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THE EFFECT OF EMPLOYEE UNIFORM ON JOB SATISFACTION: A CASE OF THE HOUSEKEEPING DEPARTMENT IN A LUXURY FIVE-STAR HOTEL IN HONG KONG, CHINA

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Abstract

Purpose – The aim of this study is to advance the understanding of Hong Kong’s housekeeping culture by examining how employee uniforms and the image they project influence job satisfaction amongst the housekeeping department employees of a luxury five-star Hotel in Hong Kong, China.

Design – Using a purposive sampling method, ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with the housekeeping staff of a luxury five-star Hotel in Hong Kong. Content analysis was conducted to identify data patterns.

Findings – Findings categorized four determinants of uniform influencing job satisfaction: fit to wearer, appropriate materials, color and design, and hotel brand image. The findings confirm that staff uniforms play an important role in demonstrating the hotel’s brand identity, improving job satisfaction, operational efficiency, and staff-management relationships. Apart from the aesthetic design, management should put operational practicality and functionality into account by getting employees to participate when launching and implementing any change initiatives on staff uniforms. Communication and mutual understanding between management and employees are imperative in understanding each other’s concerns.

Originality of the research – Using a qualitative approach, the results offered an empirical basis to guide hotel management and administrators in making decisions about uniforms.

Keywords Employee uniform, uniform satisfaction, hotel, housekeeping department, Hong Kong, China

1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to advance the understanding of Hong Kong’s housekeeping culture by examining how employee uniforms and the images projected by the uniforms influence job satisfaction amongst the housekeeping department employees of a luxury five-star Hotel in Hong Kong, China. Housekeeping department is an important and labor-intensive operational unit responsible for ensuring the best guest experience and upholding a hotel’s reputation. Apart from maintaining the overall cleanliness, tidiness and pleasant ambiance of the hotel, the housekeeping department is one of the important contact points between hotel guests and the hotel. For example, a uniformed housekeeping staff moving around with a chambermaid’s trolley can be easily identified,

and is the most accessible frontline staff when a guest needs assistance with locating facilities on a guest room floor or in public areas.

Frontline staffs play a crucial role in improving organizational performance and retaining customer loyalty (Huang and Su 2016; Coelho and Henseler 2012). Hotel frontline staffs are provided employee uniforms to characterize one's job role and department (Baharuddin and Jamaluddin 2020; Tasci et al. 2014). Extensive studies have revealed that staff uniforms enhance employees' sense of belonging, job satisfaction (Yech and Chen 2020; Dipietro et al. 2007; Nelson and Bowen 2000), and job performance (Yech and Chen 2020; Yeh et al. 2013; Tu et al. 2011a), which ultimately improve service quality, and influence customer behavioral intention in hotel choice (Wang et al. 2020; Lemy et al. 2019). The service-oriented industry like hotel operation is intangible in nature. Tangibilizing service by visible form is crucial in improving service quality. Uniform is one of the important tangible components influencing personnel appearance and customer satisfaction (Zeithaml et al. 1985; Parasuraman et al. 1985) which can optimize a positive moment of truth in every service encounter (Carlzon 1987; Nickson et al. 2005; Wang and Lang 2019). At the operational level, uniforms help hotel guests to identify employees and differentiate staff professions (Yech and Chen 2020). More importantly, hotel uniforms are designed to protect employees' health and safety (Durocher 1990; Martínez-Tomé et al. 2000). A favorable impression is the key to building brand awareness and maintaining customer loyalty (Lai 2019; Sürücü et al. 2019; Kandampully and Hu 2007). Hence, hotel uniforms are a highly influential factor on travelers' hotel choice decisions.

Previous studies revealed a relationship between employee job satisfaction and uniform preference (Yeh et al. 2013; Tu et al. 2011a). Divergent perceptions among different stakeholders (i.e., management, employee, and customer) towards various organizational practices have a proven deleterious effect on an organization's economic-financial performance, customer service quality, and employee retention (Choy and Kamoche 2021; Choy et al. 2021; Lu et al. 2016; Dedeoğlu and Demirer 2015). Many luxury hotels appoint famous designers to design their uniforms, but frontline employees are seldom involved in the design process (Karch and Peters 2017). Hotel employees' perceptions of their work outfits have not been sufficiently researched before. Prior studies pointed out the need to examine perceptual differences among various stakeholders in diverse geographical and industrial contexts (Karch and Peters 2017; Dedeoğlu and Demirer 2015). Identifying employees' attitudes toward staff uniforms can improve operational effectiveness at organizational and departmental levels, and improve job satisfaction at the individual level within a particular context (Baharuddin and Jamaluddin 2020; Yech and Chen 2020). The study facilitates the decision-making about uniforms by hotel management and administrator. The findings from the present case study are instrumental to this specific professional group, and can potentially be transferred to other hospitality contexts.

