Physical Attractiveness and Social Distance Perceptions in Service Encounters-Evidence from a Developing Country

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Abstract

Physical Attractiveness (PA) is an essential factor affecting consumer response (CR) in service encounters (SE). Using an experimental design, the purpose of the study is to demonstrate the physical attractiveness (PA) of a service representative's effects (CR) in the context of consumer satisfaction, service quality perception, and likability of the service representative. The study investigated the complex underlying mechanism between these two variables by analyzing the mediating role of social distance perceptions (SDP), and the moderating role of consumer's physical attractiveness (CPA) and gender. The context of the study is the Airline Industry of Pakistan. The data of the study was collected through scenario based self-administered questionnaires from in-flight 385 passengers using non-probability sampling (voluntary response sampling) from. Analyzing the results of the study it is predicted that high PA has a positive effect on CR. Hence it is also important to take the consumer's perspective into consideration, as this perspective gives rise to situations under which the beauty premium notion might not hold. The results of the study revealed that a consumer's gender and his/her own level of PA is an important determinants of how he/she reacts to the attractiveness of the representative. Results can provide significant insights to Airline companies to strategize the recruitment and deployment of cabin crew members in accordance with the level of the customer's gender and his/her own (PA).

INTRODUCTION

Service quality of Pakistan International Airlines (PIA), has often been in the spotlight for various aspects. One of the notable factors among these that influence passenger perceptions and satisfaction is the physical attractiveness of its service representatives. Extant research in this body of knowledge suggests physical attractiveness of service staff

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can significantly impact customer responses (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). In case of PIA's, the physical attractiveness of service representatives plays a critical role in determining the airline's image and pleasant travel experience for passengers.

Literature in Services Marketing has investigated various factors influencing (CR) in (SE). Service encounters (SE) are occasions when buyers and sellers undergo an exchange relationship (Lovelock, C., & Patterson, P., 2015). Both the parties socially connect not just for a short term, but rather the service provider aim those results in the establishment of long-term relationship. Services marketing literature suggests that there are essentially two components of services: the core service and the relationship developed between the service provider and the customer. Research findings indicate that service providers need to deliver good both quality core service and also focus on the relational factors, which can delight the consumers, making one service provider stand out from others (Darley & Luethge, 2019). Services marketing literature has studied various factors affecting consumer experience in (SE). Several factors, including the physical environment in which the service is executed and experienced (Fang, Zhang, & Li, 2020), and interpersonal characteristics of the service representative play an integral role in determining (CR) to the service (Y. Li, Zhang, & Laroche, 2019; Quach, S., Jebarajakirthy, C., & Thaichon, P., 2017). Previous studies suggest a significant impact of service representatives' nonverbal communication and physical appearance on (CR) (Agthe, Spörrle, & Maner, 2010). While many industries are now deploying modern practices and moving away from the conventional discrimination practices in recruitment decisions, (PA) nonetheless influences (CR) in (SE).

Previous research on (PA), commonly known as (PA), suggests that physically attractive individuals are perceived to possess good social skills, intelligence, and kindness (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). Secondly, physically attractive individuals have more social power, making them better candidates to receive rewards from others. Physical attractiveness (PA) of individuals is associated with more social characteristics and more excellent social skills than unattractive counterparts (Griffin & Langlois, 2006). Research suggests that (PA) leads to a clear advantage for individuals high on the dimension, and is a more significant disadvantage for individuals extremely low on (PA). Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske (2005) quoted the stereotype that "What is beautiful is good", meaning physically attractive individuals are believed to possess many positive traits which are not linked to the quality of being physically attractive. Morrow (1990) calls this the Halo Effect of (PA), where physically attractive individuals are believed to possess better social skills and be more intelligent and mentally healthy than physically unattractive individuals. This bias has been researched across various cultures (Shahani-Denning, 2003), among children and adults, and in different contexts such as teacher's' evaluation of students, voter's' preference for political candidates (Verhulst, Lodge, & Lavine, 2010), and much more . Beauty premium states that physically attractive individuals earn better than others (Rosenblat, 2008). Because it is human nature to develop an inclination for physically attractive individuals (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019), hiring such representatives

proves beneficial to both the individual and the employer (Orth & Wirtz, 2014). Where on the one hand, beauty premium is believed to have positive consequences for individuals, Behrend, Toaddy, Thompson, & Sharek, (2012) and Fang et al., (2020) suggest that under certain situations, beauty can also be problematic. Consumers might avoid interacting with individuals high on (PA) because of their self-presentation concerns, hence lowering their purchase intentions, resulting in negative consequences for the business (Ling, Shahzad, Abrar, & Khattak, 2021; Wan & Wyer Jr, 2015; Wu, So, Xiong, & King, 2019).

