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Examination of Accepted Grooming Standards for Employees in the Hospitality Sector in Kenya

Kabii Francis[a*] and K.M. Wandaka J[b]

[a]Lecturer in Tourism Department, Kenya Utalii College, Nairobi, Kenya, Email: kabiifrancis@gmail.com
[b]Consultant, Sustainable Tourism & Environmental Management, Nairobi, Kenya, Email: wandakajk@gmail.com

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***Corresponding author:** Kabii Francis, Lecturer in Tourism Department, Kenya Utalii College, Nairobi, Kenya;
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Abstract

The study examined if there exists any relationship between respondents' age, gender, and position in employment and their perceived acceptable grooming. It investigates the accepted grooming for those working in the hospitality sector. The study used exploratory research design and combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study areas were purposefully selected and included Nairobi region, Nakuru, and Naivasha regions. The sample size was 384 participants from hotels and resorts. The study found that there was a significant relationship ($\chi 2=12.116$, df =1, p <0.001) between the respondent's gender and their perception of hairstyles. The majority 67% of respondents of both genders were against men having dreadlocks while on duty. Those against dreadlocks were aged from 30 years and above while those aged below 25 years 24% of them did not have any problems with men having dreadlocks while on duty. These findings were significant at ($\chi 2=14.113$, df =8, p<0.079), meaning that respondents' ages influenced their perception of whether men should have dreadlocks or not and the majority was against it. It concluded that there are no universally accepted grooming standards as it is influenced by other variables.

Keywords: Hospitality sector; Perceived; Accepted, Grooming; Standard

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Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the acceptable grooming standards for those working in the hospitality industry in Kenya. It examined if there exists any relationship between respondents' age, gender, and position in employment and their perceived acceptable grooming. The researcher agrees with others who have noted that the younger generation in today's workforce is gradually replacing the older generation [1-3]. They have different opinion on what constitute to proper grooming. Since the current grooming standards were set by older generations who are being replaced with the new entrants in the job market, it is a matter of time before the industry gives up to the pressure of new and emerging grooming styles that were previously not accepted.

Problem Statement

It is not clear who should sets the grooming standards for employees in the hospitality industry. In some cases, the owners of these facilities together with other professionals in the hospitality sector have come up with acceptable codes of grooming and dressing for employees in different departments in a hotel. In other cases, it's the industry traditions and the nature of job assigned to an individual that dictate to the expected grooming. As the old generations gets faced out due to retirement and natural reasons, there comes a new young generation whose perception of hairstyles, facials makeup, pedicures and manicures, beard cuts, and other forms of grooming has brought confusion in the industry. Today, new forms of grooming and hairstyles that were previously not accepted are gradually taking the space that was previously not possible. Among such hairstyles are dreadlocks and braids. What are the accepted hairstyles and other forms of grooming in the hospitality sectors in Kenya and to what extent does age and gender influence hairstyles? This is the gap the study intended to fill. This study is guided by similarity theory which states that human beings tend to be attracted to individuals who share similar traits, attitudes, and values.

Objective of the Study

The general objective of the study was to investigate the perceived accepted grooming standards for those working in the hospitality sector.

The specific objectives were:

1. Investigate the accepted grooming for ladies working in the hospitality sector
2. Investigate the accepted grooming for men working in the hospitality sector
3. Examine whether gender, age, and work experience influence the perception of grooming this study hypothesis that:

Ho: There is no significant relationship between gender age, work experience, and perception toward grooming

Ha: There is a significant relationship between gender age, work experience, and perception toward grooming

Literature Review

Available literature from scholars and researchers agree to the fact that personal grooming in hospitality is important to both institutions and the individual [4,5]. It create the first impression to those one interacts with. Robinson, et al, 2022 defines personal grooming as being presentable to others, by paying attention to body hygiene, groomed nails, and hair, and dressing well. The researcher argues that there are no universal grooming standards as it is influenced by individual social background, personal preferences, socioeconomic status, culture and age. This study opines that personal grooming is ever-evolving and what is considered acceptable grooming from one person may not necessarily be the same to the other. Saidun Akhmetova [16]

