

## CONSUMER DINING DURATION AND SPENDING: THE ROLE OF EMOTIONAL LABOUR PRACTICE IN THE RESTAURANT INDUSTRY

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### Abstract:

*This paper centres on examining the link between emotional labour and dining duration within the restaurant industry. In this study emotional labour practice was modelled as one of the crucial predictors of dining duration. This is a multiple case study methodology using a cross sectional approach. The target population was 480 dyads encounters in 6 of the most popular fast food restaurant chains in Harare. Some 214 seat-in customers were the unit of analysis while wait staff were the unit of observation. In terms of responses, 200 responses were attained and were deemed sufficient for meaningful Structural Equation Modelling. The quantitative approach employed a self-*

*completed structured questionnaire in collecting data. A structural equation modelling was run to test the direct effects, a multi-group structural equation modelling was run to test the moderating effects of categorical variables, and a moderated multiple regression was run to test the moderation effects of the latent variables. The study revealed various factors that influence the connection between emotional labour and dining duration such as the gender factor of the people involved, the rate and strength of the interaction between restaurant employees and the clients. The outcome directed that emotional labour is positively associated with consumer dining duration. The consumer dining duration is in turn associated with consumer expenditures within the restaurant. However, all the hypothesised moderators had no statistically significant effect. The study recommended the use of emotional labour as one of the predictors for increased revenue in the restaurant industry through increased consumer spending as mediated by the dining duration under the scenario of excess capacity and limited demand.*

**Keywords:** *emotional labour, dining duration, consumer spending, restaurant*

**JEL Classification:** J12

## **Introduction**

Consumer spending in the restaurant industry contributed to the viability and lucrativeness of the fast food restaurant businesses (Mukucha et al., 2019). Consumers are likely to spend a lot of money on dining services if they spend a longer duration dining in the restaurant. They are also likely to spend a lot of dining in the service environment if the conditions are favourable to their expectations and requirements (Yoon, Scopelliti, & Morewedge, 2021). Usually restaurant businesses prefer patrons to have a considerably lengthy period of dining when the existing capacity is higher than the prevailing demand. The idea is that if the patrons spend a lot of time in the dining environment they may end up demanding more items than what they had initially planned for (Sharma, Trott, Sahadev, 2023).

Various factors influence the attitudes of dining within the restaurant environment (Mukucha et al., 2022), food quality (Zhong and Moon, 2020), service experience (Slack et al., 2021; Bichler et al., 2021; Mukucha et al., 2019), and consumer ethnocentrism (Mukucha and Jaravaza, 2021). Labour efforts from

employees are the other possible contributors to the dining experiences of the patrons (Chehab et al., 2012). However, modern trends are exponentially incorporating other set of capabilities such as aesthetic labour and emotional labour (Wu et al., 2020). There is also a possibility that emotional labour may also contribute to the customer outcomes (Hulsheger et al., 2015) such as dining duration of the patrons in the restaurant businesses. Previous studies in the service industry indicate a strong link between consumer behaviour and general employee characteristics such as mental, physical abilities and competencies (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2022; Rodríguez, Antonovica, & Martín, 2023), hence this study is novel as it focus on specific attributes namely, consumer behaviour (dinning duration) and emotional labour.

Emotional labour practice as manifested through its mechanical displays is located within the framework of social factors which are part of the dimensions of the services space. The social dimension of the services space comprises of the number, appearance, and behaviour of the employees in the service setting (Line and Hanks, 2019); Baker, 1986) and it facilitates employee-customer interactions (Tran, Dang & Tournois, 2020). The space in which interactions occur could influence avoidance behaviour (Halbusi et al., 2020). Emotional labour practice addresses concerns that arise from client expectations and discourtesy behaviours (Hwang et al., 2022). This leads to the suggestion that if emotional labour is practiced appropriately the dining duration of the patrons may be extended. This resonates with the thinking that emotional labour practice is associated with positive customer outcomes (Hulsheger et al., 2015; Humphrey, Ashforth & Diefendorff, 2015). The study looks at whether emotional labour practice by the frontline employees leads to an extended dining duration. It also sought to determine whether the dining duration leads to consumer spending. Furthermore, the study seeks to establish whether customers' gender, employees' gender, interaction frequency and interaction intensity moderate the relationship between employee emotional labour practice and customers' dining duration.

