Non-verbal communication in the workplace: Perceptions of hospitality management interns in the service encounters

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Abstract - Effective communication plays a crucial role in the hospitality industry's successful service encounter. Although verbal communication is significant for this role, non-verbal communication is just as significant. However, there's a relatively limited body of knowledge about non-verbal communication in the hospitality and tourism literature. Therefore, the study's objectives are to elucidate the perception of Filipino hospitality management student interns of the roles of non-verbal communication and how its dimensions assist in the service encounters. By achieving the abovementioned objectives, the findings have provided valuable insights to the inadequate knowledge. Using a qualitative approach, specifically interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), target students from Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) taking an internship in Tacloban City. Applying purposive convenience sampling, 18 selected participants who conformed to the criteria were interviewed (semi-structured). The data collected were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis, followed by Saldaña's (2015) manual coding for the emergence of themes imperative for final conclusions. Findings show that non-verbal communication is an important part of service encounters, promoting effective connections, improving customer satisfaction, and optimizing customer interaction. While the non-verbal dimensions including facial expressions, kinesics, paralinguistics, and proxemics greatly aids by creating exceptional customer experiences and enhancing overall service quality. While the student interns met the customer's demands and forged stronger bonds by effectively utilizing and understanding these non-verbal cues. Therefore, it concludes that non-verbal communication intervention and the assistance provided by its dimensions contribute to successful service encounters and create favorable experiences for both student interns and customers.

Keywords: non-verbal communication, hospitality management industry, service encounters, non-verbal communication dimensions, student interns

I. INTRODUCTION

When was the last time you experienced an exceptional service encounter? Services are an indispensable aspect of modern society, encompassing a vast array of professions and industries. However, amidst the multitude of service interactions, there exists only a subset of individuals whose services transcend the ordinary due to the deficit of knowledge in providing conventional services (Abuelhassan, 2022). In the hospitality industry, success largely depends on how well service workers are able to provide a high-quality service despite the diverse and rapidly changing needs of customers. Hospitality organizations then pay specific attention and make investments in service-related training to foster service delivery (Dhar, 2015). The hospitality industry operates in a competitive environment that caters to diverse cultures, principles, and viewpoints. For this reason, training must be especially keen on adapting to this diverseness. One of which is to be trained to establish rapport and connectedness for each customer interaction. The most commonly used medium is to promote cross-cultural understanding by accommodating a variety of preferences through effective communication.

Communication is crucial to the efficiency of a workplace because without it, among many other factors, plans would not be carried out and connections would not be made. Cottam (2022) indicated in an article that verbal communication skills in the hospitality industry is especially important as it allows hospitality professionals to build affinity with guests and colleagues, convey information clearly, and handle difficult situations with tact and diplomacy. Moreover, non-verbal communication is just as important since it acts as a supplement to verbal communication in amplifying the overall message, improve the way words are used, to express emotions, to negotiate interpersonal connections, to process information and how to approach individuals (Mandal, 2014). Non-verbal communication encompasses all human emotions that are not expressed through speech but in the dimensions of kinesics (body movements), distance (proxemics), and voice character (paralanguage) which is also the primary focus of the aforementioned study including the facial expressions in the context of service encounters. Although there is a great importance of verbal interaction in providing services, Islam and Kirillova (2020) said in their study that the successful exchange of non-verbal cues during service encounters largely determines the outcome of joint contact. According to statistics, non-verbal dimensions like physical movement and vocal character make up 38% and 55%, respectively, of human communication. In contrast to just 7% verbal. Non-verbal communication can greatly impact the overall customer experience in the field of hospitality management where interpersonal interactions are crucial. As a result, common issues with non-verbal communication in hospitality management could arise because it can be difficult to interpret non-verbal cues in the diverse and multicultural environment of the hospitality management industry. But Islam and Kirillova (2020; Tusell-Rey et al, 2021) stated that the non-verbal aspects of customer service encounters have not received as much attention from studies as the verbal aspects have. Empirical study on non-verbal communication from the viewpoint of those working in the hospitality industry is still comparatively scarce or non-existent. With this in mind, the researchers have addressed these issues on a community level with the goal of learning about student interns' perspectives in the field of hospitality management to advance the body of knowledge regarding the intervention of non-verbal communication during service encounters.

