



Tightening or loosening the “iron cage”? The impact of formal and informal display controls on service customers



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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 1 April 2014

Received in revised form 1 August 2014

Accepted 1 October 2014

Available online 30 October 2014

Keywords:

Frontline employees

Service research

Employee display

Control theory

ABSTRACT

How can service firms manage displays of frontline service employees most effectively? Building on organizational control theory, this research develops a typology of employee display controls for routine service delivery that distinguishes three formal controls (aesthetic, emotional, and verbal) and organizational culture as informal control, and tests their effects on service customers, assuming frontline employees implement controls. A role-playing experiment involving repeat service customers reveals that informal cultural control has a greater effect on customer outcomes than do formal controls. Specifically, cultural control exerts positive effects on customer arousal, perceived service quality, and trust in the frontline employee; formal controls have no significant or even negative effects. The findings suggest that service companies should reconsider their formal control strategies and increase their use of cultural controls.

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1. Introduction

Frontline service employees have a strong influence on customers' service performance perceptions and firm success (Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997). Because frontline employees' behavior toward customers is not always naturally consistent with organizational expectations, controlling their behavior represents an ongoing challenge for service firms (Bowen & Ford, 2002).

Extant research thus investigates several aspects of behavioral controls (Chebat & Kollias, 2000; Hartline & Ferrell, 1996; Schwepker & Hartline, 2005), though without determining how frontline employee display controls—defined as mechanisms that control frontline employee appearance and expressions when interacting with customers—affect service customers. Displays are essential to virtually all service transactions and shape customers' service encounter evaluations (Pugh, 2001). By extending research on how controls influence employees (Cravens, Lask, Low, Marshall, & Moncrief, 2004; Harris & Ogbona, 2011; Hartline, Maxham, & McKee, 2000), this study discerns how they also affect customers and thus ultimately the success of the service firm (Heskett et al., 1997). Extant research focuses on the emotional display of employees (e.g., Hennig-Thurau, Groth, Paul, &

Gremler, 2006) or shows that customers are able to detect control usage in service encounters (Victorino, Verma, Bonner, & Wardell, 2012). This study identifies several typical employee display controls and investigates their differential effects on service customers.

Building on organizational control theory (Jaworski, 1988), the study distinguishes two key display control mechanisms: formal and informal (cultural). Examples of formal display controls include McDonald's requiring employees to smile at customers (Murphy, 2006), Shula's Steak House telling employees to perform a fully scripted “verbal show” for groups of six or more diners, and the Queens Borough Public Library enforcing a specific dress code that requires employees to hide piercings and tattoos (Rogers & DiMattia, 2002). In contrast, Hard Rock Cafe's (2013) mission, “to spread the spirit of rock 'n' roll by creating authentic experiences that rock”, and the Ritz-Carlton's (2013) staff motto, “we are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen”, represent examples of informal cultural controls. In these latter cases, the firm's values and norms control employees' displays by evoking their identification with or pride in being part of the organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996).

This research sheds light on the effectiveness of using formal and informal cultural display controls for routine interactions, assuming employees implement controls (i.e., they follow the controls). Specifically, the study investigates the effects of formal aesthetic, emotional, and verbal display controls on repeat customers and compares the outcomes with those of informal cultural controls, using a role-playing experiment. Some scholars and most firms suggest that formal controls are more effective for ensuring consistent service quality

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(Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007), but others consider them “iron cages” that reduce employees' autonomy and trigger undesired customer reactions (Barker, 1993). Anecdotal evidence of an iron cage effect comes from the British bank Lloyds TSB, which abolishes scripts for its call center agents after customers complain that agents sound like robots (Kimberley, 2006). Safeway employees even file a lawsuit contesting the supermarket chain's “smile-and-make-eye-contact” rule, claiming that this rule leads to unwanted propositions from customers when they mistake the display as flirting (Webber, 1998). Other firms rely on informal cultural control even for routine interactions. For example, Starbucks (2013) vision is that treating employees with dignity and respect fosters their identification with the firm which translates into better customer service. Results of this study suggest that service firms need to consider loosening the iron cage of formal controls, because cultural control is much more effective in creating positive customer outcomes.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Organizational control theory

This research is grounded in organizational control theory—a framework that illustrates how environmental factors and controls influence organizational outcomes (Ouchi, 1979). Controls are “activities designed to increase the probability that specified plans are implemented properly and desired outcomes are achieved” (Jaworski & MacInnis, 1989, p. 406).

Control theory distinguishes two broad classes of controls, formal and informal (Jaworski, 1988). Formal controls are written, management-initiated mechanisms that guide employee action toward the accomplishment of a firm's objectives. Process controls, as a type of formal controls, appear particularly effective for controlling frontline employee displays because they provide explicit instructions about specific facets of an employee's behavior (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007). For example, companies often instruct their employees to show positive emotions when interacting with customers. Informal controls, on the other hand, are unwritten, worker-initiated mechanisms that influence behavior. This research focuses on organizational culture, the most prominent and general type (Ouchi, 1979), which is reflected by an employee's organizational identification (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996).

Organizational culture, which refers to the shared values and norms that guide behavior throughout the organization, exerts control over employees' behavior when they share the values at the time a firm hires them or they adopt and internalize a firm's culture through organizational socialization (Ashforth & Saks, 1996). This process fosters a sense of organizational identification within employees (O'Reilly & Chatman, 1996)—that is, “the perception of oneness with or belongingness to an organization, where the individual defines him or herself in terms of the organization(s) in which he or she is a member” (Mael & Ashforth, 1992, p. 104). Organizational identification in turn increases the probability that employee behaviors support the attainment of firm goals (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) and epitomizes the “ultimate expression of internalized control” (Albert et al., 1998, p. 270). Organizational identification thus reflects culture and is an established measure of cultural control on the individual employee level (Jaworski, Stathakopoulos, & Krishnan, 1993).

The mechanism of how culture controls behavior also works for employee displays. More specifically, cultural informal display control—defined as the shared beliefs and values that guide frontline employee displays—exerts control by reducing the range of display options employees perceive to those that are compatible with their organizational identification (Papa, Auwal, & Singhal, 1997). For instance, Rafaeli, Dutton, Harquail, and Mackie-Lewis (1997) report that employees, even without a formal dress code, invest enormous effort in selecting outfits that appear consistent with their firm culture and

signal their identification. The same mechanisms should also hold for other displays (Dutton, Dukerich, & Harquail, 1994).

Firms use formal and informal controls in combination (Cardinal, Sitkin, & Long, 2004). Jaworski et al. (1993) thus distinguish four constellations: high (high formal and informal controls), bureaucratic (high formal but low informal controls), clan (high informal but low formal controls), and low (low formal and informal controls) control systems.

2.2. A dramaturgical perspective on frontline employee display controls

The dramaturgical perspective which builds on ideas from theater (Grove, Fisk, & Bitner, 1992) is the best perspective to understand employee display controls. From this perspective, a service encounter is a performance that a firm directs and any expression, including displayed dresses, emotions, and language, is part of a theatrical social interaction (Goffman, 1959; Grandey, 2003). The dramaturgical perspective is well-established and analyzes service encounters (e.g., Grove & Fisk, 1983; Grove, Fisk, & John, 2000), new service design (Stuart & Tax, 2004), and leadership (Gardner & Avolio, 1998).

