

The influence of emotional labour on fatigue: customer complaints and return package as moderators

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Abstract

Emotional labour can occur in employees due to emotional demands from the company. This can cause employees to experience Fatigue and will certainly have a negative impact on the company. The purpose of this study is to determine the effect of Emotional Labour on couriers at Ninja Express and also to determine the role of Customer Complaints and Return Package as moderating the relationship between the two. In this study, data collection used questionnaire distribution to the object with 99 couriers involved as a sample determined by purposive sampling technique. Through quantitative analysis, the data that has been collected is processed with the SmartPLS application. The results showed that Emotional Labour positively and significantly affects Fatigue. Customer Complaints do not moderate research on the effect of Emotional Labour on Fatigue. Return Package does not moderate research on the effect of Emotional Labour on Fatigue. The implications of this study suggest that companies provide free counseling services, workshops on handling consumer complaints, and standardization of delivery procedures.

Keywords: *customer complaints, emotional labour, fatigue, return package.*

Introduction

The rapid development of technology creates convenience in all aspects of life. As in the aspects of communication, education and even the fulfillment of daily needs. This is evidenced by the many service providers for daily needs such as online transportation services, health services, repair services, delivery services and also including delivery services. The delivery service sector is experiencing a very drastic development, as evidenced by the number of companies engaged in the field of delivery service providers including Shopee Express, J&T, JNE, and Ninja Express (Nurjanah et al., 2023).

In the delivery service sector, the most common problem lies in service quality. This is due to the influence of external and internal factors experienced by couriers. Some external factors that can affect service quality such as the absence of holidays for employees and the coverage area in sending packages for each courier can include two to three more hamlets (Hasan et al., 2022), so this situation causes fatigue and makes the quality of service unstable and even tends to decline. Fatigue can also be caused by other factors such as individual factors in the form of emotional labor. Research conducted by Bai et al., (2022) revealed that emotional labor mediates between visitor incivility and fatigue. In this study, the role of emotional labor as mediation has a positive effect on visitor incivility and fatigue. So based on this research, it can be seen that emotional labor has an influence on fatigue so that allows for a correlation between the two variables. This phenomenon is in accordance with what happened to one of the goods delivery services, namely Ninja Express Pamekasan branch, which is positioned as an object that will be the focus of research. Empirical studies show that negative service quality is greater with a value of 61% than the positive service

quality of 39% received by users of the Twitter platform (Prasetiawan et al., 2022). This shows that many couriers are still less friendly to consumers, inversely proportional to the provisions of Law No.8 of 1999 on Consumer Protection which emphasizes the protection of consumer interests and guarantees good service to consumers. Based on the suitability of the problem and evidence gap, this research is intended to examine how emotional labor affects fatigue.

In addition, this study also uses customer complaints and return package variables as a moderating role to support the research hypothesis. Variable customer complaints and return packages are used as moderators based on the high incidence of complaints and returns from consumers against Ninja express couriers. Maulida & Silaban (2023) stated that the successful delivery of packages to consumers without complaints or package returns by consumers is an important factor in avoiding fatigue in expedition couriers. Based on this, it can be seen that fatigue in couriers has the potential to have a correlation with customer complaints and return packages. In research conducted by (Roper & Bourke, 2022) shows that a higher level of innovation activity increases the likelihood and number of customer complaints. As well as Animono & Suryanto (2023) revealed that customer complaints are better resolved first than customer expectations for PT Maluku Prima Makmur. Meanwhile, on the return package variable Janssen & Williams (2024) stated that the absence of a direct meeting between the seller and the buyer caused consumer dissatisfaction with the goods which led to the return package. Other researchers Helinski et al., (2024) analyzing specific structural equation modeling shows that intrinsic and extrinsic values have a positive effect on return packages. Referring to these empirical studies, it can be stated that customer complaints or return packages have never been studied as a moderate role in the relationship between emotional labor and fatigue. Based on the problems that occur in the object and research gaps, this study is intended to examine how the role of customer complaints and return packages as moderates on the effect of emotional labor on fatigue.

This research is important so that companies can find out the factors that make couriers experience fatigue, if couriers experience fatigue it allows them to behave negatively towards consumers and make the company's good name tainted. This study aims to examine the effect of Emotional Labor on Fatigue and analyze Customer Complaints and Return packages as moderates.

