MANAGING EMPLOYEE EMOTIONS AT THE WORKPLACE IN THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRYY

Liu Yue Yue[1] & Sandeep Basnyat[2]
Macao Institute for Tourism Studies
Macao, CHINA

ABSTRACT
This paper explores frontline employees' experience of managing emotions at their workplaces. The data for this study were collected using semi-structured interviews with fifteen hotel employees in Macao who were either working or had worked previously as frontline staff. The findings of this study reveal the nature and sources of emotional disturbances for hotel employees as well as strategies used by them to manage their emotions at their workplaces. The study also highlights the impacts of repeated controlling of emotions on employees, and the need for policymakers, including the hotel managers and government agencies that regulate hospitality employment, to develop regulations that emphasise these issues.

1. INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OBJECTIVES

This paper explores frontline employees' experience of managing emotions at their workplaces. The hospitality industry requires its employees to be service-oriented and manage their emotions at work so that they can provide smooth and seamless services to their guests (Chi & Chen, 2019). From the economic point of view, it seems justifiable for the hospitality managers as publicly observable facial emotions and bodily displays have exchange value (Hochschild, 1983) – this is what customers demand. Therefore, regardless of the difficulties at the workplace, a hotel secretary tries to maintain friendly and cheerful atmosphere for her customers. Similarly, a waitress or waiter tends to create a pleasant dining environment, and a tour guide makes his or her guest feel welcomed (Hochschild, 1983).

In the hotel industry, emotional management is a task that is particularly challenging for frontline employees, such as those who work at the front office, food, and beverages (F&B) department, security and retail sections. These employees often engage in face-to-face interactions with their guests, however, unfortunately, not all those interactions are congenial (Yeh, 2013). Despite the long working hours, sometimes without proper rest and handling highly complaining and annoying guests, these employees need to maintain control over their emotions and provide services to their guests as if nothing has happened to them. This concept was particularly highlighted as an 'emotional labour' by Hochschild (1983). Managing emotions at the workplace

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is considered important for hotels' interests and profitability because it is closely linked with enhancing customer satisfaction and sustaining a long-term relationship with them (Chi & Chen, 2019). Studies have shown that successful management of emotions by employees at their workplaces has positive effects on organisational outcome and overall performance. However, it has also been argued that such efforts may also negatively affect employees' physical and emotional health (Grandey, 2000). Existing studies on the management of emotions by service employees have extensively focused on the need for and importance of the management of emotions from the organisational perspective (Shani et al., 2014). How organisational culture and managerial approaches can influence the emotion management practices of employees have been discussed in relation to management effectiveness and customer services (Grandey, 2000)., Although at the centre of all of these discourses and studies are employees, their views on what they think of managing emotions at the workplace are largely ignored. Front line employees play important roles in the hotel operation (Gundersen et al., 1996). Studies have also indicated that front line workers in hotels generally work in stressful environments because of the long and irregular hours of work and sometimes being treated poorly not just by managers but also by customers (Lo & Lamm, 2005; Poulston, 2009). Therefore, it is essential to examine what they think of and how they manage their emotions at their workplace. This paper aims to fill this gap by exploring frontline employees' experiences of managing emotions at the workplaces focusing on the hotels of Macao.

Macao, as a well-known gaming tourism destination in the world, had 123 hotels with a total of 38, 282 rooms in 2019 (DSEC, 2021). The average occupancy rate of a hotel in Macau in 2019 (before the COVID-19 pandemic) was above 91% (DSEC, 2021). Similarly, in 2019, 39.5 million visitors visited Macao (DSEC, 2021). Altogether 56.1% of the total population of Macao worked in hotels, restaurants, or similar establishments in 2019 (DSEC, 2021). Considering a large number of tourists coming to Macau and significantly higher hotel occupancy rates, it can be safely presumed that the hotel employees in Macau might need to exhibit service orientation considerably as well as manage their emotions effectively. The findings of this study would be helpful for hospitality managers as well as government planners to develop policies that aim to support hotel employees in managing their emotions and increase the productivity of their organisations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Needs and impacts of emotion management in service industries
Hochschild (1983) first defined the term emotional labour (EL) as a management of emotion to create a facial and bodily expression that others can observe, and this can be exchanged for wages. Service organisations require their employees to manage their emotions in order to provide superior customer services (Shani et al., 2014). Some originations even have their own "display rule" about the proper emotion that their employees should express before the customers (Hochschild, 1979).

