Emotional Offerings in the Hospitality Industry:
A Social Psychological Approach

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Abstract

While a service offering is a well-established concept, the concept of an emotional offering is not. It has been pointed out that emotional offerings are about a host's caring attitudes, which may create an emotional connection with the guest. The aim of this paper is to examine the nature of emotional offerings both theoretically and empirically, with a social psychological approach. In social psychology, values have been found to be the main independent variable in the study of social attitudes and behavior. Values determine our attitudes, which affect our behavior. The data gathering method was semi-structured interviews, with the informants coming from the hotel and restaurant industries. The findings back the idea that emotional offerings are about caring attitudes, as most of the relational attitudes identified in the study are synonyms of caring. It is pointed out that service offerings are delivered and emotional offerings are expressed.

Key words Service offering, Hospitableness, Hosting, Instrumental values, Guest

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Introduction

Service offerings in the hospitality industry are about providing food and drink and/or sleeping accommodation, that is, they are "economic activities offered by one party to another" (Lovelock & Wirts, 2011, p. 37). In the hospitality industry, however, there is also a different type of offering: an emotional offering. In a comprehensive literature review, it was pointed out that in the hospitality industry, "service provision has a particularly high proportion of employee-customer interaction that requires an emotional offering, which, in turn, mandates genuinely caring attitudes, emotional connections to guests, warmth, and generosity" (Kandampully et al., 2014). Lashley (2017a) has also pointed out that one of the unique aspects of the hospitality industry is the possibility of creating a bond between host and guest.

In the above Kandampully et al. (2014) quote, an emotional offering is about a caring attitude, which may create an emotional connection to guests, a connection that has certain qualities, namely warm and generous. With this understanding , an emotional offering is about a social relation, that is, it is a social psychological phenomenon. However, an emotional offering does not appear to be a term used in social psychology; probably because the term has a commercial subtext. However, this study will introduce a social psychological approach to examine the concept of emotional offering.

The 21st century saw the first attempts to examine the emotional aspects of hospitality (Lashley et al., 2004, Pullman & Groos, 2004). In a 2008 study, Lugusi pointed out that the distinction between emotional and functional forms of hospitality has not been considered in detail. This shifting to the emotional dimensions of the guest experience, as originally proposed by Hemmington (2007), is an attempt to shift the focus of hospitality research away from the narrow themes of management and concerns about operational efficiency and service quality. This study follows the path proposed by Hemmington (2007). It seems the specific concept of emotional offering does not appear to have been studied in depth in hospitality research.

The aim of this paper is to examine the nature of emotional offerings, both theoretically and empirically. Analytically, a distinction between service offering and emotional offering is made. This is something that may be difficult to do in real life working situations, therefore, the distinction can be seen as a deliberately simplified picture of a piece of reality (cf. Arbnor & Bjerke, 1997, p. 83).

Two Contexts: Service and Hospitality

Service offerings are often categorized as service packages (for instance, Normann, 2007, p. 75; Grönroos, 2015, p. 206). There are several ways to describe service packages (for instance, Grönroos, 1987; Grönroos, 2015, p. 209; Fitzsimmons et al., 2014, pp. 18-19; Lovelock, 1992, and Wirtz & Lovelock, 2018, p. 95). However, they are all based on a distinction between a core service enhanced by supplementary services originally advanced by Eiglier & Langeard (1977). The Grönroos basic service package model makes a distinction between three types of services: the core service, enabling services, and enhancing services (Grönroos, 2015, pp. 209-211). Enabling services are required for the core service to be used by customers; enhancing services are not obligatory for the core service to work but are used to increase the value of or differentiate the service offering (Grönroos, 2015, p. 208).

Lashley (2017b) has introduced a continuum of hospitality, with six different categories representing the range of ways that human beings have practiced and still practice hospitality. The hospitality industry, which is the focus here, is about commercial hospitality.

King's hospitality model (1995) views hospitality as a process that involves *arrival* and *departure*. In this process, there is interaction between the host and the guest. The model includes a description of aspects of the host's job as a host; some characteristics of the host's behavior are described (deference, formality), but the host's personality and the host's values and attitudes are not part of the model.

