

Hotel employees' self-perception of Staff Uniform and its effect on job satisfaction in selected hotels of West Bengal and Orissa

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ABSTRACT. Uniforms are the outfits of specific designs used to generate a sense of honour, pride and belongingness among the staffs. In order to make the hotel industry look more professional, starting from the time the guest comes to the hotel till they check out, all the staffs should look confident and smart. This is possible only when the uniforms are efficiently designed. The purpose of the research is to find out the new ideas being followed in designing of uniforms in hotels as well as its importance in hospitality industry. A properly dressed employee can also boost up the image of the organisation where he/she is working. All the research findings are based on the interviews with Head of the departments of different hotels along with the senior team members in some hotels of West Bengal and Orissa. Questionnaires are used to find out the new concepts being adopted in designing the uniforms. The study aims at finding out the impact of modern uniforms on hotel staffs as well as on the guests. The objective of this research is to understand the role of modern uniforms in hotel industry. Hotel staffs play an important role in advertising the brand name of the organisation. Providing proper treatment to the employees of the hotel will help in creating better guest satisfaction.

Keywords: Uniform, belongingness, image, sense of honour, brand.

1 Introduction

Uniforms can satisfy the needs of the staffs at different positions in the hotel. Uniforms can fulfil the need of the staffs at various levels like strategic and operational levels. Starting at the strategic level which suggests that in order to enhance social interaction among the organisation, a comfortable atmosphere must be created (Daniel K, 1996). It indicates that uniforms portray a unique image which represents the culture of the organisation which ultimately creates a positive impact on the behaviour of the staff and also motivates them to improve their performance (Earle H, 2003).

On the other hand the operational level suggests that the uniforms of the staffs must be designed keeping in mind the functionality of the same which will appropriately suit the work the staffs are involved with. Hotel uniforms largely contribute to differentiating the hotel staffs and guests; enhances staff satisfaction and increases their commitment towards work (Dipietro RB, 2008, Nelson K, 2000).

Uniforms play an important role in expressing the image of the organisation and enhancing marketing activities specially through advertising through electronic media which describes how efficient, well-groomed and confident the staffs are in serving the guests. Hence special attention is needed while designing uniforms of the staffs. The uniform design will be successful if there is right balance between the decor of the organisation, new trends, fashion, ergonomics, comfortable to wear, safety and aesthetic appeal (Sonja Sterman, 2011).

The research aims at finding out the new ideas being implemented in designing the uniforms of the staffs in hotels. Secondly it also finds out the impact of modern uniforms on hotel staffs.

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2 Literature review

A uniform is described as the combination of garments worn together by the staffs of the organisation. The purpose of providing uniform is not only to protect the staffs from adverse weather condition, to protect against accidents and related physical and psychological risks but also uniform is used to create differences between hotel staffs and guests (Flugel, 1930). The uniforms of the employees are considered to be one important aspect of tangible service which can reduce uncertainty for customers as uniforms provide clear hint to the guests regarding whom to contact in case of needs (Rafaeli A, 1993).

2.1 Features of uniform

Uniform can improve the moment of truth (Carlzon J, 1987) between the guests and the staffs where the front line staffs act as the face of the hotel while they interact with the guests. This has been focussed by Kandampully that such image within the organisation truly represents the culture of the same (Kandampully J, 2007). Uniforms play an important role in creating positive impact on overall performance and behaviour of the staffs which in turn improves guest expectations (Earle H, 2003). Research on employee satisfaction has proved that uniform design features play an important role as they motivate the staffs in improving their level of performance (Nelson K, 2000). The reactions of the guests as well as the behaviour of the staffs working in the organisation are mostly influenced by the uniforms been provided to them (Adomaitis AD, 2005).

Studies have shown numerous benefits of wearing uniform by the staffs which includes the protective function of wearing uniform, creating image of the organisation and standardisation of service. Apart from the above mentioned benefits, some other benefits of wearing uniform in hotels are to ensure safety to the staffs while working, to ensure healthy working environment as well as to ensure the functional needs of the hotel (Martinez-Tome M, 2000). Uniforms are the means through which the values of the hotels can be transferred to the hotel staffs (Lurie A, 1983). The newly added ideas incorporated while designing the uniform for the staffs has contributed largely increasing the level of confidence among the staffs. Hence the newly designed uniforms add new colour, provides comfort and enhances the image of the organisation.

