaustion, burnout [12], and feelings of loss of identity or self-alienation [8]. These conditions can be factors that increase the emotional burden of employees in the workplace. The impact on performance manifests as a decline in motivation and productivity [13]. In the context of the service industry, disruptive situations can interfere with the emotional labor process they perform.

The term emotional labor was first introduced by Arlie Hochschild in her book "The Managed Heart: The Commercialization of Human Feeling" [8]. Hochschild views this concept using a dramaturgical approach, where guests are positioned as the audience, employees as actors, and the workplace as the stage. As actors, employees are expected to exhibit specific emotions to fulfill the expectations of their audience, in this case, the guests. In actual practice, there are two main strategies in emotional labor, namely surface acting, which modifies expressions without changing actual feelings, and deep acting, which is an attempt to change internal feelings to be in line with the expressions expected by the company. Thus, emotional labor in this view can be understood as a form of employee effort in managing emotional expressions to fit the display rules in the organization. However, because it involves demands on personal aspects such as emotions, this process often creates a psychological burden. Based on this, Hochschild highlighted that emotional labor has the potential to cause burnout and job stress [9].

Another view from Ashforth & Humphrey [10] is slightly different from Hochschild's [8] concept. Although both define emotional labor as the act of expressing emotions in line with display rules, this view more highlights emotional labor as visible behavior rather than focusing on the underlying processes [9]. This perspective argues that emotional labor is not always performed consciously, however when carried out regularly, it can develop into an automatic behavior. They also argue that emotional labor has more impact on task effectiveness than it does health or work stress [9].

The above perspectives are then integrated by Grandey [9] to provide an operational understanding of the emotional labor mechanism. Grandey explains the mechanism of emotional labor through an emotion regulation approach as a basis for understanding how this process can cause stress to individuals, but still provide benefits to the organization. Emotion regulation in this context includes modification of feelings or reappraisal of an event (which can be associated as deep acting), as well as modification of expression (which can be associated as surface acting) [9]. Based on this view, emotional labor is seen unidimensionally as front office actions in expressing emotion to match organizational goals when serving customers through a dynamic process of emotion regulation. The act of emotional labor cannot be separated from the work role of a front office [14]. If emotion regulation requires excessive effort caused by affective events occurring in the individual's environment, it can have a cumulative impact on decreased well-being and even lead to health problems. In contrast, if employees have adequate internal and external support factors, the burden of managing emotions can be minimised [9].

Based on these three theoretical views of emotional labor that have been mentioned, this study chose to use Grandey's [9] theory as a conceptual construct. This is because it takes a more contextual approach in understanding emotional labor as a dynamic process of emotion regulation. Grandey [9] sees emotional labor as a behaviour that is not separate from the role of employees, especially in the context of service, so it is more relevant to the reality of work in the hospitality frontliner sector. In addition, Grandey's theory allows researchers to explore how situational and individual factors influence emotional labor. Grandey's [9] view is also more comprehensive as it integrates an understanding of emotional labor as a visible behaviours while highlighting the mechanism of emotional labor's relationship to well-being through the process of emotion regulation.

Grandey [9] explains that affective events can cause how intense the regulation process is carried out by the front office when doing emotional labor. Sources of affective events can come from customers, co-workers, supervisors, or personal conditions [9]. This research will more specifically examine the influence of external sources, which is the perceived organizational support felt by the front office on the emotional labor process they perform.

Numerous studies have identified perceived organizational support as a key factor that has an impact on job performance [15], [16]. Based in the norm of reciprocity, this occurs because when employees feel that the organization provides the support needed during work, the sense of responsibility to reciprocate this support is higher through improving the quality of performance [17]. In addition, perceived organizational support can also help lower the level of stress they experience from various issues, whether work-related or personal, thereby improving their mood and fostering a more positive emotional state [18]. In this regard, employees who perceive support from supervisors and co-workers as organizational agents will also experience an increase in their psychological well-being and job satisfaction [19], [20]. With a positive affective state, employees will be more optimal in performing their job roles and demands [21].

Based on these conditions, perceptions of organizational support may be able to predict emotional labor mechanisms in front office employees in the hospitality industry when interacting with guests. Positive perceptions will generate positive moods and reduce their burden in performing emotion regulation, so this allows front office to feel emotions that are in line with the company's display rules and the form of expression displayed will appear more genuine. Through the concept of norms of reciprocity, it is also understood that greater perceived organizational support can enhance employees' motivation and commitment to regulate their emotional displays in line with with display rules, thereby helping to maintain service quality and uphold the company's brand image in the eyes of customers. Drawing from this understanding, the present study puts forward the following hypothesis:

*H<sub>a</sub> = There is a negatively significant influence of perceived organizational support on emotional labor.*

Previous studies have successfully found that there is a relationship between perceived organizational support and emotional labor. Bukhari et al. [22] found that perceived organizational support negatively affects emotional labor among nurses ( $p = 0.08$  and  $R^2 = 0.03$ ). This finding is explained using the norm of reciprocity, where nurses reciprocate the organizational support they feel by making extra improvements to their performance.

