

## Dance with Problem Customers: An Examination of the Moderating Effect of Emotional Intelligence

## 與奧客共舞：情緒智力調節效果檢驗

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**摘要:**本研究的目的係透過資源保存理論的觀點，來探討一線員工的問題顧客知覺、情緒智力、情緒勞務負擔、與其正向服務行為之間的關聯性。本研究以台灣八十家中型餐廳之一線員工及其直屬主管為研究對象，共回收232份配對問卷，經統計分析後，得到以下結論：一線員工的問題顧客知覺會正向影響其情緒勞務負擔，並負向影響其正向服務行為。而且，一線員工的情緒勞務負擔在問題顧客知覺與正向服務行為間扮演部份中介角色。同時，一線員工的高情緒智力可分別調節問題顧客知覺與情緒勞動負擔間的正向關係、以及問題顧客知覺與正向服務行為間的負向關係。最後，本研究根據分析結果提出實務意涵、研究限制、與未來研究的建議。

**關鍵字：**資源保存理論；情緒智力；情緒勞務負擔；正向服務行為；問題顧客知覺

**Abstract:** Adopting a perspective of conservation of resources, the aim of this study is to examine the association among frontline employees' problem customer perceptions, emotional intelligence, emotional labor tax, and positive service behaviors. This study uses data collected from a field survey of 232 employee-supervisor matched dyads from 80 mid-size restaurants in Taiwan to test a framework of influences of problem customer perceptions. The results indicate that problem customer perceptions are positively related to frontline

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employees' emotional labor tax but negatively related to their positive service behaviors. Furthermore, emotional labor tax partially mediates the relationship between problem customer perceptions and positive service behaviors. Results also reveal that high emotional intelligence buffers the positive influence of problem customer perceptions on emotional labor tax but negative influence on positive service behaviors. Finally, the implications, limitations and suggestion for future research are discussed.

**Keywords:** Conservation of resources theory; Emotional intelligence; Emotional labor tax; Positive service behaviors; Problem customer perceptions

## 1. Introduction

Coping social stressor (Clayton, 1992; Dormann and Zapf, 2002; Brotheridge, and Lee, 2002) and problem customer (Hu, Hsu, Lee, Chang, and Hsu, 2011; Rupp and Spencer, 2006; Rupp, McCance, Spencer, and Sonntag, 2008; Spencer and Rupp, 2009) has been used by organizational researchers to refer emotional labor to regulate frontline employees' behaviors to display appropriate emotions on the jobs (e.g., Goodwin, Groth, Frenke, 2011; Gross, 2002; Hochschild, 198; Scott and Barnes, 2011) to fulfill organizational requirements (e.g., Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand, 2005; Grandey, 2003). More recently, these concepts has been employed to explain why frontline employees may result in emotional stress from emotional labor, so-called "*emotional labor tax*", when they struggle problem customers, who violate generally accepted norms of behavior during service encounters (Hu, *et. al.*, 2011), and then less on delivering willingly positive service behaviors (Harris and Reynolds, 2003; Judge, Woolf, and Hurst, 2009).

In general, studies have emphasized the value of positive service behaviors-treating customers nicely, having a kind smile, and providing the service in friendly manners in service encounters (Troughakos, Beal, Green, and Weiss, 2008), such as eliciting higher levels of customer satisfaction (Brown and Sulzer-Azaroff, 1994), customers' willingness to return and recommend to others (Tsai, 2001), and encouraging customers to spend more time in stores (Tsai and



Huang, 2002). Though some studies on service encounters have focused on frontline employees' behaviors that promote customer satisfaction, however, for anyone who has ever coped with problem customers; it is sometimes hard to believe the old adage "the customer is always right", despite the fact that service quality is a critical issue to organizations. The reality is that service encounters between frontline employees and problem customers may frequently result in negative and even depressing emotions (e.g., Bitner, Bernard, and Mohr, 1994; Fullerton and Punj, 1993; Hu, *et al.*, 2011). Hu, *et al.* (2011) explained that the higher frequency of interactions with problem customers may heighten frontline employees' emotional labor burden and work-family conflict, because such interactions involve the need for frontline employees to fake/regulate their emotions in a mandated way.

Obviously, problem customer in service encounters is regarded as a source of social stressors, "a class of characteristics, situations, episodes, or behaviors that are related to psychological or physical strain and that are somehow social in nature" (Dormann and Zapf, 2004: 62), that may cause negative consequences. As such, it is important to understand frontline employees' reactions to cope with problem customers, as well as the influences of coping problem customers lead to negative work outcomes to organizations and their subordinates and are worthy of continuing academic and practical concerns.

To expand knowledge in the area, we propose two goals in this current study. First, adopting conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) as a guiding framework, we focus to replicate past research linking problem customer perceptions to frontline employees' emotional labor (Hu, *et al.*, 2011; Rupp and Spencer, 2006; Rupp, *et al.*, 2008; Spencer and Rupp, 2009) and then examining the previously untested relationship between problem customer perceptions and positive service behaviors. We also like to investigate whether burden of "emotional stress" resulted from emotional labor, so-called "*emotional labor tax*", potentially mediates the linkage between problem customer perceptions and positive service behaviors. The second goal of this study is to further examine the extent to which frontline employees' emotional intelligence can act as a buffer against the negative influence of coping problem customers. Emotional

intelligence, defined as “an individual’s capacity to process emotional information to enhance cognitive activities and facilitate social functioning” (Rivers, Brackett, Salovey, and Mayer, 2007: 230), has been shown to be a positively reliable predictor of a number of important workplace outcomes (Zeidner, Matthew, and Roberts, 2009). As COR theory suggests, social stressors are thought to reduce employees’ overall coping abilities as they drain important emotional resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). However, COR theory suggests that frontline employees with higher levels of emotional coping abilities are better able to resist the negative effects of stressors. In this study, we posit that emotional intelligence can have a similar buffering effect, due to its favorable influence on coping emotional resources. However, we also like to reason that COR theory can be used to argue the relevance of emotional intelligence as a moderator.

## **2. Theory and Hypotheses**

### **2.1. Problem Customers**

In exploring and describing customers to disrupt service in a manner, a variety of terms and phrases have been employed, including “deviant consumers” (Mills and Bonoma, 1979), “aberrant consumers” (Fullerton and Punj 1993), “jaycustomers” (Lovelock, 1994), “inappropriate customers” (Strutton, Vitell, and Pelton, 1994), “dysfunctional customers” (Harris and Reynolds, 2003), “interactional injustice customers” (Rupp and Spencer, 2006), and “problem customers” (Hu, *et. al.*, 2011). In this study, we define the term “problem customers” from frontline employees’ perspectives so that it refers to the degree of an employee’s perception of his or her customers who deliberately or unintentionally disturbed servicers that negatively affected the organization or other customers (Hu, *et. al.*, 2011). Due to the high frequency of interpersonal interactions between customers and frontline employees in service encounters, thus, coping problem customers is often the most bothersome part of service jobs. Problem customer perceptions are inherently subjective assessments for frontline employees, and are primarily considered as a source of social stressors.