For many service organisations, particularly the hospitality organisations, emotion management, including suppression of unwanted and negative emotions by employees, is considered as a part of the organisational interest (Sisley & Smollan, 2012). Hochschild (1979) noted that the friendly and warm services provided to clients by employees lead to customer satisfaction which further leads to more purchases and helps repeat customers. The demand for managing emotions at the workplace also arises because of the nature of certain types of jobs, such as

restaurant workers, nurses, and social workers. For example, the restaurant staffs welcome their guests by showing their kind smiles, create a suitable atmosphere for their customers and demonstrate polite gestures to show that the restaurant is a good one (Hochschild, 1983). Similarly, the social worker makes their clients feel that they are concerned about them (Hochschild, 1983). Likewise, nurses show a high degree of compassion to their patients and their relatives (Chowdhury, 2014).

However, managing emotions repeatedly at the workplace may affect employees' physical and mental health negatively. For example, when an employee faces a situation that needs repeated control of emotional responses, the employee may experience emotional exhaustion which is a sign of burnout that occurs when the employee is handling overly emotional interactions with customers and has little way to replenish (Jackson et al., 1986). Jackson et al. (1986) also stated that high-intensity suppression or expression at work of emotional response can make the employee feel detached from a customer, and this consequence will lead to low personal accomplishment. Therefore, a long-term emotional regulation may result in withdrawal behaviours by employees, such as "leaving the work floor, absenteeism, and turnover" (Grandey, 2000, p. 105). Several scholars (Goodwin et al., 2011; Jung & Yoon, 2014; Pugliesi, 1999) have also found that the frequent control of emotions is positively associated with job stress. Goodwin et al. (2011) examined emotion management practices among two large Australian financial institutions' call centres employees and observed that emotional control was one of the reasons for a decrease in the service performance. The stress experienced by employees while controlling emotions can often lead to negative psychological conditions including an increase in mental and physical exhaustion among employees (Jung & Yoon, 2014).

2.2 Emotion management at the workplace

How the employees manage their emotions at the workplace also largely depends upon the way management approaches employees' issues in an organisation (Shani et al., 2014). It is argued that if the managerial approach is empathetic, the employees are more likely to be able to successfully manage their emotions in a natural way (Grandey, 2000). Therefore, the organisation must understand the important roles they can play in the management of the emotions of their employees at the workplace. Shani et al. (2014) noted that many hotels deliver training on emotion management to their employees, however, most of them are similar to the informal on-the-job training and therefore have fewer pragmatic values for employees. Many of these training also, usually, do not follow a systematic process. Shani et al. (2014) argued that because of the high turnover rate of employees at hotels and restaurants, organisations do not want to invest more in those types of systematic training sessions.

Other than the training, organisational culture has also been found to influence the emotion management experience of employees. For example, while conducting a study among Disneyland staff, Reyers (2011) found that many highly skilled employees usually suppressed their emotions successfully and displayed what their customers wanted to see of them. Reyers (2011) argued that many organisations such as Walt Disney have an established culture in which their employees are not allowed to display their true emotions. In many of these organisations, the employees are psychologically bonded to the organisational culture, which means they will have a stronger sense of identity for their organisational values and practices (Cho et al., 2013).