By achieving the above objectives, this study makes several significant contributions to the hospitality and tourism literature. First, to address the issue of learning the student intern's perspective regarding the intervention of non-verbal communication during service encounters. Second, the study extends the discourse by analyzing how each dimension of non-verbal communication is likely to aid during service encounters. In order to give customers meaningful experiences, the study suggests that service providers strengthen their non-verbal skills, such as dimensions that indicate responsiveness. Therefore, the primary goal of this study is to elucidate

the role of non-verbal communication in the service encounters of Filipino hospitality management student interns and understanding their perceptions as the study is conducted. The following questions are specifically addressed during the course of the study. (1). What are the perceived roles of Filipino hospitality management student interns of non-verbal communication intervention in the service encounters? (2). How do the following non-verbal communication dimensions (facial expressions, kinesics, paralinguistics, and proxemics) assist in service encounters?

1.1 Non-Verbal Communication in Hospitality Management

Non-verbal communication (NVC) is a crucial aspect of hospitality management, as it conveys crucial information about a situation, such as how someone may be feeling, how they process information, and how to approach individuals. NVC is essential in hospitality management as it helps hosts create a welcoming and comfortable atmosphere for their guests. It includes gestures, facial expressions, body language, and tone of voice. According to a study by Phutela (2016) entitled "*The Importance of Non-Verbal Communication,*" hospitality professionals can manage conflicts and clear misunderstandings by employing non-verbal cues to their advantage, displaying professionalism, warmth, and sincerity.

Non-verbal communication is essential for team dynamics and leadership in the hotel industry and hospitality management. Managers and supervisors can motivate staff members, inspire confidence, and foster a healthy work environment by using effective non-verbal indicators. NVC transcends linguistic boundaries and enables the formation of meaningful connections, especially in situations where there are language barriers. Hospitality professionals can foster better understanding, develop rapport, and establish trust with diverse people from various cultural backgrounds by detecting and exploiting non-verbal signs. Mastering non-verbal communication abilities enables hospitality professionals to deliver outstanding service, produce unforgettable experiences, and contribute to the growth of their businesses.

1.2 Dimensions of Non-Verbal Communication

Humans are social beings who spend most of their waking hours interacting with others, affecting our ability to navigate challenges and maintain a happy, healthy life. Communication is a significant aspect of our daily lives and understanding how it works can improve our ability to communicate. Non-verbal aspects of communication, or the "unspoken dialogue," play a significant role in this process.

In a study by Hans et al (2015) titled "*Kinesics, Haptics, and Proxemics: Aspects of Non-Verbal Communication,*" which clarified the areas of proxemics, paralinguistics, and kinesics discussed the word kinesics, which refers to the study of hand, arm, body, and facial movements, derives from the Greek word *kinesis*, which is Greek for "movement." These includes techniques such as gestures, posture, eye contact, and facial expressions. Haptics, also referred to as "paralinguistics," is the study of touch-based communication, and it is where we learn about the power of touch. Negative interpersonal effects could result from a lack of touch-related non-verbal communication skills. Touch can be friendly, threatening, or persuading and is essential for human social development. There are various sorts of touch, such as touch that is functionally professional, socially polite, warmly friendly, deeply intimate, and sexually arousing. While the term "proxemics" describes the investigation of how physical distance and space affect communication. It is clear that space, communication, and relationships are intertwined when we consider the various ways that space appears in popular metaphors.

In conclusion, there are many different aspects of non-verbal communication, including facial expressions, body language, gestures, touch (haptics), and personal space (proxemics). These factors are an essential and complex part of human interaction that profoundly affects the quality of our connections, comprehension, and overall communication. The ability to communicate non-verbally is a critical skill that helps us connect, empathize, and form closer relationships with others, whether in the hospitality industry, other professional settings, or in everyday life.