2.2 Designing of Uniform

The entire concept of designing of uniform depends upon the comfort ability of wear and need of the service. The new trends adopted in uniform design are made on the basis of the need of the department the staffs will be serving. Nowadays new variations have been introduced in designing of the uniform. They have joined hands with the new fashion designers to implement new trending designs in uniform.

The following are some of the emerging trends noticed in the hotels:

Customised Uniform:

In early days the hotels focussed mainly on implementing traditional look on the uniforms. However they are now moving towards implementing designer customised uniform after consultation with the hotel staffs. "If you are embarrassed to be seen in your uniform, chances are very high that you are not going to make an effort to be seen by the public, nor are you apt to go out of your way to assist a guest" mentioned by Sheehan (2003). Therefore the uniforms to be tailored should fit the desired requirements of the staffs.

Addition of vibrant colours:

The designers had taken into considerations about more of the vibrant colours to the uniform which was not the case in the earlier days. In the earlier days mostly the general light or black and with coloured uniforms has shifted to more vibrant colours. Such colours have been introduced in designing scarves, embroidered items etc. Even bright shades of colour like citrus, blue, green etc has also made their in the modern uniforms for the hotel staffs. Even the traditional colours of the suit are also changing to charcoal grey or to some other shades of grey. Adomaitis and Johnson (2005) mentioned that the behaviour of the staffs changed when they wore uniforms of different colours.

Comfortability of wear:

Hotels are nowadays shifting from strict traditions of wearing bow ties or neck scarves to open collars or Chinese collars. Special attention has been provided to the level of comfort been provided to the hotel staffs while designing their uniform. Moreover the traditional concept of wearing the hard box type shoes has been shifted to flat soft comfortable one so that they can stand and work comfortable for prolonged time period. Even the staffs also fail to perform their tasks effectively if they wear uncomfortable and ill-fittings uniform which will have a negative impact on the satisfaction level of the guests (Sheehan, 2003).

Local flair:

Hotels are more concerned about introducing local culture in designing the uniforms for the staffs. Therefore the guests can get the essence and feel of the place they have visited. Such unique designs in the uniform will be noticed in heritage properties where the guest can even witness the ethnicity of the place through the traditional style of wear of the staffs.

Providing monochromatic look:

Nowadays the designers suggest monochromatic and single colour look from top to bottom to add simplicity and sophistication to the overall look of the uniform. Earlier the uniforms were designed with two colours to clearly distinguish the upper part of the body with the lower part. However the designers now suggest single colour to the entire set of uniform. The colour of the uniform can be all black, all grey, all brown or all blue with different coloured accessories which suggest simplicity of wear.

Flexibility of wear:

There are numerous new options available to the staffs in the present days. Rather than the traditional wear like sari, more options in pants and skirts are also available to the staffs. Front desk staffs prefer to wear skirts with jackets rather than the traditional suiting material. Moreover the advanced technology had also provided the designers with the scope of designing uniforms which are easy to clean, maintain and are more durable. Even the factor of style is well blended with the theme of the hotel which adds a unique sophisticated touch to the design of the uniform.

Blend of formal and casual look:

Hotel are moving away from the traditional conservative look and giving a tinge of casual look to the uniforms. Hence brings a blend of both formal and casual look to the modern uniform. This gives a relaxed and approachable look to the uniform and enthusiasm to the staffs to work effectively.

3 Objective

The following are the few questions raised in this research study:

1. To explore if the staffs like the designs of the uniform being provided to them.
2. To investigate the new changes being made in the uniform design.
3. To investigate the factors affecting the uniform wear in hotels
4. To investigate if the uniforms affect the level of satisfaction of employees in hotels.