The structure of this paper begins with an overview of the literature on the use of uniforms in the hospitality industry, and on the relationship between uniform features and employee job satisfaction. The next section is about the methodology, with details about ten semi-structured interviews conducted with the housekeeping staff of a luxury hotel in Hong Kong to explore their perceptions and attitudes about uniform design. The

findings enrich the corpus of knowledge on this topic. Finally, the paper concludes with some managerial implications and future research opportunities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Functions of hotel employee uniform at the meso- level

Uniforms are the “*clothing and artifacts that employees of an organization wear while at work*” (Rafaeli and Pratt 1993, p. 34) which play an essential strategic role in building organization identity and shaping corporate image (Karch and Peters 2017). One study suggested that uniforms imposed a long-term and positive effect on a hotel’s profitability when employees were properly dressed (Baharuddin and Jamaluddin 2020). The functions and features of employee uniforms are multifaceted, and can be classified into three interdependent and interrelated levels. At the macro level, it is the legal duty of organizations to exercise due diligence by providing appropriate uniforms that can protect employees from accidents and physical risks (Šterman 2011; Martínez-Tomé, et al. 2000). At the meso-level, uniform reflects one’s position in an organizational hierarchy and carries the symbolic meaning of a business entity and the travel destination (Kwon 2014). Quinn (2008, p. 82) suggested that hotel employees’ uniform was a catalyst for inviting customers to be “*more readily [to] buy-in to this particular environment*”. Therefore, it is common to see that employee uniforms of the best hotels are designed by the best designers who understand the latest trends and importance of uniforms in the hotel industry (Kwon 2014). Hotel guests determine the creditability of staff members using the first five seconds of interaction (Robison 2005). Poorly designed uniforms could impose an improper and inferior hotel image (Wang and Lang 2019; Tu et al. 2011a). Barnard (2002) argued that clothing and fashion reflect social roles. Different types of uniforms allow hotel management to identify staff members’ roles and ranks in the servicescape (Yech and Chen 2020). Moreover, hotel uniforms help guests to quickly identify hotel employees and their expertise/responsibilities (e.g., porters, cooks, and concierge). Successful companies effectively use a symbolic personality for their brands (Dowling 1993). Researchers have also found a link between corporate communications and uniforms, suggesting that uniforms “*make a statement about a brand*” and shape guest expectations (O’connor 2007). These findings were supported by Wang and Lang (2019), who suggested that appropriate business attire improved employee-brand congruence, aesthetic trait and enjoyable interactions. Hotel managers in India suggested that properly dressed employees could reinforce organizational image (Das n.d.). Some studies maintained that uniform is a critical channel to exhibit the nature of tourism attractions and facilities, cultural distinctiveness, and service professionalism (Kwon 2014). For example, guests would expect to see colorful uniforms when visiting theme park hotels but formal attire in hotels situated in central business districts.

2.2. Functions of hotel employee uniform at the micro- level

At the micro-level, uniform can be considered as fringe benefits and contributes to employees’ self-efficacy (Baharuddin and Jamaluddin 2020), customer service quality (Wang and Lang 2019; Karch and Peters 2017; Tu et al. 2011b) and job satisfaction

(Yech and Chen 2020; Yeh et al. 2013; Tu et al. 2011a). Job satisfaction is a complex and multidimensional construct that refers to an individual's "*pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one's job or job experiences*" (Locke 1976, p. 1304). Job satisfaction could be derived from individual factors and job-related factors including employee uniform (Nelson and Bowen 2000). Uniforms have psychological and behavioral effects on the people who wear them (Adomaitis and Johnson 2005). Uniforms can also help develop employees' sense of belonging (Flitcroft and Kelly 2016), enhance staff morale and productivity (Solomon 1986) as well as their self-confidence and credibility (Nelson and Bowen 2000). Employees who are satisfied with their appearance can make a positive impact on service delivery (Yech and Chen 2020; Yeh et al. 2013). On another note, hotel staff's willingness in service provision may be diminished by embarrassing uniforms which make staff wanting to hide from the public (Sheehan 2003). Given the intangible, heterogenic and inseparable nature of the hospitality industry, favored tangible evidence such as staff appearance and uniform enhance customers' satisfaction and ultimately increases revisit/repurchase intention (Zeithaml et al. 1985; Parasuraman et al. 1985; Karch and Peters 2017).