## **2.2. Emotional Labor Tax**

Organizations in service settings undoubtedly “commercialize” frontline employees’ emotions as a means to attract, please and retain customers (Hochschild, 1983). The dramaturgical view of the service encounter is that frontline employees feel they must put on an act to present appropriate emotions to their customers (Goffman, 1959; Hochschild, 1983). This is a form of emotional labor, wherein an employee manages their feelings to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display to perform organizational requirements and expectations (e.g., Diefendorff, Croyle, and Gosserand, 2005; Grandey, 2003), as well is performed through two identified forms (or strategies): surface acting (involves the suppression of emotions and then fake emotional displays) and deep acting (attempts to actually feel the emotions and then express a desired emotion) (Gross, 2002; Hochschild, 1983). Both surface acting and deep acting requires frontline employees to intentionally fake/modify their own emotions. Studies indicated that frequent use of surface acting is generally related to negative job outcomes and deep acting can result in positive job outcomes (e.g., Brotheridge and Lee, 2002; Grandey 2003).

Usually, frontline employees experienced negative emotions as coping problem customers; they may have lower motivation to work. Consequently, they might choose to adopt more surface acting because it only involved “superficial” changes of external emotions (e.g. hiding negative emotions). Furthermore, individuals may also result negative job outcomes as often masking their true feelings and incurring as a result of psychological stress of emotional taxing from deep acting, because these positive outcomes of deep acting may be offset by the negative emotional experience that originates from coping problem customers. That is to say that frontline employees heighten emotional labor tax on emotional acting under implicit and explicit pressure to fake/regulate their emotions as a tool to attract customers into patronizing the organization (e.g., Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003), specifically as coping problem customers. In this study, emotional labor tax, which differs from deep acting and surface acting (two strategies of emotional labor), is therefore defined as the extent to which the

individual's burden of "*emotional stress*" resulted from deep acting or surface acting.

### **2.3. Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory**

A review of the literature indicated that conservation of resource studies have been conducted by both Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) and Hobfoll's (1989). Basically, an assumption underlying the conservation of resources is that individuals strive to protect and conserve the resources they value (Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Hobfoll defined resources "as those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individuals or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects" (Hobfoll, 1989: 516). And Lazarus listed as resources the following characteristics, including intelligence, money, social skills, education, supportive family and friends, physical attractiveness, health and energy, and sanguinity (Lazarus, 2001:382). While the substance of Lazarus' critique of conservation of resources (COR) theory is examined closely to emphasize that "Hobfoll's viewpoint is fundamentally unsound and fails to advance beyond what he know" (Lazarus, 2001: 381). For all that, there are still two reasons to explain why Hobfoll's COR theory is much more relevant in this study than Lazarus's appraisal theory and then we adopt COR theory as a theoretical foundation in this study.

Firstly, COR theory implies that individuals make efforts to conserve their valued resources, so as to better attain desired goals (Grandey and Cropanzano, 1999). According to COR that stress occurs when individuals are either threatened with resource loss, actually lose resources, or fail to gain resources following a significant resource investment (e.g., coping problem customers). This loss of resources can lead to a negative state of being, namely, strain (Hobfoll, 1989). But Lazarus (1984) addressed that stressor comes from stimuli, in which leads to psychological distress, or physical impairment or deterioration. In this current study, we argued when individuals under stressful conditions (i.e., coping problem customers) may experience emotional resources loss rather than the stimuli, they may lead to the burden of "*emotional stress*" resulted from deep



acting or surface acting in order to perform expected emotions to customers (Hochschild, 1983).

Secondly, the concept of resource loss is central to Hobfoll (1989) approach in the experience of stress and coping. Whereas, according to Lazarus (1991), stress appraisal model is the evaluation of gains and losses with regard to the well-being of the person. In other words, COR theory suggests that perceiving stressors (i.e., coping problem customers) and being able to handle the problem motivate action (e.g., emotional regulation). Accordingly, COR theory from Hobfoll (1989) can examine a relationship between stressful person and environment (e.g., coping problem customers). But Lazarus (2001) addressed that primary appraisal is the evaluation of whether something relevant to our well-being has occurred (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). Therefore, stress appraisal model from Lazarus widely applied in the depression literature (Lazarus, 2001), and COR theory from Hobfoll suitably related to emotional regulation literature (Brotheridge, and Lee, 2002).

Social stressors during service encounters, such as problem customers may threaten and/or cause a depletion of valued emotional resources. Thus, coping problem customers being viewed as a stressful work status in service transactions (i.e., conditional emotional resources loss), experiencing feelings of service failure (i.e., personal emotional resources loss), or spending efforts coping with bad interpersonal situations (i.e., emotional energy expending) all can deplete emotional resources, resulting in emotional taxing from emotional labor (Hu, *et al.*, 2011) and then less on delivering willingly positive service behaviors (Judge, *et al.*, 2009).

## **2.4. Problem Customer Perceptions, Emotional Labor Tax and Positive Service Behaviors**

Studies have examined the impact of customer interactional injustice perceptions on emotional labor (e.g., Rupp and Spencer, 2006; Rupp, *et al.*, 2008; Spencer and Rupp, 2009), which found that customers may communicate and interact with frontline employees in an uncivil or a discourteous manner. Anger and unhappiness are cited as the most common negative emotions experienced by



frontline employees in such situations (Clayton, 1992). The result is that frontline employees when coping problem customer find it more difficult to comply with emotional display rules than well-treated employees by customers. They thus tend to engage in heavier emotional labor in order to adhere to organizational display rules (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Diefendorff, *et. al.*, 2005).

