A Study of Restaurant Servers' Perceptions of Asian Customers in the U.S.: From the Perspective of Physical Appearance

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미국 레스토랑 서버들의 아시아 고객인식에 대한 연구: 외모적 관점에서

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to investigate restaurant servers' perceptions of Asian customers in the U.S. based on physical appearance. Servers' tipping expectation and intention to give quality service were measured by manipulated photographs featuring three aspects of physical appearance (i.e., gender, attire, obesity). Repeated-measures ANOVA was performed to compare eight conditions created by these combinations of three physical appearance factors. The results showed that servers' tipping expectation and intention to give quality service differed according to Asian customers' physical appearance, and the relationship between attire and gender was also found. The research findings are expected to provide managers with guidelines that offer equitable service.

Key words: tipping expectation, intention to give quality service, physical appearances, Asian customers

Ⅰ. Introduction

With the dramatic growth of the immigrant population in the past 30 years, service discrimination against racial minorities is an emerging issue in the restaurant industry (Brewster ZW 2012). In April of 1997, for example, a party of Asian Americans was denied service at a restaurant in Syracuse (Wang D · Kleiner BH 2001), and recently a party of Asian customers received a receipt typed "chinx", which is a racial slur, and sued the restaurant in Queens (Semple K 2012). Tipping norms have been a primary focus in stud-

ies of racial discrimination in the restaurant industry. Substantial studies have reported that Caucasian servers have offered discriminatory service based on race because of their perception that African-American customers are prone to leave lower tips than Caucasian customers (e.g., Brewster ZW · Rusche SN 2012; Lynn M 2004). Likewise, Brewster ZW (2012) proposed that servers' tipping norm, rather than racial animus, plays a significant role in race-based discrimination in the restaurant industry.

Tipping norms are servers' perception or beliefs regarding a certain group of customers' tipping be-

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havior, which can influence servers' behavior (Conlin M et al. 2003). Based on tipping norms, servers may intentionally or unintentionally attempt to avoid serving for a certain group of customers because servers are sensitive to the amount of tips they receive, which constitute a large portion of their monthly income (Dirks D · Rice SK 2004). Consequently, these servers' injustices to a certain group of customers often lead to lawsuits and operating loss (Lynn M 2004).

Another factor affecting servers' tipping norms is customers' physical appearance (McCall M · Lynn A 2009). As a fundamental factor of physical appearance, gender differences in servers' tipping perception have been examined, and the results showed that male customers are more likely to receive quality service than female customers because of servers' perceptions that male customers are more generous tippers (McCall M · Lynn A 2009). Kim M · Lennon SJ (2005) proposed that attire also plays a significant role in service quality because service providers often offer faster service in a more friendly manner to formal-attired customers than to informal-attired customers. In addition, customers receive discriminatory service (e.g., longer response times from service providers) due to obesity (Pauley LL 1988).

Given the fact of discriminatory service based on physical appearances, this study attempts to examine U.S. servers' tipping expectation and intention to give quality service toward Asian customers. More specifically, this study employed respondents having experience as servers, and examined whether their tipping expectation and intention to give quality service differ according to customers' gender, types of attire and level of obesity or not through manipulated photographs including three factors of physical appearance. With

this primary research question, the objectives of this study are (1) to examine U.S. servers' differing tipping expectation and intention to give quality service toward Asian customers according to gender, attire and obesity, and (2) to identify the effects of these factors of physical appearance on tipping expectation and intention to give quality service.

Ⅱ. Literature Review & Research Questions

1. Servers' perceptions of customers' tipping behavior

Barkan R · Israeli A (2004) proposed that servers have an ability to predict customers' tipping size based on their experience. Prediction of a large tip leads the server to invest more effort in the customers, while prediction of a small tip demotivates servers, which leads to reduced effort. In other words, servers may determine how much effort they invest based on the prediction of customers' tipping size.

Furthermore, customers' physical appearance is one of the most significant factors in predicting customers' tip size (Brewster ZW 2012). For this reason, servers often offer inequitable service based on customers' physical appearance, or attempts to negotiate with other servers to avoid a certain group of customers (Dirks D · Rice SK 2004). Even though many studies have examined maltreatment against racial minorities, few studies have examined this topic with Asian customers, and diverse factors which can influence servers' perceptions related to customers' tipping behavior were not included in previous studies. Because of this, this study examined U.S. servers' perceptions of Asian customers based on three factors of physical appearance (i.e., gender, attire and weight).