Since the publication of King's model, research on host traits have been published, notably hospitableness (Blain, 2012). Hospitableness is about the genuine desire to meet the guest's needs and to make the guest feel special (Blain & Lashley, 2016). Hospitableness is a socio-psychological phenomenon (Tasci and Samrad, 2016). This means that hospitableness can be both a trait and a value that some people have (Telfer, 1995; 2007). A trait is defined as "a characteristic pattern of behavior or a disposition to feel and act" (Myers, 1998, p. 430). The so-called trait perspective in psychology is about identifiable patterns of people's characteristic behaviors or conscious motives that describe basic personality dimensions (cf. Myers, 1998, p. 430). A trait is an aspect of a person's personality that can be experienced in the individual's attitudes and behavior (Blain & Lashley, 2014; cf. Allport & Odbert, 1936; Myers, 1998, p. 430).

As mentioned, an emotional offering does not appear to be an established concept in social psychology. Likewise, it does not appear to be an established concept in hospitality theory. However, there are a number of other concepts that are related to the concept of emotional offering: emotional labor and hospitality intelligence, the latter a construct of emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and hospitality experiential intelligence (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013). According to Hochschild (1983), emotional labor is distinct from physical and mental labor. Emotional labor is about "delivering smiles, making eye contact, showing sincere interest and engaging in friendly conversation with people who are essentially strangers and who may or may not be seen again" (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2011, p. 253). Emotional labor "requires the management of one's feelings in order to display appropriate emotions in the job setting" (King, 1995). Emotional intelligence is about having empathy and being curious about other people (Goleman, 1996). Cultural intelligence is about understanding intercultural interaction (Ang et al., 2007). Hospitality experiential intelligence is about generosity and professional behavior (Bharwani & Jauhari, 2013).

Emotional Offerings: A Social Psychological Approach

Our personality has an influence on how we think, how we feel, and what we know, that is, our thoughts, feelings, and knowledge (cf. Myers, 1998, p. 430). Thoughts, feelings, knowledge are about values (Harris, 1988; Nisbitt, 1970; Radcliffe-Brown, 1957; Tylor, 2010). Values are about likes and dislikes based on different religious, ideological, and/or aesthetic aspects of a culture. In a hospitality context, values can be about hospitableness, generosity, and openness (Telfer, 2017).

Rokeach (1973) found that the concept of values, more than any other, is the core concept across all social sciences: Values were found to be the main independent variable in the study of social attitudes and behavior, that is, a person's values affect the person's behavior. This is a social psychological process. Value is a higher-order concept that is believed to have broad control over an individual's mere attitudes (Vaughn & Hogg, 1998, p. 95). Winson (1977) found strong support for the Rokeach value paradigm; Braithwaite & Law (1985) found support for the comprehensive nature of the paradigm. However, one should be aware of cultural differences and changes in values when using the Rokeach paradigm (Tuulik, 2016).

There are different types of values: moral values, religious values, political values, as well as other types of values, including social values, which are about human interaction and feelings towards other people (Hungerford et al, 1994). Values can be divided into two categories: terminal values and instrumental values (Rokeach, 1973). Terminal values are about desirable end-states of existence, such as, for instance, freedom and equality. Instrumental values are about preferable modes of behavior and relations, such as, for instance, helpfulness and honesyt, and competences, and such as, for instance, imagination and logic.

Table 1 is an overview of the terminal and instrumental values that Rokeach (1973) identified.

Table 1. Terminal values and instrumental values (Rokeach, 1973).

TERMINAL VALUE	INSTRUMENTAL VALUE
A comfortable life (a prosperous life)	Ambitious (hardworking, aspiring)
An exciting life (a stimulating, active life)	Broad-minded (open-minded)
A sense of accomplishment (lasting contribution)	Capable (competent, effective)
A world of peace (free of war and conflict)	Cheerful (light-hearted, joyful)
A world of beauty (beauty of nature and the arts)	Clean (neat, tidy)
Equality (brotherhood, equal opportunity for all)	Courageous (standing up for your beliefs)
Family security (taking care of loved ones)	Forgiving (willing to pardon others)
Freedom (independence, free choice)	Helpful (working for the welfare of others)
Happiness (contentedness)	Honest (sincere, truthful)
Inner harmony (freedom from inner conflict)	Imaginative (daring, creative)
Mature love (sexual and spiritual intimacy)	Independent (self-reliant, self-sufficient)
National security (protection from attack)	Intellectual (intelligent, reflective)
Pleasure (an enjoyable, leisurely life)	Logical (consistent, rational)
Salvation (saved, eternal life)	Loving (affectionate, tender)
Self-respect (self-esteem)	Obedient (dutiful, respectful)
Social recognition (respect, admiration)	Polite (courteous, well mannered)
True friendship (close companionship)	Responsible (dependable, reliable)
Wisdom (a mature understanding of life)	Self-controlled (restrained, self-disciplined)