The presumption linking emotional labour practice and the dining duration is of cause not simple. It is highly influenced by variables such as the gender of both staff and the clients, rate of interaction. Further, consumer behaviour such as spending is closely linked to customer perceptions of the quality of service provided (Jain, Banerjee, Sharma, 2023).

The structure of the study outlines, literature review on the theoretical basis that links emotional labour practice to dining duration, and the moderators of that

relationship. Furthermore, the study seeks to determine whether the dining duration leads to consumer spending. The research and methodology is then introduced. This is then followed by data analysis and findings of the study, after which the authors dwell on discussions and implications. This paper winds down by making major recommendations, limitations and areas of future research.

### Literature Review

This section presents the applicable theoretical foundation discussions. Furthermore, the conceptual background illustrating the relationship among variables of interests (Emotional labor, dining duration; and consumer spending). An empirical literature review is also focused on.

### Theoretical and Conceptual Background

**Emotional labour:** Emotional labour is the extent of emotional interaction between the organisation's key stakeholders (employees and customers) (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993). The emotions are expected to be managed in accordance with the prescription enshrined in the job specification (Needham et al., 2021). The prescribed emotions usually involve mechanically expressing emotions such as smiling and eye contact (Mauersberger et al., 2022). Emotional labour practice is a common feature in jobs that involve personal contact in the services industry (Hochschild, 1983). There is a dominance of the female gender in services industry, leading to the assumption that the emotional labour is a practice that is associated with females (Hochschild, 1983).

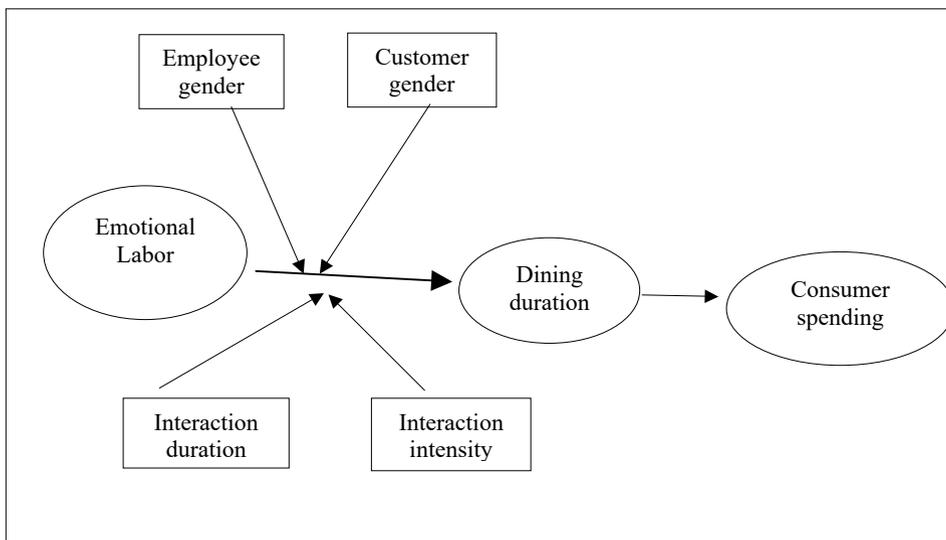
Usually the prescribed emotions are at variance with the felt emotions (Ngcobo et al., 2022). In such cases employees either surface act or deep act in order to project the prescribed emotions (Huang et al., 2019). The effect of deep acting is that, the inner feeling is modified to match the displayed emotions, while surface acting involves faking the felt emotions (Kwon et al., 2019). Deep acting is commonly preferred as it is less associated with employee fatigue and emotional dissonance, while surface acting is discouraged as it leads to emotional dissonance (Sciotto and Pace, 2022), emotional exhaustion (Amisshah et al., 2021; Chen et al., 2019; Li et al., 2017) and less favourable customer outcomes (Kim et al., 2019). However, the most recent perspective suggests that surface acting may not pose a lot of problems to the employees as has been previously envisaged (Dudau and Brunetto, 2020).