2. Customers' physical appearance

Gender differences have received a great deal of attention in hospitality research because of gender differences in customer behavior (McCall M · Lynn A 2009; Yamamoto JA et al. 2005; Hubbard ASE et al. 2003; Stephen R · Zwigenhaft R 1985). In ordering behavior, male customers are more likely to order food including more calories than female customers (Yamamoto JA et al. 2005). In tipping behavior, male customers were perceived as more generous tippers than female customers (McCall M · Lynn A 2009). As a role in tipping size, customers pay higher tips to female servers than male servers when servers used ways to increase tip size (Rind B · Bordia P 1996). More specifically, male customers react less positively to waitresses' touching them than female customers in terms of tipping behaviors (Stephen R · Zwigenhaft R 1985), and severs received higher tips from customers having the opposite gender than customers having the same gender (Hubbard ASE et al. 2003).

Even though the findings of previous studies have significant implications for marketing, there are few studies employing manipulated images of Asians. For this reason, this study employed gender variable to examine U.S. servers' differing perceptions of both Asian men and women. Therefore, the first research question is:

Question 1: Do U.S. servers' tipping expectation and intention to give quality service toward Asian customers differ according to gender?

Since attire is a tool to express people's style and social cues, attire is one of the key factors affecting people's first impressions. For this reason, substantial studies have examined the effects of attire on perception both on service providers and customers (Kim M · Lennon SJ 2005; Rehman SU et al. 2005; Ainscough TL · Motley CM 2000). More specifically, attire is a significant factor which can influence service providers' trust (Rehman SU et al. 2005; Kerr BA 1976), while customers have sometimes received discriminatory service because of attire they were wearing (Gurovitsch M · Prince N 2009; Kim M · Lennon SJ 2005).

Gurovitsch M · Prince N (2009) examined the differences in service promptness to both customers wearing formal attire and informal attire, and the results showed that formal-attired customers were more likely to receive shorter service waits than informal-attired customers. Likewise, Kim M · Lennon SJ (2005) found that friendliness of service providers and promptness of service were associated with customers' attire because salesperson instantly react to the social cues such as attire without much thought, and they were more likely to perceive well-dressed customers as customers having more intention to purchase.

Given the significant role of attire on service quality, this study employed attire variables to examine U.S. servers' differing perceptions of Asian customers. Therefore, the second research question is:

Question 2: Do U.S. servers' tipping expectation and intention to give quality service toward Asian customers differ according to types of attire?

As a representative factor of physical appearance, substantial studies have examined the prevalence of obesity in the U.S. (Stovitz SD et al. 2011) and discriminatory treatment of obese people both in employment and commercial transactions (Puhl RM et al. 2008; Klassen ML et al. 1993; Pauley LL 1988). In general, younger people and women perceived that they were at high risk

of discriminatory treatment due to their weight status, and obese women were three times more likely to receive discriminatory treatment than obese men (Puhl RM et al. 2008).

Likewise, in a retail setting, overweight individuals experienced much longer response times from service providers than individuals belonging to a non-overweight group (Pauley LL 1988). Although many studies have attempted to compare categorized groups based on overweight, research designs may include possible confounding variables (e.g., attractiveness, attitude, and behavior). For this reason, this study employed images of Asians different only in weight after controlling possible confounding factors through photograph manipulation in order to examine U.S. servers' differing perceptions of Asian customers according to weight. Therefore, the third research question is:

Question 3: Do U.S. servers' tipping expectation and intention to give quality service toward Asian customers differ according to obesity?

Ⅲ. Research Methodology

1. Research design

A 2 (gender; male / female) x 2 (attire: business / casual) x 2 (obesity: normal / obese) within-subject design was employed to examine servers' expected tip size and intentions to give quality service based on Asian customers' physical appearance. In order to create conditions of customers' physical appearance, customers' gender, attire and obesity were manipulated with photographs. In addition, servers' expectations of tip size and intentions to give quality service were employed as dependent variables.