Values determine our attitudes, as mentioned above. An attitude is defined as "a relatively stable and enduring predisposition to behave or react in a certain way towards persons, objects, institutions, or issues" (Chaplin, 1985, p. 41). Attitudes are about beliefs and feelings (Myers, 1998, p. 551). A popular way of understanding attitude is that "attitudes are tendencies to respond to people, institutions or events, either positively or negatively (Chaplin, 1985, p. 41).

A person's values have control over the person's internal attitudes (which cannot be seen), and it is these internal attitudes as well as external or social influences that lead to to having a certain behavior (Myers, 1998, p. 552). Without the concept of attitude, we would have difficulty in construing and reacting to events, in trying to make decisions, and in making sense of our relationships in everyday life (Vaughn & Hogg, 1998, p. 80). According to research by Smith, Bruner and White (1956), attitudes save energy, as we do not have figure out "from scratch" how we should relate to a situation, a person anew every time we are in the situation or meet a specific type of person (for instance, a guest).

Kandampully et al. (2014) mention "a caring attitude" as an emotional offering (or part of an emotional offering), that is, emotional offerings are about attitudes. In this study, an emotional offering is defined as an attitude based on relational values ("relational attitude"). A person with the relational values *helpful* and *polite* will have behavior that reflect these social values; that is, the relational attitudes "translate" the values into behavior, for instance, behavior that is caring and friendly towards guests.

Method and Data-gathering
In qualitative research, clarifying, motivating and implementing all aspects of methodological choices and procedures in order to establish the quality of the data, in particular their transferability (Trochim, 2006) is imprtant.

The data gathering method was semi-structured interviews, based on an interview guide (Kvale, 1997). Informants were required to speak Danish fluently, work in the Danish hospitality industry, having had their current position in the eight months prior to the interview and be working at stand-alone Danish hospitality companies (which exclude international hotel brands).

For space reasons, only a few of the criteria for establishing quality suggested by Olson (2000) will be included in this section. The interview guide did not include questions about values or attitudes. You can ask hosts directly about their attitudes towards guests, but then values and attitudes can be expected to be idealized, whether they are company values or personal values. Therefore, questions that would lead the informant to express or describe intended or actual reactions and behavior towards guests were included in the interview guide, in particular these questions: How do you receive a guest? Do you have philosophy or policy about this? How do you interact with your guests?

A total number of 15 semi-structured interviews was carried out between April and December 2019 among staff in the Danish hospitality industry; in all three major regions of Denmark. The interviews had an average length of 51 minutes. In the transcribed interviews, quotes that a. describe an attitude, b. express an attitude, c. describe a reaction expressing a value or an attitude, and d. describe behavior expressing a value or an attitude were selected. Statements were selected if they express reactions and behavior, also if only given as an example, which would cover all guests, not just one specific guest.

Analysis
Several informants express that they want to take care of guests: "the most important thing is that we take care […] of our guests" (Informant #6). Four other informants come with similar statements: "This about showing to our guests that we care" (Informant #1). "Exercising the role of host […] has to do with taking care of the guest from the guest come in through the door" (Informant #12). "a small detail like [giving another napkin] shows to the guest that we take care of you" (Informant #11). "We want to show the guests that we really care about how they are" (Informant #15).

For one informant, taking care of guests is an intention: "we try […] to show our guests that we care" (Informant #1). The intension is also expressed in this quote: we want the guest "to really feel that they are taken care of" (Informant #8).

Several informants refer directly to relational values, for instance, being helpful: "you are ready to help" (Informant #3); another informant states, "Help them in all situations" (Informant #9). Other informants speak about honesty, another relational value: "to be honest. What we care about is being honest towards the guest from the beginning" (Informant #1). Another informant states: We use "different words, but it is about being open and honest" (Informant #12).