However, prior studies has identified a positive correlation between these two variables, opposing the hypothesis suggested in this study. First, Palupi & Prasetyo [23] examined the relationship between perceived organizational support and emotional labor

in account manager employees in telecommunications service companies, finding that there is a significant positive relationship between perceived organizational support and emotional labor ( $R_{xy} = 0.553$  with  $p = 0.000$ ) with an effective contribution of 30.6%, which means that as perceived organizational support increases, employees tend to engage in more emotional labor. Second, research conducted by Wijaya [24] on sales in cosmetics stores also found similar results. There is a significant positive relationship between perceived supervisor support (classified as one of the organizational agents) on emotional labor. Indicated by the correlation coefficient value  $R_{x1y} = 0.398$  and  $p < 0.001$ ) with an effective contribution of 13.2%.

Differences in research findings are a natural occurrence, as they can be influenced by various factors, such as variations in subject characteristics or the theoretical frameworks used to explain the research problem. The presence of a research gap is one of the key reasons this study was undertaken. Specifically, this research aims to examine how perceived organizational support influences emotional labor, using Grandey's [9] emotional labor theory and the concept of reciprocity norms from Eisenberger et al.'s [17] theory of perceived organizational support as its theoretical foundation.

The research subjects were front office from 4- and 5- star hotels in Semarang. This location was selected due to the limited number of similar studies conducted in Semarang, despite the city being the capital of Central Java and having a high level of tourism, business, and government activities. This condition is supported by data presented by Badan Pusat Statistik Semarang [25], which shows that in September 2024, the room occupancy rate (TPK) of 4- and 5-star hotels reached 69.92% and 54.84%, respectively. These factors make Semarang an ideal setting to conduct this study.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODS

This study uses a correlational quantitative research design that focuses on numerical data analysis and statistical data processing to determine the relationship between variables [26]. The population in this study was the front office of 4- and 5- star hotels in Semarang. The research sampling used purposive sampling technique with the criteria of employees working in the front office department of 4- and 5- star hotels in Semarang with work experience  $\leq 1$  year. Based on these criteria, 60 respondents were determined as research samples. According to Roscoe [27], an ideal sample size for quantitative research ranges from 30 to 500 subjects. Therefore, the sample size in this study was deemed sufficient for quantitative analysis.

Both variables will be measured using psychological instruments. Perceived organizational support is measured using the 8-item version of the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) developed by Eisenberger et al. [17] which has been adapted into Indonesian version by Saputra [28], which the answer options are rated based on a 7-point Likert scale. Meanwhile, emotional labor is measured using a scale formulated by Khetjenkarn & Agmapisarn [29] which consists of 4 items for surface acting and 4 items for deep acting, and has been translated into Indonesian by Emilisa et al. [30] with answer scoring using a 5-point Likert scale.

The results of the item discrimination test showed that two items on the emotional labor instrument (item numbers 6 and 7) had an item-total correlation value below 0.30, so they were considered inconsistent and eliminated. Thus, the number of items used for emotional labor became 6 items. In contrast, all items in SPOS showed a good item-total correlation value ( $> 0.30$ ). The Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value of both instruments is greater than 0.70, which means that both are reliable and suitable for use in this study [31].

**Table 1.** Item discrimination test results

Instrument	Item	Item-total Correlation (before drop)	Checklist	Item-total Correlation (after drop)	Checklist
SPOS	1	0.739	✓	0.739	✓
	2	0.614	✓	0.614	✓
	3	0.628	✓	0.628	✓
	4	0.521	✓	0.521	✓
	5	0.683	✓	0.683	✓
	6	0.708	✓	0.708	✓
	7	0.751	✓	0.751	✓
	8	0.636	✓	0.636	✓
Emotional labor scale	1	0.699	✓	0.764	✓
	2	0.667	✓	0.762	✓
	3	0.552	✓	0.564	✓
	4	0.500	✓	0.604	✓
	5	0.345	✓	0.450	✓
	6	0.020	✗		
	7	-0.265	✗		
	8	0.381	✓	0.354	✓

**Table 2.** Reliability test results

Instrument	Cronbach's Alpha
SPOS	0.882
Emotional labor scale	0.816

Finally, to determine whether the research hypothesis is accepted or rejected, a simple regression analysis will be conducted to test the linear functional effect of predictor variable on response variable [32]. The classical assumption test (prerequisite) consists of normality test, linearity test, and heteroscedasticity test [23]. The entire testing process of this research will then be calculated using SPSS version 27 software.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Descriptive Test Result

A total of 81 respondents were collected from several 4 & 5 star hotels in Semarang. However, considering that the subject criteria were employees with ≥ 1 year of working experience, 21 respondents with less than one year of working experience were eliminated and 60 respondents who matched the criteria were taken for further analysis. The 60 subjects consisted of 44 men (73%) and 16 women (27%). A total of 25 people (42%) worked as front office staff in 4-star hotels and 35 people (58%) worked in 5-star hotels.