Hence most of the studies conducted till now with respect to services did not take into account other factors that contribute to an individual's (PA) and only remained focused exclusively on the impact of facial beauty on (CR). Ahearne et al. (2010) encompass the definition of (PA) from facial image to the general physical appearance that also include body symmetry and body weight. Extant literature (Wan and Wyer, 2015) captures customer response as a multidimensional construct including satisfaction, service quality perceptions, and the likability of the service representative as the core elements in service encounters (M.Laroche, C.Zhang & Y.Li, 2019).

Thus, most studies conducted so far on services have focused solely on the impact of facial beauty on consumer response, neglecting other factors that contribute to an individual's physical attractiveness (PA) and the core elements that make the construct of customer response. Recent studies predicted the relationship between PA of service representatives and CR and the mediation effect of SDP (M.Laroche, C.Zhang & Y.Li, 2019). Previous studies also established the impact of the consumer's own (PA) on the relationship between (PA) of the service representative, and SDP of the consumer. However, the extant literature has not taken into account, the moderating role of consumer's gender on the relationship between (PA) and (SDP) (M.Laroche, C.Zhang & Y.Li, 2019). To bridge this gap, this study analyzed the impact of multiple dimensions of (PA) in the context of the airline industry in Pakistan. The study also analyses the moderating role of the consumer's gender and his/her own (PA) in the relationship between (PA) and social distance perceptions (SDP). Simultaneously, it also determines the mediating role of social distance perceptions (SDP) in the relationship between (PA) and (CR) in SE.

Interpersonal interaction is an integral part of the (SE) between the service representative and the consumer. Therefore, there arise a need to study services not only from core services perspective, but also from the perspective of understanding how the nature of these interpersonal interactions can determine (CR). Previous literature has examined many different factors that influence interaction between the two parties, in various contexts. However detailed study, involving other relevant variables like consumer's gender and consumer's belief on his own (PA), has not been conducted, specifically in context of the Airline Industry of Pakistan.

To fill the gap the study aims to determine the different dimensions of (PA) and their significance in determining (CR) in (SE). The objective of the study is also to determine how the consumer's gender and his/her (PA) moderates the relationship between (PA) of

the representative and (SDP) developed by the consumer, and how (SDP) mediates the relationship between (PA) of the representative, and (CR).

The study seeks to find answers to the following questions to achieve the objectives of the study:

1. Do the various dimensions of (PA) of the service representative significantly impact the multiple dimensions of (CR) in the airline industry of Pakistan?
2. Do perceptions of social distance (SDP) mediate the relationship between the (PA) of representatives and (CR) in the airline industry of Pakistan?
3. Does the interaction between a consumer's gender and the (PA) of service representatives significantly impact the consumer's perceptions of social distance (SDP) in the airline industry of Pakistan?
4. Does the interaction between a consumer's (PA) and a service representative's (PA) significantly impact the consumer's perception of social distance (SDP) in the airline industry of Pakistan?

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Lens

Implied clarifications for the (PA) stereotype are provided by both personality theory and expectancy theory. Applying the personality theory framework to explore the (PA) stereotype Eagly et al. (1991) proposed that the social labels "physically attractive" and "physically unattractive" are connected inferentially to a range of evaluative dimensions. Perception of what makes a person attractive varies among individuals. Individuals judge others based on their (PA). The target individuals who are judged often behave according to the expectation of their (PA) from those who judged them (Y. Li, Zhang, & Laroche, 2019). Klein & Shtudiner (2021) suggest that expectations of behavior are affected by employee gender and physical appearance.

Physical Attractiveness (PA)

As defined in the literature, (PA) is a combination of facial and non-facial features. Early researchers described PA to be synonymous with facial attractiveness. Still, recent literature examined various other factors contributing to PA and deduced that both facial and non-facial features sum up to make the (PA) construct (Abubakar, Anasori, & Lasisi, 2019). The (PA) phenomenon has been discussed in literature several times. Also termed as the (PA) stereotype, the beauty premium effect, and what is beautiful is good, Morrow (1990) states that (PA) is 'the degree to which one's facial image elicits favorable reactions from others. This definition was further extended by (B. Lee & Choi, 2020), who claimed facial beauty to represent the entire physical appearance. Although each culture has its purpose of beauty, and predefined beauty standards (Rhodes, 2006), research suggests consensus on what counts as physical beauty across gender and ethnic groups (Y. Li, Xie, et al., 2019; Rhodes, 2006). Physical attractiveness (PA) is defined by facial averageness, facial symmetry, and sexual dimorphism (Söderlund, 2017). Research suggests that