Two informants refer to politeness: "A smile goes a long way. And politeness" (Informant #8); one informant refer to "Polite service" (Informant #13).

Several informants speak about being friendly: "of course, you have to be friendly" (Informant #4). "Our approach is – to be friendly and welcoming" (Informant #5).

Several informants state that guests should be treated with respect: "Well, of course, respect [when we deal with] our guests" (Informant #5). "we all have to treat each other respectfully" (Informant #7). "It is also about respect for the other guests" (Informant #6).

Being open and open-minded is also a theme: "Therefore, it is about openness and about being open to all kinds of guests" (Informant #8). "you have to be open-minded" (Informant #11). "We welcome [guests] with an open mind" (Informant #10).

Being receptive to the needs of the guests is one way of expressing a host's attitude: "every half hour we take a round [in the lounge area] and pay attention to the guests and see if everything is OK in the lounges" (Informant #1). For other informants, their attitude is: "you want to listen and be there for the guest – you *are* there for the guest […] You er standing [there] and are interested in the person standing in front of you" (Informant #4). Another informant talks about being present: "But […] our guests also get our presence, which is a value of ours" (Informant #7).

One informant describes behavior that expresses thoughtfulness: "For example, we have a technician, who every morning goes to the person in charge of the meeting and gives his private phone no. and will say, for instance: "If you need anything, then just call me. Then you do not have to through the reception; this can save you some time" (Informant #7).

One informant describes a reaction to a situation, a reaction that expresses kindness: "Well, I had a conference chair, who comes up to in the reception and [explains he] has a terrible headache, because apparently he has lost one of his contact lenses […] It turns out that I use contact lenses and I have the exact same correction as he had. And I had some extra contact lenses, so I went to get a contact lens for him and give it to him and say 'Here this is from me […]'; then he could be focused again, and that is how you talk with the guest[s] and care about them […] and you listen to them" (Informant #8).

Concluding Comments

The informants express or describe values and/or relational attitudes and describe reactions and/or behavior that express or describe relational attitudes. The direct or underlying relational attitudes identified in the analysis are caring, friendly, helpful, honest, kind, open-minded, polite, present, respectful, receptive, thoughtful. Based on a dictionary of synonyms (Chambers, 2004, pp. 47, 175, 178), these words are synonyms of four specific relational values: helpful and polite (with the subcategories: courteous, well-mannered), honest (with the subcategories sincere, truthful) and broad-minded (with the subcategory open-minded).

Kandampully et al's (2014) suggestion that emotional offerings are about caring attitudes match with the data, as most of the relational attitudes identified in the study are synonyms of caring. As a category of either positive or negative words, all these words are likely to be categorized as positive words by most people, that is, they reflect a positive attitude.

It is apparent from the analysis that an emotional offering is not an offering in an economic sense (the way that a service offering is an economic exchange). An emotional offering is about relations, about emotional connections to guests, as also stated by Kandampully et al. (2014). Thus, a service offering and an emotional offering are two distinct phenomena. Since an emotional offering is not a service offering, it cannot be categorized as neither an enabling service nor an enhancing service. Consequently, an emotional offering is not a service that is delivered, that is, it is not part of a service delivery (for instance, understood as an augmented service package (Grönroos, 2015, p. xxx). An emotional offering is expressed by a person, who exercises the role of host (regardless of job title).

Just like customers perceive the quality of a service delivery in certain ways, guests may perceive the quality of the host's behavior and communication in a certain way. Kandampully et al. (2014) mention warmth and generosity, which are two examples of how behavior and communication may be perceived; what can be termed *emotional* quality.

In the same vein that a service offering is delivered, an emotional offering is expressed. A hospitality place can communicate their service offering, for instance, "We are right in the city center". Sometimes a hospitality place may also communicate an emotional offering on their website, for instance, "Meet our friendly staff".

How a service offering is delivered can vary as can the expression of an emotional offering. It is by no means a sure thing that a host will have a hospitable attitude and express a positive emotional offering. This study has only identified emotional offerings that are positive but there may also be emotional offerings that are negative, namely when a host has an uncaring, unfriendly and disrespectful attitude towards the guest or emotional offerings that are automated, mechanical, or impersonal.

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