Olorunda [17] Castro Bestilleiro, [18] in their study found that personal grooming may be used objectively or subjectively depending on individual perception and grooming inclinations. Heim, & Hopper, [19-23] in their study noted that there are no universally acceptable grooming standards. Because of this broad definition of the term grooming, this study limited itself to dressing, hairstyles, and shoes for those working in the hospitality industry in Kenya which may have introduced some biases.

Hair Policy at the Workplace

Hair is one of the first things people notice about others, and can strongly impact the first impression. Neat, well-groomed hair may convey professionalism, attention to detail, and respect for oneself and others. The influence of hair on grooming may vary depending on the corporate culture of a particular workplace. In some conservative industries like finance and law, they expect employees to maintain traditional hairstyles, while creative industries like advertising or fashion may encourage more individuality and self-expression. Research has shown that physical appearance, including hair, can influence perceptions of competence and trustworthiness in the workplace. Those perceived as well-groomed are perceived to be more competent reliable, and capable of handling professional responsibilities. This perception can impact career advancement opportunities and professional relationships for those in dreadlocks and braids. Employers need to be sensitive to the cultural and diversity considerations surrounding hair grooming. Discriminatory grooming policies or practices that target specific hairstyles associated with certain racial or ethnic groups can lead to feelings of exclusion and contribute to a hostile work environment. Employers must navigate legal considerations related to grooming standards and hair discrimination. In many jurisdictions, discriminating against employees based on hairstyles Associated with race, ethnicity, or religion may be considered discriminatory and illegal. Employers should review their grooming policies to ensure compliance with anti-discrimination laws and promote a diverse and inclusive workplace environment.

History of Dreadlocks and Braids

There have been some controversies in Kenya on whether dreadlocks should be allowed in schools and the hospitality industry. For a long time, employers in the hospitality industry had grooming rules that were against dreadlocks and those adoring the locks could either be disadvantaged at recruitment or be requested to change the hairstyles. There have been cases where those aggrieved by such directives have gone to court for further interpretations and the courts have ruled in their favor. Gradually, dreadlocks have continued to evolve as a hairstyle, with people from diverse backgrounds embracing its aesthetic appeal, cultural significance, or personal expression. Dreadlocks have been worn for thousands of years and can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Egypt, India, and Greece [6]. In Africa dreadlocks are deeply symbolic, representing a spiritual journey and a connection to African roots [7]. The Rastafarian movement, which emerged in Jamaica in the 1930s, played a significant role in popularizing dreadlocks globally [8,9]. It influenced their interpretation of the Bible and African culture, where they saw locks as a symbol of their covenant with God and their resistance to Babylonian oppression. Throughout history and across cultures, dreadlocks have held various meanings, including spirituality, rebellion, cultural identity, and resistance [10]. They are often seen as a symbol of non-conformity and individuality. Bucar, [11] in his study noted that dreadlocks have sparked discussions about cultural appropriation, with debates over who can wear them and the importance of respecting their cultural origins. Overall, the history of dreadlocks reflects a complexity of cultural, spiritual, and social meanings, making them a fascinating aspect of human expression and identity. Cattien, and Stopford, [12]. Likewise, braiding is one of the oldest hairstyles known to humanity ancient artifacts, such as figurines and sculptures, depict people with braided hairstyles, suggesting that braiding has been a part of human grooming for millennia [13]. Lin, [14] documents that hair braiding has its roots in African cultures, where it holds significant cultural and social importance. In many African societies, braids are not only a form of adornment but also serve as a way to communicate social status, ethnicity, age, marital status, and even religious beliefs.

Soldatic, et al., [15] found that braiding has been practiced by indigenous peoples around the world, including Native Americans, Aboriginal Australians, and various tribes in Asia and the Americas. In these cultures, braids often convey cultural identity, family lineage, and spiritual beliefs.