II. METHOD

2.1 Research design

The relatively lacking knowledge of the intervention of non-verbal communication especially on its four dimensions have provided an avenue to conduct a qualitative approach, specifically interpretative phenomenology analysis (IPA). The qualitative IPA approach can capture the experience of the study participants through observing them in their practice internship or "by collecting their own accounts such as through interviews which attempts to explore their personal experiences and personal perceptions". Furthermore, Creswell (2006) also advises the use of this approach since the subject of this study has never been addressed to the participants, and no existing theories or studies have applied the need to fully understand the use of non-verbal communication in the life of a student intern.

2.2 Settings and Participants

The target participants of this study are 4th year students of Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (BSHM) who are currently taking their internship in any of the hotel chains in Tacloban City, Philippines. The researchers used purposive-convenience sampling in gathering data and the interview guide as their research instrument that employs only to those who extended their availability on the prompt semi-structured interview, which then totaled to 18 participants, who also conforms to the following criteria in choosing the subject participants: (1) they must be a 4th year BSHM student taking internship; (2) they must be taking their internship to any of the hotel chains in Tacloban City, Philippines; and (3) they must be of legal age and was permitted to voluntarily participate in the conduct of the study after reading and signing the consent.

2.3 Data collection and Analysis

The needed participants were only subjected to participate in the study if the general management of the hotel they were interning had permitted them and the researchers. Thereafter, reading and signing the consent to let the researchers use their personal information solely for research purposes.

The participants implemented their dialect language (Waray-Waray) to answer the questions since the interview mostly probed them to describe their personal experiences. Although the interview was semi-structured, the participants were given preset open-ended questions to allow them to explore further their experiences. The data collected after the interviews will then be coded to transcripts for the analysis of data.

The data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2021) thematic analysis. According to their book, this analytical tool specializes in identifying and reporting data patterns by employing the six phases of thematic analysis (1) Familiarization with the data; (2) Generating initial codes; (3) Searching for themes; (4) Theme review; (5) Theme definition; and (6) Drafting of the final report. The research questions posed for this study have guided the development and layout of the theme. In the final analysis, formulation of themes included the researchers to establish codes using Saldaña's (2015) manual coding that involved process coding for the first cycle and applying both eclectic coding and axial coding for the second cycle. Followed by the final cycle, namely selective coding for the emergence of themes.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The objective of this study was to investigate the perceived roles of hospitality management interns of non-verbal communication in the service encounters. To accomplish this, the researchers conducted a thorough analysis in the gathering of data which then emerged four relevant themes for this specific objective.

3.1 Perceived Roles of Non-Verbal Communication in the Service Encounters

3.1.1 Importance of Non-Verbal Communication in Service Encounters

Effective employee-client interactions are fostered by effective non-verbal communication. Complex information, emotion, and expectation exchanges frequently take place during service interactions. Non-verbal cues can fill up any potential gaps in communication, enhancing the effectiveness of a service contact.

"Of course, it is helpful in a way that it won't be hard for us to understand our own ways at work. That's why it (non-verbal communication) is really important because it helps us a lot." **[PC 15]**

This excerpt implies that non-verbal cues enable service providers, which in this case, the student interns, to adapt their communication styles to meet the specific needs and preferences of the customers by understanding each other (Puccinelli et al, 2013). But this does not only apply between the customers. Student interns also convey messages through the understanding of non-verbal cues which makes their work easier and efficient.

"Being trained is one of the factors that helps in making your job easier." **[PC 13]**

This level of service interaction makes it easier for both parties to communicate with one another and build relationships. Additionally, non-verbal cues can also help student interns identify the need or concerns that customer may not verbalize, allowing them to proactively address these issues and provide more good quality service. The following insight have proven to meet the standards of a satisfied customer:

"...and we should only follow the task we were given and not say anything more for our customers to not be bothered." **[PC 6]**

In a study by Bonaccio et al (2016) explored that non-verbal communication is important and a fundamental aspect of successful service encounters. By recognizing its importance, service providers create positive experiences leading to successful service encounters.