**Dining duration:** Dining duration refers to the period which the patrons spend in a restaurant (Jia, 2021). Where demand is higher than the restaurant capacity,

restaurants prefer customers to have a shorter dining duration in order to maximise table turnover (Bloom et al., 2012). There are several factors that contribute to the patrons’ desire to spend a lot of time in the restaurant premises. The services cape framework by Bitner (1992) and Baker (1987) provide some insights that shed light on how patrons develop some approach or avoidance behaviours as result on how they interact with the services cape. Some of the services cape elements that contribute to the customers spending more time in the service environment are ambient factors, physical factors, and more importantly social factors (Han and Ryu, 2009).

**Consumer spending:** Consumer spending in the restaurant industry refers to the personal consumption expenditures on various culinary items (Yang et al., 2009). Consumer spending is of paramount importance (Mateos et al., 2021) represents the revenue in the hospitality industry (None, 2016) and the restaurant in particular (Bloom et al., 2012). As the consumers spend more time in a restaurant they are likely to demand a variety of services and dishes in the restaurant. It is through such demand that the consumers will continue to spend more within the restaurant.

The above literature informs the conceptual model presented in the figure 1 below.



**Figure 1: Conceptual Model of the Study; Source: Authors**

Figure 1 above suggests that emotional labour practice is associated with the customers' dining duration. However, the gender of the staff moderates the connection of the staff and patrons as elucidated in the emotional contagion theory (Ozgen & Esiyok, 2019). The relationship is supported by the occurrence and concentration of the interface during the service encounter duration. Finally, as the patrons spend more time in the service outlet they are expected to increase their spending during the service encounter.

### **Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development**

**Emotional labour practice and dining duration:** Social factors involves the human elements in a service environment who are almost always employees and customers (Andres et al., 2016; Sheng et al., 2016). These human elements are evaluated on the basis of their numbers, appearance, and behaviour (Baker, 1986). Some of the employee behaviours are the manifestation of the emotional labour practice (Kim et al., 2019). Management assumes a strong connection between emotional labour and positive customer behaviours (Humphrey et al., 2015). These emotions involve physical manifestation through facial expressions, tone of voice, and body posture (Li et al., 2018). Behaviours such as a soft tone of voice, smile demonstrate emotional labour (Hietanen and Peltola, 2021; Hietanen, 2018), and form a key element of the services cape as viewed by Baker (1986). Approach behaviours can manifest in patrons through having an extended dining duration. Other similar studies have already acknowledged that customer behaviour can be stimulated by emotional labour efforts (.e.g. Mukucha et al., 2012). It can thus be presupposed that:

*H1: Emotional labour practice by the frontline employees leads to an extended dining duration*

**Dining duration and consumer spending:** Previous research has demonstrated that restaurant revenue increases as a result of high table turnover (Bloom et al., 2012; Kimes et al., 2002). However, this scenario is likely to be valid when there is higher volume of demand against limited supply capacity (Noone et al., 2007). In the event that the ability is high and the volume of customers is limited revenue is likely to be generated when customers increase their spending. The increase in spending is anticipated to be a function of the customers' extended dining duration. Therefore, it is anticipated that;

*H2: Dining duration is associated with consumer spending.*

**Employees' gender, employee emotional labour and customers' dining duration:** The link between staff emotional labour and customer dining duration

can be moderated by the gender of the employee. Usually women are good at expressing emotions (Hess et al., 2000; Ozen & Esiyok, 2019). They are therefore likely to express their emotions such as smiling and eye contact (Hietanen and Peltola, 2021; Hietanen, 2018; Sutton and Rafaeli, 1990) exceptionally well than their male counterparts. This could be explained by the fact that women are socialised to be emotionally expressive (Hertenstein and Keltner, 2011), while men are expected to inhibit their emotional expressions (Brescoll, 2016). Emotional labour practice is likely to produce better results when practiced by females than men because women are more expressive than men during their interpersonal transactions with clients. It is therefore anticipated that;

*H3a: The employees' gender moderates the relationship between employee emotional labour practice and customers' dining duration*