Research Methods

The research design was exploratory and combined qualitative and quantitative research methods. The study areas were purposefully selected and included Nairobi region, Nakuru, and Naivasha regions. The Target population included managers and supervisors from city hotels and resorts whose ratings were from 3 to 5 stars. Researcher-administered questionnaires were used to collect quantitative data while interviews and observations were used to collect qualitative data. The sample size was 384 participants from hotels and resorts. Cronbach alpha was used to measure the Validity and reliability of the questionnaire. The chi-square test of independence was used to measure the relationships of variables.

Discussion of Finding

Respondents' Profile

A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed of which 65% (205) responded. The majority of respondents were from city hotels (50%) followed by resort hotels (30%) with a minority being from tented camps. About 69% of all respondents were in managerial positions most of whom were males 52%. In terms of their ages, over 62% were aged between 25 to 40 years with minority10 % being over 50 years. The majority of them (54%) had work experience ranging between 5 to 15 years with only 36% who had more than 15 years of work experience. From this demographic profile it's clear that the respondents were fit to respond to the questionnaire and their opinion may represent the population.

Acceptable Grooming For Ladies While In the Office

Objective one of the study investigated the perceived accepted grooming for ladies while in office. The dependent variables used in the study were the accepted hairstyles for both males and females, accepted dressing, types of shoes, nails, perfumes, and ear

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piercings. Since these are not the only variables that constitute grooming, this may have caused some biases in the findings.

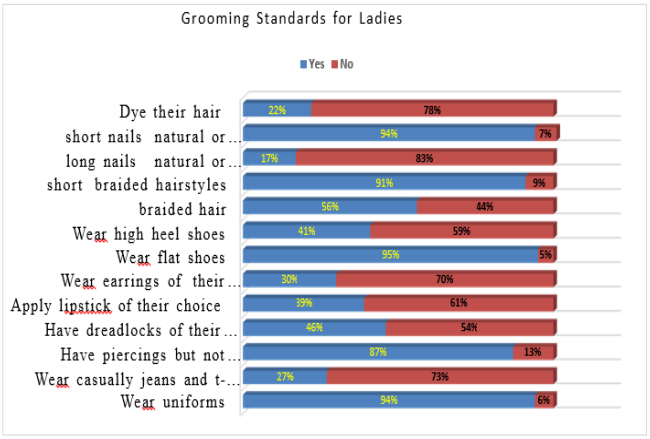


Figure: 1: *Perception of grooming standards for ladies while on duty.*

Whether to dye the hair or not, 78 % of respondents were against dying of hair. Likewise, 91% believed that if ladies wanted to braid their hair, the braids should be short and not too long. In terms of nails, the majority 94 % of the respondents were comfortable with ladies having short nails whether natural or acrylic. For the ladies' lips, about 61% of respondents opined that while on duty ladies should be natural avoid striking lipstick, and wear flat shoes (95%) instead of High-heeled shoes. For those who would like to pierce their ears, the majority (94%) of the respondents preferred ladies to have not more than one ear piercing. Unless on special occasions, 73% of respondents were not comfortable with ladies putting on jean trousers or T-shirts while on duty. This is different during special occasions when blended T- shirts are used for Uniformity. In terms of hairstyle, 54% of respondents recommend short to medium braided hair. About 46% of respondents were comfortable with ladies having dreadlocks as compared to 56% who were against it. (Figure 1) This study noted that the perceptions of the accepted grooming and dressing standards were changing and other independent variables influenced what constitutes to nice grooming and dressing for the ladies. Dreadlock hairstyle which a few years ago was associated with the Rastafarians' movement is gradually being accepted in the tourism and hospitality industry.