The dramaturgical perspective distinguishes traditional and improvisational theaters. Whereas traditional theater means that companies use scripts that specify “the sequence of behaviors that employees [...] are expected to follow during the service encounter” (Lovell & Wirtz, 2007, p. 54), in improvisational theater no scripts exist, but employees spontaneously adapt their behavior during the service encounter (McCarthy, Pitt, & Berthon, 2010). Scripts include display rules and can be formal or informal (Grandey, 2003; Grove & Fisk, 1989).

This research builds on traditional theater, as the study focuses on the control of routine work practices which usually use scripts and include display rules. In contrast, improvisation applies to unforeseen situations (e.g., unusual customer requests) or unanticipated service failures which require employees to adapt and to be spontaneous. The script concept is well-established and appears in research on organizational behavior (e.g., Gioia & Poole, 1984), sales (e.g., Leigh & McGraw, 1989), and services (e.g., Larsson & Bowen, 1989; Schau, Dellande, & Gilly, 2007).

2.3. Identification of frontline employee display controls

2.3.1. Data sources and analysis

Because no comprehensive, mutually exclusive frontline employee display control typology exists yet, this research draws from existing literature on display rules and related topics in management, marketing, psychology, and sociology as well as qualitative data to develop such a typology. The study uses three different qualitative data sources to identify display controls service firms use: 75 frontline employees from various service firms and industries who describe formal and informal controls in place at their firms (e.g., banks, health care, hospitality, retailing); semi-structured interviews with five top-level managers from different service industries (e.g., hospitality); and employee handbooks of these five firms. Consistent with the research objective, the study limits the data collection to routine service delivery processes.

Three analysts content analyze all three data sources (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The first analyst creates the initial display control categories by comparing each control with the other controls. At least two respondents must mention a control to establish a category. The three analysts meet multiple times to discuss the first analyst's classifications and compare their concepts with existing literature on display rules to ground their interpretations. Prior to the last coding round, overall intercoder agreement reaches 88.6% (or almost 100%, if the calculation accounts for the number of categories and coders; Rust & Cooil, 1994). The analysis of the different data sources and the literature results in a typology with three types of display controls which can be formal or informal: aesthetic, emotional, and verbal (see Table 1). No research to date compares the effects of these display controls on customers.

Table 1
A typology of display controls.

Display control	Definition	Employee interviews (n = 75)	Service managers (n = 5)	Service handbooks (n = 5)	Related concepts and literature
Aesthetic	Display controls that refer to an employee's appearance.	45 (60%) Example: "I have to wear my uniform and must put the blouse inside my skirt." (supermarket)	5 (100%) Example: "Employees should wear white or black clothes and black shoes; we provide them with a black apron." (coffee house)	5 (100%) Example: "Employees wear clean uniforms and look flawless." (hotel chain)	Aesthetic labor (e.g., Witz et al., 2003) Organizational dress (e.g., Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997) Service encounters (e.g., Solomon, 1998)
Emotional	Display controls that refer to the display or suppression of certain emotions when employees interact with customers.	43 (57%) Example: "I have to smile permanently." (catering service)	5 (100%) Example: "Employees should get out of a bad mood fast, because customers are not interested in this." (fast-food restaurant)	5 (100%) Example: "Smile with your face and with your voice." (fast-food restaurant)	Emotional display rules (e.g., Diefendorff & Richard, 2003; Hochschild, 1983)
Verbal	Display controls that refer to certain vocabulary, phrases, or scripts that employees may use when communicating with customers.	50 (67%) Example: "I have to say the company's name first, then my own name when taking phone calls." (call center)	5 (100%) Example: "It goes without saying that employees should welcome and say goodbye to each customer." (perfumery)	5 (100%) Example: "Guests have to be called by their name, if possible, but no more than twice during a conversation—at the beginning and the end." (hotel chain)	Politeness (e.g., Brown & Levinson, 1987) Service scripts (e.g., Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994) Verbal rules (e.g., Talwar et al., 2007)

2.3.2. Aesthetic display rules

Aesthetic display controls refer to an employee's appearance. They appear in 45 (60%) of employee interviews. Thirty-nine interviews (52%) reveal formal aesthetic controls, nine participants mention informal controls (12%) (e.g., "I have to wear my uniform and must put the blouse inside my skirt," supermarket). The discussions with all five managers and all handbooks contain aesthetic display controls (e.g., "employees wear clean uniforms and look flawless," hotel chain handbook). Research on aesthetic labor (e.g., Witz, Warhurst, & Nickson, 2003), organizational dress (e.g., Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), and service encounters (e.g., Solomon, 1998) studies such controls.

The literature defines aesthetic labor as "a supply of 'embodied capacities and attributes' possessed by workers at the point of entry into employment" (Warhurst, Nickson, Witz, & Cullen, 2000, p. 4). Researchers argue that these capacities and attributes often are requirements for employment in retail and hospitality industries (e.g., Nickson, Warhurst, & Dutton, 2005; Witz et al., 2003).

Organizational dress research considers dress as an important symbol in organizations which serves different functions for organizational members, including organizational control (Joseph & Alex, 1972; Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993). Pratt and Rafaeli (1997) show how nurses in a rehabilitation unit of a hospital use dress to represent and negotiate issues inherent to the identity of their unit and the nursing profession. Similarly, Rafaeli et al. (1997) conduct an inductive study of the everyday decisions about dress at work of female administrative employees in a university business school. They reveal that dress can be an important component of individual role taking and performance and employees recognize this usefulness of dress.

Research on service encounters considers dress as a way for packaging the service provider. Solomon (1985) proposes that the symbolic power of service apparel increases customer preferences for the service brand, facilitates employee team cohesion, and serves as a means for brand positioning and communication. Solomon (1998) offers propositions how apparel and the meaning it conveys influence customer perceptions of corporate identity and service quality, as well as employee morale, self-definition, and performance. Finally, Daniel, Johnson, and Miller (1996) study perceptions of uniform from the service provider's perspective.

2.3.3. Emotional display rules

Emotional display controls refer to the display or suppression of certain emotions during interactions with customers. Forty-three interviews reveal emotional controls (57%; formal: 26 interviews, 35%; informal: 17 interviews, 23%) (e.g., "I have to smile permanently," catering service). All five managers and all handbooks also mention emotional controls (e.g., "smile with your face and with your voice," fast-food restaurant handbook). Emotional labor researchers extensively study emotional display controls (e.g., Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003). They show that emotional display rule existence depends on discrete emotions (e.g., happiness), work targets (e.g., customers, coworkers), and national culture (e.g., Diefendorff & Greguras, 2009), and that such rules predict employee use of emotional labor (Grandey, 2000, 2003). Employees' internalization of display rules depends on their customer orientation (Allen, Pugh, Grandey, & Groth, 2010), display rule commitment (Gosserand & Diefendorff, 2005), and personality (Randolph & Dahling, 2013). Further research identifies antecedents of display rule perception and commitment (Diefendorff & Richard, 2003) as well as their outcomes (e.g., employee burnout) (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007; Trougakos, Jackson, & Beal, 2011; Wilk & Moynihan, 2005).