**Customers' gender, employee emotional labour and customers' dining duration:** The impact of emotional labour practice during interpersonal transactions depends of transference of emotions in what Hatfield et al, (1993) termed emotional contagion. The emotional contagion theory states that where two or more people have an encounter there is some transference of emotions through either conscious or unconscious mimicry (Hatfield et al., 1993). The fluidity of emotional contagion depends on the gender of the participants involved. A growing body of literature pointed to the fact that females accurately perceive emotional facial expressions than males (Montagne, Kessels et al., 2005; McClure, 2000; Ozgen & Esiyok, 2019). Previous research has also indicated that women are more prone to emotional influence than their male counterparts (Magen and Konasewich, 2011). Perhaps this can be accounted by females' ability to use additional neural networks for dealing with emotions (Schulte-Ru"ther et al., 2008). As a result females are better at decoding and judging emotional cues from the faces of the other people whom they are interacting with (Chen et al., 2018; Hoffmann et al., 2010; Hampson et al., 2006; Hatfield et al., 1993). It is therefore anticipated that;

*H3b: The customers' gender moderates the relationship between employee emotional labour practice and customers' dining duration*

**Interaction frequency, employee emotional labour and customers' dining duration:** The interaction frequency is likely to affect the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration. The increasing frequency of the employee-customer interactions reinforces the emotions displayed by the employee during their encounter (Kim and Baker, 2019). This has the effect of creating a

rapport between the employees and the customers (Hwang et al., 2021). Rapport is conceptualised as the quality interaction characterised by mutual understanding and satisfactory communication (Gremler and Gwinner, 2000). The rapport inculcates fertile grounds for the contagion of employees' displayed emotions (Lee and Hwang, 2022) leading to the approach behaviours of the customers in the form of extended dining duration and customer appreciation such as tipping in the restaurant business (Medler-Liraz, 2020). It is therefore anticipated that;

*H4a: The interaction frequency moderates the relationship between employee emotional labour practice and customers' dining duration*

**Interaction intensity, employee emotional labour and customers' dining duration:** The other possible moderator of the link between emotional labour practice and dining duration is interaction intensity. Where the intensity of the interaction is high the transference of emotional displays from the wait staff is likely contagious. When the patrons are overwhelmed with the pleasantries of the emotions from employees among other behaviours in the service package, they are likely to linger around the service outlet for a considerably longer duration exploring other services and products on offer. It is therefore plausible to anticipate that;

*H4b: The interaction intensity moderates the relationship between employee emotional labour practice and customers' dining duration.*

### Research and Methodology

**Population:** The study followed a multiple case study methodology anchored on a cross sectional approach. The population of interest for the study is comprised of dyads in fast food restaurants and the study target population was 480 dyads in six of the most popular fast food restaurant chains in Harare. There are so many factors that determine the sample size in generalizable studies (Saunders et al., 2018) such as cost, affordability and the appropriate statistical tool (Bryman, 2016).

**Sample and data acquisition:** Some 214 seat-in customers were considered the unit of analysis as they were the entity about which the data was reported while wait staff were the unit of observation who happen to be the source of data regarding the unit of analysis. Therefore, the sample size was 214 dyads encounters. In terms of responses, 200 dyads encounters responses were attained and were deemed sufficient in line with the rule of thumb of not less than 200 for meaningful Structural Equation Modeling. The study followed a quantitative approach by employing a self-completed structured questionnaire in collecting

data. The collected data was analysed using quantitative tools. Regarding Structural Equation Modeling, the study used a sample of 200 dyads encounters in line with Reisinger and Mavondo (2007) who notes that a sample of 200 is vital in offering appropriate power in conducting the modelling. Kline (2011) and Barrett (2007) also agree that 200 as sample size adequately addresses requirements of structural equation modelling and that any research that utilise a sample lower than 200 need to be rejected, except when it is drawn from a constrained population.

### Measures

Constructs were based on extant literature, In order to stay aligned to similar studies conducted in the past, the study adopted validated measures from the extant literature. Emotional labour was measured using the 15 item Hospitality Emotional labour Scale (HELs) developed by Chu and Murrmann (2006).

Interaction frequency and interaction intensity were measured using scales adopted from Brotheridge and Lee (2003). The other variables were either categorical in the case of employee and customer gender, or concrete in the case of dining duration, and consumer spending.

### Findings and Discussions

In this section results regarding this study are presented including discussion of the findings.