3.1.2 Non-Verbal Communication for Effective Communication

Non-verbal communication encompassing body language, voice characteristics, physical distance, and facial expressions plays a vital role in effective communication. While verbal communication provides explicit information, non-verbal communication adds nuance and clarity to the intended message. The given excerpt shows the following statement.

"Sometimes they are talking to someone, so they just respond by nodding their heads or by using their eyebrows with a hint of smile. And for those who doesn't ask for assistance, usually they just wave their hand as a response." **[PC 15]**

It is evident that non-verbal cues support the significance of non-verbal communication in conveying messages (Burgoon & Buller, 2020). Incorporating non-verbal cues into communication methods enhances the overall effectiveness of the interaction and minimizes the likelihood of miscommunication.

Non-verbal communication serves as a valuable tool in deciphering customer needs, preferences, and emotions. Understanding the non-verbal cues exhibited by customers and the student interns allow them to go beyond the spoken word and perceive the underlying sentiments.

"There is one scenario, where a guest doesn't tell us if we should bring or help them bring their luggage to their room, so we use hand gestures instead to ask them which they also understand." **[PC 15]**

A noticeable agreement between the given excerpt validates the student interns who actively observe and interpret non-verbal cues and are better equipped to meet the customer expectations by effectively decoding non-verbal signals, enabling them to tailor their responses

accordingly (Hwang & Matsumoto, 2015). Through non-verbal cues, individuals establish connections, impressions, and create a sense of understanding.

3.1.3 Training and Developing Non-Verbal Communication Skills

Developing and honing non-verbal communication skills is essential for achieving coordination in work nature and ensuring successful service encounters. This section explores the significance of training and developing non-verbal communication skills, which emphasizes the role of non-verbal communication in service encounters.

Kankanhalli et al (2007) examined the impact of non-verbal communication on team coordination. According to them, non-verbal communication plays a crucial role in facilitating coordination, ensuring smooth workflow.

> "Of course, it is important (training), because learning non-verbal communication can be a way for the people to know your motives through like... your gestures." **[PC 7]**

Comparatively, training and developing non-verbal communication skills implement advantages that greatly influence a successful service encounter. A study conducted by Grandey et al (2005) revealed that service providers who received training in non-verbal communication skills demonstrated more positive non-verbal behaviors, leading to higher customer satisfaction ratings.

> "It is important to use non-verbal communication because there are guests who actually prefer not to talk, so you will just have to observe their gestures or their facial expressions. Example, when we make a mistake on serving their orders, by looking at their expressions, we immediately understand them. That's why it is important to learn or train how to use non-verbal communication properly." **[PC 18]**

It can be deduced from the excerpts that the interns understood the customers' non-verbal responses by analyzing their gestures and expressions. This was made possible with the proper knowledge of understanding non-verbal signals which is crucial in training.

3.1.4 Non-Verbal Communication for Service Etiquettes

In service industries, another theme regarding the role of non-verbal communication indicated the vital role of service etiquettes. These etiquettes encompass various aspects in terms of non-verbal communication, including, but not limiting to, the importance in smiling during service encounters, building rapport with customers, and minimizing disruptions during service encounters, which is greatly observed in the internship of the students.

> "Since it's a hospitality industry you really need to always smile if there are guests. Even if there is no response from the guests, as a part of the industry, you smile to show that you're willing to serve." **[PC 4]**

The following excerpt display smiling during service encounters to acknowledge their customers. For this reason, they are able to instill a positive impression towards their service. In a study by Omar and Duarte (2018) revealed that customers perceive smiling employees to be more competent, trustworthy, and approachable.