2.3.4. Verbal display rules

Finally, 50 (67%) employees report on verbal display controls that refer to certain vocabulary, phrases, or scripts that employees may use when communicating with customers (formal: 42 interviews, 56%; informal: 11 interviews, 15%) (e.g., "I have to say the company's name first, then my own name when taking phone calls," call center employee).

Evidence of verbal controls comes from all manager interviews and all handbooks (e.g., “guests have to be called by their name, if possible, but no more than twice during a conversation—at the beginning and the end,” hotel chain handbook). Verbal controls are central in politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) and in research on service scripts (Humphrey & Ashforth, 1994).

Politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987) is a “social psychological theory of language usage” (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, p. 719). Individuals can take different courses of action with different levels of politeness, called superstrategies (Ambady, Koo, Lee, & Rosenthal, 1996; Brown & Levinson, 1987). Scholars find that interpersonal power and distance, request size, and gender contribute to politeness and that the different politeness levels are the same in different national cultures (Holtgraves & Yang, 1990, 1992; Lee, 1993). Further, LaPlante and Ambady (2003) show that the tone of voice affects perceptions of politeness, and Holtgraves (1997) provides evidence that politeness conveys interpersonally relevant information.

Regarding research on service scripts, Schau et al. (2007) suggest that in many service interactions employees and customers follow verbal scripts to smoothen operations and they study what happens when customer do not stay on scripts. Victorino, Verma, et al. (2012) show that customers detect degrees of verbal script rigidity across both standardized and customized types of encounters. Indeed, any social interaction uses verbal display rules which people learn early in life. For instance, Talwar, Murphy, and Lee (2007) reveal that children from 3- to 11-years-old are able to tell white lies and use appropriate verbal display rules when receiving an undesirable gift.

3. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

Fig. 1 provides the conceptual framework, which links the three formal display controls and cultural informal display control with important customer outcomes that drive firm success, namely, customer-perceived service quality, trust in the frontline employee, arousal, and, ultimately, loyalty. These concepts span the spectrum of behavioral customer constructs, from more cognitive (service quality) over cognitive–emotive (trust, loyalty) to more emotive (arousal) constructs, and from past- or present-oriented (service quality, arousal) to future-oriented (trust, loyalty) constructs (Gupta & Zeithaml, 2006; Palmatier, Dant, Grewal, & Evans, 2006).

The links in the model build on two general arguments: First, customers are able to perceive the different display control usage either

consciously or unconsciously. Victorino, Verma, et al. (2012) provide evidence for this ability of customers in the context of verbal display rules which should apply also to aesthetic and emotional rules as well as to formal and informal controls in general. Evidence for the latter comes from research showing that individuals are able to infer the underlying determinants for a person's behavior, in this study formal (management-initiated) and informal (employee-initiated) controls (e.g., Friedman, Deci, Elliot, Moller, & Aarts, 2010). Second, customers' perceptions of display controls should trigger cognitive and/or emotive processes, which produce the changes in customer outcomes the hypotheses propose. Because this research focuses on the effects of the two control types of formal and informal controls, the model does not offer hypotheses for specific display controls (i.e., aesthetic, emotional, verbal).

The model considers a situation where employees effectively implement controls (i.e., they follow the controls), because this research focuses on customer-related effects of controls, and not on how controls affect employees or how employees that improperly implement controls influence customers. Moreover, the model considers the organizational culture to be a clan culture, as such culture fosters values of employee attachment, collaboration, and support and links closely to the concept of cultural control (Ouchi, 1979).

3.1. Display controls and customer-perceived service quality

Customer-perceived service quality is the “difference between consumer expectations and perceptions” of a service (Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1988, p. 36). Both formal and cultural display controls should improve service quality, because they both reduce service heterogeneity, a key facet of service quality (Zeithaml et al., 1988). Formal controls dictate standardized work practices that detail how employees should perform tasks, which then reduces any variance associated with tasks and eliminates undesired behaviors (e.g., inappropriate clothing). Cultural control reduces heterogeneity because employees working in a clan culture share information and collaborate to remedy any weaknesses in service delivery (Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011). By increasing identification with the organization, cultural controls should also encourage the employee to act in organizationally desired ways which positively influence service quality (e.g., Bell & Menguc, 2002; Gilson, Mathieu, Shalley, & Ruddy, 2005).

Controls should also lead to higher service quality by reducing employees' role stress (Cravens et al., 2004). Formal controls lower stress

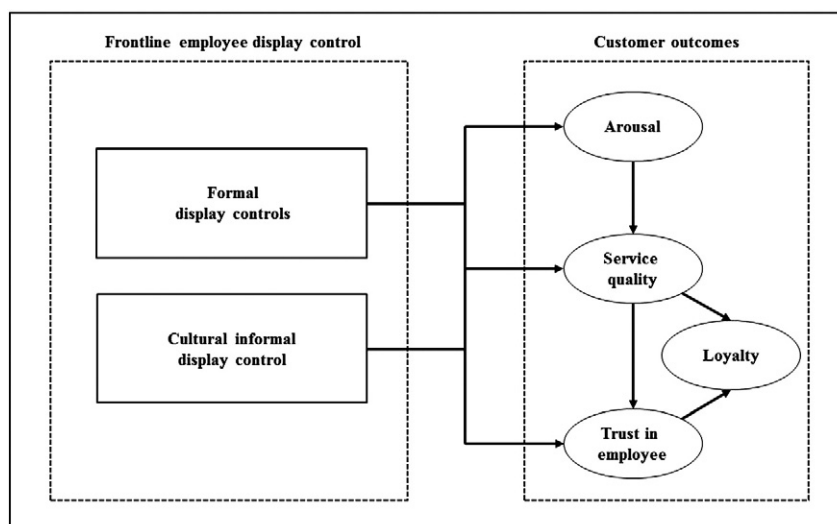


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

by reducing uncertainty about what a firm expects from its employees and by giving employees control over the determinants of their performance evaluation (Floyd & Lane, 2000). This is consistent with research that shows empirically that formalization correlates negatively with role stress (e.g., Michaels, Cron, Dubinsky, & Joachimsthaler, 1988). Cultural control should reduce role stress by increasing the likelihood that coworkers see their interests as convergent, avoiding any intra-organizational role conflict (Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989). In turn, customers perceive employees with less stress as more assuring and empathetic, key facets of service quality (e.g., Zeithaml et al., 1988). Thus,

Hypothesis 1a. Formal display controls positively influence customer-perceived service quality.

Hypothesis 1b. Cultural informal display control positively influences customer-perceived service quality.