Individual differences among employees, such as emotional intelligence, also partly influence the way they manage their emotions at the workplace (Sisley & Smollan, 2012). Emotional intelligence is the ability to regulate one's own emotions to promote emotional and intellectual growth and the ability to understand others' emotions and emotional knowledge (Salovey & Sluyter, 1997). While examining the frontline staff of a five-star hotel in Macau Yadisaputra (2015) found that those who exhibited higher emotional intelligence performed better in service recovery, a process in which a dissatisfied customer is converted into a loyal customer. Cossette and Hess (2012) have argued that if employees find opportunities to express their positive emotions, it leads to the development of natural feelings and emotions in them, which helps in the management of emotions. Furthermore, if employees understand how important it is for them to manage their emotions toward their customers, it will be easier for them to regulate their emotions, and consequently will have less effect on their mental and physical health. It is indeed true that how willing the employees are in regulating their emotions also depends on how employees identify their job roles and the extent to which they are satisfied with their jobs (Blake & Ronald, 1993).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study has used qualitative research methods to collect and analyse interview data. Qualitative research methods are considered more suitable for examining the feelings and experiences of research participants (Turner, 2010). Because this study investigated the experience of employees in managing emotions at work, the use of qualitative methods not only provided comprehensive information about each participants' experiences but also allowed the researchers to seek clarifications and explanations (Reyers, 2011).

The data for this study was collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 participants between November 2018 and January 2019. Semi-structured interviews are considered suitable for current research because the study aimed at investigating the frontline employees' experience about emotion management which can be difficult to examine through the survey method. Additionally, a semi-structured interview enabled participants to freely answer the questions. The current study adopted the purposive sampling method to recruit participants. Using purposive sampling, those participants were recruited who were willing and had the ability to provide the needed information based on their experience and knowledge for this study (Tongco, 2007). In the current study, participants were chosen from various five-star hotels in Macao who had either worked in the frontline previously or were working at the time of data collection. Both female and male employees were considered to be qualified participants. The interviews were conducted in Chinese which was later translated into English and transcribed verbatim. All interviews were conducted in cafés and lasted for between 45 minutes to 1 hour. Table 1 presents the demographic information of the study participants. As can be seen in the table, pseudonyms were used to maintain the anonymity of the participants.

Table 1 Respondent Demographics

Pseudonyms	Age Bracket	Gender	Department	Years of Working
J	20-25	Female	Housekeeping	Less than 1 year
L	20-25	Female	F&B	1 to 3 years
N	25-30	Female	F&B	1 to 3 years
T	25-30	Male	F&B	1 to 3 year s
C	20-25	Female	Retail	Less than 1 year
S	20-25	Female	F&B	1 to 3 years
X	25-30	Female	F&B	Less than 1 year
E	20-25	Female	F&B	1 to 3 years
A	20-25	Female	F&B	1 to 3 years
F	20-25	Female	F&B	Less than 1 year
Y	20-25	Female	F&B	1 to 3 years
Z	20-25	Female	F&B	Less than 1 year
H	25-30	Male	F&B	1 to 3 years
O	20-25	Male	Housekeeping	Less than 1 year
D	20-25	Female	F&B	Less than 1 year

Table 1 Respondent DemographicsNote: Compiled from the authors' own interview participants

The transcribed data for this was analysed using a 6-step thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the researchers became familiar with the data by reading them repeatedly. Second, interviews were coded focusing on paragraph contents. Third, several themes were identified after grouping codes that had similar meanings or represented a similar idea. Fourth, identified themes were reviewed and refined. Fifth, a coherent story was identified based on the themes and sub-themes. Finally, the thematic story was written which is presented in the next section.

4. FINDINGS

Two themes that emerged after the thematic analysis are the nature and sources of emotional disturbances and strategies used by employees in managing their emotions. These themes are examined in detail in the following sections.

4.1 Nature and sources of emotional disturbances

The first theme "nature and sources of emotional disturbances" mainly discusses the underlying factors that gave rise to the situations that affected the participants' emotional conditions. The hotel frontline employees reported two major sources of their emotional disturbances: their job requirements, and relationship with their colleagues

4.1.1 Job Requirements

When discussing the sources of emotional disturbances, most participants mentioned their problems related to physical pressure at work. All participants reported that they were taking "a great physical pressure" while performing their jobs and on several occasions, these work-related pressures caused negative emotions in them. 'J', who worked in the housekeeping department, mentioned that sometimes she was "too much tired" during work because she needed to clean a room in a very short time. 'A' had to perform "eight hours of standing and walking" which often caused "pain in her feet". She reported that it was harder for her to naturally smile while bearing the pain of her feet and sometimes she even needed to take "rest for a few minutes in the toilet".