2. Subjects

Servers having work experience in the restaurant industry were recruited as respondents from an online survey company utilizing nation-wide sampling. For the target sampling, a targeting audience function included in the website (surveymonkey.com) was used, and a specific industry (food and beverage) and job function (i.e., customer service) were chosen to identify respondents having experience in the restaurant industry. In addition, a sentence describing a requirement to be eligible for this study was included at the first page of the survey "you must have work experience as restaurant servers to participate in this research".

3. Manipulation stimuli

In order to compare eight different Asian customers' visible characteristics, eight photographs were manipulated with the following procedures. First, facial photographs of Asian men and women were taken from an Internet site (http://www.Pmsol3.wordpress.com) for average facial features of Asian customers. Second, for the other parts of the body, two models were recruited based on average height and weight of Asian customers, and other factors (e.g., hair style, facial shape and body shape) were also manipulated by a photographer. Finally, these two parts of the photographs were composited to create average Asian customers who are not real people. In addition, pictures were taken of the models with both casual attire and business attire and the pictures were manipulated with a photo composite program to create obese customers based on a BMI of 35. Thus, a total of eight types of photographs including three visible characteristics (i.e., gender, attire and weight) were used in the survey (see Fig. 1).

〈Fig. 1〉 **Images used in this study**

4. Measurement and Data Analysis

After reviewing related studies, the question used to assess servers' expected tip size after seeing Asian customers' photographs was adapted from McCall M's and Lynn A's study (2009) (e.g., I would guess that this customer tends to be: very bad tipper, bad tipper, below average tipper, average tipper, above average tipper, good tipper or very good tipper). The question used to measure servers' intention to give quality service was adapted from Brewster ZW's study (2012) (e.g., Because I guessed this customer's tipping size, I would be likely to provide this customer good service). Respondents were asked to rate each item on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 = "Extremely unlikely" to 7 = "Extremely likely". The survey instrument also included questions about demographic information and experience as a restaurant server. For data analysis, among 168 questionnaires, 142 data were used due to incomplete questionnaires and invalid data under the criteria of data screening. Repeated-measures ANOVA with SPSS 18.0 were mainly used to examine serv-

ers' differing tipping expectations and intention to give quality service according to Asian customers' physical appearance.

Ⅳ. Results

1. Demographic characteristics

Respondents' demographic information and experience as restaurant servers were reported by descriptive analysis. Regarding demographic information, 57% of respondents were male, while 43% of respondents were female. Respondents' average age was 27.12 years old, and the majority of respondents were Caucasian (79.0%). In addition, 61.3% of respondents had working experience at restaurants which offer same level of service as a casual dining restaurant or higher, and their average work experience was 4.6 years. Their average income was 1,203 dollars per month.

2. Servers' tipping expectation and intention to give quality service according to customers' gender

〈Table 1〉 Demographic information

N= 142

Characteristics	Categories	n	%
Gender	Male	81	57.0
	Female	62	43.0
Age	> 20	44	31.0
	21 - 30	60	42.2
	31 - 40	17	12.0
	41 - 50	12	8.5
	< 51	9	6.3
Race	Caucasian	112	79.0
	African American	11	7.7
	Hispanic or Latino	7	4.9
	Asian	7	4.9
	Others	5	3.5
Restaurant type	Fast food restaurant	33	23.2
	Fast casual restaurant	20	14.1
	Casual dining restaurant	69	48.6
	Fine dining restaurant	18	12.7
	Others	2	1.4
Work experience	> 1 year	22	15.7
	1 year - 2 years 11 months	51	35.7
	3 years - 4 years 11 months	27	18.6
	5 years - 9 years 11 months	23	16.4
	< 10 years	19	13.6
Monthly income	> $500	50	35.2
	$500 - $999	30	21.1
	$1000 - $1499	27	19.1
	$1500 - $1999	12	8.4
	< $2000	23	16.2

Paired t-tests were used to examine servers' tipping expectation (TE) and intention to give quality service (ITQS) and <Table 1> shows that there are no differences in servers' TE according to Asian customers' gender, while servers have a higher intention to give quality service for Asian female customers (m = 5.85) than for Asian male customers (m = 5.71). Thus, the results indicated that although servers' TE does not differ according to Asian customers' gender, servers' ITQS differs according to Asian customers' gender (t= 2.91**) (see <Table 1>).

3. Servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' attire

<Table 2> shows that servers' tipping expectation (TE) and intention to give quality service (ITQS) for Asian customers differ according to the attire the customers were wearing. Severs perceived that Asian customers wearing business attire (m= 4.44) were more generous tippers than Asian customers wearing casual attire (m = 3.94). In addition, servers are prone to give better service to customers wearing business attire (m = 5.87) rather than customers wearing casual attire (m=

⟨Table 2⟩ **Differences in Servers' TE and ITQS according to Asian customers' gender**

Customer Gender	n	TE				ITQS		
		Mean ± SD	df	t		Mean ± SD	df	t
Female	142	4.17 ± 0.79	141	-0.79		5.85± 1.03	141	2.91**
Male	142	4.21 ± 0.89				5.71± 1.17		

** $p<.01$, TE: tipping expectation, ITQS: intention to give quality service

5.69). Therefore, the results indicated that servers' TE ($t = 6.41^{***}$) and ITQS ($t = 3.98^{***}$) differ according to Asian customers' style of attire (see ⟨Table 2⟩).

4. Servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' obesity

⟨Table 3⟩ shows that servers' tipping expectation (TE) and intention to give quality service (ITQS) differ according to Asian customers' weight. Severs perceived that non-obese Asian customers ($m = 4.26$) were more generous tippers than obese Asian customers ($m = 4.12$). Furthermore, servers are more likely to give better service to non-obese customers ($m = 5.84$) than to obese customers ($m = 5.72$). Thus, the results indicated that servers' TE ($t = 2.87^{**}$) and ITQS ($t = 3.08^{**}$) differ according to Asian customers' obesity (see ⟨Table 3⟩).

5. The effects of attire on servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' gender

A 2 (Gender: male / female) x 2 (Attire: business / casual) repeated-measured ANOVA was performed to examine the effects of attire on servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' gender. For TE, a significant main effect for attire (F (1, 142) = 41.10, $p< 0.001$) and a gender x attire interaction (F (1, 142) = 29.67, $p< 0.001$) were found. For ITQS, main effects for gender (F (1, 142) = 8.45, $p< 0.01$) and attire (F (1, 142) = 15.87, $p< 0.001$) were found, while there is not an interaction between gender and attire (see ⟨Table 4⟩). Based upon further examination of data, ⟨Fig. 2⟩ shows that servers perceived Asian male customers wearing casual attire as relatively poor tippers, while Asian male customers wearing business attire were perceived as relatively good tippers, even better than Asian female customers wearing business

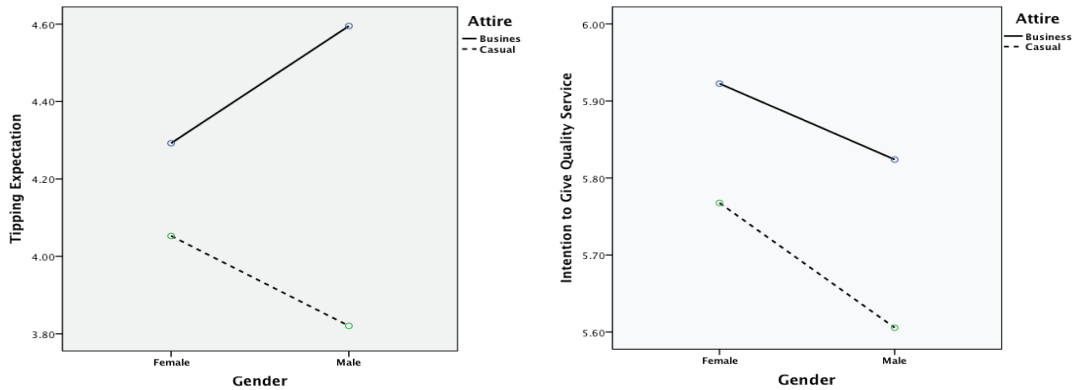⟨Table 3⟩ **Differences in servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' attire**

Customer Attire	n	TE				ITQS		
		Mean ± SD	df	t		Mean ± SD	df	t
Business	142	4.44 ± 0.96	141	6.41***		5.87 ± 1.04	141	3.98***
Casual	142	3.94 ± 0.89				5.69 ± 1.16		

*** $p<.001$, TE: tipping expectation, ITQS: intention to give quality service

⟨Table 4⟩ **Differences in servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' weight**