females with symmetrical, average faces with sexually dimorphic features (small chin and nose, high, prominent cheekbones, thick lips, thin eyebrows) are considered facially attractive (Nedelec & Beaver, 2014). Rhodes (2006) later suggested that these features contribute to facial attractiveness in males and females across various cultures and ethnic groups. Numerous non-facial features also play a vital role in contributing to (PA). Physical traits including youth, lower hip-to-waist ratio, lower body weight, lower body mass index, and bilateral body symmetry are considered physically attractive features in females (Y. Li, Xie, et al., 2019). Physical traits of high shoulder-to-waist ratio, lower waist-to-chest ratio, soft body mass index, increased height, and increased musculature contribute to (PA) in men (Kanazawa, 2011; Luoh & Tsaur, 2009). Hence it can be stated that literature has identified various dimensions of the (PA) construct (facial beauty, body symmetry, and body weight), and there is a need to study the impact of non-facial as well as facial features in determining the (PA) of a service representative, in order to understand the impact of the (PA) stereotype on (CR) in (SE) (Fang et al., 2020).

Consumer Response

Humans respond to the stimuli they are exposed to in the external environment. This response can be positive or negative. Service Encounters (SE) are of interest when understanding human response (Chen, Wang, & Cai, 2018). The experiential nature of services entails that response starts to be generated while the service is consumed. The consumer responds positively to the service if he feels it provides him with a pleasurable experience (Sarker, Mohd-Any, & Kamarulzaman, 2021). Consumer response (CR) in (SE) has been established as a function of many factors (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). As researched in recent literature, some of these factors contributing to (CR) in (SE) are customer satisfaction, perceived service quality, and the likeability of the service representative. Customer satisfaction has been described as "a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product or service itself, provides pleasurable consumption-related fulfillment" (Sharma, Joseph, & Poulose, 2018; Xiao, Xie, Shahzad, & Khattak, 2020). It is a response that denotes the fulfillment and development of favorable associations with a brand or a service provider (M. F. Shahzad, Bilal, Xiao, & Yousaf, 2019). Customer satisfaction plays an integral role in determining what attitude the consumer will develop towards the service and whether he will become a repeat and hence loyal customer or not (Xiang, Schwartz, Gerdes Jr, & Uysal, 2015). Measuring the satisfaction level of customers provides a meaningful way of segmenting customers in terms of their loyalty and repeat purchasing (Hwang, Choe, Kim, & Kim, 2021; J. J. Kim, Han, & Ariza-Montes, 2021). Perceived Service Quality measures how a service meets or exceeds customer expectations (Moon & Han, 2019). It has also been defined as "a global judgment, or attitude, relating to the superiority of the service" (P.-L. Huang, Lee, & Chen, 2019). Literature suggests that consumers develop service quality perceptions towards a service depending on a comparison between the actual service experience and their expectations of what should be provided by the service (Stamolampros, Dousios, Korfiatis, & Symitsi, 2020). Consumers react more favorably toward a service when

serviced by a physically attractive service provider and feel likeability towards the service representative (Wan & Wyer Jr, 2015). This feeling of likeability contributes to the consumer's positive response towards the service.

Physical Attractiveness and Consumer Response

Physical attractiveness (PA) plays an important role in (SE), making the service representative more likable and capable of providing service (Wan & Wyer Jr, 2015). Since services are intangible and variable in this, consumers rely on external cues, evaluating the service provider (Y. Li, Liu, Chen, & Huan, 2021). Therefore, the literature suggests that the service representative's physical appearance and the quality of the interpersonal interaction play an integral role in shaping (CR) in (SE) (Park, Spence, Ishii, & Togawa, 2021). Generally, the physical appearance of the service representative is an important influencer of the nature of interpersonal interaction between a consumer and the representative. Hence it can be concluded that (PA) stereotype occurs in (SE), resulting in a positive (CR) towards the service and the service representative (Wan & Wyer Jr, 2015). Consumers have a higher satisfaction rate and positive perceptions of the service quality when dealt by an attractive sales representative. Hence it can be proposed that:

H_1: Physical Attractiveness (PA) positively affects (CR) in (SE).

H_{1a}: Facial beauty has a positive effect on likeability in (SE).

H_{1b}: Body Symmetry positively affects likeability in (SE).

H_{1c}: Body Weight harms likeability in (SE).

H_{1d}: Facial Beauty has a positive effect on service quality perception in (SE)

H_{1e}: Body Symmetry has a positive effect on service quality perception in (SE)

H_{1f}: Body Weight harms service quality perception in (SE).

H_{1g}: Facial Beauty positively affects customer satisfaction in (SE).