### Findings

**Sample characteristics:** the study also collected data on age and gender as illustrated in table 1 below.

**Table 1 Sample characteristics**

Variable	Category	N	%
Employee's age	18-30	97	48.5
	31-40	91	45.5
	41-50	6	3.0
	51-60	6	3.0
Employees' gender	Males	79	39.5
	Females	121	60.5
Customers' gender	Males	92	46.0
	Females	108	54.0

Source: Authors

As illustrated in table 1 above most of the wait staff surveyed were young (18-30) and comprised 48.5%. This is the typical age for most employees in the

hospitality industry. This age group was followed by the 30-40 age group (45.5%). This suggested that almost 94% of the employees in the restaurant industry are below the age of 40. The age pattern suggested that restaurant industry employers are keen to retain young employees who still have a lot of energy as it is a job that requires exhibition of energy during service delivery.

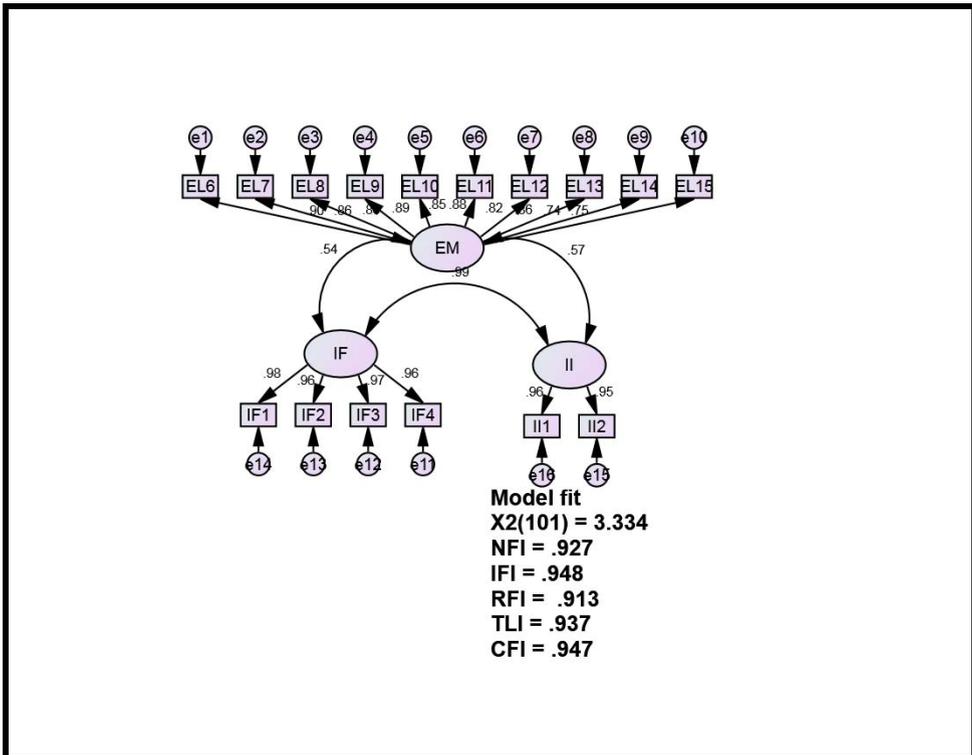
Females dominated the restaurant industry, both as employees (60.5%) and as customers (54.0%). The presents of more females as employees in the restaurant industry is in line with what the extant literature has already revealed in saying that service work is gendered. This particularly true for the hospitality industry were a feminine touch provides a welcoming atmosphere. Interestingly the restaurant industry is patronized by females than males. This can be explained that with more women joining the formal employment sector they tend to have less time to cook at home, while at the same time they now have more disposable income.

### Measurement Model

Unidimensionality tests were conducted on all the latent variables in this study using exploratory factor analysis.

A KMO and a Bartlett's test of sphericity indicated that the data was factorable as evidenced by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy of **.947** and the  $p < .001$  for the 16 items measuring the three constructs. Two dimensions were extracted from the items for emotional labour, with the first dimension being represented by items 6 -15, while the second dimension was represented by items 1-5. The first dimension was deemed to represent the emotional labour construct and its items were used in subsequent analyses. The interaction frequency and interaction duration were found to be unidimensional as a single factor was extracted for each construct.

Model fit is one of the prerequisites for examining parameter estimates (Hair *et al.*, 2014). Model fit refers to the extent to which there is a resemblance between an empirical covariance matrix and the implied covariance matrix (Hair *et al.*, 2014). A confirmatory factor analysis was run to assess the model fit inferentially using the  $X^2$  test and descriptively using model comparisons measures and the results are shown a figure below.