Physical pressure at work was also caused by irregular schedules and was another source of emotional problems for employees. 'C' expressed her dissatisfaction with her schedule this way:

> *The morning shift schedule they have assigned me has put me in an awkward situation. I don't have time to eat breakfast, and the morning shift's work is exhausting. When I get the morning shift schedule I am upset and cannot perform well because I am so hungry and tired*

Apart from the irregular schedules, some of the participants mentioned that the "improper arrangement" of their duties was also a source of physical pressure and caused emotional problems. 'E' and 'J' both commented that the "improper arrangement" of their duties assigned to them by two different managers at the same time "increased the pressure" because they did not know which one they should finish first, and also if they wanted to complete both, they needed to be much faster and it was tiring. Because of the physical pressure at work, the employees experienced a painful working environment. However, as the hospitality job required from them, they had to forget those pains and still perform normally, which often caused negative feelings in them.

Apart from the physical pressure, the participants considered that their emotions were usually affected when they had unpleasant interactions with the guests. Some participants expressed dissatisfaction with some guests' "unreasonable requests or disrespectful gestures or language". 'A' said she felt "uncomfortable" when a guest waved his "hand" and called her to "serve" Similarly, 'F' mentioned that some guests always wanted to "change the table" giving not-so-authentic reasons such as by saying "this place is too hot", whereas the temperature in the whole restaurant would be the same. 'F' further reported that she would get an "impatient look" when she met such "demanding and unreasonable" guests. 'Y' narrated her story saying that during her early days in her current job, two ladies wanted her to serve the table, they were in such a hurry that they even "pushed her" aside which made her very unhappy for the whole day.

'L' narrated her story of an unpleasant interaction with guests this way:

> *Our restaurant charges a bottle opening fee of 400 MOP for each bottle. Once a few guests went out and brought their own bottle of white wine in a mineral water bottle, sat in Table 203 in my area and started drinking it in their teacups. Initially, I didn't realise it, but a colleague told me to remind the guests that they weren't allowed to bring their own drinks. When I informed the guests, one of them said that they didn't bring any white wine. So, I said again, politely, that, sir, 'I know that your teacup has white wine'. After hearing me he*

started shouting atme, "do you have a dog's nose?", and verbally attacked me and told me to go away. The guests continued to drink their wine and even lit a cigarette in the dining hall (in the no-smoking area). So, I went ahead and took his bottle of mineral water (containing wine). Seeing this, one of the guests gave me a very hard slap with his chopsticks. Later, I was taken to the kitchen by the manager.

Although the hospitality industry in Macau has always upheld the concept that guest is always right, as some employees responded, sometimes because of the behaviour of the guests, it was hard for them to control their emotions. However, such situations were not very normal, or regular, and as more than half of participants reported, they often met more polite guests than rude ones.

Some participants reported that the miscommunication or misunderstanding created by the arrogant behaviour of some guests had also caused unpleasant interactions. 'J' shared the following story this way:

A visitor from Hong Kong, who did not speak Mandarin well, asked me why I was speaking Mandarin in Macau. I told him that I was a Chinese. He again asked me if I were in Hong Kong, would I still use Mandarin. I replied that I would also speak Mandarin in Hong Kong because Hong Kong is also part of China. Suddenly, the guest was angry and asked me to bring the manager because he wanted to complain that I was educating him, don't think it was necessary. I was just answering his questions but not educating him. If he had spoken to me in English, I could have communicated with him fluently.

4.1.2 Relationship with colleagues

A good relationship with co-workers creates a pleasant working environment, and it is beneficial for employees' performance (Nguyen et al., 2015). The reverse is also true. In this study, some of the participants claimed that "not getting along with their colleagues" gave them a bad mood during work. Two participants, who were team leaders, expressed that they were having great pressure while managing some of the employees who worked under them. 'S' commented that she used to be an easy-going person, but it's difficult for her when someone made "the same mistake repeatedly". "I don't want to repeat what I've said repeatedly. I don't have that time; it is annoying," she said.