Understanding Frone & Tidwell (2015) states fatigue is not only a form of physical fatigue but also a decrease in functional capacity that can be experienced as a whole or specifically in one of the physical, mental, or emotional dimensions due to work demands. Based on ergonomics, occupational safety, and public health interpret fatigue as a physiological condition that is a major risk factor in incidents that may occur Caldwell et al., (2019). It can be seen that fatigue is not only a problem for the individual himself but can also give problems to others, therefore companies must be able to manage fatigue as an operational risk. Job Demand-Control Theory by Karasek (1979) explains that mental fatigue is caused by tension that occurs because of job demands beyond the ability of employees and employees who do not have control over their work. An employee whose level of control over his job is lacking when getting high work demands tends to be vulnerable to job stress and mental fatigue which has an impact on health and performance.

Focused emotional labor is determined as a critical mechanism that leads to resource

depletion which ultimately causes fatigue in a person who experiences it (Qin et al., 2025). Çetin & Çolak (2020) also confirms that the emotional labor strategy that minimizes the decline in human resource power is genuine expression, which is an emotional condition that is displayed in accordance with personal feelings. Based on this, emotional labor becomes a cause of fatigue when the expression displayed is not in accordance with personal feelings. The Conservation of Resources theory introduced by Hobfoll (1989) can be a reference to understand how emotional labor affects fatigue. This theory emphasizes that stress and fatigue arise when individuals experience excessive loss of emotional resources, such as when doing emotional labour intensely and continuously.

H1: Emotional Labor has an influence on Fatigue

Customer complaint is one of the problems often faced by couriers (Kania & Salsabila, 2023). Consumers tend to complain about their dissatisfaction with the services received. Customer complaints are also used as a measuring tool to determine whether customers are satisfied with the services or goods they get so that companies can innovate according to consumer needs (Zhu et al., 2023). Couriers are required by the company to be responsive and friendly to all questions, complaints, and consumer attitudes. This condition will certainly make the courier experience pressure if the courier's emotional state is unstable. Emotion Regulation Theory by Gross (1998) emphasizes that if a person is able to condition and adjust facial expressions, it will affect the emotional impact when interacting with others even when in a position of personal disadvantage.

H2: Emotional Labor has an influence on Fatigue with customer complaints as a moderate.

Couriers who deliver packages often experience reprimands from consumers because the contents of the package do not match what consumers buy. The incidence of package mismatches with the ordered goods should be the responsibility of the online store, not the courier who delivers the goods (Fikri & Sugiyono, 2025). Consumers who are not satisfied with the package tend to return the package directly to the courier without confirming the e-commerce where they bought the goods. When this condition occurs, there is a possibility that the return of the goods will be rejected and the courier will have to spend more energy due to repeated delivery of the same package. Even though this happens, the courier cannot reprimand consumers due to company regulations that require couriers to provide friendly service to consumers, so the courier will suppress feelings and remain kind in accepting consumer behavior.

H3: Emotional Labor has an influence on Fatigue with return package as a moderate.

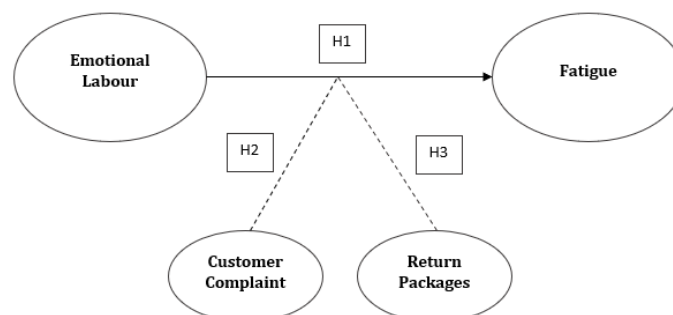


Figure 1. Research Model

Methods

This study examines the effect of emotional labor on fatigue, through customer complaints and return packages as mediators on Ninja Express Pamekasan couriers using quantitative methods. Through an online questionnaire using Google Form, primary data was obtained in the form of 132 couriers. The questionnaire is a technique for obtaining data by giving subjects a statement that must be answered by them (Bahri, 2018). Determination of the number of samples produced using the Slovin formula, which amounted to 99 respondents. The sampling technique uses purposive sampling which is a sample collection technique with certain characteristics that are in accordance with the research objectives (Sugiyono, 2022). In this study, two criteria were determined, including couriers aged 20-35 and a working period between 5-10 years. This determination was chosen with the aim of ensuring that individuals who act as samples in this study are couriers with advanced age have a higher potential to experience fatigue which is influenced by emotional instability and is also influenced by the factor that a long enough working period causes fatigue due to boredom.