2.3. Determinant of hotel uniform design

A model appraising apparel end-users' wants and needs incorporates function, expression, and aesthetics as key determinants of uniform design (Lamb and Kallal 1992). One study concluded that functionality, appropriateness to job task, fit to wearer, comfort, and appearance as essential uniform design features from employees' perspective (Nelson and Bowen 2000). Perry and Lee (2017) also argued that satisfactory uniforms need to fit, offer protection, be comfortable, and be fashionable. Functional elements that satisfy wearers' practical needs when carrying out job duties include ease of movement, protection, and thermal comfort. For example, a loose sleeve reduces the movement of one's arm because the sleeve can stick to something quickly (Kwon 2014). Aesthetic considerations include color coordination, workmanship, and clothing design. Harmonization between color, seasons, working environment/content, and fit to the relative age of the wearer is indispensable (Kwon 2014). These views were supported by Park and Bae (2018) who argued that employee uniform and color are important aspects in creating a theatrical foodservice encounter. A study on international travelers to Hong Kong found that tourists' general color preference might not be consistent with their desired color selection for an employee uniform. A Korean study suggested that interaction effect existed between uniform color and preference in restaurant type but not guest satisfaction with restaurant service (Park and Bae 2018). Despite that, the influence of employee uniform is evident in the hospitality industry, relevant studies in the Hong Kong context are inadequate. The few exceptions included a comparative study of hotel customer-contact staff in Hong Kong and Austria using a quantitative approach. The study concluded that uniform brought a sense of identity within the organization and imposed significant impact on employees' job enjoyment and satisfaction (Karch and Peters 2017). Another study suggested that favorite color and desired uniform color choice remained homogeneous among Hong Kong inbound international travelers within the same geographical cluster, whereas heterogeneity was observed from three distinctive cluster groups, implying that uniform color preference could be differentiated by culture (D.A. Tasci et al. 2014). Despite the abundant literature on employee uniform,

all of these studies gauged statistical results of aggregated magnitude and impact of work outfit from the perspective of various stakeholders (i.e., management, employee, and customer) featured by adoption of quantitative approach. Nevertheless, heterogeneity within the subgroups remains, especially among hospitality employees from different operational units. To date, no previous research has investigated the impact of uniforms on employee job satisfaction in the context of the housekeeping department in Hong Kong using a qualitative approach. Given the importance of the housekeeping department in providing hotel guests a remarkable staying experience, this paper addresses the gap by adopting a different interpretive lens. Table 1 summarizes the key findings from hospitality employee uniform studies in the last decade.

Table 1: Key Findings of Hospitality Employee Uniform Studies between 2010 and 2020

Author(s)	Sample Population	Hypothesis Formation	Key Findings
Baharuddin and Jamaluddin 2020	Hotel frontline staff in Malaysia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a significant relationship between uniform features (i.e., material, appropriateness, style and functionality) and employee's self-efficacy in 5-star hotels 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Proper uniform has an impact on employees' self-efficacy and imposed a long-term, positive effect on the hotel's profitability
Yech and Chen 2020	Restaurant employees and customers in the United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is no significant relationship between styles of uniform and employees' job performance, job satisfaction, customers' perceptions of restaurant image, customers' perceptions of employee performance There is no significant difference in uniform style preference among employees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A significant relationship between uniforms, employees' job satisfaction, and performance
Wang and Lang 2019	Customer of full-service restaurants in the United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a significant relationship between service employee dress and employee-brand congruence, aesthetic trait and enjoyable interaction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Uniform improves employee-brand congruence, aesthetic trait, and enjoyable interaction
Park and Bae 2018	Restaurant employees and customers in Korea	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interaction effect exists between uniform color and preference in restaurant type but not guest satisfaction with restaurant service Employee uniform and color are important aspects in creating a theatrical foodservice encounter