As noted above, coping social stressors (i.e., problem customers) during service encounters are thought to promote a number of undesirable outcomes for individuals and organizations. In this study, we like to rely on the COR model (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001) to explore the relationship between problem customer perceptions and emotional labor tax. That is to say that it would deplete personal emotional resources as well as threaten the loss of emotional energy in coping with problem customers for competing demands of work, therefore, frontline employees generally have to put more efforts into faking/regulating their emotions in order to follow organizationally-desired expectations, and may therefore heighten emotional labor tax (emotional stress) to mask their true feelings (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1993; Diefendorff, *et. al.*, 2005). The labor of inhibiting felt or “true” emotions requires a great deal of physiological effort (e.g., Goodwin, Groth, and Frenke, 2011; Gross and John, 2003; Scott and Barnes, 2011) of emotional suppression (e.g., Brotheridge and Lee, 2002), and invests a significant amount of emotional labor to maintain relationships with problem customers and other customers at work. The higher frontline employees perceive problem customers, therefore, the higher they load emotional taxing resulted from emotional labor. Thus, we propose to test the following hypothesis:

***H1: Problem customer perceptions are positively related to frontline employees’ emotional labor tax.***

Specifically, based on Hobfoll (1989) COR theory, it is argued that people strive to protect and retain resources under stressful conditions. Psychological stress is sparked when there is a threat of net loss of resources, a net loss of resources actually occurs, or when resources are not gained following the investment of resources (Hobfoll, 1989). However, COR theory of stress argues that certain behaviors and attitudes are likely to occur as a result of emotional

resources loss. As COR theory suggests, social stressors are thought to reduce employees' overall emotional coping abilities as they drain important resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). Therefore, individuals under stressful conditions (e.g., coping problem customers), one potential behavioral reaction, in order to maintain a balance between the demands placed upon them and their emotional resources, is to attempt to reduce work demands (e.g., less positive service behaviors) (e.g., Judge, *et. al.*, 2009) in an effort to protect one's emotional resources during service encounters. We therefore offer to test the following hypothesis:

***H2: Problem customer perceptions are negatively related to frontline employees' positive service behaviors.***

In this study, we conceptualized emotional labor tax as a mediator between problem customer perceptions and positive service behaviors. According to COR theory, individuals lose emotional resources when they encounter emotional stress (Hobfoll, 1989). In other words, more negative perceptions of one's job situation will more likely lead to higher perceptions of resources being threatened (Hobfoll, 1989). Coping problem customers (i.e., social stressors) in service encounters are the negative perceptions of frontline employees' job situations. Such stressors adversely affect people by investing a significant amount of emotional labor to suppress emotions for maintaining relationships with customers at work, and then by attempting to reduce work demands (e.g., less positive service behaviors) in an effort to protect one's emotional resources in service encounters. Based on the above argument of Hypothesis 1 and 2, since service organizations always ask frontline employees to put on an act to present appropriate emotions. In this study, we argue that when frontline employees encounter problem customers, they may increase employees' emotional stress from emotional labor because they are asked to create a publicly emotional display to satisfy organizational requirements (e.g., Diefendorff, *et. al.*, 2005; Goodwin, *et. al.*, 2011; Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1983; Scott and Barnes, 2011). More specifically, heighten emotional stress resulted from emotional labor would eventually relate to weaken their willingness to deliver positive service behaviors. Hence, we like to test the following hypothesis:

***H3: Frontline employees' emotional labor tax mediates the relationship between problem customer perceptions and positive service behaviors.***

## **2.5. Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

The term emotional intelligence-which we abbreviate to EI-has been ascribed to various sources and is a fairly popular construct in organizational research. In that short time it has created much discussion and controversy among researchers and practitioners. However, the first systematic research on EI was conducted by Jack Mayer and Peter Salovey. They define EI as a collection of "abilities to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate among them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey and Mayer, 1990). Later, they refined their definition as the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thoughts, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth (Mayer and Salovey, 1997). To Goleman (1995) EI is "the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in ourselves and in our relationship". He focuses EI on performance at work and organizational leadership, and depicts EI as a model of emotional competencies: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Zeidner, *et. al.*, 2009). Moreover, for the measurement of EI, Bar-On introduced the term emotional quotient (EQ) and defined EI as an array of emotional and social knowledge and abilities that influence our overall ability to effectively copy with environmental demands (Bar-On, 2000).

Since EI has been defined and used by different researchers in various ways, in this study, we adopt an integrated four-dimensional definition and a self-report scale of EI proposed by Wong and Law (2002), which was developed based on the definition of Mayer and Salovey (1997). Wong, Law and Wong (2004) argued that this self-reported scale of EI measure is valid for Chinese and they proposed four dimensions: self emotional appraisal (individual's ability to understand their deep emotions and enable to express their emotions naturally), others' emotional appraisal (individual's ability to perceive and understand the emotions of those

people around them), regulation of emotion (the ability of individual to regulate their emotions, which can enable quick recovery from psychological distress), and use of emotion (the ability of individuals to make sure of their emotions by directing them towards constructive activities and personal performance) (Wong and Law, 2002; Wong, *et. al.*, 2004).

## **2.6. The Moderating Effect of Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

Employing COR theory as the guiding my reasoning, we argue that higher EI can act as a buffer against the undesirable impact of problem customer perceptions on emotional labor tax and positive service behaviors, respectively. Specifically, to the extent that problem customer perceptions heighten heavier tax on emotional stress from emotional labor and then diminish positive service behaviors by depleting individuals' emotional resources, frontline employees with high levels of coping emotional resources will have a greater tolerance for problem customers than those with low levels. As noted by Hobfoll (1989), high, as opposed to low, levels of coping emotional resources should theoretically permit individuals to endure relatively high levels of social stressors (i.e., coping problem customers).

We argue that EI is relevant to this discussion due to the abilities to act as coping emotional resources. The notion of EI can function in this way is based on three lines of reasoning. First, stressful events are pressures or constraints that challenge one's emotional coping abilities. In fact, coping involves a person's efforts to manage the demands of a person-social transaction that is appraised as stressful (e.g., Folkman, 1991). These constantly changing efforts can be cognitive or behavioral, direct and indirect (Zeidner, *et. al.*, 2009). Accordingly, when the demands of an actually stressful situation (e.g., coping problem customers) are perceived as stressful, efforts are directed at regulating emotional stress (i.e., regulation of emotion) (Wong and Law, 2002). Epstein (1998) indicated that higher EI individuals may have richer emotional and social coping resources compared to their lower EI counterparts. Thus, we expect that there is a direct link between EI and a person's ability to cope with social stressors (i.e., problem customers). Specifically, we argue that frontline employees with higher



EI are relatively unlikely to take socially stressful events personally, given their relatively positive self-perceptions. Meanwhile, research suggested that EI plays an important role in emotion-related performance (Bechtoldt, Rohrman, De Pater, and Beersma, 2011; Mayer and Salovey, 1990, 1997; Yoo, and Salovey, 2008/2009). As such, there may be less of an emotional cost or tax associated with social stressors for these frontline employees, promoting higher levels of positive service behaviors, a greater ability to avoid emotional resources loss associated with spending less emotional resource and taxing less emotional acting in service encounters (Bechtoldt, *et. al.*, 2011).