To establish a strong connection with customers and create a personalized service experience, it is crucial for effectively building rapport (Gremler et al, 2000). Non-verbal cues such as smiling, maintaining eye contact, and body language contribute significantly to rapport-building. The following response confirm this section:

> "It's really important for us interns to try using non-verbal communication since there are cases that there are guests that are not friendly. When you encounter these guests and you are unable to greet them, at least you know you smiled at them." **[PC 2]**

The excerpt given effectively made the student interns utilize non-verbal cues in creating a positive atmosphere and successfully establishing rapport. Just as importantly, minimizing disruptions during service encounters is essential for ensuring a seamless and enjoyable customer experience. Non-verbal communication can help manage disruptions effectively too.

> "Like for example, every breakfast there's a lot of people here. We don't want to add up to the noise, that's why we're using non-verbal communication." **[PC 3]**

Research by Lemon and Verhoef (2016) highlights the role of non-verbal cues in managing disruptions. Their study found that service providers who utilized non-verbal cues, such as hand signals, gestural cues, and soothing vocal tones, are better equipped to handle disruptive situations. By emphasizing the pivotal role of non-verbal communication in minimizing disruptions during service encounters, the interns are able to show professionalism, sincerity, and commitment to limit hindrances promptly and effectively.

Overall, non-verbal communication has a crucial role in service encounters. It helps promote effective employee-client connections, improves customer satisfaction, and optimizes customer interaction. The student interns were able to comprehend and cater to the needs and preferences of their customers attributable to non-verbal cues including body language, tone of voice, and facial expressions. It also aids in identifying and proactively addressing any underlying customer problems. It's also critical during service encounters to put into practice the incorporation of smiles, establishing connection, and limiting interruptions.

Our second research question extends by analyzing how each dimension of non-verbal communication is likely to aid or assist during service encounters. There was a total of five major themes that emerged acquiring from the responses obtained from the student interns. The themes are the following: (1) Delivering Exceptional Customer Experiences, (2) Embracing Customer Feedback through Facial Expressions, (3) Body Language Symphony in Effective Customer Communication, (4) The Resonating Vocal Influences in Customer Services, and (5) Leveraging Proxemic Preferences for Customer Welfare.

3.2 The Employment of Non-Verbal Communication Dimensions

3.2.1 Delivering Exceptional Customer Experiences

In today's competitive marketplace, hospitality organizations recognize the importance of providing outstanding customer care, ensuring high levels of customer satisfaction, and achieving excellence in service delivery. Customer care is the foundation of building strong and lasting relationships with customers.

> "Because it gives us a good feedback? Yes, that's right, our whole team receives good feedback and less complaints, meaning, we achieve a successful service encounter." **[PC 16]**

This excerpt illustrates the significance of non-verbal communication in customer care, as observed by the student interns. A study by (Puccinelli et al, 2013) emphasizes that customer care enables service providers to deliver communication styles that meet the specific needs and preferences of customers.

Whilst excellence in service delivery encompasses various aspects, including efficiency, effectiveness, and consistency, and providing a memorable service encounter.

> "It is helpful for us to understand the customers easier and provide them with their needs. And we can also make sure that our customers are in good condition." **[PC 18]**

The excerpt highlights the efficiency and effectiveness of the student interns by receiving conventional feedback from the customer. As well as understanding how non-verbal communication assists effectively in service delivery. Hospitality industry constantly strives to deliver exceptional customer experiences, therefore, acknowledging and harnessing the power of

non-verbal communication becomes a vital component in achieving this goal (Kankanhalli et al., 2007).

3.2.2 Embracing Customer Feedback through Facial Expressions

Facial expressions play a significant role in conveying customer feedback, as they can reveal emotions, satisfaction levels, and overall experiences. Embracing customer feedback is crucial for the hospitality management industry if they seek to improve their services.

> "Smiling to the guest is a must, it serves as your facial expression when facing them. When you smile it adds a good service experience for them since your approach is good." **[PC 5]**

This excerpt highlights how the student interns chose the facial expression dimensions as an effective dimension on customer experience. A warm smile can set the tone for a positive interaction, creating a welcoming environment and positive atmosphere that also contributes to the enjoyment of a customer.