Customer Obesity	n	TE				ITSQ		
		Mean ± SD	df	t		Mean ± SD	df	t
Normal	142	4.26 ± 0.83	141	2.87**		5.84 ± 1.03	141	3.08**
Obesity	142	4.12 ± 0.88				5.72 ± 1.15		

** $p<.01$, TE: tipping expectation, ITQS: intention to give quality service

〈Fig. 2〉 Effects of customers' attire and gender on servers' TE and ITQS

attire. However, for ITQS, servers have the intention to give better service to Asian female customers than to Asian male customers, and to Asian customers wearing business attire than to Asian customer wearing casual attire.

6. The effects of attire on servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' obesity

A 2 (Attire: business / casual) x 2 (Obesity: non-obese / obese) repeated-measures ANOVA was used to examine the effects of attire on servers' TE and ITQS according to customers' obesity. For TE, main effects for attire (F (1, 142) = 41.10, $p<$ 0.001), and obesity (F (1, 142) = 8.24, $p<$ 0.01), were found, while there is not an interaction between attire and obesity. For ITQS, significant main effects for attire (F (1, 142) = 15.87, $p<$
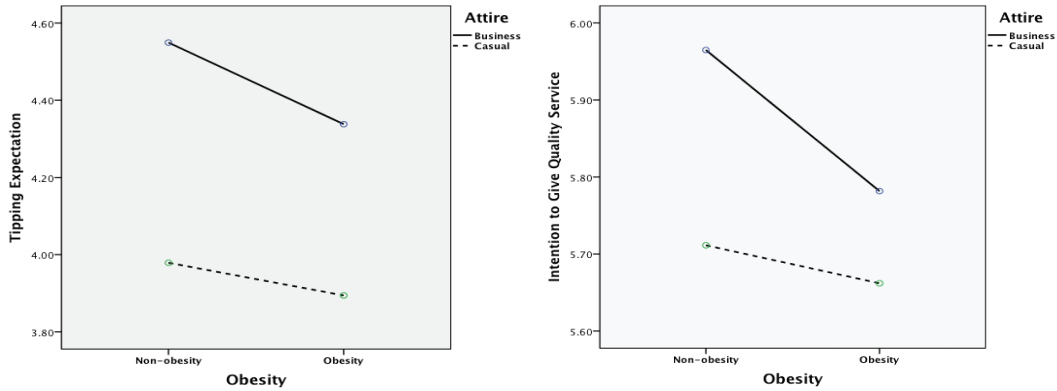
0.001) and obesity (F (1, 142) = 9.50, $p<$ 0.01), and a gender x obesity interaction (F (1, 142) = 4.60, $p<$ .05) were found (see 〈Table 5〉). Based upon further examination of data, 〈Fig. 3〉 indicates that servers perceived non-obese Asian customers and Asian customers wearing business attire as relatively better tippers. In addition, servers have the intention to give better service to non-obese Asian customers and Asian customers wearing business attire, and the effects of attire on ITQS are more effective for non-obese Asian customers than for obese Asian customers.

〈Table 5〉 Effects of customers' attire and gender on servers' TE and ITQS

df = 1, 142

Source	TE			ITSQ		
	Sum of Square	Mean Square	*F*	Sum of Square	Mean Square	*F*
Gender	0.18	0.18	0.62	2.41	2.41	8.45**
Attire	36.51	36.51	41.10***	4.95	4.95	15.87***
Gender x Attire	10.17	10.17	29.67***	0.14	0.14	1.46

** *p<* 0.01 *** *p<* 0.001, TE: tipping expectation, ITQS: intention to give quality service

<Fig. 3> Effects of customers' attire and obesity on servers' TE and ITQS

V. Conclusion

The first research finding is that TE does not differ according to Asian customers' gender but that ITQS does, which means servers have the intention to give better service to Asian female customers regardless of their tip expectation toward both genders of Asian customers. Regarding the relationship among TE, ITQS and physical appearance factors, <Fig. 1> indicated that type of attire were able to influence the relationship between TE and gender, while the relationship between ITQS and gender was not influenced by type of attire. In addition, the results of main effects of both attire and gender on ITQS (Table 4) show that Asian customers may receive different service from servers due to their gender and their attire styles. A possible explanation based on the pattern comparison between TE and ITQS results may be that female Asian customers wearing business attire may receive superior service from U.S. servers compared to male Asian customers wearing business attire, although male Asian customers wearing business attire were perceived as better tippers.