Karch and Peters 2017	Hotel customer contact staff in Hong Kong and in Austria	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross-cultural differences exist in the two samples • Uniform brings a sense of identity within the organization and imposes significant impact on employees' job enjoyment and satisfaction • Uniform influences can be explained by the determinants of job satisfaction such as communication, performance, organizational identification, service encounter, orientation, and job support • There is a lack of employee involvement in the uniform design process
Kwon 2014	Hotel employees in Jeju, Korea	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniform design can be closely related to the identity and destination image of Jeju • A combination of comfort, folk elements, and fashionable design is desired • Harmonization among color, seasons, working environment/content, and fit to the relative age of the wearer is crucial
Tasci et al. 2014	Inbound international travelers to Hong Kong	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers' general favorite colors may not apply to their preferences regarding hotel employee uniforms • There is a similarity in preferred color and choice of uniform color among different cultural groups

Yeh et al. 2013	Hotel customers in the United States	N/A	There is a significant relationship between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniform, employee perception of job performance and job satisfaction
Tu et al. 2011a	Front office employees and hotel guests in the United States	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no significant relationship between styles of uniform and employee job performance, employees' satisfaction with their jobs, customers' perceptions of hotel image, customers' perceptions of employee performance • There is no significant difference in preference of styles of uniform among employees 	There is a significant relationship between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Styles of uniform, employees' job satisfaction and customers' perception of employee performance
Tu et al. 2011b	Hotel guests in United States	N/A	There is a significant relationship between: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Styles of uniforms and customers' perceptions of employee performance
Das, n.d.	Hotel senior staff in India	N/A	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniform plays an important role in improving organizational image

3. METHODOLOGY

This study investigated how employee uniforms and their projected image influenced job satisfaction amongst the employees of a housekeeping department. We collected data from a luxury five-star Hotel in Hong Kong, China (referred to as, "Hotel" in this study). There were around 60 staff employed by the housekeeping department of this sample Hotel. Qualitative research was conducted to understand the informants' attitudes, behaviors and lived experiences by unfolding their 'main story' (Strauss 1987). The adoption of a qualitative approach was appropriate for this study as it enabled an understanding of the respondents about the underlying reasons of their behaviors, feelings, and perceptions in a specific organizational group. This research complemented earlier quantitative findings by exploring possible explanations from the perspective of the interviewees (Gillham 2000). An embedded case study approach was suitable for this empirical investigation to identify the peculiarities and commonalities of a phenomenon of interest utilizing qualitative data among a particular department(s) or group(s) of individuals(s) (Yin 2018). Open-ended semi-structured interviews were conducted with the housekeeping staff of the Hotel to allow respondents to give thick description to the questions and probes by expressing their views in their own words (Gillham 2000). Interactive dialogical process was warranted to gain an in-depth insight into a specific real-life phenomenon (Hollis 1994).

Data was collected using a purposive sampling method that allowed the researchers to select knowledgeable and experienced respondents who could provide relevant data to answer the research questions and meet the research objectives. Based on the research questions, and subsequent to a review of relevant literature, an interview guide was developed. The informants were asked how employee uniforms affected their job satisfaction, and then were asked to make recommendations on the uniform decision-making process. The researchers interviewed ten housekeeping staffs working in the sample Hotel including four room attendants, two linen room attendants, one supervisor, two senior supervisors, and one housekeeping manager. There were five male respondents and five female respondents. Their age ranged from 25 to 49 years old, and the majority fell into the 25 to 29 (40%) and 30 to 39 (40%). The respondents had been working for the sample Hotel between one and over five years, with the vast majority of them (70%) having 1 to 4 years of working experience with the Hotel. All the respondents have completed their secondary school education. To protect the respondents' identity, their names had been replaced by pseudonyms as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Pseudonyms of respondents

Pseudonyms	Position
H1	Senior Supervisor
H2	Supervisor
H3	Room attendant
H4	Room attendant
H5	Linen room attendant
H6	Linen room attendant
H7	Senior Supervisor
H8	Housekeeping Manager
H9	Room attendant
H10	Room attendant

All the interviews were conducted from January 2020 to April 2021 by both authors. The duration of each audio-recorded interview was between 45 to 60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in Cantonese to eliminate the language barrier for the interviewees, and to establish a good rapport between the researchers and the informants (Welch and Piekkari 2006). Field notes were taken to record the key points of the informants' responses and the interviewers' observations during the interviews. Informed consent was obtained from the informants, and data confidentiality and anonymous reporting were assured. All the informants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the interviews at any time. Extant studies maintained that small sample size could still sufficiently represent the studied population and arrive at a richly-textured understanding of the central phenomenon under examination when saturation occurred with no additional data that could be identified (Yin 2018; Creswell and Poth 2017). Data saturation was achieved at the tenth interview for the current study. The first author transcribed, translated all interviews and checked against the audio records. Interview summaries were sent to the informants for approval to ensure consistency between the transcript and data shared by the interviewees (Hagens et al. 2009). The first author employed content analysis to label the transcripts with codes, and identify patterns of collected data after code comparison. All coded data were reviewed by the second author.