**Figure 2: measurement model**

*Source: Authors*

**Table 3 model fit indices**

Fit indices name	Acceptable threshold by Hair et al., (2014)	Fit indices	Comment
$X^2/DF$	Between 1 and 3	3.334	Acceptable
NFI	$\geq .900$	.927	Acceptable
IFI	$\geq .900$	.948	Acceptable
RFI	$\geq .900$	.913	Acceptable
TLI	$\geq .900$	.937	Acceptable
CFI	$\geq .900$	.947	Acceptable

*Source: Authors*

The results from model fit assessment in figure 2 and table 3 above indicate that the conceptual model fitted to the data,  $X^2/df = 3.3$ . This implies that there is a similar level of discrepancy between the implied covariance matrix and the data based covariance matrix. Normed Fit Index = .927, Incremental Fit Index = .948, Tucker-Lewis Index = .937, and Comparative Fit Index = .947. Given that the fit indices fell within the acceptable range they were then adopted for the structural model.

**Reliability and Construct validity of the model**

Composite reliability (CR) and construct validity (convergent validity and discriminant validity) were employed in assessing reliability and validity of the models respectively in line with Hair et al, (2014). Convergent validity was assessed using factor loadings (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988) and the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion of using the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). However, discriminant validity was valuated through comparison of measurement model correlation coefficients and the square root of the latent factors ( $\sqrt{AVE}$ ) values as advised by McDaniel and Gates, 2010). The results on reliability and construct validity of the model are shown in table 4 below.

**Table 4 Factor loadings, AVE,  $\sqrt{AVE}$ , CR, Mean and SD**

CODES	ESTIMATE	P	AVE	$\sqrt{AVE}$	CR	M	SD	1	2	3
EL6	.901	***								
EL7	.861	***								
EL8	.879	***								
EL9	.892	***								
EL10	.854	***	.715	.863	.961	4.45	1.35	1		
EL11	.884	***								
EL12	.824	***								
EL13	.857	***								
EL14	.738	***								
EL15	.746	***								
IF4	.961	***								
IF3	.969	***								
IF2	.963	***	.936	.967	.983	3.91	2.29	.29	1	
IF1	.976	***								
II2	.952	***								
III1	.963	***	.917	.958	.957	3.81	2.31	.33	.98	1

Source: Authors

In terms of reliability the composite reliability shown in table 4 above ranged from .957-.983 which was all above the minimum threshold of .7 and this indicates the reliability of constructs. The result table 4 indicated that all the constructs had adequate convergent validity as AVEs for all the constructs were above the threshold of .5 and also that all the factors loading were above the 0.50 level thus were significant to their respective factors. Furthermore, correlation coefficients and the square root of the latent factors values shown in table 4 above confirms discriminant validity in line with Hair et al (2010) given that the correlation coefficient were below the square root of the AVE value for all the latent variables except for one. Given that interaction frequency and interaction intensity measure different aspects of wait staff and customer interaction, there were an anticipated level of inter-correlation.

**Structural equation model and Hypotheses testing**

The first hypothesis stated that emotional labour practice leads to an extended dining duration, while the second hypothesis suggested dining duration to be positively associated with consumer spending. A structural equation modelling was run to test these hypotheses.

**Table 5 Hypotheses for main effects**

Hypotheses		B	T	P	Decision
H1	Emotional labour practice --> Dining duration	.183	2.630	.009	Accepted
H2	Dining duration --> Consumer spending	.124	1.757	.079	Accepted

Source: Authors

As shown in table 5 above the suggestion that emotional labour practice influences the duration of dining was supported, B= .183, T = 2.630, P=.009. This lead to the acceptance of H1. The anticipation that dining duration in turn influence consumer spending was also supported, B= .124, T= 1.757, P= .079. This lead to the acceptance of H2 as well.

**Genders of the employees and customers as moderators:** H2a and H2b suggested that both the genders of the employees and customers moderate the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration. A multi-group structural equation modelling (MG-SEM) was run to test these hypotheses since the hypothesised variables were dichotomous in nature. The results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6 Categorical Moderators**

Hypotheses	Moderators	X <sup>2</sup>	Df	P
H2a	Employee gender	2.205	1	.138
H2b	Customer gender	1.477	1	.224

Source: Authors

The results in table 6 above revealed that both employee gender,  $X^2 = 2.205(1)$ ,  $P = .138$ , customer gender,  $X^2 = 1.477(1)$ ,  $P = .224$ , do not moderate the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration.