Furthermore, <Fig. 2> shows that type of attire was not able to influence the relationship between TE and obesity, while the relationship between ITQS and obesity was influenced by Asian customers' attire type. If obese Asian customers wear business attire, U.S. servers' tipping expectation may increase. However, wearing business attire does not lead to U.S. servers' favorable intention to give quality service to obese Asian customers because the effects of attire on ITQS for obese

<Table 6> Effects of customers' attire and obesity on servers' TE and ITQS   df = 1, 142

Source	TE			ITSQ		
	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F
Attire	36.51	36.51	41.10[***]	4.95	4.95	15.87[***]
Obesity	3.11	3.11	8.24[**]	1.92	1.92	9.50[**]
Attire x Obesity	0.57	0.57	2.99	0.64	0.64	4.60[*]

[*]$p < 0.05$ [**]$p < 0.01$ [***]$p < 0.001$, TE: tipping expectation, ITQS: intention to give quality service

Asian customers are lower than those for non-obese Asian customers.

Ⅵ. Implications and limitations

This study examined U.S. servers' perceptions of Asian customers, and found that U.S. servers' tipping expectations and intentions to give quality service differ according to Asian customers' gender, type of attire, and their level of obesity. The implication of this study is that unlike previous tipping studies focusing on how to increase tipping size from the servers' perspective, this study focused more on customers' perspective. Specifically, this study pointed out that service quality is already determined at first sight regardless of tipping size that customers would pay. In other words, even though customers' tipping action occurs after service is given, severs' tipping expectations occur before service is given. Tipping studies investigating customers' perspective may allow researchers to inspire taking care of customers' discriminative issue in restaurants. In addition, in terms of managerial perspective, it may allow restaurateurs to create guideline for training restaurant servers in order to offer equitable service regardless of customers' physical appearance.

In addition, this study employed photographs consisting of representative physical appearances after controlling for possible confounding variables such as other possible factors which can influence respondents' perceptions. All conditions were created by compositing two types of image, facial images for both genders and images of models for other parts of the body. In addition, the final photograph controlled Asian customers' heterogeneity by using the same person's photograph to represent different factors of physical appearance. For

these reasons, it was easy for respondents to distinguish each condition in physical appearance.

This study also includes several limitations. Studies using photographs cannot present realistic environmental factors in a restaurant. Regarding this issue, future studies may require advanced techniques presenting a realistic restaurant environment such as a virtual reality experimental study. Furthermore, regarding measurement issue, this study was not able to conduct validity test and reliability test because this study employed single scale for each dependent variable. Though this issue may be problematic, this study focused more on fatigue-effect affecting the quality of data. Since this study employed within-subject design, it requires a participant watch all images used in this study. Because of this, this study assumed that reducing fatigue-effect has more positive effect on data quality than convincing validity of the study. Regarding this issue, future study may require between-subject design with more participants.

In addition, due to the fact that discriminatory service is a sensitive topic, respondents might feel reluctant to express their implicit perceptions of Asian customers. Because of this, future studies also require a measurement to investigate respondents' implicit perceptions in an accurate manner.

한글 초록

본 연구의 주목적은 미국 레스토랑 서버들의 아시아 고객들에 대한 인식을 조사하는데 있다. 서버들의 팁에 대한 기대수준과 양질의 서비스를 주고자 하는 의도를 세 개의 외모적 특징들 (성별, 의복, 비만)을 포함하고 있는 8개의 이미지를 활용하여 측정하였다. 8개의 각기 다른 조합으로 만들어진 조건들을 비교하기 위해서 반복측정 분산

분석을 이용하였으며 그 결과, 미국 서버들의 아시아 고객들에 대한 팁의 기대수준과 양질의 서비스를 주려고 하는 의도는 고객의 외모적 특성에 따라 다르게 나타났으며, 의복과 성별의 상호작용에도 영향을 주었다. 이 연구결과는 고객의 외모적 차이에 상관없이 균등한 서비스를 제공할 수 있는 가이드라인 제작에 기초자료로 활용될 것으로 사료된다.

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