4. FINDINGS

Our analysis generated four themes that characterized the determinants influencing job satisfaction of housekeeping staff: (1) fit to wearer, (2) appropriate materials, (3) color and design, and (4) hotel brand image. Our results confirmed that the central concern of all respondents on their uniforms was 'perfect fit'. They believed that their duties were physically very demanding, requiring them to have a high frequency of physical movements such as raising hands and squatting. In the sample Hotel, the employees were provided with a perfectly fitted uniform. However, the perfectly fitted design did not allow employees to move comfortably, as H3 reported that he could not move when he got down on one knee. Besides, the trimming on the uniform further caused

inconvenience and discomfort. Another employee (H6) acknowledged that personal emotions were affected by their uniforms, especially when the uniform was unfit. The following two quotes provide insight into this:

“the tight collar is too hot for me... we need to zip up the collar to the neckline, it is just like taking a sauna when checking the rooms”. (H3)

“I feel clumsy and inconvenient when I wear an unfit uniform... If the suit fits my body, I feel satisfied and motivated to work”. (H6)

Another important aspect of the uniform was the use of appropriate materials for different working environments. For example, one respondent (H1) commented that uniform using sweat-absorbing, malleable and quick-drying material was preferred when working outdoors. All respondents agreed unanimously that uniform affected their self-confidence and job satisfaction. The findings demonstrated that uniform color and design were key concerns of housekeeping employees because these elements affected their work effectiveness as well as workplace health and safety. As a supervisor (H1) commented, *“... the old white uniform could get dirt and torn off easily. The new one in dark color is more durable and hides dirt”*. One female respondent also commented that wearing a uniform skirt can be inconvenient and embarrassing on some occasions. For example, *“[...] we are at risk of having wardrobe malfunctions, particularly when performing physical duties such as getting down on our knees and bending over”* (H4). One male respondent (H10) reported that wearing waistcoat vest and shirt to carry out physical work is not pleasant. Moreover, the uniform shoes also drew concerns from frontline housekeeping staff. Two room attendants (H9 and H10) reported that the hard soled and pointed toe uniform shoes caused heel pain and increased the risk of slipping on a marble floor. *“... I wish I could wear sport shoes at work even if they are at my own expense”* (H9). A manager mentioned that some room attendants recovered from heel pain after a few days' rest, but experienced relapse after they resumed work. *“...their (room attendants) heel pain can hardly subside because they are on their feet all day... A few frontline staffs took up to one month of sick leave due to heel pain”* (H8). All the respondents shared similar views about the symbolic meaning of uniforms towards a hotel's brand and image. A respondent said *“... fine feathers make fine birds, and fine clothes make the man”* (H8). Coupled with other tangible (e.g., appearance) and intangible elements (e.g., communication skills), uniforms reflected one's professional image, established a positive occupational identity, and signified service quality.

In addition, our findings revealed that unsatisfied uniform design threatened supervisor-subordinate relationship. In the sample Hotel, the design of the uniform was determined by management. Frontline staff members had little opportunity to discuss their concerns in the uniform decision-making process. Given that top management was allowed to wear their own business attire, they did not experience, firsthand, how well the uniform functioned in a particular job role. *“As a wearer, we do not have a say in how the uniform fits into our job duties, or the style and materials to be used. Until we are asked to select uniform size, we do not have much idea about what the uniform looks like...”* (H3). Another respondents had similar views and commented that *“whether it is a comfy workwear or not, should be decided by the wearer”* (H1). *“We (room attendants) as a wearer-to-be, should take the role of fit model in the fitting session instead of asking*

someone who haven't worked in the frontline position for a long time" (H7). In addition, the frontline and supervisory staff likewise suggested that Hotels should strive for a balance between aesthetic and functionality when determining uniform design. They hoped that the wearer could participate in the decision about uniform selection/alteration. "Communication between management and us is inadequate...They need to be in our shoes when making decisions" (H4). Employee uniforms also contributed to inharmonious employee-manager relationship. "We engage in manual work with many bodily movements and become hot... we are alerted to button the unbuttoned top collar button... We follow the instructions to avoid being blamed... it is frustrating" (H6).