In Chinese culture, it is usually considered important to have meetings and interactions with colleagues sometimes even after work. However, as some participants mentioned, this particular culture also became a source of emotional disturbance for them. 'S' added:

When I am off work or resting, I don't want to talk to them [colleagues]. You will only meet your guests one or two times, but you need to get along with your colleagues every day which bring me more pressure. I don't feel it nice to say this but probably because of this, I do not have very good relationships with my colleagues. For me, they are just colleagues, not friends

'Z' reported that sometimes her manager criticised her appearance saying, "unprofessional appearance". In her opinion, she always dressed the same, but she needed to act as if she was

agreeing with the manager. This gave rise to unpleasant feelings in her. As 'F' said, "hiding your true emotion before the manager is a must and even at the worst moment, you need to show your smiling face to the manager".

4.2 Strategies used by employees in managing emotions at work
The participants experienced a number of effects because of the emotional disturbances they had to feel at their work. For example, some participants showed a significant intention to change their job, as 'Y' expressed: "I don't want a guest-facing me all the time in my next job. I just want to do my own thing." 'Z' and 'D' also said that they would not choose a frontline job next time. Besides, some of the participants who were taking a great pressure at their work experienced emotional burnout during or after the work. For example, 'Z' "could not fall asleep" the night when she encountered stressful situations at work. Despite difficulties, the participants had to find ways to manage their emotions so that they could return to normally work the next day. Although the participants emphasised that the strategies that they used in managing their emotions at work depended upon the situations and conditions, the findings of this study show that they mainly used two distinct strategies: self-regulation and focusing on the enjoyment parts of the work.

4.2.1. Self-regulation
Several participants said that they used 'self-regulating methods' at work to control their emotions. Participants 'T' said that he would "wear a virtual mask" during the work. Clarifying the meaning of "wearing a virtual mask", he said he would show the "same and flat" smile to all the guests, no matter whether they were polite or not. "It is easier because I don't need to concentrate on my facial expression and can focus on providing services". 'E' also added that she only put on one single "fake smile" during work. When there was a need to ventilate their strong emotions, participants 'E', 'Y', 'S' and 'C' expressed that they would "go to the back of the office" till they calm down. 'Y' added that if she were not happy, she would control the facial emotion which can save her energy. "When I notice that guests are not looking at my face, I will smile less" 'Y' added. 'J' shared that she would not communicate with other colleagues till she recovered.

Apart from maintaining a virtual face with a flat smile, self-regulating methods also included mental preparation before the work began. Some participants shared that they had to prepare themselves mentally even before the work started which was a time-consuming process but helped them to control their emotions at work. 'S' told her experience:

> I would get up in the morning and sort myself out until I come to the office and get into my uniform. I have to adjust myself mentally for the work during this whole time so that I can stay calm during work till the end of the day.

Some participants had to calm themselves down even after office hours using a number of self-regulating strategies. 'J', 'F' and 'Y' said that they sometimes went shopping with their friends or watched tv shows to relax after the office hour ends. 'Z' added that she usually liked to go to a good restaurant to eat after stressful work. 'C' said she would listen to music after work to convert her 'working mood' into a 'relaxing mood'.

A few participants reported that the repeated practice of self-regulating behaviour can greatly help to control emotions. "It's hard to control the emotions at first, but when I encountered more and more situations and different guests, I started practising more, and it became easier.", said 'L'.