**Interaction frequency and interaction intensity as moderators:** Regarding the fourth hypothesis (sub-hypotheses H4a and H4b) a moderated multiple regression was run to assess the statistical significance of interaction frequency and interaction intensity as moderators of the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration since the hypothesised moderators were modelled as continuous variables. The findings are shown in Tables 7-9.

**Table 7 Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
a.	.267	.071	.057	4.999
b.	.256	.066	.051	5.014

a. Predictors: Moderator intensity, Zscore (Emotional labour), Zscore (Interaction frequency)

b. Predictors: Moderator frequency, Zscore (Emotional labour), Zscore (Interaction intensity)

Source: Authors

**Table 8 ANOVA**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
a.	Regression	376.239	3	125.413	5.019	.002
	Residual	4897.281	196	24.986		
	Total	5273.520	199			
b.	Regression	345.836	3	115.279	4.585	.004
	Residual	4927.684	196	25.141		
	Total	5273.520	199			

a. Dependent Variable: Dining duration

b. Predictors: Moderator frequency, Zscore Emotional labour), Zscore (Interaction frequency)

c. Predictors: Moderator intensity, Zscore (Emotional labour), Zscore (Interaction intensity)

Source: Authors

**Table 9 Coefficients**

Model		Beta	T	Sig.
Model 1	Zscore (Emotional labour)	.078	.971	.333
	Zscore (Interaction frequency)	.206	2.570	.011
	Moderator frequency	.064	.929	.354
Model 2	Zscore (Emotional labour)	.077	.944	.346
	Zscore (Interaction intensity)	.194	2.359	.019
	Moderator intensity	.053	.762	.447

a. Dependent Variable: Dining duration

Source: Authors

Results in table 8 above suggest that the model with interaction frequency as a moderator predicts a significant amount of variability in dining duration,  $F(3, 196) = 5.019$ ,  $P = .002$ ,  $R^2 = .071$ , while the model with interaction intensity as a moderator also predicts a significant amount of variability in dining duration,  $F(3, 196) = 4.585$ ,  $P = .004$ ,  $R^2 = .066$ . The results in table 9 above for the first model indicated that emotional labour has no statistically significant effect on dining duration,  $B = .078$ ,  $T = .971$ ,  $P = .333$ , while interaction frequency has a statistically significant effect on dining duration,  $B = .206$ ,  $T = 2.570$ ,  $P = .011$ . However, the moderation effect assessed through the emotional labour practice interaction and the frequency was not statistically significant,  $B = .064$ ,  $T = .929$ ,  $B = .354$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted and the alternative hypothesis that interaction frequency moderates the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration was rejected.

The results for the second model indicated that emotional labour has no statistically significant effect on dining duration,  $B = .077$ ,  $T = .944$ ,  $P = .346$ , while interaction intensity has a statistically significant effect on dining duration,  $B = .194$ ,  $T = 2.359$ ,  $P = .019$ . However, the moderation effect assessed through the interaction between emotional labour practice and interaction frequency was not statistically significant,  $B = .053$ ,  $T = .762$ ,  $B = .447$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted and the alternative hypothesis that interaction intensity moderates the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration was rejected.

### Discussion

The study sought to determine the link between emotional labour practice and dining duration. Despite the existence of relevant large body of literature such a relationship has largely remained missing in the extant literature. The study

revealed that emotional labour moderately influences the dining duration of the restaurant patrons. This suggests that as employees display the organisationally prescribed emotions they lead to the patrons whom they have interacted with into extending their dining duration. These findings provide support to the social service scape framework which predicts that a pleasant social service environment characterised by appropriate employee behaviours leads to approach behaviours (Bichler et al, 2021; Slack et al, 2021; Tran et al, 2020). The relationship between dining duration and consumer spending was found to be statistically significant. These findings suggest that as patrons spend more time in the restaurant environment they are likely to increase their expenditure on the restaurant's services and food items. Therefore increasing dining duration is one of the strategies in maximising the revenue for restaurant businesses (Yoon et al, 2021). This strategy works well under the conditions of having excess capacity against limited traffic of patrons. Against the background of limited number of patrons finding ways to detain the present patrons potentially leads to increased consumer spending. This may be a departure from previously popularised practice of encouraging patron's accelerated meal pace in order to increase table turnover so as to accommodate many patrons.