**Table 3.** Descriptive test results

Variable	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Perceived organizational support	60	24	32	56	45.17	7.040
Emotional labor	60	24	6	30	16.10	4.970

Based on the range value, minimum value, maximum value, mean, and empirical standard deviation above, the categorisation of this current research subject can be formulated based on the categorisation guide according to Azwar [33]. The following is an overview of the categorisation of the subjects of this study:

**Table 4.** Overview of subjects categorization

Category	Formula	Perceived organizational support		Emotional labor	
		Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Low	$X < M - 1SD$	9	15%	9	15%
Medium	$M - 1SD \leq X < M + 1SD$	41	68.3%	39	65%
High	$M + 1SD \leq X$	10	16.7%	12	20%
<b>Total</b>		60	100%	60	100%

Based on the data distribution, the majority of subjects showed perceived of organizational support in the medium category. This indicates that they have positive experiences with the organization, but not yet strong enough to form the belief that the support is provided consistently. In contrast, the low and high categories have fewer percentages. A total of 9 subjects in the low category felt that they lacked support or appreciation, both from superiors and colleagues as organizational agents. Meanwhile, 10 subjects in the high category felt valued, cared for, and believed that the organization would help them when facing difficulties, both in the context of work and personal needs.

Similar results also appear on emotional labor variables. Most of the subjects were in the medium or neutral category, which shows that although they sometimes required high effort to regulate their emotions, this did not consistently occur to the point of interfering with their well-being. A total of 9 subjects in the low category rarely felt high pressured to modify expressions and emotions, so that they could display emotions more naturally. Meanwhile, 12 subjects in the high category felt consistent and intense demands to adjust their expressions and emotions.

The data above is presented in aggregate and does not illustrate the direct influence between variables and categories.

### 3.2. Classical Assumption Test Result

Prior to testing the research hypothesis, prerequisite or classical assumption tests will be conducted to meet the requirements of the regression model. This process includes tests for normality, linearity, and heteroscedasticity.

**Table 5.** Normality test results

One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test		
		Unstandardized Residual
N		60
Normal Parameters <sup>a,b</sup>	Mean	.0000000
	Std. Deviation	4.61336452
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.081
	Positive	.081
	Negative	-.059
Test Statistic		.081
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) <sup>c</sup>		.200 <sup>d</sup>

- a. Test distribution is Normal.
- b. Calculated from data.

The results above show the value of Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) = 0.200, this value is greater than the confidence level of 0.05, which means that the data has a normal distribution and meets the requirements of the normality test.

**Table 6.** Linearity test results

		<b>ANOVA Table</b>					
			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Emotional Labor * Persepsi Dukungan Organisasi	Between Groups	(Combined) Linearity	601.033	20	30.052	1.369	.197
		Deviation from Linearity	201.695	1	201.695	9.185	.004
			399.338	19	21.018	.957	.525
Within Groups			856.367	39	21.958		
Total			1457.400	59			

The results above show the value of sig. of Deviation from Linearity = 0.525. This value is greater than the confidence level of 0.05, which means that there is a linear relationship between the perceived organizational support and emotional labor.

**Table 7.** Heteroscedasticity test results

		<b>Coefficients<sup>a</sup></b>				
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.982	2.603		.377	.707
	<i>Perceived organizational support</i>	.054	.057	.123	.943	.350

a. Dependent Variable: ABS\_RES

The results above show the value of sig. for the perceived organizational support = 0.350. This value is greater than the confidence level of 0.05, which means that there are no symptoms of heteroscedasticity in the regression model.

Based on the results of the classical assumption test that has been carried out, it is known that this research data is normally distributed, the two variables have a linear relationship, and there are no symptoms of heteroscedasticity. So it can be concluded, the research data has met the requirements needed and can continue the hypothesis analysis.

### 3.3.Hypothesis Test Results

Simple linear regression analysis is employed to test the formulated hypothesis. The results from this analysis will provide information including the regression coefficient and the R square (R<sup>2</sup>) value, which help determine the significant effect and the equation of the simple linear regression.