Second, COR theory suggests that positive aspects of the self appraisal will likely serve as coping resources when exposed to stress (Hobfoll, 2001). Two components of EI, self emotional appraisal and others' emotional appraisal, are likely to be served as the abilities. Specifically, frontline employees with higher self's and others' emotional appraisal will have more resources available for coping with negative social interactions (Bechtoldt, *et. al.*, 2011). These components are likely to provide employees with a sense of control to express organizationally-desired emotions naturally (high self emotional appraisal) or better enable them to react more calmly to perceive and understand the emotions of problem customers (high others' emotional appraisal), both of which will lead to less emotional resources being depleted from these negative workplace interactions (Hobfoll, 1989). Moreover, Mayer and Salovey (1997) argued that high EI may result in employees increasing their affective commitment to the organization by generating enthusiasm for their work, especially for their positive service behaviors. Therefore, we argue when coping problem customers during service interactions, frontline employees with high EI may find it easier to handle stress and regulate emotion (i.e., regulation of emotion), and motivate themselves, and in turn view coping problem customers as an opportunity to express their identity to service awareness, and then perform in more positive service behaviors during service encounters (i.e., use of emotion) (Wong and Law, 2002; Wong, *et. al.*, 2004).

Third, COR theory suggests that a more positive perception of one's job or job situation will likely lead to lower perceptions of resources being threatened



(Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, we expect that the impact of higher EI at work might also promote emotional coping abilities that can act as a buffer against coping social stressors (i.e., problem customers) in service encounters. Wong and Law (2002) explained that high EI help individuals perceive their job in a positive light, causing them to focus on the desirable characteristics of the jobs. In other words, frontline employees with high EI enable quick recovery from psychological distress (i.e., regulation of emotion) and make sure of their emotions by directing them towards positive activities and personal performance (i.e., use of emotion). Therefore, we argue that high EI can serve frontline employees to increase their positivity regarding their jobs. The abilities can help frontline employees see negative social interactions (i.e., coping problem customers) at work as isolated episodes. Additionally, Hobfoll (2001) noted that such positivity can act as an emotional resource for coping with social stressors. Therefore, we argue that higher EI can add to frontline employees' stocks of coping emotional resources by adopting less emotional acting to diminish emotionally taxing for frontline employees in service encounters.

Taken together, these arguments suggest that frontline employees with higher EI will have greater abilities to cope with problem customers than those with lower EI. Therefore, we argue that the heightened emotional coping abilities can attenuate the impact of problem customer perceptions on emotional labor tax by providing additional coping emotional resources (i.e., regulation of emotion) (Wong and Law, 2002) that can offset the depleted by coping problem customers, and by performing less emotional acting in service encounters. The emotional coping abilities associated with higher EI are also predicted to weaken the negatively influence of problem customer perceptions on positive service behaviors by promoting high resource levels that can withstand the depleting effect of positive service behaviors. Frontline employees with high EI are also expected to see incidents of coping problem customers of social stressor as isolated events, and then are willing to deliver positive service behaviors in service encounters (i.e., use of emotion). Base on the above, we propose the following moderation hypotheses:

***H4: Frontline employees' emotional intelligence (EI) moderates the positive relationship between problem customer perceptions and emotional labor tax, such that the relationship is weaker for those with higher EI and stronger for those with lower EI.***

***H5: Frontline employees' emotional intelligence (EI) moderates the negative relationship between problem customer perceptions and positive service behaviors, such that the relationship is weaker for those with higher EI and stronger for those with lower EI.***

### **3. Method**

#### **3.1. Participants and Procedures**

Since the settings of this study are service contexts. In order to make an appropriate sample for this study of the concepts of problem customer perceptions and emotional labor tax during service encounters, participants were recruited from full-time frontline employees of restaurants. Due to the high frequency of interactions between customers and frontline employees in restaurants, restaurants are deemed appropriate for this study because there is general a high proportion of employed frontline employees may cope with problem customers and all the time conforming to the organization's emotional display rules. In this study, we conducted over a period of approximately half year in three separate located in the cities of Taipei, Taichung and Kaohsiung in Taiwan and distributed 600 matched-pair questionnaires to 80 mid-size restaurants (at least 100 capacities or seats for customers in restaurants).

Since previous research suggested that a same-source bias may inflate actual relationships (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff, 2003; Podsakoff and Organ, 1986), using different sources helps alleviate the potential same-source bias. Therefore, we adopted an in-dyad research method in this study. In other words, the questionnaires were administered to both frontline employees and their immediate supervisors, and were completed during work hours. The surveys were

performed at two different time periods with a two-week time lag in order to minimize the potential common-method bias too. At Time 1, participants (i.e., frontline employees and their immediate supervisors) received questionnaires and postage-paid envelopes at their work addresses, together with a covering letter explaining the purpose of study and inviting them to participate. The letter also emphasized the importance of honesty in responding, and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of their answers. Participants were asked to provide their name so that we could match data collected at later times. However, respondents were assured their names would be used for research purposes only and that all identifying information would be removed after data were coded. After completing the survey, participants were asked to return the completed questionnaires in the pre-paid envelope. After the data were collected from frontline employees at Time 1, supervisors were then asked to rate their respective employees at Time 2, two weeks after Time 1 data were collected.

To ensure confidentiality and to diminish socially desirable responses, frontline employees and their immediate supervisors were informed that their participation was voluntary and that a coding system was used to match the surveys. Accordingly, we coded each questionnaire with an assigned identification number to match frontline employees' responses with their immediate supervisors' evaluation. The questionnaire for frontline employees comprised four parts: demographics, problem customer perceptions, emotional intelligence, and emotional labor tax. Additionally, emotional labor is a requirement and expectation of organizations, and supervisors are responsible to ensure that frontline employees fulfill this requirement. Therefore, we argue that supervisors should be the most appropriate people to judge emotional stress resulted from emotional labor of frontline employees. In order to minimize the potential bias in results, immediate supervisors completed the assessment of positive service behaviors and emotional labor tax for their matched frontline employees.

We discarded 11 returned questionnaires with excessive missing data and 6 without accurately matched as dyads. After deleting invalid responses, we obtained 232 valid employee-supervisor matched dyads, giving a valid return rate

of 39%. Among the participants of frontline employees, 58% were female, over half (61%) had at least a college degree, 53% were at least 25 years old, and 63% had worked in restaurants for over a year. Of the supervisors participants, 87% were male; the average age was 34 years (S.D.=4.83); the average organizational tenure was 3.1 years (S.D.=2.50); and they were generally well-educated, with 84% having completed a college or university degree. Since we explore frontline employees' perceptions and their behaviors reactions, therefore, only the demographics provided from employees were used to data analyses in this study.