The study had also suggested that the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration is moderated by the gender of the wait staff and the gender of the practice. However, the results indicated that the gender of the wait staff does not moderate the link between the employees' emotional labour efforts and the dining duration of customers. This result was not expected since previous research has already demonstrated that females are emotionally expressive than men hence they practice more emotional labour than their male counterparts (Hampson et al, 2006). This explains why emotional labour has hitherto been regarded as a gender dimension of labour (Hochschild, 1983). However, it seems the strict regulation of emotional labour in many service industry (Sharma et al, 2023), the restaurant industry included, may account for the less variation in the emotional displays between males and female employees. A study by Chehab et al (2021) hinted on the prevalence of the standardisation in employee behaviours in the hospitality industry.

The results from this study indicated that gender of the customer does not moderate the link between emotional labour and the dining duration. Hence, there are no gender differences in the prevalence of emotional contagion. This suggests that although previous research has demonstrated that males and females differed

in terms of how they are susceptible to emotional contagion, these differences do not cut across all the sectors of the economy and all the real life situations. This observation is strengthened by authors such as Wild et al, (2001), Krings and Gordon, (1998) who agreed that gender differences are not a key consideration in determining the extent of emotional contagion under different situations. The gender of the patrons did not moderate the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration as has been hypothesised. This may be accounted by the fact that in the dining platforms there might be no differential effect of emotional contagion. The patrons' receptiveness of emotions from the wait staff might not be different along gender basis as has been suggested in previous studies. It is most likely the prevalence of emotional labour varies between men and women when emotions are exchanged in other social set up other than the ones in the restaurant. The emotions exchanged in the restaurant set up are calibrated to uniform for all the patrons. This augurs with previous studies where gender was found to have no differential effects along various constructs in the dining environment. For instance a study by Mukucha et al (2022) has revealed different patterns of patrons' perceptions of food quality, service quality and atmospherics quality that are influenced by gender.

Interaction frequency was also found not to moderate the relationship emotional labour practice and dining duration (also see, Rodríguez et al, 2023). This could explain the key role that the employer plays in controlling emotional behavior at the workplace. Therefore increasing the frequency of the display of those emotions is not likely to add any novelty that may induce differential outcomes. The same applies to the intensity of the emotions displayed. The displayed emotions cannot vary a lot since they have to be within the parameters prescribed by the employer.

### **Conclusions**

The first hypothesis (H1) that presupposed that emotional labour moderately influences the dining duration of the restaurant patrons was proved. Regarding the second hypothesis that suggested dining duration to be positively associated with consumer spending, it was proved. However, the third hypothesis (sub-hypotheses H3a and H3b) that presupposed that the gender of the wait staff and that of customers moderate the relationship between the employees' emotional labour efforts and the dining duration of customers was not proved. In terms of the interaction frequency and interaction duration, it was also found not to moderate the relationship between emotional labour practice and dining duration.

Customers' dining duration and spending data was collected from the patrons themselves. There are always rare possibilities that some patrons may not remember the accurate duration they have taken dining and the actual amount they spent in the restaurant. Therefore, future studies must use observational method for estimating the patrons' dining duration, and collect the expenditure amount from the cashiers. Furthermore the external validity of the findings of this study is limited to the dining conditions where there is excess capacity and limited traffic of the patrons.

By modelling of factors that influence dining duration to consumer spending, the model turn out to be a vital tool in the prediction of consumer perception of wait staff and ultimately their ability to positively perceive the fast food outlet in the Zimbabwean set-up. In this vein the model could be generalised in the prediction of consumer perception of fast food outlet in other countries and it could be applied by fast food outlet marketers in crafting sound marketing strategies. Regarding future studies may be done using larger samples and in other provinces such as Bulawayo and Midlands in order to ascertain the results pan out especially on the gender dynamics. Taking note that there was lack of discriminant validity between interaction frequency and interaction intensity, there is therefore the need for replication of this study in order to improve the validity of these two scales. The is also need to assess the impact of global health issues and the ensuing national health policies especially those arising out of the covid-19 pandemic and their role on consumer dining duration.

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