4 Research design

In order to get appropriate answers for the questions, a questionnaire was prepared to find out the new trends in uniform design prevailing in hotels of West Bengal and Orissa, factors influencing uniform wear, job satisfaction of the employees and several other data. A seven point Likert-Scale is used in finding out the preference of the staffs in designing the uniform and finding out the level of satisfaction among the staffs. Along with the questionnaires qualitative interviews are also conducted for the staffs of the different departments and levels. The questionnaires were first distributed to the executive officers for approval and then they are distributed to the staffs. These questionnaires are randomly handed over the staffs in numerous hotels. The data was collected with the help of Human Resource departments of

the hotels. The employees were explained the purpose and synopsis of the research study. The participants were given a time span of 15 minutes to answer to the questions.

5 Data analysis

The total number of participants in the process of collection of data was 200. The demographic factors like age, gender, years of experience of the employees are taken into considerations. Out of 200 respondents, there were 120 female respondents and rest were male. The average age group of the respondents were 35 years and they had on an average 5 years of experience. In order to answer the first two questions, a set of 12 questions were prepared in the form of statements for the respondents to answer. A 7 point Likert scale method was used for evaluation, where 1 indicates highly disagree and 7 indicates highly agree. The table below shows the list of statements prepared to get the appropriate answer from the respondents.

Table 1. Statement of evaluation of problem

[7-point Likert Scale is used: 1 indicates Highly disagree and 7 indicates highly agree.]

Sl. No.	Statement	Result (Mean value)
1.	New changes have been introduced to the uniform.	6.5
2.	The design of the uniform matches with my job role	5.55
3.	The uniform provided by the organisation is comfortable to wear	6
4.	The uniform provides confidence in serving the guest needs	5.45
5.	The management involved you while taking decisions about the changing of designs of uniform.	4.6
6.	A touch of local culture and heritage been introduced to the uniform design.	6.2
7.	More vibrant colours are added to the uniform.	6.1
8.	New varieties of dresses options in uniform are available.	5.30
9.	New uniform designs are the blend of formal and casual look.	5.55
10.	More flexibility has been introduced to the new sets of uniform.	5.45
11.	The uniform provides a positive impact on behaviour.	5.25
12.	New uniform enhances job satisfaction.	5.50