### **3.2. Measures**

This study followed Brislin's (1980) translation-back-translation procedure to create a Chinese version of the questionnaire containing measures of focal variables, except for the problem customer perceptions scale. The measures used in this study were translated from English into Chinese by a professional translator. The Chinese versions of these materials were then back-translated from Chinese to English by a Chinese doctoral candidate fluent in both English and Chinese. The student did not see the original English version. Both of the original materials and their reverse-translated counterparts (English version) were evaluated by a bilingual psychologist to ensure that the translations were correct and that the content was the same.

**Problem Customer Perceptions (PCP).** To measure problem customer perceptions, based on the existing scales from Colquitt's (2001) along with the discussions with industry and academic professionals, eight items were developed specifically for this study as shown in Appendix. We employed "*my customer*" as the referent in each item. To avoid socially desirable response, frontline employees were asked to indicate the degree to which customers had treated them as violating generally accepted norms of behaviors during service encounters, as described on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*very great extent*). This meant that higher scores denote a higher degree of problem customer perceptions. The exploratory factor analysis revealed a one-factor structure, and alpha reliability was measured as .83.



**Emotional Labor Tax (ELT).** The emotional labor tax scale, consisted of a six-item self-report measure adapted from Brotheridge and Lee (2003). The six-item questionnaire reflected the extent to which the individual's burden of emotional stress from deep/surface acting of faking/regulating emotions as service part of the work role. Frontline employees were asked to indicate the extent to which emotional labor tax they engaged in display appropriate emotional acting to perform their service jobs effectively during service encounters. The items are: "*During service encounters, I hide my true feelings about a situation*", "*During service encounters, I resist expressing my true feelings*", and "*During service encounters, I pretend to have emotions that I don't really have.*" (surface acting) and "*During service encounters, I make an effort to actually feel the emotions that I needed to display to others*", "*During service encounters, I try to actually experience the emotions that I need to display to others*", and "*During service encounters, I really try to feel the emotions I have to show as part of my job.*" (deep acting). The answer format using a 5-point scales: 1=*very lightly or not at all*, 2=*a little*, 3=*moderately*; 4=*quite a bit*; 5=*extremely*. However, in this study, we combined the two components into a composite measure of emotional labor tax to have a conceptual justification for examining a total level of tax resulted from emotional labor as the dependent measure than each of its separate components. Exploratory factor analysis for ELT revealed a one-factor structure. Alpha reliability was measured as 0.85. Due to we cannot conclude all the items to be '*observable*' only by frontline employees, but we argue that supervisors should be the most appropriate people to '*judge*' emotional display of frontline employees. Therefore, 6-item to be judged frontline employees' emotional labor tax by supervisors were the same as those for the self-reported scale of employee rating (Brotheridge and Lee, 2003) we mentioned above, except that the former were referenced to "*my subordinate*" rather than "*I*". All items were scored on a 5-point scale (1=*very lightly or not at all*, 2=*a little*, 3=*moderately*; 4=*quite a bit*; 5=*extremely*), and the coefficient alpha of these six items was .80. Finally, we calculated to average on scales consisting of employee ratings and supervisor judgments, which we labeled emotional labor tax for analytic purposes, alpha reliability was measured as .83.



**Emotional Intelligence (EI).** A total of 16 items, adopted from Wong and Law (2002) and Wong, *et al.* (2004), were used to measure EI, consisting of self-emotion appraisal, others' emotional appraisal, regulation of the emotion, and use of emotion. Each of the four subscales consisted of four items. The 16-item reflected self-emotion appraisal (*"I have good understanding of my own emotion."*), others' emotional appraisal (*"I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others."*), regulation of the emotion (*"I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally."*), as well as use of emotion (*"I always tell myself I am a competency person."*). All items are presented in Appendix. Frontline employees reported their own EI, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not true of me*) to 5 (*true of me*). The exploratory factor analysis yielded a four-factor structure, and the respective alpha reliabilities were .79, .74, .81, and .80. In this study, we combined the four dimensions into a composite measure of EI in order to have comprehensive conceptual justification for examining EI as the moderator measure than each of its separate dimension. Thus, single factor subscales consisting of all 16 items, which we labeled emotional intelligence for analytic purposes, produced an overall internal reliability coefficient of .78.

**Positive Service Behaviors (PSB).** Immediate supervisors were asked to rate the selected employees' positive service behaviors during service interactions. A three-item scale, adopted from Tsai and Huang (2002), was used to measure positive service behaviors, assessing employees' interactions with customers based on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). The items are: *"My subordinate has a kind smile during service interaction"*, *"My subordinate provides the service in a friendly manner."*, and *"My subordinate treats customers nicely."* The exploratory factor analysis revealed a one-factor structure, and alpha reliability was measured as .84.

**Control Variables.** We controlled the frontline employees' gender, age, education, and job tenure because of their potential relevance to the independent and dependent variables, based on past research (e.g., Hochschild, 1983; Wharton and Erickson, 1993). For example, women are expected to do more emotion management than men (Hochschild, 1983), as well as emotional labor (Wharton

and Erickson, 1993). In addition, age, education, and job tenure were considered important control variables, because older, higher educated, or more experienced frontline workers are more adept at controlling their distress and emotions, and create necessary feelings and display appropriate emotions to promote a stronger job performance (Hochschild, 1983).

Actually, discriminate validity verifies that measures of different constructs are unique. Thus, CFA is allowed to examine whether the participants conceptualized of the focal constructs in this study as distinct and separate. We examined two models: a one-factor model comprised of all items in all four scales and a four-factor model forcing each item to load on its intended factor. The fit statistics for the one-factor model were root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) of .20, comparative fit index (CFI) of .51, goodness of fit index (GFI) of .72, and Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) of 896.71 ( $p < .001$ ). For the four-factor model, RMSEA = .052, CFI = .94, GFI = .93, and  $\chi^2 = 556.68$  ( $p < .001$ ). According to Hu and Bender (1999) the RMSEA should be lower than .06; the CFI should be above .95 for good fit. With these cutoffs in mind, we considered that the fit of the four-factor model was acceptable. Besides, the Chi-square difference test resulted in a change-in-Chi-square ( $\Delta\chi^2$ ) of 175.12 ( $p < .001$ ). This suggested that the four-factor model fits the data significantly better than the one-factor model. The statistically significant  $\Delta\chi^2$ , the nearly acceptable fit statistics of the four-factor model, and unacceptable fit statistics of the one-factor model suggested that our respondents conceived of the four constructs as distinct and separate.

Furthermore, two-tailed tests of significance for the relationship between the demographic variables and the focal constructs were run. The correlations between the latent variables were all within a low to moderate range indicating good discriminate validity (Kline, 1988). Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations of the study variables. Regarding the relationships among the focal constructs, all were significantly related at  $p < .01$ , the positive correlation between ELT (employee rating vs., supervisor judgments, respectively) and PCP ( $r = .23, .20, p < .01$ , respectively) suggests frontline employees with high problem customer perceptions heighten emotional labor taxes in service

encounters, while the positive correlation between EI and PSB ( $r = .31, p < .01$ ) suggests employees with high emotional intelligence display more positive service behaviors toward customers.