H_{1h}: Body Symmetry positively affects customer satisfaction in (SE).

H_{1i}: Body Weight harms customer satisfaction in (SE).

Social distance perceptions (SDP)

As defined in the literature, social distance measures the closeness between two parties in an interaction, which is proven to have a significant impact on an individual's decision (Braley, Fraiberger, & Tas, 2021). Individuals with whom one develops a closer social distance are said to be in-group, while individuals with a more significant social distance are out-group (F. Shahzad, Khattak, Khattak, & Shahzad, 2015). Social comparisons are likely to occur in (SE) (Orlowski, Bufquin, & Nalley, 2021). Consumers tend to make social comparisons between themselves and the service representative based on physical appearance. Often, we compare our physical appearance with that of same-gender peers (Jones & Buckingham, 2005). Consciously or subconsciously, we make evaluations based on these comparisons. Scholars commonly use assimilation and contrast comparison in research. According to the assimilation effect, people consider or notice

similar features between objects, while the contrast effect pays more attention to the differences between things (Sharma et al., 2018).

Physical Attractiveness (PA) and Social Distance Perceptions (SDP)

In SE, social comparisons tend to occur. When consumers undergo a service encounter with a physically attractive representative, they tend to compare their physical appearance with that of the representative (Sharma et al., 2018). The selective accessibility process model proposes that either assimilation or contrast effect can be triggered in such a situation (Aleshinloye, Fu, Ribeiro, Woosnam, & Tasci, 2020; Sharma et al., 2018). Hence if an individual believes that there is a more considerable similarity between his (PA) and that of the service representative, this would create a sense of belonging and make the two individuals feel close to one another (Lin, Lin, & Wang, 2021). However, more significant are perceived differences between the (PA) of both parties. The contrast effect occurs, making the consumer drift away from the representative (Aleshinloye et al., 2020). Hence it is proposed that:

> **H2:** Physical attractiveness (PA) decreases the social distance perceptions (SDP) between the service representative and the customer.

Individuals develop feelings of positivity depending on whether others are believed to be in a group or out-group. In-groups are the people whom an individual perceives to be similar to him, hence developing positivity for (Liberman, Trope, & Wakslak, 2007). This implies that the (PA) of the consumer determines the social distance he develops between the self and the service representative in (SE). The construal level theory supports this argument. The construal level theory suggests that the lesser the social distance created the target is believed to be similar to oneself. If greater distance is developed, and the target is believed to be dissimilar to oneself (Kwon, Ha, & Im, 2016). Hence lower the social distance more significant is the likeability of the target. Therefore, when applied in the context of the services, the assimilation effect lowers the social distance and develops likeability for the service representative. Accordingly, it can be proposed that:

> **H3:** Social distance perceptions (SDP) mediate the relationship between (PA) and (CR)

Gender

It is suggested that females generally have a greater tolerance for mistakes incurred by service representatives and a greater probability to reuse similar services by evaluations based on the quality of interpersonal interactions. It is also suggested that we often compare ourselves to same-sex peers. This implies that a physically attractive consumer and a physically attractive service representative would reach themselves. As previously discussed, the assimilation effect dominates in (SE); hence depending on the consumer's gender, a greater or lower social distance would be established between the two parties. However, limited research suggests whether the relationship would hold in interaction with the opposite gender. Hence social length developed between an individual and the

service representative is also dependent on the gender of both parties, and the effect can vary depending on gender match or mismatch between the two parties. It is also proposed by (Schmitt et al., 2001) that male customers willingly accept the lower competence of a physically attractive sales representative of the opposite gender (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). On the other hand, female customers prefer a balance between PA and the competence of the service representative. Hence it can be proposed that:

> **H₄:** Consumer's gender moderates the relationship between (PA) and (SDP).

Consumer's Physical Attractiveness

Consumers (PA) play a role in determining how they respond to individuals high on (PA). Self-presentation concerns can make unattractive individuals respond negatively toward physically attractive others, which implies that there are situations where the beauty premium notion might not hold (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). The social distance an individual develops between himself and another individual, depending on the similarity between the (PA) of both, is influenced by the consumer's gender (Y. Li et al., 2021). Due to self-presentation concerns, an unattractive individual might react differently to an attractive individual of the same gender. A person uses their (PA) as a benchmark to compare others (L. Lee, Loewenstein, Ariely, Hong, & Young, 2008). Individuals who perceive themselves as physically attractive would have low self-presentation concerns and develop a more downward social distance between themselves and a physically attractive target. Conversely, individuals who perceive themselves to be lower on (PA) would have more severe self-presentation concerns when coming across a (PA) individual, increasing the social distance between the two parties. Therefore, it can be proposed that:

> **H₅:** Consumer's PA moderates the relationship between the service representative's PA and SDP.
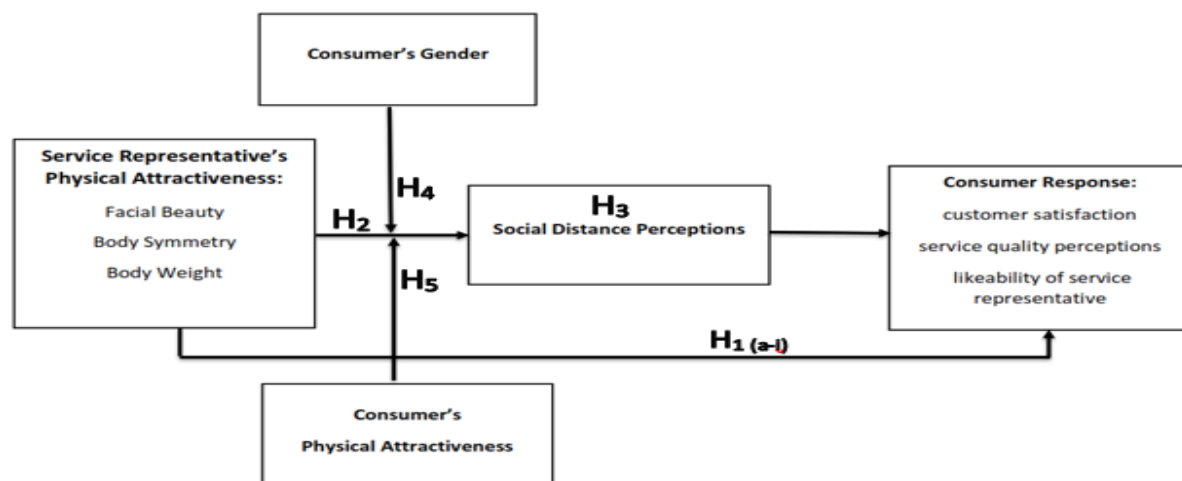
Conceptual Model

Figure 1. Conceptual Model

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the study was to explain the relationships among (PA) of service representative and (SDP), and how this affects (CR) in (SE). In order to achieve the objectives of the study, a quantitative research approach was adopted. The data was collected using a survey questionnaire. Data was collected in-flight using a voluntary response sampling technique (Murairwa, 2015; Supasitthumrong et al., 2024) from 384 willing and qualifying respondents (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019) in order for the researcher to gather accurate and dependable data and reduce the non-response rate. The method of voluntary sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where the participants have the option to participate or not to participate in the study and thus self-select themselves in the sample of the study. The sampling technique also ensure that customers can best answer questions while undergoing the experience. In total 700 questionnaires were distributed and 384 accurate and complete responses were extracted making a response rate of a response rate of 56%.

Measures and Survey Questionnaire

The measurement items for research constructs were employed from services marketing and (PA) studies. The items in the questionnaire in the study were measured through 7-point Likert Scale, with a minimum value of 1 signifying 'Strongly Disagree,' while a maximum weight of 7 denoting 'Strongly Agree. Physical Attractiveness (PA) was measured using the five-items (R. Li, Laroche, Richard, & Cui, 2022), Social Distance Perceptions (SDP) was measured using a 3-items (K. Kim, Zhang, & Li, 2008), Consumer response (CR) was measured on three dimensions adopted from Wan and Wyer (2015) and using a 7-items. Physical Attractiveness (PA) was measured as a multi-dimensional construct. As identified by the literature, each dimension was measured using a single-item 7-point Likert scale. Various images of female service representatives were shared with respondents, and they were asked to rate the PA of the individual in the image on a scale of 1 to 7. To ensure the accuracy of results, a single shot was photoshopped across various dimensions to ensure that only the size understudy was modified. Similarly, respondents were asked to rate the (PA) of the female staff serving them in the airline on a scale of 1 to 7. The (PA) of the female service staff was measured including facial beauty, body symmetry, and body weight. The use of a single item is in line with recent literature on the study of (PA) in (SE) (Kwon et al., 2016; (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). Likeability was measured using a 3-item, and customer satisfaction was measured using a 2-item, and service quality perception was measured using a single-item. Composite scales for all main variables (Service Representative's (PA), Social distance perceptions, Consumer's (PA), and (CR) are used as provided in the extant literature (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019).

The data of the study was collected in flight from passengers traveling from Islamabad to Karachi on four flights. After the data had been collected and screened, it was coded in SPSS Version 25.0 for statistical analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to show the demographic information of the respondents. Cronbach alpha test was then used to test the reliability of the constructs in the measuring instruments. The hypotheses proposed for the direct relationships between variables were tested using linear regression analysis in SPSS version 25. Mediating and moderating effects were tested using Process Hayes (Hayes, 2009).