3.2. Display controls and customer trust in frontline employees

Customer trust is a customer's "willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (Moorman, Zaltman, & Deshpandé, 1992, p. 315). This study focuses on customer trust in the frontline employee which increases in response to informal cultural display controls, but decreases with formal controls (Das & Teng, 1996; Ramaswami, 1996). These effects result from differences in the extent to which customers perceive employees as being authentic, which involves "acting in accordance with one's true self" (Gardner, Avolio, Luthans, Douglas, & Walumbwa, 2005, p. 344), with authenticity being more likely when employees feel their behavior is fully their own choice (Sheldon, Ryan, Rawsthorne, & Ilardi, 1997). Because cultural control is employee-initiated and builds on their identification with the firm, employees feel that they can choose displays according to their true self. In contrast, formal controls are management-initiated and are not necessarily in sync with employees' true self, so that they may feel inauthentic when following such controls (Victorino, Bolinger, & Verma, 2012).

Extant research confirms that aesthetic rules such as uniforms suppress expressions of individual identity (Joseph & Alex, 1972; Pratt & Rafaeli, 1997), whereas a personal dress is an outcome of individual choice and increases employees' feelings of authenticity (Rafaeli & Pratt, 1993; Rafaeli et al., 1997). Similarly, emotional labor research shows that employees may feel inauthentic when firms require them to display certain emotions, and that customers place more emphasis on emotional authenticity than on the amount of emotions employees display (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Regarding verbal scripts, Victorino, Verma, et al. (2012, p. 398) assume that "customers' ability to detect service scripts has significant implications for the [...] authenticity of service delivered as perceived by customers".

The perceived authenticity of a person should impact the trust others have in this person, because authenticity affects benevolence and integrity dimensions of trustworthiness (Gardner, Fischer, & Hunt, 2009; Gardner et al., 2005). Benevolence is the degree to which people believe a person wants to do good to others, which relates inversely to lying (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Because inauthenticity constitutes lying (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013), customer trust is likely to be lower if an employee acts inauthentic and is higher vice versa (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004). Integrity involves that a person adheres to a set of principles others find acceptable to the extent that the person's actions are congruent with his or her words (Mayer et al., 1995). Employees displaying aesthetics, emotions, and phrases that are congruent with their true self and the organizational culture, appear consistent and reliable and engender higher levels of customer trust (Avolio et al., 2004; Gardner et al., 2009). For example, people perceive informal personal dresses that also fit the organization as more trustworthy than more formal dress codes (Karl, Hall, & Peluchette, 2013; Sebastian & Bristow, 2008).

Revealing personal matters and acting informally drive interpersonal closeness which reflects authenticity (Crocker & Canevello, 2008; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2013). Interpersonal closeness is similar to a relational orientation which means being genuine rather than fake in relationships with others (Kernis & Goldman, 2006). From these perspectives, authenticity involves a "reciprocal process of self-disclosure and of mutual intimacy and trust" (Kernis & Goldman, 2006, p. 301). Employees using informal displays, such as wearing a personal dress, expressing genuine emotions, or talking informally, self-disclose personal information, which fosters customer trust in the employee (Kernis & Goldman, 2006; Offerman & Rosh, 2013). Thus,

Hypothesis 2a. Formal display controls negatively influence customers' trust in frontline employees.

Hypothesis 2b. Cultural informal display control positively influences customers' trust in frontline employees.

3.3. Display controls and customer arousal

Customer arousal is a customer's level of activation during a service encounter (Reisenzein, 1994). Arousal theories state that stimulus characteristics can induce arousal in customers, which drives their evaluation of the stimulus (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Formal display controls reduce customer arousal, whereas cultural control heightens it. To explain the effects of formal controls, this research builds on Mehrabian and Russell's (1974) argument that the environment's information rate, measured by its degree of novelty (i.e., unexpected and surprising elements) and complexity (number, variation, and heterogeneity of cues) acts as a stimulus that positively influences arousal. As formal display controls are usually not stimulating themselves (e.g., a provocative verbal display), but rather should reduce the number and variety of cues employees emit (e.g., customers always see employees in the same, easily recognizable uniform), the information rate declines, and so should customer arousal.

To predict the effects of cultural controls, this research draws on intimacy–arousal theory (Patterson, 1976), which suggests that nonverbal intimacy (e.g., direct body orientation) and intimate disclosures (e.g., personal recommendations) increase the other person's arousal (Coutts, Schneider, & Montgomery, 1980; Kleinke, 1986). Arousal also increases with cues of attentiveness, kindness, and support (Baker, Grewal, & Levy, 1992). Because employees in clan cultures and with high organizational identification are more likely to engage in intimate and social behaviors toward customers, greater customer arousal should occur when cultural controls are in place (Hartnell et al., 2011). Employees with high organizational identification also could experience more arousal themselves in interactions with customers (Branscombe & Wann, 1992), which likely transfers to the customer through emotional contagion processes (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). Thus,

Hypothesis 3a. Formal display controls negatively influence customer arousal.

Hypothesis 3b. Cultural informal display control positively influences customer arousal.

3.4. Augmented relationships

The model considers theoretically and empirically established paths among the outcome variables, but refrains from offering formal hypotheses. Specifically, (1) service quality and trust in the frontline employee mediate the impact of formal and cultural controls on customer loyalty (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, & Sabol, 2002; Zeithaml, Berry, & Parasuraman, 1996), (2) service quality leads to trust (Chiou & Droge, 2006), and (3) arousal positively influences service quality (Jiang & Wang, 2006).

4. Methods

4.1. Procedure and participants

This research uses a role-playing laboratory experiment, with short film stimuli especially designed for the study. The 2 (formal aesthetic control: present versus absent) by 2 (formal emotional control: present versus absent) by 2 (formal verbal control: present versus absent) by 2 (cultural informal control: high versus low) experimental design produces 16 conditions. Short films represent each of the 16 conditions. Of the 280 students who participate in the experiment, 54% are men, and they range in age from 18 to 34 years ($M = 22.9$, $SD = 2.9$).

Role-playing laboratory experiments using video stimuli are an often used method for research in service settings (e.g., Luong, 2005; Seawright & Sampson, 2007; Victorino, Verma, et al., 2012). Such video experiments have ecological validity and are expedient when the study manipulates dimensions of a routine, short-duration service interaction (Bateson & Hui, 1992).

The researchers inform participants that they would be taking part in a study on customer service that involves watching a short film about the service experience of a customer who visits the fictitious full-service restaurant “Rive Gauche” on four different days. Researchers describe the “Rive Gauche” as a good middle-class restaurant that offers its customers French and international food. Each participant sits at a computer terminal and watches a randomly assigned film with one of the 16 conditions. After watching the short film, participants complete the relevant on-screen survey and are then debriefed.

4.2. Stimuli development and experimental manipulations

The study develops written scenarios for all 16 conditions. All conditions build on a general framework for the service encounter with the waitress first greeting the customer, then presenting the customer with the menu, and completing the encounter with a closing statement. Within this framework, the study develops the experimental manipulations. The experimental manipulations of all display controls rest upon the qualitative data from Section 2.3 thereby ensuring a high level of realism. For each display rule, the study identifies the example the data sources mention most often, so that manipulations are as typical as possible across service industries. Manipulations are consistent with the restaurant's portrayal in terms of products and ambiance. Other than the experimental manipulation of display controls all other aspects remain constant. The actress who plays the waitress receives the descriptions of the manipulations listed in Table 2, which forms the basis for her performance.