Data analysis in this study used SmartPLS 4.0 software. with the Structural Equation Modeling - Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) approach to test the direct relationship between emotional labor and fatigue and the moderating role of customer complaint and return package variables. The content of the statements in the questionnaire comes from the indicators of the research variables. The results of the questionnaire were quantified using a Likert scale. According to Sanusi (2016) Likert scale itself is a measuring tool used in surveys to obtain quantitative data on answers from respondents, with a score of 1 to 5 consisting of 5 strongly agree, 4 agree, 3 neutral, 2 disagree, and 1 strongly disagree.

Table 1. Variable Measurement

Variable	Measurement	Source
Emotional Labour	Surface acting, Deep acting, Frequency, Yeriety, Intensity	(Robbins & Judge, 2008)
Fatigue	Points are added or subtracted based on duration of, Shifts work breaks taken during, Shifts on-call commitments, Presence/absence of full days off in a week, Presence/absence of break between shifts of less than 10h, Points are weighted for hours worked at night, Based on work schedules in the previous and forthcoming week	(Ippolito et al., 2024)
Customer Complaints	Mechanical complaint, Attitudinal Complaint, Service-related complaint, Unusual complaint	(Norwell, 2005)
Return Package	Implement full refund policies, The length of period is allowed for returns after a purchase, The need for the original receipt, Unfitness of the purchased product	(Chen & Chen, 2015)

Result and Discussions

Outer loadings are used to measure the contribution of the relationship between indicators and latent variables in research. According to Wibowo (2024) outer loadings that have a value > 0.7 are declared to meet the prerequisites of convergent validity. Based on the table above, it can be seen that all outer loading values are > 0.7 so it can be said that it has met the prerequisites of convergent validity.

AVE has the aim of measuring whether indicators can correlate with latent variables. AVE can be declared valid when the AVE value is > 0.5 this is stated by Wibowo (2024). In table 2 the AVE value is above 0.5, so based on this it can be said that convergent validity. Cronbach's alpha in research serves to measure the internal consistency between one indicator and another indicator in a latent variable. Cronbach's alpha can be confirmed reliable when the value is > 0.7 (Wibowo, 2024). So if seen in table 2 which states that the value of the table is above 0.7, it is certain that it is reliable. Composite reliability is used to measure internal consistency which is more accurate than Cronbach's alpha. In research using composite reliability, it can be said to be reliable when the value is > 0.7 (Wibowo, 2024). In this study, it can be seen in the table above that the composite reliability has a value > 0.7 , so it can be declared reliable.

Table 2. Outer Model Evaluation.

Indicator	Outer loading	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability
Emotional Labour		0.735	0.910	0.933
Surface acting	0.838			
Deep acting	0.849			
Frequency	0.887			
Yeriety	0.864			
Intensity	0.846			
Fatigue		0.690	0.925	0.940
Points are added or subtracted based on duration of	0.824			
Shifts work breaks taken during	0.790			
Shifts on-call commitments	0.863			
Presence/absence of full days off in a week	0.835			
Presence/absence of break between shifts of less than 10h	0.807			
Points are weighted for hours worked at night	0.850			
Based on work schedules in the previous and forthcoming week	0.844			
Customer Complaints		0.789	0.911	0.937
Mechanical complaint	0.847			
Attitudinal Complaint	0.897			
Service-related complaint	0.915			
Unusual complaint	0.894			
Return Package		0.748	0.888	0.922
Implement full refund policies	0.871			
The length of period is allowed for returns after a purchase	0.862			
The need for the original receipt	0.873			
Unfitness of the purchased product	0.855			

R -Squared is used in research to be able to determine the value of the dependent variable which is influenced by the independent variable variable, the rest is the part that is influenced by other variables and is not included in the study (Wibowo, 2024). In table 3, the R Square value on the Fatigue variable is 0.443, this explains that the Emotional Labor, Customer Complaints, Return Package variables affect the Fatigue variable by 44.3%, and 55.7% of the Fatigue variable is influenced by other variables not examined in this study.

In H1, p values and t statistics are used to measure the significant relationship between variables. If the p values < 0.05 and if the t statistic value > 1.96 then it can be said to be significant (Wibowo, 2024). In H1, namely the direct effect of emotional labor on Fatigue, the p value is 0.008 < 0.05 with t statistics 2.667 > 1.96, so H1 is accepted, which means that Emotional Labor has a significant positive effect on Fatigue. In H2, namely the effect of emotional labor on Fatigue with customer complaints as a mediator, the p value is 0.908 > 0.05, so H2 is rejected. In H3, namely the effect of emotional labor on Fatigue with return packages as a mediator, the p value is 0.837 > 0.05, so H3 is rejected.