Description of Sample studied

The demographic information of the sample is that in a sample of 384, 48% were male, and 52% were female. 57 % were between 31-40, 31% between 41-50, and 12% between 51-60. 60% had an undergraduate degree while 40% had a postgraduate and above.

EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

Measurement Model

Reliability was tested using the Cronbach Alpha test, where an Alpha coefficient greater than 0.7 is considered acceptable (Hair Jr, Black, Babin, Anderson, & Tatham, 2011). Cronbach Alpha results, presented in Table 1, suggest that all constructs have a Cronbach Alpha coefficient greater than 0.7. Hence the Cronbach Alpha values meet the minimum requirement for reliability.

Table 1
Reliability of Constructs

Constructs	Standardized Cronbach Alpha
PA	0.76
SDP	0.89
CR	0.93

A correlation matrix was also tested for the variables. Correlation helps in the initial examination of hypothesized relationships to ensure multicollinearity problem amongst the independent variables does not exist (Hair Jr et al., 2011). None of the independent variables have correlation values close to 1.

The normality of data was checked using descriptive statistics and normality test (Sekaran,2003). The normality of data is denoted by skewness and kurtosis of data. According to Newsom (2005), value of +/- 2 or equivalent to 2 is considered acceptable for skewness, while +/-3 or equivalent to 3, is considered acceptable for data to be called normal.

Table 2

Descriptive Analysis of Data

	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Service Representaive's PA	384	5.74	0.731	0.453	-1.021
Conusmer's PA	384	4.41	1.8	-0.202	-1.652
SDP	384	4.17	2.03	-0.196	-1.853
CR	384	5.52	1,12	-0.953	-0,583

The results in Table 2 show that the data is normally distributed, and all values are within the accepted limits.

Hypothesis Testing

The relationship between direct and indirect variables was tested using linear regression. The purpose of the study was to test the composite effect of the IV on the DV. However, for deep understanding, the effect of individual dimensions of IV on the individual dimensions of DV was also tested.

Results in Table 3 revealed that a unit change of (PA) significantly increased ($\beta = 0.438$, $p < .01$) CR by 0.438 units. The effect of individual dimensions of (PA) constructs in Table 3 depicts that, facial beauty ($\beta = 0.287$, $p < .001$), body symmetry ($\beta = 0.446$, $p < .001$) and body weight ($\beta = -0.398$, $p < .001$), significantly affect the (CR) construct of likeability of the representative. Results in Table 4 also illustrate that facial beauty ($\beta = 0.230$, $p < .001$), body symmetry ($\beta = 0.501$, $p < .001$) and body weight ($\beta = -0.365$, $p < .001$), significantly affect the (CR) construct of service quality perception. Results in Table 3 also prove that facial beauty ($\beta = 0.637$, $p < .001$), body symmetry ($\beta = 0.407$, $p < .001$) and body weight ($\beta = -0.147$, $p < .001$), significantly affect the (CR) construct of consumer satisfaction. It is worth noting that the dimension of the body weight has a negative significant relation with all constructs of the consumer satisfaction dimensions. All hypotheses of the direct relationship between IV's dimensions (PA), and DV's dimensions (CR) are supported. As suggested by the t-values, the strongest impact is created by facial beauty, followed by body symmetry, and then body weight. This is in line with previous studies conducted in similar domains.

Facial beauty and body symmetry have a positive relationship while body weight negatively affects (CR). The results confirm the extant literature (Xiao et al., 2020). Results are also in line with both the personality theory and expectancy theory. In accordance with the theories results clearly state that individual judge others based on their (PA). The results also show that those who judge target individuals derive satisfaction from their expectation of the (PA) of the target individuals (Y. Li, Zhang, & Laroche, 2019).

Table 3

Regression Estimates

	Dependent Variable: Likeability of the Representative			
	R Squar = 0.72	Beta	T Statistics	P-Value
Facial Beauty		0.287	9.533	.0000
Body Symmetry		0.446	5.845	.0000
Body Weight		-0.398	2.187	.0000
	Dependent Variable: Service Quality Perception			
	R Square= 0.63	Beta	T Statistics	P-Value
Facial Beauty		0.230	8.713	.0000
Body Symmetry		0.501	5.455	.0000
Body Weight		-0.365	1.325	.0000
	Dependent Variable: Consumer Satisfaction			
	R Square= 0.64	Beta	T Statistics	P-Value
Facial Beauty		0.363	10.816	.0000
Body Symmetry		0.407	3.313	.0000
Body Weight		-0.147	3.285	.0011
	PA-CR			
	R Square= 0.32	Beta	T Statistics	P-Value
PA		0.438	13.198	.007