## 4. Results

In order to determine if significant relationships existed among the independent variable (i.e., PCP) and dependent variable (i.e., PSB) and the mediator (i.e., ELT), and were consistent with the method used to test mediating variables suggested by Baron and Kenny (1986). Due to the demographic characteristics would be related to problem customer perceptions, emotional labor tax and positive service behaviors, we controlled for gender, age, education level and job tenure in each of regression models. The first regression analysis (M1 on Table 2) demonstrated that PCP ( $\beta = .29; p < .01$ ) explained significant variances in ELT, thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

The second regression analysis (M3 on Table 2) demonstrated that PCP explained significant variances in PSB ( $\beta = -.26; p < .01$ ), Hypothesis 2 was also supported. A further regression analysis (M4 on Table 2) demonstrated that ELT explained significant variances in PSB ( $\beta = .21; p < .01$ ). Finally, to determine if a significant mediating effect existed, the changes in the size of the direct effect of PCP on PBS (M3 vs. M5 on Table 2) were observed. A partially mediating role was found to exist, because the size of the direct effect was reduced from  $-.26$  ( $p < .01$ , M3) to  $-.12$  ( $p < .05$ , M5), when ELT was included ( $\beta = .18; p < .05$ ). Hypothesis 3 gained partially supported.

To test the proposed moderation hypotheses, we conducted hierarchical regression analyses. As noted above, certain demographic characteristics would relate to emotional regulation, we controlled for gender, age, education, and job tenure in each of regression models. Table 2 states the statistical results for the moderation tests (M2 and M6). Following Aiken and West's (1991) suggestion, the dependent variable on the control variables, independent variables, and the interaction term that are the components of the interaction term in the moderation analysis.

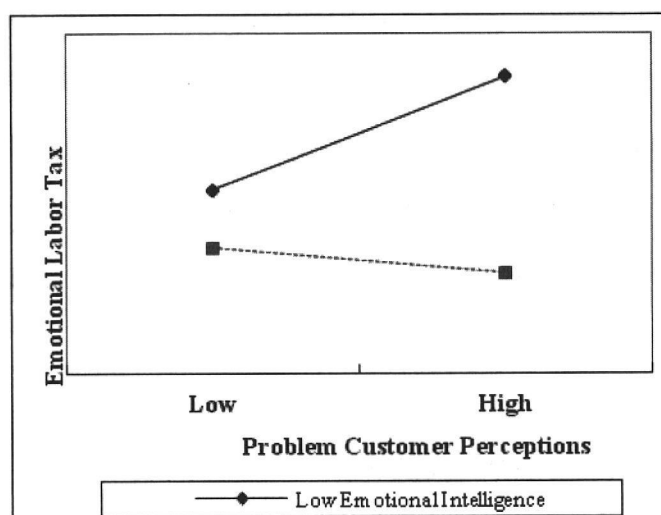
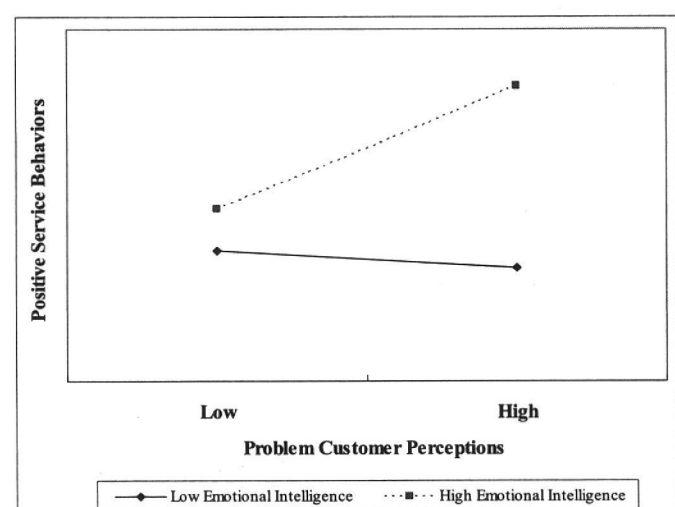
We regressed the dependent variable of ELT on the control variables (gender, age, education level, and job tenure), independent variables (PCP), and the interaction term (PCP  $\times$  EI) (M2 on Table 2). The regression resulted in a significant *F*-score with an *R*-squared value of .16. The beta weight for PCP was significant at .22 ( $p < .05$ ), the beta weight for EI was also significant -.11 ( $p < .05$ ) and the beta weight for the interaction of PCP and EI was significant at -.20 ( $p < .01$ ). In order to examine the nature and form of the interactions, we plotted the interaction by developing separate equation using one standard deviation above and below the mean to represent high vs. low on each respective variable (Aiken and West, 1991). Figure 1 depicts the interaction graphically for the interaction of PCP and EI. The findings indicated that, indeed, the higher level of ELT happened when frontline employee has lower EI and stronger PCPs. Conversely, the lower level of ELT happened when frontline employee has higher EI and stronger PCPs. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported.

In a similar vein, we regressed the dependent variable of PSB on the control variables (gender, age, education level, and job tenure), independent variables (PCP), and the interaction term (PCP  $\times$  EI) (M6 on Table 2). The regression resulted in a significant *F*-score with an *R*-squared value of .31. The beta weight for PCP was significant at -.24 ( $p < .01$ ), the beta weight for EI was also significant .29 ( $p < .01$ ) and the beta weight for the interaction of PCP and EI was significant at -.32 ( $p < .01$ ). We plotted the two-way interaction according to the guidelines of Aiken and West (1991). Figure 2 shows that the pattern of the two-way interaction is consistent with Hypothesis 5, indicating the higher PSB happened when frontline employee has higher EI and stronger PCPs. Conversely, the lower PSB happened when frontline employee has lower EI and stronger PCPs. Hypothesis 5 therefore was supported.

## 5. Discussion and Implications

This study makes two contributions to literature. First, despite the theoretical and empirical studies have explored the differences in frontline employees' reactions to problem customers (Hu, *et. al.*, 2011; Rupp and Spencer,

2006; Rupp, McCance, Spencer, and Sonntag, 2008; Spencer and Rupp, 2009), problem customer perceptions (PCP) has rarely been examined in conjunction with emotional labor tax and positive service behavior (PSB). This study addressed the gap by examining the role of emotional labor tax as a mediator between PCP and PSB. Meanwhile, empirical study indicated that distress tolerance can help frontline employees cope with problem customers (Hu, *et. al.*, 2011); however, our knowledge of some individual-level stressor-buffering characteristics may still remain relatively underdeveloped. Thus, in this study, we also examine the extent to which higher emotional intelligence (EI) buffer the negative influence of problem customer perceptions (i.e., social stressors). To our knowledge, no prior study has looked closely at these potential mediating and moderating effects to explain the processes by which frontline employees' problem customer perceptions relates to their emotional labor tax and positive service behaviors, as well as the extent to which frontline employees' emotional intelligence can act as a buffer against the negative influence of problem customer perceptions.