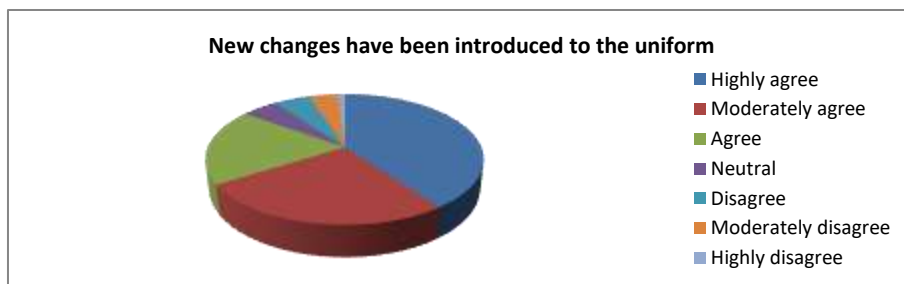


Fig. 1. New changes made in uniform designs

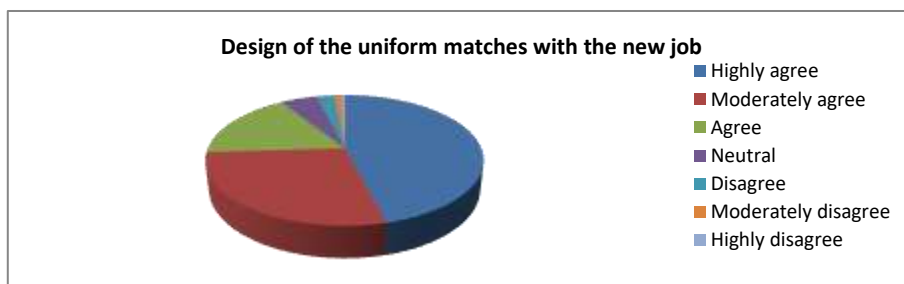


Fig. 2. The design of the uniform matches with my job role

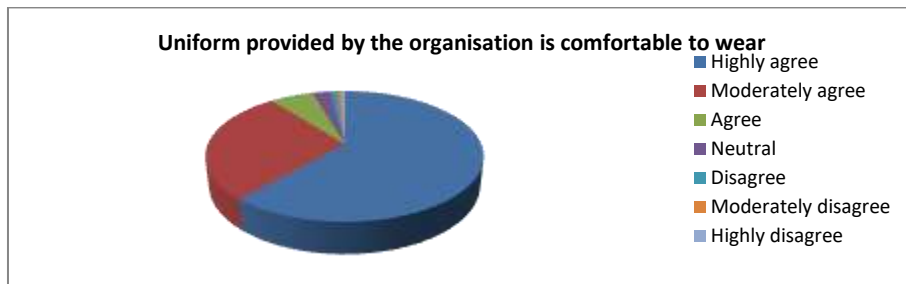


Fig. 3. Comfortability of uniform wear



Fig. 4. Uniforms in providing confidence among staffs



Fig. 5. Involvement of staffs in uniform designing

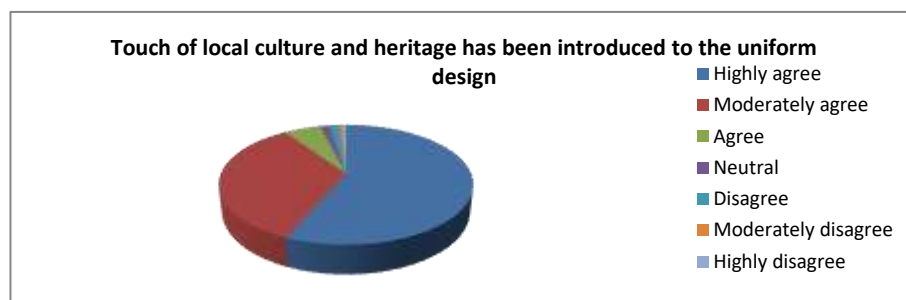


Fig. 6. Touch of local culture and heritage in uniform design

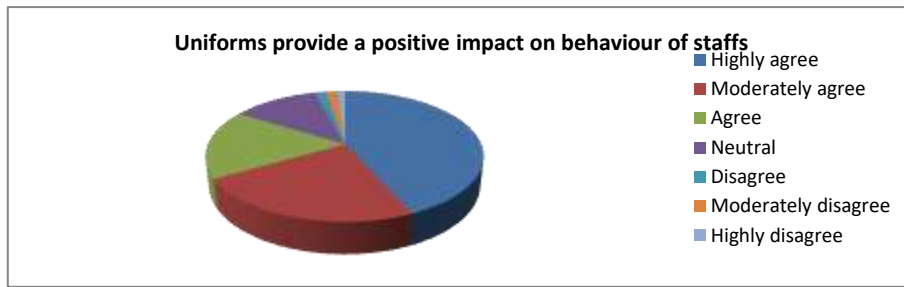


Fig. 7. Impact of uniform on behaviour of staffs

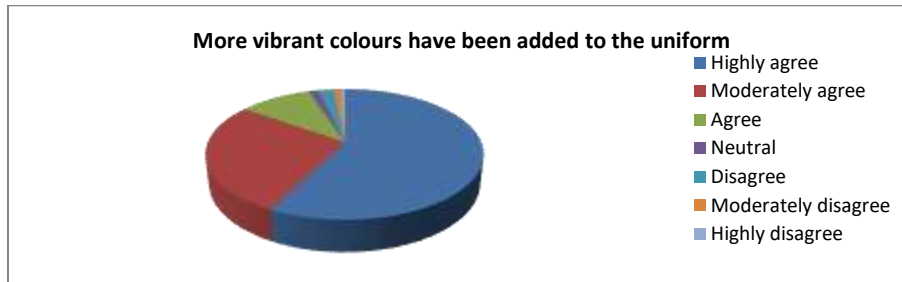


Fig. 8. Addition of colours to uniform



Fig. 9. New varieties of dresses options are available in uniform

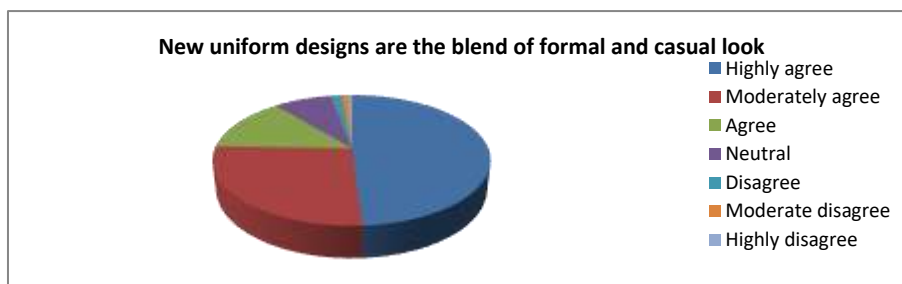


Fig. 10. Blend of casual and formal look in uniform

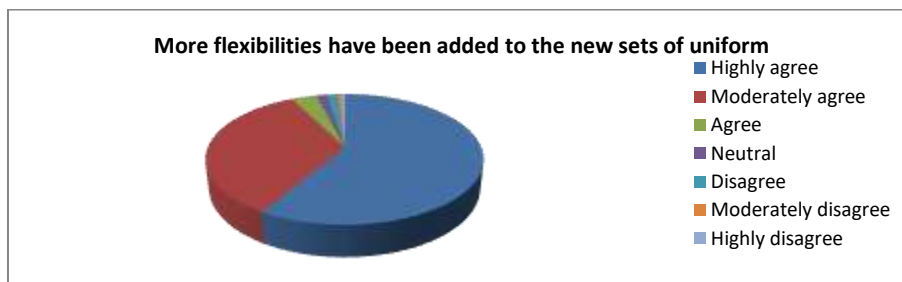


Fig. 11. Flexibilities in uniform design in hotels

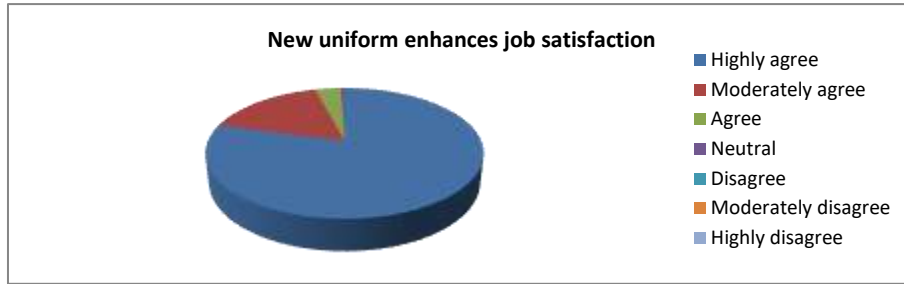


Fig. 12. Impact of uniform on job satisfaction

From the above table it has been found that the highest score is obtained by the statement indicating "New changes has been introduced to the uniform"(6.5). This means that about 92.85% of the respondents had agreed that new changes to the uniforms had been made. The next high scores are obtained by " A touch of local culture and heritage been introduced to the uniform design" (6.2), "More vibrant colours are added to the uniform" (6.1) and "The uniform provided by the organisation is comfortable to wear" (6.0). Therefore we can say that the new designs have been introduced to the uniforms. The uniforms are not only comfortable to wear but also more vibrant colours like blue, green or citrus are added to the uniforms. It has also been observed that the uniforms are now the blend of both formal and casual style and hints of local culture and traditions can also be noticed in the uniforms. More over the newly designed uniforms also enhances the level of job satisfaction. However it has been observed that numerous negative responses are received while answering to the statement of "The management involved you while taking decisions about changing of designs of uniform".

After going through the various responses of the employees it has been observed that lot of changes have been brought about in the new uniforms. These uniforms have enhanced the level of confidence among the staffs to anticipate the guest needs which in turn helps in maximum guest satisfaction. While understanding the third research question that has been raised, the following are the few statements been presented to the employees for receiving their responses. The table below describes the prime factors affecting the uniform wear in the hotels. Again a 7 point Likert scale has been used for effective justification.