Mediation of (SDP) and moderation effects of gender and consumer own (PA) were tested using the procedures advocated by Process Hayes in SPSS v25 (Hayes, 2009). The main effect as shown in Table 4 of (PA) of the representative to (CR) (β = 0.842, p < .001). Since SDP was reverse coded in the questionnaire, hence a greater score means lower social distance developed. This shows that when dealt with a physically attractive representative, the consumer develops a shorter social distance between himself/herself and the representative. Main effect of the mediator (Social distance perceptions) to (CR) (β = 0.367, p < .001). This shows that lesser the social distance, more positive is the (CR). These results justify for conducting mediation test.

As depicted in Table 4 the indirect path between (PA) and (CR) is also positive and significant (β = 0.126, p = 0.0015). However, the strength of this relationship has decreased when the mediating role of (SDP) is taken into account. Hence it can be said that (SDP) partially mediates the relationship between (PA) of the representative and (CR). When the staff is high on (PA), the social distance developed between the customer

and representative is low, resulting in positive (CR). Hence Hypothesis 2 and 3 (H$_2$, H$_3$) are supported

Table 4
Mediation

	Beta	T Statistics	P-Value
PA Rep-SDP	0.842	6.212	.0000
SDP-CR	0.367	17.070	.0000
PA Rep-CR	0.126	2.101	.0015

Results in Table 5a explain that the interaction effect of the consumer's gender and (PA) of the representative significantly decrease the main effect of (PA) of the representative and SDP from (β = 0.842, p < .001) to (β = 0.339, p < .001) the relationship between (PA) of the representative and social distance perceptions. Similarly, results also reveal that for female consumers, self-presentation concerns, in the case of low (PA) of representative, increased (SDP) between the two parties. On the other hand, in the case of males, the (SDP) decreased irrespective of their own (PA) when dealing with representatives high on (PA).

Table 5a. *Moderation*

	Beta	T Statistics	P-Value
PA Rep and SDP	0.339	2.572	.0002

As shown in the table above, the gender of the consumer significantly moderates the relationship between the physical attractiveness of the staff, and (SDP) (β = 0.3393. p = 0.0002). This means that the response of the consumer towards the (PA) of the staff and the (SDP) developed as a result, depends on the consumer's gender. A male respondent would react positively to a physically attractiveness representative of the opposite gender. However, a female would not always respond positively when dealing with an attractive female representative. Hence the results support hypothesis 4 (H4).

Table 5b. *Moderation*

	Beta	T Statistics	P-Value
PA Rep and SDP	0.244	4.333	.0000

The consumer's own (PA) determines the (SDP) developed between the representative and oneself. This means that a consumer low on (PA) might not respond favorably to an attractive respondent because of self-presentation concerns. This means that greater the (PA) of the consumer, lesser is the social distance developed. Since (SDP) has been reverse coded, hence from results shown in Table 5b can be concluded that there is significant positive moderation due to (PA) of consumer (β = 0.2437, p = 0.0000). Hence Hypothesis 5, (H5) is supported.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the impact of representative (PA) on (CR) by considering the (SDP) developed between the consumer and the representative (Fang et al., 2020). This distance between the two parties determines how the consumer will respond to the physical attractiveness of the representative. The social length formed is dependent on the consumer's own (PA), meaning that a consumer low on (PA) might react negatively to the (PA) of a representative because of their self-presentation concerns (Kanazawa, 2011; Nedelec & Beaver, 2014). This self-presentation concern increases (SDP) and results in negative (CR) (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). The gender of the consumer also determines how social distance is developed between the two parties. Therefore this framework aimed to study all these underlying factors affecting (CR) in (SE) (P.-L. Huang et al., 2019).

Firstly, (PA) was investigated as a multidimensional construct. Facial beauty, body symmetry, and body weight were taken as dimensions of PA (J. J. Kim et al., 2021). Results showed that facial beauty, including symmetrical face, and body weight contribute to increased (PA). Similarly, body symmetry, which includes a low hip-to-waist ratio and balanced body, contributes to (PA). The lower hip-to-waist ratio denotes youthfulness and hence is considered appealing. Consumer response (CR) was also evaluated as a multidimensional construct (Y. Li, Xie, et al., 2019). The dimensions included the likeability of the representative, customer satisfaction, and service quality perception.