Aside from providing feedback, facial expressions or facial observations can also be an effective means of assessing service quality. Facial expressions can indicate different meanings from customers, allowing hospitality management to ascertain the effectiveness of their service delivery.

> "…the guests look after your service, and under that service is the quality of how you provide services for them, guests will not feel good if they saw that crews wear an unwelcome face." **[PC 9]**

A study by Matzler et al (2013) found that observing facial expressions can serve as an objective measure of service quality and the excerpts mentioned justify these findings. It further demonstrates how facial expressions can provide insights into service quality. Positive facial expressions indicate successful service delivery, while negative expressions highlight areas that require improvement (Sundaram & Webster, 2000).

3.2.3 Body Language Symphony in Effective Customer Communication

This theme has particularly explored the aspects of body language symphony in customer communication including working with gestural cues, understanding the effects of bodily actions, adaptability in customer approach, and connecting through body language.

Gestural cues such as eye contacts, hand movements, posture, and other more, greatly enhance a customer interaction. Non-verbal signals provide additional layers of meaning, emphasizing, or clarifying messages. The following intern experiences showcase this:

> "I think it is the body movements because even if you're far from your co-workers just by looking at the body movements you will be able to know what they were trying to say." **[PC 8]**

The response highlights kinesics as the chosen non-verbal dimension for the particular student interns that greatly assist during service encounters. Understanding these body languages can facilitate comprehension and foster a deeper connection between them. On the other hand, the following are excerpts correlating to the effects of bodily actions:

> "In my opinion, the body movement because it shows that in this line of work you look confident…" **[PC 13]**

These bodily actions can convey confidence, openness, and attentiveness, influencing the customer's perception of the interaction. These include posture, body orientation, and movements. A study by Harrigan et al (2015) concludes that positive bodily actions can enhance

perceived service quality, customer satisfaction and environment conducive to effective communication.

The adaptability in customer approach refers to the ability to adjust communication styles and non-verbal cues. In accordance with Gabbott & Hogg (2001), adaptive non-verbal behavior can lead to enhanced communication effectiveness.

> "We have different kinds of customers, there are those who are really nice and there are those we can barely understand, so you will be the one adjusting for them." **[PC 17]**

This excerpt emphasizes the importance of adaptability in customer communication. By aligning the non-verbal cues and communication style with the customer, service providers such as the students interns to establish and enhance the overall communication experience.

Last resulting aspect for this theme is connecting through body language. Body language serves as a powerful tool for establishing connections with a customer and a fellow workmate. The following excerpt serves as evidence:

> "I remember my experience when I was still learning sign language. This experience had a big impact on me because at that time, it was like we were helping the H.I. (hearing impaired) people we know. So, we felt happy or fulfilled." **[PC 16]**

The excerpts showcase the building of connection with the deaf-mute community or hearing impaired (H.I.) which gave a different kind of satisfaction to the interns. It illuminated the power of non-verbal signals that are fulfilling and inclusionary.

3.2.4 The Resonating Vocal Influences in Customer Services

In customer services, communication goes beyond the spoken words. The paralinguistic dimension like the vocal tone, pitch, and quality also plays a role in customer interactions. Paralinguistic skills encompass non-verbal elements of speech, such as pitch, volume, rhythm, and intonation, which add depth and meaning to verbal communication. The effective use of paralinguistic skills can enhance customer interactions, convey emotions, and emphasize key points which is why the majority of the student interns chose the paralinguistic dimension as the most effective dimension in assisting during service encounters.

> "To not have any gap or misunderstanding with each other, you have to use the tone of your voice not sounding angry, but in a calm manner." **[PC 15]**

The main content of the excerpt given, mainly denotes the manner of having a calm voice in interacting with a customer. According to Dawood et al (2018), the skillful modulation of pitch, volume, and rhythm can convey empathy and professionalism. A calm modulation during a service recovery situation helps alleviate any frustration or anger and rebuild trust.