**Table 8.** Simple linear regression results

Variabel	B	Std. Error	Beta (β)	R Square (R <sup>2</sup> )	Sig. (P-value)
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(Constant)	27.962	3.932			.000
<i>Perceived organizational support</i>	-.263	.086	-.372	.138	.003

a. Dependent Variable: *Emotional labor*

The results above show p-value = 0.003. This means that there is a significant influence between perceived organizational support on emotional labor and it can be concluded that the hypothesis in this study is accepted.

From the constant number (a) and regression coefficient (b), a simple linear regression equation s formed a follows:

$$\text{Emotional labor} = 27.962 - 0.263 (\text{Perceived organizational support})$$

Based on the equation model above, it can be seen that the constant value (a) of 27.962 indicates the level of emotional labor when the perception of organizational support is at zero. Meanwhile, the regression coefficient (b) of -0.263 indicates that every 1% increase in perceived organizational support will decrease the level of emotional labor by 0.263. Thus, perceived organizational support has a negative influence on emotional labor.

The proportion of variance given by the predictor variable to the response variable can be known by looking at the value of R<sup>2</sup>. Table 8. Show the value of R<sup>2</sup>. This value demonstrates that the amount of effective contribution given by perceived organizational support to emotional labor by 13.8%. Meanwhile, the remaining 86.2% is attributed to other variables not examined in this study.

### 3.4. Discussion

Current study revealed that perceived organizational support has a negative influence on emotional labor, with an effective contribution of 13.8%. This indicates that as front office perceive greater organizational support, the intensity of emotional labor they experience decreases. These findings are consistent with similar results reported by Bukhari et al. [22] among nurses. Through a simple regression analysis test, Bukhari et al. [22] found that perceived organizational support negatively affects emotional labor which is shown through the regression equation model as follows: Emotional labor = 31.57 - 0.15 (Perceived organizational support); and p-value = 0.08 which is less than the confidence level of 0.05.

Based on the norm of reciprocity in social exchange theory, the employee-organizations relationship is viewed as a beneficial exchange, where employees respond with increased effort, loyalty, and commitment in return for the socioemotional and material support provided by the organization [17]. In service industries such as hotels, especially among front offices, perceived organizational support plays an important role in fostering a sense of responsibility and encouraging improved service performance [22], which is reflected by providing excellent service to ensure guest satisfaction and support company goals. Front office staff will be motivated to display positive emotions according to the company's display rules, such as being friendly and patient, but without feeling emotionally burdened. They are more capable of regulating their emotions adaptively such as by engaging in deep acting or displaying genuine expression [34] rather than just suppressing emotions through surface acting. Thus, interactions with customers feel more natural.

High perceived organizational support holds a key role in helping front offices deal with the burden of emotional labor. When employees perceive consistent support from the company, it builds trust that the company truly cares about their well-being [17]. This perception creates a sense of security, increases job satisfaction [35], and contributes to reducing emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation [36], [37]. Under these conditions, employees' social and emotional needs are more easily met, such as feeling valued, cared for, and included in a positive and supportive work environment [38].

Richards, Washburn, and Lee [34] explained that in the perspective of Affective Events Theory [21], organizational support is one source of affective events that can affect employees' emotional state at work. Perceived support can create employee's emotional responses that contribute in shaping their work attitudes and behaviours. This is especially applicable to service workers, like front office in hospitality industry who routinely face emotional labor demands. When employees perceive a high level of organizational support, they tend to experience positive emotions that match the organization's expected emotional expressions, which typically include friendliness, politeness, and enthusiasm. As a result of this alignment, they do not need to exert excessive effort when engaging in emotional labor [9], as the expressions displayed are more spontaneous and authentic. This is supported by Richards, Washburn, and Lee's [34] findings that perceived organizational support is significantly correlated with employees' involvement in displaying genuine expression in the emotional labor process. Expressing genuine and authentic emotions is seen as more effective in delivering high-quality service performance and can further enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty [39], [40].

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study found that perceived organizational support negatively influences emotional labor among front offices of 4- and 5- star hotels in Semarang. Which means, when the front office perceives high and positive support from the workplace, the effort in performing emotional labor is reduced. This is because the perception of high organizational support can reduce the emotional burden during work and increase employee's motivation to provide high quality service expected by organization. When front offices do not feel the demands of emotional labor so intensely, the appearance of the services provided will seem more sincere and authentic, which can further increase customer satisfaction and loyalty.

Finally, given the differences in results with prior studies, implications for future research are expected to consider the role of moderator or mediating variables, so that the relationship between perceived organizational support and emotional labor can be explained more comprehensively. In addition, future research can examine the relationship between other broader dimensions of organizational support, such as supervisor support, social support, or environmental conditions on emotional labor. This would help to deepen and expand the understanding of the topic, especially within Indonesian cultural settings.

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