The direct effects of (PA) were calculated on the three dimensions of (CR). It was found that facial beauty positively affects all measurements of (CR) (Li, Y., Zhang, C., & Laroche, M., 2019). Similarly, body symmetry had a positive response on all measurements of (CR), and body weight had a negative response on all measurements of (CR) (R. Li et al., 2022). The indirect effect of the entire (PA) construct was determined on the consumer as the whole response construct through the mediating effect of social distance perceptions. Partial mediation was supported, meaning that (SDP) partially mediates the relationship between (PA) and (CR). This means that a direct connection between the two also exists, but it is partially mediated by social distance perceptions. The social distance developed between an individual and the representative, because of the (PA) of the representative, determines whether a consumer will generate a positive response or not. To understand what factors this (SDP) depends on consumer's rating effects of a consumer's gender and their (PA) were studied. The airlines in Pakistan mainly recruit female staff to serve customers, except PIA, which has male staff but only on international flights. Hence, in our study, we found that males respond favorably towards physically attractive female staff, reducing social distance perceptions. However, females may or may not respond favorably (Y. Li, Xie, et al., 2019). Hence the moderation effect of gender was supported. The role of consumers (PA) was found to affect the (SDP) developed. A female low on (PA) may increase the social distance between herself and an attractive (PA) due to self-presentation consumer's (PA) was also found to have a

significant impact on the social space developed between them and the representative (G. Huang & Liang, 2021). Therefore, it can be concluded that all hypotheses proposed in the framework have been proved through statistical results.

CONCLUSION

The study extends our understanding of the (PA) construct and its impact on (SE). Generally, it can be concluded that physically attractive representatives positively impact (CR). Secondly, (SDP) mediates the relationship between (PA) and (CR), depending on assimilation or contrast effects. This assimilation of contrast lowers or increases the social distance between the two parties. In the case of a greater social space, the (CR) is negative, while in the case of a lower social space, the answer is positive (F. Shahzad et al., 2015). Thirdly, the interaction effect of consumer's gender was investigated, and it was proved that consumer's gender has a moderating impact on the relationship between (PA) and (SDP). Lastly, the interaction effect of the consumer's PA was investigated, and it was proven that the greater the consumer's own (PA), the lesser is the social distance developed between the individual and the representative. Hence all the relationships were reported to be significant in the proposed framework in the context of the Airline industry in Pakistan.

Theoretical Implications

The study provides some theoretical implications. Although the impact of (PA) on (CR) has been studied multiple times, however, there is little research on the underlying factors that influence this relationship. Therefore, this study investigates the mediating effect of (SDP) developed depending on whether assimilation or contrast effect dominates in (SE). The study also investigated the interaction consumer's (PA) and consumer's gender, as proposed by researchers in their future research directions (Ling, Shahzad, Abrar, & Khattak, 2021; Wan & Wyer Jr, 2015; Wu, So, Xiong, & King, 2019). Also, there is limited research in services marketing that investigates (PA) as a multidimensional construct. Most literature in services marketing equates facial beauty to (PA), so this research contributes to the literature by presenting (PA) as a multidimensional construct. This study hence takes an integrated approach to understanding the underlying factors that influence the relationship between (PA) of the representative and (CR).

Managerial Implications

The findings of this study have significant implications for managers. Firstly, it can be successfully concluded that physically attractive representatives generate positive (CR) hence it is beneficial to recruit beautiful representatives in (SE). Since (PA) has been studied as a multidimensional construct, results suggest that facial beauty contributes the greatest towards the (PA) construct hence managers need to pay attention to facial features and youthfulness of the face when hiring service representatives. Similarly, body symmetry and lower body weight contribute to (PA) and should be incorporated as criteria when hiring service representatives. However, the underlying factors of (SDP) denote that

managers must deal with the (PA) phenomenon very cautiously. Managers need to carefully segment their customers and assign representatives low on (PA) to deal with customers of low (PA) of the same gender, this finding is in line with PIA's strategy of not being too rigid about the (PA) of their cabin crew members. Consumers low on (PA) do not feel comfortable interacting with physically attractive representatives due to the contrast effect and their self-presentation concerns. This is specifically true for interaction with same-gender peers. Companies hence need to follow a multifold strategy, select, recruit, and designate representatives accordingly when dealing with customers on a one-to-one basis.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study has its limitations. The results of this study might not apply to many other service industries. For example, a consumer utilizing the services of a fitness center would naturally develop a liking for a physically fit trainer, irrespective of their (PA), as the (PA) of the trainer is directly indicative of the expected service quality. Hence the mediating effect of (SDP) might not hold. The study can therefore be conducted across industries to generalize results. Secondly, this study is only focused on female service representatives. Consumers might respond differently to the (PA) phenomenon when served by male representatives. Future studies should also investigate the potential moderating role of service characteristics on the relationship (PA) of representative and CR.

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