Moving on to the vocal impact in perception and communication, the vocal qualities, such as clarity, tone, pitch, and articulation, has a profound bearing on customer perception and communication.

> "We were in the hotel last month, and a customer called us using a hand signal. When we went near this customer, his voice sounded strange and told us that he needed to talk to our manager. However, we already knew that there was something wrong because of his voice even before he asked for our manager." **[PC 12]**

This excerpt emphasizes the importance of vocal qualities in terms of service encounters. A study by Bayer & Stauss (2008) suggests that vocal qualities significantly affect customer interactions and work performance. A well-modulated voice with a clear approach can enhance customer trust, satisfaction, and overall communication effectiveness.

"…it is inappropriate to talk loudly or show anger in your tone." **[PC 14]**

The abovementioned excerpt demonstrates a situational use of vocal tone to different customer situations. The proper situational use of vocal tones involves understanding customer cues and tailoring the tone appropriately (Kreps, 2001). The student interns recognize this significance and implement it- the usage of vocal tone according to the situation at hand since it also affects the paralinguistic approach during customer interaction.

Lastly, the quality of the service provider's voice has a direct impact on the service performance through their voice quality. A book by Bayer & Stauss (2008) highlights that a pleasant and well-projected voice positively influences perceived service performance.

"It is important to keep in mind that even when you're not agreeing with the customer, you still have to rightly entertain them for the betterment because that is our customer. And we will be able to do this, first of all, with the tone of our voices. If we sound calm in such situations, eventually, you are providing the best service for your customer." **[PC 17]**

Under any given circumstances, pleasant or not, as interns' part of the hospitality industry, quality service must still be a priority and try as hard as possible to prevent a feudal interaction. It is the clear, resonant voice with good projection that contributes to the overall customer satisfaction, and service delivery.

3.2.5 Leveraging Proxemic Preferences for Customer Welfare

In the realm of customer welfare, one last emergent theme can significantly impact the overall customer experience. Leveraging proxemic preferences is crucial to ensure a safe and comfortable environment. Although this dimension was the least preferred dimension in terms of assistance during service encounters, its application in customer service is still relevant, especially in terms of customer safety measures.

"…and distancing ourselves from our customers because we aren't allowed to stay close to our customers for privacy." **[PC 6]**

"Before when I was assigned at the restaurant, when you serve the orders, you should give distance between the guests and the orders so that the food won't spill on them, in case. Same goes when you serve them drinking water." **[PC 18]**

These excerpts highlight the importance of implementing customer safety measures based on proxemic preferences. By respecting personal space and providing adequate distancing. Aligning service environments with customer's proximal preferences positively influences their perception and enhances their trust and satisfaction to the service provider (Tussel-Rey et al, 2021).

In conclusion, Non-verbal communication dimensions, including facial expressions, kinesics, paralinguistics, and proxemics are essential in-service encounters. These dimensions contribute to exceptional customer experiences, improved satisfaction, and service quality. By understanding and utilizing these cues, service providers can adapt to customers' needs, foster positive interactions, and build stronger relationships. By incorporating these dimensions, service encounters improve customer understanding, communication, and service outcomes.

IV. CONCLUSION

This research study explores the perceived roles of non-verbal communication intervention in hospitality and tourism, focusing on the assistance provided by facial expressions, kinesics, paralinguistics, and proxemics. The findings reveal that these dimensions contribute to successful service encounters and enhance communication, trust, empathy, and rapport. By prioritizing

non-verbal cues, student interns can establish meaningful connections with customers, address their needs, and deliver exceptional service experiences. By utilizing these dimensions, student interns can adapt to customer needs, foster positive interactions, and build stronger customer relationships. Recognizing the importance of communication skills and practicing them in their internship program can help create a competent and qualified service provider in their future endeavors. Overall, competent knowledge and use of non-verbal communication significantly contribute to successful service encounters and create favorable experiences for both student interns and customers.

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