Table 2. Statement for the factors affecting uniform wear.

[7-point Likert Scale is used; 1 indicates strongly disagree and 7 indicates strongly agree.]

SL No.	Statement	Result (Mean value)
1.	The uniforms provided suit the job role.	5.95
2.	Uniforms look good on every employees.	5.75
3.	Suitable materials are used for designing different uniforms.	5.90
4.	Uniforms are comfortable to wear.	6.20
5.	The uniforms provided are easy to clean and maintain.	6.10
6.	Uniforms are embroidered with company logo and names of employees.	5.20
7.	Varieties of colours are added to the uniforms.	5.50
8.	Uniforms provided properly fit to the body of employees.	6.10

The above statement indicates that the most important factor affecting uniform wear is the level of comfort being provided by the uniforms to the staffs. The next important factors are uniforms should be easy to maintain and clean so that the employees can easily use a stained free uniform which will enhance their level of confidence. Moreover designers also use suitable uniform materials while designing the uniforms for different staffs of hotels. The other important factor affecting uniform wear is it's appropriateness to the jobs being performed. For example, housekeeping staffs are always provided with short sleeved, beltless and comfortable uniform as they have to perform lot of bending, climbing and other tedious activities. Again the uniforms of the waiters should have pockets to keep their pens, lighters,

angel's wing etc. However it has been found that many uniforms of the staffs are not embroidered with employees' names. Rather they are handed over with name badges.

Again a set of 6 questions have been raised in finding out the answer to the last question of the research problem. The following are the set of questions being prepared to get responses from the hotel employees.

Table 3. Statement for evaluating the impact of uniform on job satisfaction of employees.

[7-point Likert Scale has been used where 1 indicates strongly disagree and 7 indicates strongly agree.]

SL. No.	Statement	Result (Mean Value)
1.	Uniforms create a feeling of belongingness among the staffs.	5.20
2.	Blended uniforms provide higher level of satisfaction in performing the duties.	5.55
3.	Uniforms provide additional motivation to the staffs in performing their tasks.	5.45
4.	Uniforms provide a professional look to the employees.	6.10
5.	Uniforms are the means of communication.	5.25