**Figure 1****Interaction Plot for EI as a Moderator between PCP and ELT****Figure 2****Interaction Plot for EI as a Moderator between PCP and PSB**



**Table 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Reliabilities**

Variables	Mean	S.D. <sup>c</sup>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender (FE) <sup>a</sup>	1.38 <sup>d</sup>	.92										
2. Age (FE)	25.11 <sup>f</sup>	4.37	-.12 <sup>*</sup>									
3. Education Level (FE)	2.75 <sup>e</sup>	.95	.02	.02								
4. Job Tenure (FE)	1.29 <sup>f</sup>	.74	.06	.08	-.06							
5. Problem Customer Perceptions (Time 1)	2.86	2.06	-.03	.04	.05	.14 <sup>*</sup>	(.83) <sup>g</sup>					
6. Emotional Labor Tax (FE) (Time 1)	3.01	.91	.16 <sup>*</sup>	.02	.06	.07	.23 <sup>**</sup>	(.85)				
7. Emotional Labor Tax (IS) <sup>b</sup> (Time 2)	2.82	.75	.19 <sup>*</sup>	-.01	.08	.04	.20 <sup>**</sup>	.27 <sup>**</sup>	(.80)			
8. Emotional Labor Tax (FE+IS) (Time 1+2)	2.92	.96	.17 <sup>*</sup>	-.01	.07	.05	.21 <sup>**</sup>	.23 <sup>**</sup>	.25 <sup>**</sup>	(.83)		
9. Emotional Intelligence (Time 1)	2.69	1.90	.22 <sup>**</sup>	-.03	.08	.11 <sup>*</sup>	-.04	-.09	-.08	-.08	(.78)	
10. Positive Service Behaviors (Time 2)	3.21	1.38	-.13 <sup>*</sup>	-.07	-.05	.08	-.28 <sup>**</sup>	.22 <sup>**</sup>	.24 <sup>**</sup>	.26 <sup>**</sup>	.31 <sup>**</sup>	(.84)

<sup>a</sup>: Frontline employees (FE) reported their own emotional labor tax.

<sup>b</sup>: Immediate supervisors (IS) judged frontline employees' emotional labor tax.

<sup>c</sup>: S.D. = Standard Deviation

<sup>d</sup>: The coding of gender: 1=male; 2=female.

<sup>e</sup>: The coding of education level: 1=high school; 2=college; 3=bachelor; 4=master; 5=Ph.D.

<sup>f</sup>: Age and job tenure were provided in number of years.

<sup>g</sup>: Internal consistency values (Cronbach's Alpha) were shown on across the diagonal parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$

**Table 2**  
**Results of Hierarchical Regression Analysis**

Variables	Emotional Labor Tax		Positive Service Behaviors			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Controls						
Gender	.14*	.13*	-.13*	-.12*	-.12*	-.11*
Age	-.06	-.04	-.01	-.00	-.00	.01
Education Level	.04	.04	.03	.02	.01	.02
Job Tenure	-.07	-.02	-.06	-.04	-.03	-.05
Problem Customer Perceptions	.29**	.22**	-.26**		-.12*	-.24**
Moderator: Emotional Intelligence		-.11*				.29**
PCP × EI		-.20**				-.32**
Mediator: Emotional Labor Tax (ELT=FE+IS)				.21**	.18*	
<i>F</i>	9.48***	7.36***	19.43***	16.11***	14.05***	17.48***
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.17	.16	.33	.30	.26	.31
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.15	.14	.31	.28	.24	.29

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$

Second, while consideration attention has been paid in the past to problem customers research issues related to justice theory (e.g., Rupp, *et. al.*, 2008) and affective events theory (e.g., Rupp and Spencer, 2006), little empirical evidence has been found to establish a direct relationship between problem customers perceptions and conservation of resources (COR) theory. Using COR as the theoretical basis, we found support for both of the main effects hypothesized in the framework. Specifically, we found a positive relationship between problem customer perceptions and emotional labor tax, and a negative association between problem customer perceptions and positive service behaviors. From a COR perspective, we suggest that a likely reason for these findings is that individuals reporting higher levels of social stressors perceive (i.e., coping problem customers) that their emotional resources either are threatened or are actually required to

expend additional resources (e.g., emotional energy) in service encounters. For example, when problem customers are present during service interactions, frontline employees spend effort thinking about how to manage and possibly avoid these situations. To do so, these frontline employees must expend valuable emotional resources, thus resulting in greater strains for performing emotional acting and less energy in delivering positive service behaviors. As a result, coping problem customers lead to higher levels of emotional labor tax, and lower level of positive service behaviors.

Given that problem customers may sometime present during service encounters, and given that it is difficult to eliminate them, we examined the potential for EI to minimize/buffer the negative impact of these stressors. We found evidence for the interactive effect of problem customer perceptions and EI on both emotional labor tax and positive service behaviors. These findings are important because it supports the idea that although social stressors (i.e., coping problem customers) have an undesirable influence on job outcomes, however, problem customers do not impact all frontline employees in the same way. In other words, relative to those with lower EI, frontline employees with higher EI appear better equipped with the cognitive resources needed to cope with problem customers effectively. To explain these findings, COR theory suggests that frontline employees have different coping emotional resources that influence their abilities to cope with stressful situations (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001). As previous studies have shown that employees with higher EI view the workplace through more optimistic lenses (e.g., Bechtoldt, *et. al.*, 2011; Carmeli, Yitzhak, and Weisberg, 2009; Zeidner, *et. al.*, 2009), it is likely that EI provides frontline employees with beneficial coping emotional resources. That is, those with relatively favorable self emotional appraisal that are more positive appear to have additional buffers against emotional resource loss than those with self emotional appraisal that are more negative. The finding that higher EI can buffer the negative effects of problem customer perceptions elicits to mitigate the impact of workplace-interaction stressors. Thus, we discuss this topic in a further detailed manner in the directions for practical implications and future research.

## **5.1. Practical Implications**

We submit the findings have four practical implications. First, the statistics results reinforce the notion that problem customer perceptions can be especially potent drivers of emotional labor tax and positive service behaviors, explaining 23% and 15% of the variance in the respective outcomes, respectively. COR suggests that the depletion of coping emotional resources (caused by coping problem customers) is a likely source of this explained variance. As such, it appears critical that supervisors work to minimize potential social stressors (i.e., coping problem customers) by establishing appropriate service norms against aggression from problem customers. Although it may be important to minimize the number of task-specific stressors frontline employees may face, it is generally accepted that these stressors (problem customers) are almost never completely avoidable.