Table 3. Hypothesis Testing Result

Variable	Path Coefficient	T Statistics	P Values
Emotional Labour → Fatigue	0.224	2.667	0.008
Customer Complaints *Emotional Labour → Fatigue	0.014	0.116	0.908
Return Package *Emotional Labour → Fatigue	-0.024	0.206	0.837

Source: Processed data (2025)

Discussion

Based on the research that has been done, H1 is accepted with the results of Emotional Labor has a significant positive effect on Fatigue. This is determined based on the p value of 0.008 and t statistic 2.667, which means that if an employee does emotional labor on an ongoing basis, they will experience intensive mental stress, causing fatigue conditions. The results of the study can be clarified by field conditions that show Ninja Express couriers who are in a position where they are required to be professional in serving consumers in a friendly manner while their feelings are inversely proportional to the attitude they have to show, it will make couriers experience mental fatigue. In line with the Conservation of Resources theory Hobfoll (1989) which emphasizes that stress and fatigue arise when individuals experience excessive loss of emotional resources, such as when doing emotional labor intensely and continuously.

Based on the research that has been done, H2 is rejected with the result that Customer Complaints cannot moderate the influence of Emotional Labor on Fatigue. This is evidenced by the p values above the 0.05 significance level. Because the more often consumers submit complaints, the more accustomed the courier is in handling customer complaints, so the courier will find it easier to overcome this . This situation is also in line with Emotion Regulation Theory Gross (1998) which states that a person's ability to control and adjust their emotional expressions will affect the emotional impact when interacting with consumers, including complaints or complaints. When couriers are able to measure their emotions well through stable emotional management, then the existence of customer complaints does not make any changes to the effect of emotional labor on fatigue.

Based on the research that has been done, H3 is rejected with the result that Return Package cannot moderate the influence of Emotional Labor on Fatigue. This is evidenced by the p values above the 0.05 significance level. Because the more often consumers return packages, the courier will know which consumers have this problem, so that when the courier gets a package delivery with the intended consumer destination they can confirm to the consumer whether the package will be accepted or something is not appropriate so that a package return is needed, thus this will make the courier avoid situations where they will experience Fatigue. Referring to objects that often experience return package events on Ninja Express couriers, they cannot choose which packages they will send themselves, but they can exchange packages to be delivered with other willing couriers, of course this is an advantage for one courier but a disadvantage for other couriers so that confirmation of the recipient of the package is still needed to consumers so as not to experience return packages.

Conclusion

Based on the results of this study, it can be seen that Emotional Labor has a significant positive effect on Fatigue, this relates to the emotional manipulation that occurs due to emotional labor making couriers have to suppress personal feelings so that couriers experience distress which results in mental fatigue. Therefore, companies must pay more attention to employee mental health, companies can provide free mental health counseling services to employees and companies can hold employee gatherings so that couriers get recreational stimulation and reduce their stress levels. In the moderate test results show that the moderate role of Customer Complaints weakens the effect of Emotional Labor on Fatigue, this relates to complaints from consumers made directly to the contact person available on e-commerce so that couriers do not get pressure due to reprimands from consumers. But it is still recommended for companies to provide workshops for couriers regarding handling consumer complaints that are not on target because not all consumers understand that product errors are the fault of e-commerce. As well as the results of the moderate test of the return package variable show that the moderate role of the Return Package weakens the effect of Emotional Labor on Fatigue, this relates to the return of goods can be done if it is in accordance with the provisions in the market place ordering goods and the return of goods will be rejected if it does not comply with the provisions, so that couriers do not need to argue with consumers because there are definite provisions for returning goods accepted or rejected on the ordering platform. It is still recommended that the manager of establish standardization and evaluation in the company regarding shipping procedures so that the packages received by consumers do not suffer damage due to shipping, so that this minimizes consumers reprimanding the courier.

However, there are still limitations in this study. In this study, only the population of one service company in an area was taken, so not all couriers from these companies were studied. In addition, only one independent variable was used, so in this study there are limitations in identifying the dependent variable. Based on this, it is recommended for future researchers to take a broader scope of population such as using several delivery service companies, or can increase the population by combining several couriers in different areas who are in the same delivery service company. Researchers can also add other independent variables such as workload, environmental conditions, and individual courier.

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