5. DISCUSSION

This study advanced the understanding of Hong Kong's housekeeping culture by examining how employee uniforms and the image projected by uniforms influenced job satisfaction amongst the housekeeping department employees of a luxury five-star Hotel in Hong Kong. Our findings suggested that fit to wearer, appropriate materials, color and design, and hotel brand image were influential factors affecting job satisfaction. Our findings echoed the results of previous studies in that fitness to wearer, appropriateness to job task, and functionality were essential uniform design features (Nelson and Bowen 2000), which could exert influence on employees' work performance and job satisfaction (Yech and Chen 2020; Yeh et al. 2013; Tu et al. 2011a; Tu et al. 2011b). Our results underlined the importance of using appropriate uniform materials that support particular job duties in the housekeeping department. These concerns are not specific to Hong Kong, similar findings had been reported in two studies from the United States (Perry and Lee 2017; Lamb and Kallal 1992). Our findings were consistent with prior findings emphasizing that color, functionality, and work-appropriateness were key uniform design features from the employees' perspective (Park and Bae 2018; Nelson and Bowen 2000; Lamb and Kallal 1992). This is in line with research emphasizing that employees appreciate uniform designs that help them to perform their job duties (Kwon 2014). Our findings illustrated the importance of uniform functionality in improving housekeeping employees' work effectiveness, efficiency and occupational health and safety. This study showed that staff uniform played a part in leveraging brand identity that ties well with existing studies of Wang and Lang (2019), Kwon (2014) and Tu et al. (2011a). Uniform reflects organizations' core products and shapes customers' expectations (O'connor 2007; Das n.d.). At the micro-level, uniform symbolizes service quality by making the intangible nature of service-oriented industry tangible, which strongly influences employees' self-efficacy and ultimately exerts a distinct impact on the hotel's financial performance (Zeithaml et al. 1985; Parasuraman et al. 1985; Baharuddin and Jamaluddin 2020; Karch and Peters 2017). Our results tied in with those of previous studies, which indicated that when making uniform selection decision, there was insufficient participation from the employees who were the uniform wearer in identifying their practical needs (Karch and Peters 2017). A positive correlation has been drawn between job satisfaction, job performance, and employee participation in decision making (Akhtar and Nazarudin 2020). Hence, we recommend the adoption of participatory decision making and the involvement of employees when making any change initiatives on staff uniform. Extant studies revealed that high-perceived organizational prestige and organization identification enhances job satisfaction (Akgunduz and Bardakoglu 2017). As a means

of protecting employees' health and safety and improving staff belongingness, a good employee uniform should make the wearers feel proud to be a part of the organization.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has contributed towards understanding the important and under-researched role of staff uniform in the hospitality sector. The determinants influencing the job satisfaction of housekeeping staff were categorized into four themes: (1) fit to wearer, (2) appropriate materials, (3) color and design, and (4) hotel brand image. The results of this study are evident that staff uniform has a role to play in demonstrating a hotel's brand identity, and improving job satisfaction, operational efficiency, and staff-management relationship. Apart from the aesthetic design, management should put operational practicality and functionality into account by getting the employees (the wearers) to participate in the process of launching and implementing any change initiatives on staff uniforms. Communication and mutual understanding between management and employees are imperative in understanding each other's concerns. This study extends the body of literature exploring the impact of employee uniform on job satisfaction in the housekeeping department, making it a reference for the Hong Kong hotel industry at large. The proposed recommendations would have a positive impact on employees' job satisfaction by improving hotel management and administration in employee uniforms. Job satisfaction is a complex and multifaceted construct containing a wide range of measures. The development of job (dis)satisfaction is a dynamic process that could be influenced by diverse factors and situations in a workplace. Thus, there is not just a single variable that boosts/decreases job satisfaction. Although the study has successfully demonstrated how employee uniform design influences the wearers' overall job satisfaction, the correlation between the identified determinants and job satisfaction remains inconclusive. This limitation implies that the findings need to be interpreted cautiously. The current study had a few methodological weaknesses. The relatively limited sample size, and the adoption of a mono-population approach that dealt with a single department of a sample organization might restrict the generalizability of the study. The findings of the present study are specific to the housekeeping department of a researched Hotel, without investigating other departments in the hotel industry. Given that job duties, working conditions, and physical demands vary in different hotel positions, further research is needed. It is recommended that future research should examine the other frontline staff from different hotel departments or conduct a comparative case study to allow multifarious exploration of the effect of staff uniforms on job satisfaction across different hotel positions. Future research might also examine how employee job dissatisfaction might impact turnover, retention, and perceptions of identity.

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