Furthermore, emotion regulation can be defined as the act of controlling one's inner feeling states and an external reflection of the expected state in order to produce a desired emotion display that is considered appropriate in a given situation (Hochschild 1979). Consequently, organizations are increasingly willing to direct and control how frontline employees presented themselves to others. In other words, the images frontline employees created for customers and the quality of interactions between employees and customers have come increasingly under the control of management. However, problem customers always occurred in service encounters, the interaction of problem customers and service staffs also influenced emotional reaction, "was the customer always right?", it has become commonplace in past but worthy to discuss. These results unveiled that organizations implementing management mechanism should concentrate on encourage, training and rewarding their frontline employees in how to be effective emotion display and customer service management. Although organizations cannot control the behavior of their customers, managers can take steps to mitigate customer interactional justice effects on staffs' reactions by extending more fair treatment toward them to compensate for instances of unfairness coming from the customers. Masterson's (2001) indicated that the same might



hold true for justice perceptions coming from supervisors as compensating for perceptions of injustice emanating from the customers.

A third implication concerns employees' training and selection. Employees' emotional abilities, such as those included in the EI construct, are generally assumed to be learnable (e.g., Bechtoldt, *et. al.*, 2011; Mayer and Salovey, 1997; Zeidner, *et. al.*, 2009). EI is often a better predictor of a person's success in the workplace (Ashkanasy and Daus, 2002). For service industries, therefore, the development of abilities of emotional intelligence is seen as a key determinant of positive service behaviors toward customers, and therefore helps underpin corporate success (Carmeli, *et. al.*, 2009; Voola, Carlson, and West, 2004). As such, it may be practical for supervisors to try to enhance and improve frontline employees' EI. We have argued, however, that higher EI will help frontline employees perceive their job in a positive light (Carmeli, *et. al.*, 2009), causing them to focus on the desirable characteristics of the jobs when working in socially stressful environments. This study provided preliminary evidence suggesting the development of abilities of EI is a potentially effective way to manage emotions and to foster employees' positive service behaviors. Therefore, service sector companies should also increasingly consider EI abilities as a potentially important selection criterion. Since in situations where problem customers tend to exist at high levels, such as "people-work" jobs (e.g., Hu, *et. al.*, 2011) that involve a large amount of interaction with frontline employees, we therefore suggest that supervisors seek to hire individuals who possess higher EI. Such individuals are likely to have the resources necessary to cope with the social stressors inherent in these types of jobs.

Last, interestingly, the study also found that the gender control variable exhibited significant effects on emotional labor tax and positive service behaviors, respectively, supporting the suggestion that female frontline employees are more adept than males at displaying appropriate emotions (e.g., Hochschild, 1983), carrying a lower emotional labor tax and conveying higher levels of positive service behaviors to customers (e.g., Deutsch, 1990; Hochschild, 1989; James, 1989; Rafaeli, 1989). For example, Deutsch (1990) and James (1989) indicated that women may be socialized to act in a warmer and friendly manner. Therefore,

the findings of the study also have implications for hiring practices in the service sector.

## **5.2. Limitations and Future Research**

This study has certain limitations that also need to be taken into considerations. The sample population only consisted of frontline employees of restaurants in Taiwan and the overall sample size was relatively small (232 frontline employees). Meanwhile, various restaurants may operate under same or different management models. Therefore, the results may be somewhat limited in their generalizability. This issue could be addressed in future research with a larger sample of frontline employees across a broader range of service sectors.

We explore in this study about employees' perceptions of their struggling on problem customers, who unintentionally or deliberately disturbed servicers during service encounters (Hu, *et. al.*, 2011). In fact, problem employees may also cause problem customers during service encounters. Despite it is not within the scope of this study to provide an extended discussion of the ongoing debates. Future study should be alerted this limitation and hope to clarify the concern for the judgments of "problem customers".

Evidence have examined a causal relationship between personality and emotional intelligence (e.g., Landy, 2005), and reported the influence of negative affectivity on emotional labor (Thoresen, Kaplan, Barsky, Warren, and deChermont, 2003). Future researchers may included these controls (i.e., personality and negative affectivity) based on prior research in order to gain a better understanding in relation to problem customer perceptions, emotional labor tax, emotional intelligence, and positive service behaviors.

Similar to other studies on emotion management, this study used a cross sectional design to test the relationships among the variables. Even so, the design was still limited in being able to assert a causal relationship among problem customer perceptions, emotional labor tax, emotional intelligence, and positive service behaviors. To clarify the directionality of these relationships, it is recommended that future research incorporate a longitudinal design to further confirm the causality of the aforementioned relationships.

In this study, though the overall results are consistent for these outcome variables, however, we suggest that future research investigate the potential for higher EI to influence relationships between problem customer perceptions and other outcomes, such as job performance and motivation. Such research could add additional insight into the abilities of higher EI to increase overall levels of coping emotional resources. Moreover, a suggestion for future research is to examine other variables that may buffer or minimize the negative impact of problem customer perceptions. In conclusion, we believe that there is much to learn about the implications of problem customer perceptions and the abilities of EI to act as an interactive variable. We hope that the findings can serve as a foundation for future research and we believe that the use of COR provides the appropriate reasoning to clarify these relationships.

## **Appendix**

### **Problem Customer Perceptions**

- I feel my customer treats me in impolite manners.
- I feel my customer treats me with insult.
- I feel my customer persists from improper remarks or comments.
- I feel my customer treats me without dignity.
- I feel my customer clarifies his/her service needs incompletely.
- I feel my customer explains his/her service needs unreasonable.
- I feel my customer has been unfair in his/her communications with me.
- I feel my customer informs his/her service needs in an untimely manner.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

#### *Self-emotion appraisal*

- I have a good sense of why I have certain feelings most of the time.
- I have good understanding of my own emotions.
- I really understand what I feel.

I always know whether or not I am happy.

*Others' emotion appraisal*

I always know my friends' emotions from their behavior.

I am a good observer of others' emotions.

I am sensitive to the feelings and emotions of others.

I have good understanding of the emotions of people around me.

*Use of emotion*

I always set goals for myself and then try my best to achieve them.

I always tell myself I am a competent person.

I am a self-motivated person.

I would always encourage myself to try my best.

*Regulation of emotion*

I am able to control my temper and handle difficulties rationally.

I am quite capable of controlling my own emotions.

I can always calm down quickly when I am very angry.

I have good control of my own emotions.

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