The actress uses method acting to impersonate the film character for each of the 16 different roles (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006). In method

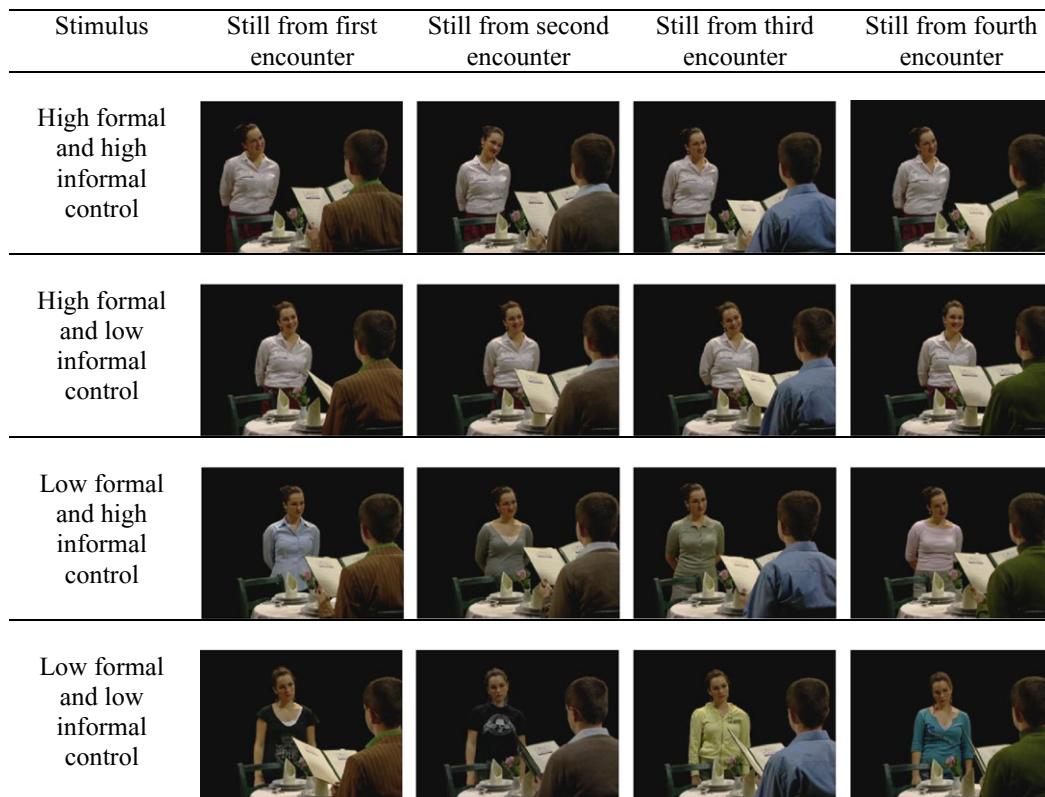
acting, the actress takes a character's perspective and identifies with her real-life emotions, beliefs, and behaviors. She receives information about the fictitious restaurant and literature on display controls to facilitate her performance. In case of the existence of formal controls, she uses the specifically prescribed aesthetic (i.e., the waitress wears the same uniform across encounters), emotional (i.e., the waitress displays positive emotions consistently across encounters), and verbal displays (i.e., the waitress uses given phrases across encounters). Without formal display controls, the waitress wears four different dresses, the waitress displays either positive or neutral emotions at each encounter, and she uses different variations of phrases. Selecting clothing to wear for scenes in which the restaurant does not provide a uniform (i.e., absent formal aesthetic controls) is part of the actress's performance. She familiarizes herself with the concepts of culture and identification, and creates a character in accordance with the theory. Specifically, consistent with organizational identification, the character has an intrinsic desire to align her aesthetic, emotional, and verbal displays with the restaurant's culture in the high cultural control condition but no such desire in the low cultural control condition. The culture of the restaurant is one that fosters values related to employee attachment, collaboration, and support, as well as addressing customer needs and wants (Hartnell et al., 2011), as such values link closely to the concept of cultural control (Ouchi, 1979). To support the actresses' use of method acting, the study shoots scenes for a specific condition one after another, which means that the actress does not have to switch between characters. Two authors judge whether her displays are consistent with the manipulations during filming. The study shoots scenes that appear inconsistent with the required role again.

Each film consists of four scenes, showing the same waitress welcoming a customer on four different visits (i.e., one scene per visit). Repeat service visits help participants to detect the restaurant's use of the different formal and informal display controls. A concrete date and time caption (e.g., “Monday, 7:00 pm”) precedes each scene and the customer wears different inconspicuous shirts in each scene to highlight the idea of different visits. All scenes are roughly equal in length (16 to 21 s) and shoot over the customer's shoulder, such that the waitress is fully visible in all scenes, whereas the customer's face is not visible to viewers, to facilitate the participants' ability to take the perspective of the restaurant customer. Fig. 2 contains stills from four exemplary stimuli.

To ensure a high level of realism and quality, a professional film studio produces the 16 short films. The service employee and the guest are trained student actors whom authors specifically recruit for this study. They initially recruit four actors (two female, two male) and train them over a period of three weeks. During that time actors perform in a series of auditions and rehearsals and participate in a pretest of the video production. On the basis of their performances in these tests, authors select the final actors (one female as waitress, one male as guest).

Table 2
Experimental manipulations.

Factor	Level 1	Level 2
Formal aesthetic display control	Rule: Waitress implements the formal control by wearing the same uniform across encounters.	No rule: Waitress wears different dresses in each encounter as she is not formally required to wear a uniform.
Formal emotional display control	Rule: Waitress implements the formal control by displaying positive emotions consistently across encounters.	No rule: Waitress displays either positive or neutral emotions at each encounter as she is not formally required to display positive emotions consistently across encounters.
Formal verbal display control	Rule: Waitress implements the formal control by using given phrases across encounters.	No rule: Waitress uses different phrases at each encounter as she is not formally required to use given phrases.
Cultural informal display control	High: The actress implements the informal control by embodying a waitress that experiences high organizational identification with the restaurant, with the specific organizational culture being described as a clan culture. A clan culture emphasizes beliefs and values of employee attachment, collaboration, and support and of addressing customer needs and wants. She thus has the intrinsic desire to align her aesthetic, emotional, and verbal display with the restaurant's culture and description. (For instance, when no aesthetic display rules are in place, the waitress tries to select dresses that match the restaurant.)	Low: The actress embodies a waitress that experiences low organizational identification with the restaurant, with the specific organizational culture being described as one which does not emphasize beliefs and values of employee attachment, collaboration, and support and of addressing customer needs and wants. She thus makes no efforts to align her aesthetic, emotional, and verbal display with the restaurant's culture and description. (For instance, when no aesthetic display rules are in place, the waitress selects any dresses.)



Note: In the exemplary experimental stimuli, all three formal display controls are either all high or all low.

Fig. 2. Film stills from exemplary experimental stimuli.