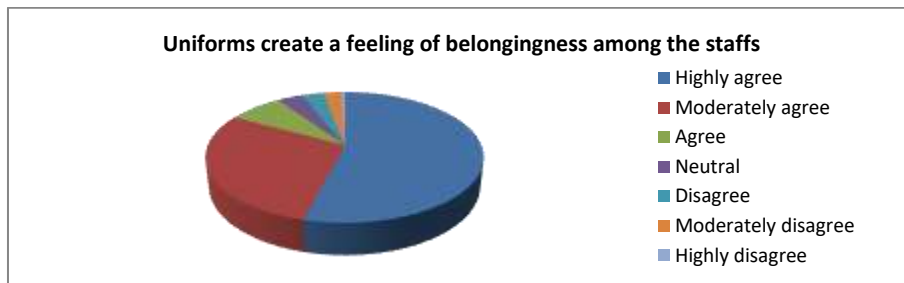


Fig. 13. Uniform create a feeling of belongingness among the staffs

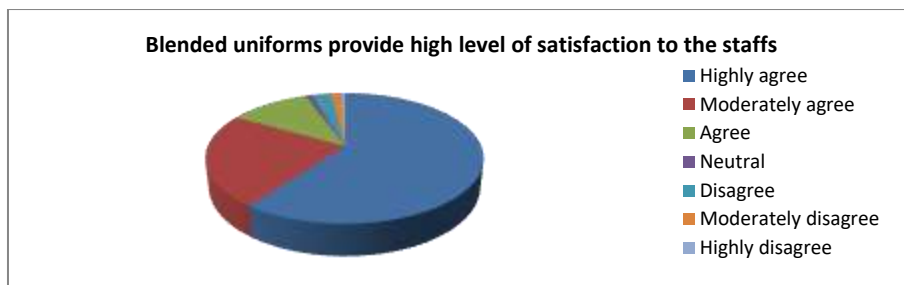


Fig. 14. Uniform provide high level of satisfaction to the staffs

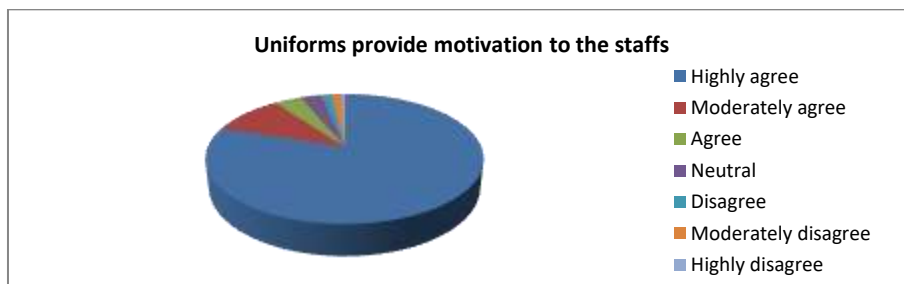


Fig. 15. Uniforms as a source of motivation to the staffs

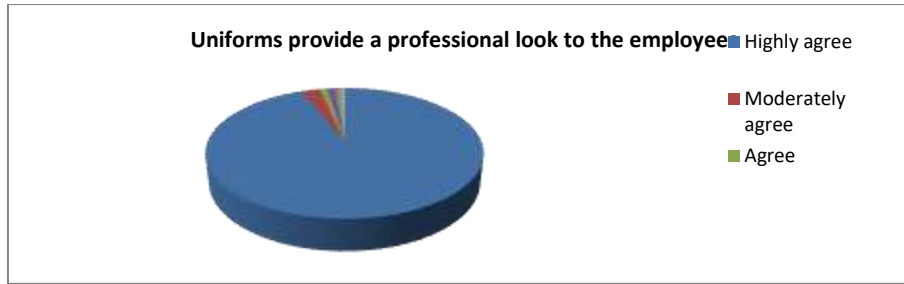


Fig. 16. Uniform provide professional look to the employees

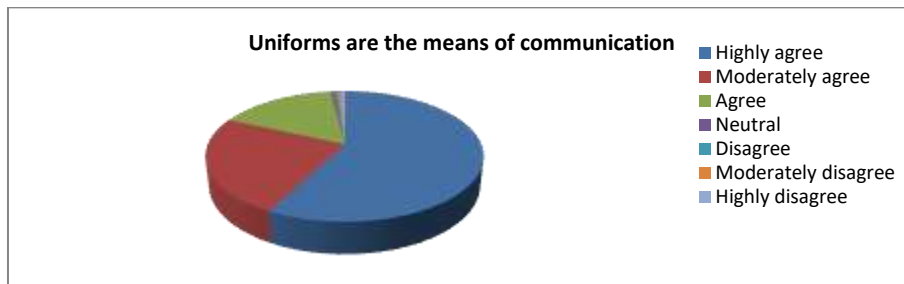


Fig. 17. Uniform as a means of communication

From the above table and pie charts it has been found that most of the employees had agreed to the point that new uniforms provide more professional look to the employees. Not only does the uniform provide confidence to the staffs in executing their duties but also the guests also feel confident on the staffs if they are well dressed.

A blend of formal and informal wear in uniform gives more satisfaction to the employees in performing the tasks. Moreover many staffs had also agreed that uniforms create a sense of belongingness which develops team work among the employees.

6 Conclusion

Uniforms provide us more than the mere protective functions. It enhances the level of confidence among the staff members to deliver their duties and responsibilities effectively. Also in collaboration with designers numerous new patterns, ideas and variations have been incorporated into the existing styles of uniform resulting in enhanced job satisfaction of the employees of the hotels.

Through this research study we have observed the prevailing modern trends in designing of uniform. It has been observed that hotels are providing those uniforms to the staffs which are comfortable to wear for longer duration of time. Unlike older days designers are nowadays also concerned about customised uniforms which are made after consultation with the employees of the hotels mostly the executives.

Even the hint of local traditions and culture into the uniform mesmerizes the guest about the ambience of the place. Moreover addition of vibrant colours to the dresses has also positive changes in the behaviour of the employees.

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