4.2.2 Focusing on the enjoyment parts of the work
Some participants reported that they tried to forget the difficulties and focus on the nicer parts of their job to improve their feelings. 'S' expressed: "Now I am working at the dessert shop. See those desserts! Whenever I look at them, they make me feel happy." 'H' said that when he needed to control his emotion, he "breathes deeply and look out of the window". He worked in a restaurant with a great view, and whenever he looked out, he felt "calm and relaxed". "Sometimes too much focus on the work for a long time makes me feel very irritable, so I look away at a distance and that makes me feel relaxed, too." He further added. 'H' also narrated that he expressed his true feelings during his work which many guests liked and helped him feel relaxed. He shared:

> *I do express my true feelings more often. They [guests] can tell this by the look in my eyes, the tone of my voice, the body language. I hope they come here to have fun, whether they can remember my service or not. But as long as their journey is remembered a little differently because of our services, I think it's worth it and this feeling makes me happy.*

'T' expressed that he always performed his duty with true emotions, "I like our restaurant, and I want my guests to like it as I do, so I treat them with my true emotions, and I feel happy about it." 'T' further explained, "I think a good environment is not a must, but what drives me to perform better in my work are my own true emotions. They also keep me happy".

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION
This study examined the experience of frontline employees in managing their emotions at the workplace focusing on hotels in Macao. In doing so, several findings of this study have also provided an understanding of the nature of hospitality work and how they affect its employees in managing emotions at the workplace. In addition to many different reasons, which have been explained elsewhere by researchers (Nguyen et al., 2015; Sisley & Smollan, 2012), this study has identified two key sources of emotional exhaustion that affect hotel employees – job requirements and relationships with colleagues. Within the job requirements, as desired by the hospitality enterprises, employees substantially experience physical pressure at work (e.g., Reyers, 2011; Shani et al., 2014). As found in this study, this physical pressure that usually arises as employees needed to work for long hours gradually drain them emotionally and affect their physical and mental health conditions. In the absence of opportunities to ventilate their emotions, hotel frontline employees suffer internally and use a variety of strategies to relieve from such emotional draining. It is highly possible, as revealed in this study, that employees may often engage in an unnatural process of emotional release such as staying in a toilet or crying or eating more than required. These methods may cause more harm to employees than benefit them. Therefore, hotel management needs to pay particular attention to the ways how their employees are managing their emotions.

Some of the findings of the current study have also highlighted frontline employees' experiences of unpleasant interactions with their guests. As noted in the current study, despite facing abusive language or behaviour from the guests, the participating front-line employees often needed to hide their feelings and emotions, show a fake smile to the guests and are being taken away from the scene by the manager to resolve the matter. Such efforts to suppress the emotional disturbances of the employees by managers can be painful for employees and will eventually affect their mental and spiritual health and needs immediate attention (Reyers, 2011). As revealed in an earlier study by Grandey (2000), a higher frequency of negative events require employees to regulate their emotion more often and such efforts may damage employees' morale and self-esteem. Therefore, policymakers, including the hospitality managers and government agencies that regulate the tourism and hospitality industry, should consider these aspects while developing regulations that abide hospitality industry and its workers.

This study contributes to the existing literature on emotion management at the workplace focusing on the hospitality industry, and more particularly the hotel sector, in two distinct ways. First, it reveals the sources that can cause emotional disturbances among hotel employees. Hotel is a labour-intensive business sector; a significant number of employees work there. Among the hotel employees, front-line employees play important role in developing the overall image of the hotel (Gundersen et al., 1996). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge and study the sources that can damage frontline employees' emotions. Second, this study highlights strategies that frontline employees used in managing their emotions at the workplace. Managing emotions at the workplace is important and necessary as it not only affect employees' physical and mental health but also subsequently affect a hotel's productivity, performance and profitability.

The limitations of this study must be highlighted which may pave the way for future researches. One of the limitations of this research is that the findings of this study were obtained from the employees of five-star hotels only. There are several categories of hotels and frontline employees at those hotels may face various types of emotional challenges. Future studies can examine these challenges by collecting more diverse data. Another limitation of this study is that the findings of this study were based on subjective analysis of qualitative data. Frontline employees in hotels may work in a wide variety of departments. Therefore, future studies on examining those employees' views using quantitative survey methods not only can help to validate the findings of this study but also to check if they can be generalised.

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Conflict of interest
The authors declared that they have no conflict of interest in the research work.