The authors hire a professional student crew consisting of a production coordinator, camera operator, script supervisor, a lightning technician, a sound technician, boom operator, a set decorator, a costume standby, a make-up artist, and a film editor to film and edit the video clips. Two authors serve as directors on the set and as post-production supervisors. For professional quality, they use a three-CCD camera, a camera dolly, and a fluid head, allowing the camera to rotate smoothly. The student crew uses the studio lighting system and Flexfill reflectors, a microphone with a boom, and monitors. A DVCAM records the films. The city's local theater lends movie props to the study (round dining tables, wood chairs, tablecloth, tableware, cutlery, napkins, table décor, and menu). The crew designs a restaurant logo specifically for this study and attaches it to the waitresses' uniform and the restaurant menu cover.

To ensure consistency across the 16 conditions except for the manipulations, the written scenarios and the training of actors go through multiple iterations. A group of four graduate students sampled from a services management course provides preliminary feedback on the written scenarios; the study reiterates this process three times and refines the scenarios until the authors and the graduate students agree that the written scenarios are consistent. Next, the study pretests the scenarios and further refines them during several rehearsals. In two reading rehearsals, the authors and the four professional actors initially recruited read the written scenarios to develop a common understanding of the required scene and different manipulations. Actors then perform three run-throughs in which they practice their text, movements, and facial expressions. Finally, the actors and the complete film crew perform two dress rehearsals at the production facility. As a result, all scenarios follow the three steps of the general service encounter framework such that they keep the service process and outcome constant; the physical servicescape as well as the guest's behavior are consistent across all encounters.

4.3. Measures and manipulation checks

To measure customer outcome variables, this study uses established reflective seven-point multi-item scales. All items appear in [Appendix A](#). For the formal and informal cultural control manipulations, the study uses unweighted effects coding (formal/informal control = 1, no formal/informal control = -1; [Aiken & West, 1991](#); [Henseler & Fassott, 2010](#)). The study uses mean replacement for missing values ([Hair, Hult, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2014](#)). The Cronbach's α values for the outcome variables are .90 (service quality), .82 (trust), .68 (arousal), and .92 (loyalty); all item loadings are at least .79, and the composite reliability is greater than .84 for all constructs. Average variance extracted (.92 for service quality, .76 for trust, .73 for arousal, .76 for loyalty) is consistently higher than the latent construct squared correlations, and each indicator loading on a construct is higher than all of its loadings on other constructs, providing support for discriminant validity.

To check for the success of the manipulations, participants rate the extent to which they believe the restaurant uses formal aesthetic, emotional, and verbal rules (each with one item) or cultural control (four reflective items; $\alpha = .94$) on seven-point agreement scales. [Appendix A](#) lists all items. In support of the manipulations, participant perceptions of the respective controls are significantly higher ($p < .05$) in each of the four conditions (formal aesthetic: $M_{\text{aesthetic}} = 6.32$, $M_{\text{no aesthetic}} = 2.61$; $F = 429.00$; formal emotional: $M_{\text{emotional}} = 6.53$, $M_{\text{no emotional}} = 4.79$; $F = 93.67$; formal verbal: $M_{\text{verbal}} = 6.48$, $M_{\text{no verbal}} = 5.03$; $F = 65.41$; cultural informal: $M_{\text{high}} = 4.41$, $M_{\text{low}} = 1.80$; $F = 373.63$). Three unintended effects of manipulations exist: cultural control perceptions differ in both the formal aesthetic and emotional control conditions, and formal emotional control perceptions differ in the cultural control condition. Because the intended manipulation effects (partial η^2 between .61 and .26) are consistently greater than the unintended ones (partial η^2 between .16 and .02), the manipulations work effectively ([Perdue & Summers, 1986](#)).

In sum, the manipulation checks show that participants are able to detect and distinguish between the different formal and informal display controls.

4.4. Model estimation and fit

To analyze the data, this study uses partial least squares (PLS) structural equation modeling (SEM) with SmartPLS software (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005). Unlike multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), SEM can analyze relations between interrelated latent dependent variables, includes full information from multi-item scales which reduces measurement error, and has no restrictive assumptions of homogeneity in variances and covariances of dependent variables across groups (Bagozzi & Yi, 1989; Cole, Maxwell, Arvey, & Salas, 1993; MacKenzie, 2001). This research prefers PLS over LISREL because PLS “avoids many of the assumptions and chances that improper solutions will occur in LISREL analyses” (Bagozzi, Yi, & Singh, 1991, p. 125). PLS is a conservative test of path coefficients because compared with LISREL, PLS tends to underestimate path coefficients (Dijkstra, 1983). The modeling approach of using PLS for experimental data with categorical manipulations for testing complex causal processes is well-established in research (e.g., Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006; Kamis, Koufaris, & Stern, 2008).

In assessing the model, the study finds no collinearity (highest variance inflation factor is 1.3; Hair et al., 2014). To estimate the predictive power of the model, the study uses a blindfolding approach. The Q^2 values are .40 (service quality), .22 (trust), .04 (arousal), and .38 (loyalty), all of which are positive and indicate that the model has predictive power (Geisser, 1974). The model explains 45.2% of the variance in service quality, 29.9% in trust, 7.4% in arousal, and 52.2% in loyalty, in further support of its relevance (Chin, 1998). The overall goodness of fit, as the geometric mean of the average communality and the average R^2 , is satisfactory at .52 (Tenenhaus, Vinzi, Chatelin, & Lauro, 2005).

5. Results

Table 3 reports the path coefficients for the model. In addition to the manipulations, the model includes the perceived physical attractiveness of the waitress as a control (Argo, Dahl, & Morales, 2008). A single item measures the variable (“I found the waitress attractive”) on a seven-point agreement scale, which links to all outcome variables. Regarding the formal control hypotheses, the study accepts a hypothesis if at least two out of three formal display controls have the proposed effects, and rejects the hypothesis in the case of less than two effects. This rule is

appropriate because the study contends the same theoretical mechanism for the impact of all formal display controls on a specific dependent variable. Thus, if the analysis confirms two or more of the effects, more evidence exists in favor than against a hypothesis and its underlying mechanism, such that the hypothesis can be accepted.

5.1. Hypothesis testing

Regarding the link of formal display controls with service quality, the analysis finds a positive impact for aesthetic ($\gamma = .11$) and emotional ($\gamma = .10$) display rules, supporting H1a. The path from verbal rules to service quality is also positive, but does not reach significance. In line with H1b, cultural display control has a strong positive impact on service quality ($\gamma = .61$).

The analysis also finds the proposed positive influence of cultural control on trust ($\gamma = .15$), and negative effects of formal controls for both aesthetic ($\gamma = -.11$) and emotional ($\gamma = -.18$) rules, supporting H2b and H2a; the path from formal verbal controls to trust is also negative but not significant. The results are in line with H3b, in that cultural control has a positive influence on arousal ($\gamma = .14$). The analysis rejects H3a, since only formal verbal controls have the proposed negative impact on arousal ($\gamma = -.14$) and paths from formal aesthetic and emotional controls are not significant.

The augmented effects are all consistent with extant findings: Service quality and trust both affect loyalty positively, and service quality has the expected positive effect on trust. Arousal is positively linked to service quality. The attractiveness control positively affects all customer outcomes.

5.2. Robustness tests

The study performs several tests to verify the robustness of results. First, the model employs an alternative operationalization of formal display controls to confirm the acceptance and rejection of hypotheses. The model operationalizes formal display controls as a formative construct consisting of aesthetic, emotional, and verbal display rules as indicators, and links this construct with the outcome variables of service quality, trust, and arousal. All other constructs and model relationships remain unchanged. In evaluating the formative formal control measure, the analysis finds that collinearity is absent; the construct keeps all indicators irrespective of statistical significance to retain its content validity (Hair et al., 2014). The model's reflective measures fulfill the evaluation criteria the study uses with the original model. The alternative model

Table 3
PLS results.

Hypothesis	Impact of	On	Path coefficient	t-Value
H1a	Formal aesthetic control	Service quality perceptions	.11	2.46*
H1a	Formal emotional control	Service quality perceptions	.10	2.17*
H1a	Formal verbal control	Service quality perceptions	.03	.69
H1b	Cultural informal control	Service quality perceptions	.61	15.00*
H2a	Formal aesthetic control	Trust in frontline employee	-.11	2.14*
H2a	Formal emotional control	Trust in frontline employee	-.18	3.51*
H2a	Formal verbal control	Trust in frontline employee	-.05	.96
H2b	Cultural informal control	Trust in frontline employee	.15	2.14*
H3a	Formal aesthetic control	Customer arousal	.02	.28
H3a	Formal emotional control	Customer arousal	-.03	.59
H3a	Formal verbal control	Customer arousal	-.14	2.31*
H3b	Cultural informal control	Customer arousal	.14	2.37*
AR	Service quality perceptions	Customer loyalty	.44	8.61*
AR	Trust in frontline employee	Customer loyalty	.36	6.98*
AR	Service quality perceptions	Trust in frontline employee	.40	5.54*
AR	Customer arousal	Service quality perceptions	.10	1.99*
Control	Attractiveness of employee	Service quality perceptions	.12	2.25*
Control	Attractiveness of employee	Trust in frontline employee	.10	2.03*
Control	Attractiveness of employee	Customer arousal	.17	2.90*
Control	Attractiveness of employee	Customer loyalty	.11	2.60*

Notes: AR = augmented relationship. Bootstrapping calculates the t-values with 280 cases and 500 samples.

* $p < .05$, two-tailed.

explains 45.0% of variance in service quality, 29.7% in trust, 5.8% in arousal, and 52.2% in loyalty, and has predictive power (all $Q^2 > 0$). In line with the original results, the analysis finds that formal controls have the proposed significant effects on both service quality ($\gamma = .14$; $t = 2.01$) and trust ($\gamma = -.21$; $t = 2.58$), but not on arousal ($\gamma = -.08$; $t = .65$). Cultural informal display control impacts arousal ($\gamma = .14$; $t = 2.34$), service quality ($\gamma = .61$; $t = 14.96$), and trust ($\gamma = .15$; $t = 2.20$), and the augmented relationships remain consistent with extant findings. These findings confirm the acceptance and rejection of hypotheses.

Next, the study tests whether potential interactions between formal and informal controls improve the original model and whether results remain consistent. The model uses the product indicator approach by multiplying formal and cultural control measures to create interaction terms (Chin, Marcolin, & Newsted, 2003; Henseler & Fassott, 2010) and links them with the outcome variable service quality, trust, and arousal. All other constructs and model relationships remain unchanged. All constructs fulfill the evaluation criteria the study uses with the original model. The model with interactions explains 47.0% of variance in service quality, 36.4% in trust, 9.0% in arousal, and 52.2% in loyalty, and has predictive power (all $Q^2 > 0$). By comparing R^2 's of the original model with R^2 's of the interaction model (Henseler & Fassott, 2010), the analysis finds that interaction effects are weak (arousal = .02; service quality = .02; trust = .10; loyalty = .00). Out of nine interactions, only two are significant ($p < .05$): the interaction between cultural control and formal aesthetic control on service quality ($\gamma = -.09$; $t = 2.01$) and cultural control and formal emotional control on trust ($\gamma = .25$; $t = 4.84$). All main effects are fully consistent with the original model (Aiken & West, 1991). Overall, the findings suggest that including interactions neither substantially improves the model nor changes findings.

Finally, the study tests whether customer heterogeneity in terms of age and gender affects findings. The model uses the product indicator approach to create interaction terms between each display control and each demographic variable (gender: female = 1, male = -1), and links age and gender as well as each interaction term with arousal, service quality, and trust. All other constructs and model relationships remain the same. All constructs fulfill the evaluation criteria the study uses with the original model. The interaction model explains 47.9% of variance in service quality, 31.8% in trust, 11.7% in arousal, and 52.2% in loyalty, and has predictive power (all $Q^2 > 0$). Comparing R^2 's of the original model and the interaction model, the analysis finds that interaction effects are weak (arousal = .05; service quality = .05; trust = .03; loyalty = .00). Only three out of 24 interaction effects are significant ($p < .05$): the interaction between formal aesthetic control and gender on trust ($\gamma = .11$; $t = 2.17$), formal verbal control and gender on arousal ($\gamma = -.13$; $t = 2.16$), and cultural control and age on service quality ($\gamma = -.12$; $t = 2.61$). All main effects remain consistent with the original model. Overall, the results indicate that heterogeneity in terms of customer age and gender does not affect findings.

6. Discussion and implications

6.1. Discussion of results

Both formal and cultural informal display controls affect important customer outcomes. Cultural control positively affects customer-perceived service quality, trust in the frontline employee, and arousal, whereas formal controls enhance service quality, but lower trust. The effects of cultural control on service quality are stronger than those of formal controls, which suggest that cultural controls are more effective when it comes to creating service quality. These results are particularly insightful because the context of the experimental design is routine service encounters, where formal rules seemingly should be most effective.

The study does not find a generalizable effect of formal controls on customer arousal: only verbal rules lower arousal, but not aesthetic and emotional rules. Customers may be more sensitive toward verbal

rules because they easily recognize their existence, whereas it may take more interactions until customers notice the same for aesthetic and emotional rules. The robustness checks demonstrate that formal control measures, interactions between formal and informal controls, and customer heterogeneity do not affect results, providing further support for the findings.

6.2. Implications for service managers

Because the study finds no negative effects of cultural informal control on customers, whereas all three formal controls negatively influence some customer outcomes, controlling employee displays through organizational culture appears to be an effective strategy with limited risk. Such a strategy is even more appropriate for non-routine encounters. In contrast, it seems difficult to regulate displays through formal controls without causing negative side effects. As Merchant and Van der Stede (2007, p. 92) note, "shared organizational values have become a more important tool for ensuring that everyone is acting in the organization's best interest."

This research recommends that service firms should consider loosening the iron cage of formal display controls and rely more on cultural informal control. Examples for companies that relax formal display rules are The Body Shop who encourages employees to be themselves when displaying emotions (Martin, Knopoff, & Beckman, 1998), Southwest Airlines who allows employees to tell jokes (Humphrey, Pollack, & Hawver, 2008), and retailing and hospitality industries often requiring personal aesthetics from employees (Nickson et al., 2005). For example, Macy's (2014) expects its employees to "take pride in [their] appearance while still expressing [their] unique, personal style". Of course, limits to using cultural controls exist. For instance, it can be difficult to hire and retain a sufficient number of employees that are willing and able to identify with the organization's values and norms, and it may require higher investments in salaries and in the work environment.

If fully relying on cultural control is not desirable for a company, this study suggests that they should at least consider relaxing formal emotional display control. Although formal emotional control enhances customer loyalty through service quality, the relatively stronger negative effect on trust leads to a negative total effect on customer loyalty. Instead of using formal emotional control, companies could define general behavioral rules that people universally consider important in interpersonal interactions (e.g., being polite and courteous) and affect emotional expressions in an indirect way (Goldberg & Grandey, 2007). Regarding formal aesthetic display control, the total effect on customer loyalty via service quality (positive) and trust (negative) is slightly positive. This study recommends that service firms being characterized by a lower degree of customer contact and lower levels of customization, such as fast-food restaurants, budget hotels, and theme parks, should use formal aesthetic control, because for them service quality is most crucial (Paul, Hennig-Thurau, Gremler, Gwinner, & Wiertz, 2009). In contrast, companies for which trust is relatively more important should consider loosening formal aesthetic control. Usually these are firms characterized by services directed at people, a high degree of customer contact, and higher levels of customization, such as full-service restaurants, hotels, and fashion retailing (Paul et al., 2009). Of course, when relaxing formal aesthetic control, employee aesthetic displays still must reflect the organization's culture and image.

If fostering high organizational identification through culture is a more effective control strategy, how can service firms achieve it? A first answer to this question is hiring the right people. During recruitment, firms should clearly communicate the distinctive characteristics of their culture to initiate a self-reinforcing loop. Amazon's CEO Jeff Bezos posits that a customer-centric service culture attracts "new people who like that kind of culture, while the people who don't like it eject themselves" (Kirby & Stewart, 2007, p. 80). In addition, companies may provide their employees with general guidelines of how they should behave, without being too specific and limiting their own

choices. For example, Macy's (2014) communicates how employees should generally look ("professional, neat, pulled-together, and stylish") and gives them style tips (e.g., "have fun with a traditional suit coat by adding slim cut pants"). Firms might also use socialization tactics that nurture employees' internalization of their values and beliefs (Ashforth & Saks, 1996).

The main goal of formal and informal control mechanisms is reducing variability. However, oftentimes variability is introduced by customers (Frei, 2006). For example, they may request service variation or differ in their capabilities to co-produce the service. Refusing to accommodate such variability can negatively affect customers, so that companies may choose different strategies to tackle this challenge (e.g., fully accommodate customer desires, target customers with the right level of expectations and capabilities; Frei, 2006). With any strategy, cultural controls instead of formal controls may better enable employees to accommodate variability introduced by customers, because culture represents a much broader and flexible framework, allowing employees to develop responses to customers according to a much larger set of unwritten rules that belong to an organization's culture.

6.3. Implications for theory and future research

This study contributes to research on organizational control theory and research focusing on specific display rules. With regard to organizational control theory, the effectiveness of formal and informal controls are rarely compared, but most research focuses on one control type only (e.g., Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). By comparing the different control mechanisms, the study finds that informal controls are more effective in controlling employee displays in a routine context. Interestingly, this finding contradicts standard control theory (Jaworski, 1988) and most service firms' current practices (Merchant & Van der Stede, 2007).

Regarding specific display controls, this research contributes to research on display controls by offering a comprehensive, mutually exclusive typology of frontline employee display controls. Moreover, extant research focuses on emotional displays, and no research studies the differential effects of display controls on customer outcomes. Studies discuss the link between formal aesthetic controls and service quality conceptually (e.g., Solomon, 1985), but no research confirms that they indeed enhance service quality perceptions, and no research predicts that formal aesthetic control lowers customer trust in the frontline employee. Formal aesthetic control thus appears to be a double-edged sword for customer perceptions, which provides a new perspective to this area of research. By showing negative effects on customer trust, the study also adds to research on formal emotional display controls, and suggests that emotional labor researchers should stronger take into account cultural informal control mechanisms. Finally, the finding that verbal controls lower customer arousal is new to research, although anecdotal evidence on this link exists (e.g., Kimberley, 2006).

A number of limitations suggest avenues for future research. The experiment refers to a routine service encounter context. Effects of the various controls likely are context-dependent though—the superiority of cultural over formal controls might be even stronger in non-routine contexts. Moreover, manipulations consider certain carefully selected aspects of display controls which are typical for many service industries, but findings may not generalize to all types of aesthetic, emotional, and verbal controls. Also, the ambivalent effects of formal display controls on customers indicate that the content of a rule matters as well and not only the rule per se. Further research thus should investigate in more depth the effects of these specific display rules. Finally, though this study finds positive effects of cultural control, the study does not account for the costs of implementing such strategies. Estimating returns on controls requires estimating both revenues and costs associated with different controls—a demanding but very interesting topic for further research.

Acknowledgments

The first and the second author conducted this research while they were at Bauhaus-University of Weimar. They thank Bauhaus students for their support of the video production and data collection in the experimental study.

Appendix A. List of All item constructs

Construct	Adapted from
Service quality perceptions	
I would say that the restaurant provides superior service.	Brady and Cronin (2001)
I believe the restaurant provides excellent service.	Brady and Cronin (2001)
Trust in frontline employee	
The waitress is perfectly honest and truthful.	Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, and Gremler (2002)
The waitress can be trusted completely.	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002)
The waitress has high integrity.	Hennig-Thurau et al. (2002)
Customer arousal	
In this restaurant, I would feel aroused.	Mehrabian and Russell (1974)
In this restaurant, I would feel stimulated.	Mehrabian and Russell (1974)
Customer loyalty	
The next time I need the services of a restaurant, I will choose this restaurant.	Taylor and Baker (1994)
I will do more business with this restaurant in the next few years.	Zeithaml et al. (1996)
I consider this restaurant my first choice.	Zeithaml et al. (1996)
I would recommend this restaurant to someone who seeks my advice.	Zeithaml et al. (1996)
I would say positive things about this restaurant to other people.	Zeithaml et al. (1996)
Formal display controls	
Instructs its employees which dress to wear at work. [aesthetic control]	Own development
Instructs its employees to smile when welcoming customers. [emotional control]	Own development
Instructs its employees the phrases with which customers have to be welcomed. [verbal control]	Own development
Cultural informal display control (reflected by organizational identification)	
I believe the waitress feels strong ties with this restaurant.	Smidts, Pruyn, and van Riel (2001)
I believe the waitress experiences a strong sense of belonging to this restaurant.	Smidts et al. (2001)
I believe the waitress feels proud to work for this restaurant.	Smidts et al. (2001)
I believe the waitress is glad to be a member of this restaurant.	Smidts et al. (2001)

Note: Respondents assess all items on seven-point scales, with higher numbers indicating greater levels of agreement.

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