Influence of Gender on Accepted Grooming For Ladies

The study hypothesized that there was no significant relationship between the respondent's gender and their perception of grooming. The study noted that there was a significant relationship between gender and perception of men grooming while on duty. The Hypothesis was rejected as discussed. Table 1.

Table 1: *Grooming standards for ladies while in the office.*

Independent Variables	Dependent variables	Yes %	No%	Pearson's Chi-Square test of independence
Gender	Have dreadlocks	Males 34	67	(χ2=12.116, df =1, p<0.001)
		Females 55	39	
	Wear high heel shoes	Males 30	69	(χ2=7.722, df =1, p<0.005)
		Females 46	46	
	have short or medium braided hairstyle	Males 86	14	(χ2=6.731, df =1, p<0.009)
		Females 88	2	
	have long nails that are either natural or artificial	Male 11	92	χ2=33.207, df =13, p<0.027)
		Female 21	73	
	wear flat shoes	Males 95	5	(χ2=35.553, df =4, p<0.001)
		Females 90	10	

Hairstyles

The study noted that there was a significant relationship (χ2=12.116, df =1, p <0.001) between the respondents gender and their perception on hairstyles. Whether ladies should have some dreadlocks or not, the majority (67%) of male respondents were against it as compared to only 39% of the females, meaning that gender influenced the perception of dreadlocks. Likewise, the majority of respondents of both genders were in agreement that ladies should have medium braided hair that is not too long. This relationship was significant at (χ2=6.731, df =1, p<0.009)

Shoes

About the nature of shoes to be worn, the majority (69%) of men said that ladies shoes should not be high-heeled but flat. For the ladies, only 46% of them believed that high-heeled shoes were presentable. This relationship was significant at (χ2=7.722, df =1, p<0.005)

Nails

It was also found that there was a significant relationship between gender and what was perceived as acceptable nail sizes and colors for ladies while on duty. The majority 92% of male respondents recommended natural and artificial, but be short. The minority 21% of ladies we comfortable with long nails as opposed to 73 % who thought otherwise. There was a significant relationship (χ2=33.207, df =13, p<0.027) between gender and perception towards nail size and colors. From this finding, the study rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant relation between genders and perceived grooming for ladies working in the hospitality sector.

Influence of Gender on Accepted Grooming For Gentlemen

The study also sought to understand what was considered acceptable grooming for men while on duty. Several variables were used such as clothing, suits and ties, hair with dreadlocks that are either short or long, size of beard, and hair colors. (Figure 2.).The majority 95% were comfortable with men wearing uniforms. T-shirts and jean trousers were not accepted by 62% of respondents. Whether to wear suits and ties, a simple majority 48% agreed to the statement while 38% disagreed. This indicated that about half of the participants were torn between the issue of ties and suits. In

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terms of the hairstyles and sizes, 67% were against having dreadlocks while at work. The majority 84% did not recommend men to have braided hair. In all circumstances, the majority 83 % indicated that men should not dye their hair like the ladies the majority 83% agreed that men should not have long beards (83%) or long hair (75%) but instead, men should try to have short in all circumstances.

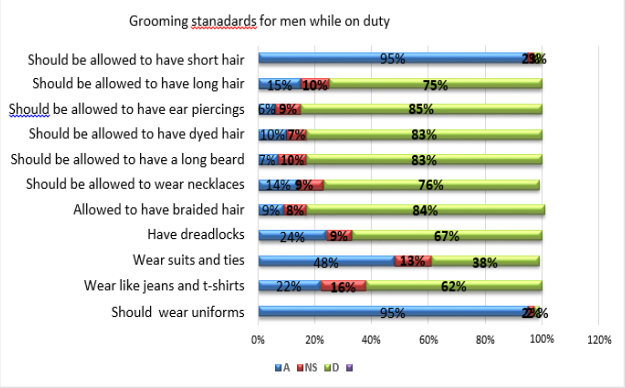


Figure 2: *Acceptable grooming for gentlemen while in the office.*

Relationship between Gender, Age and Grooming For Gentlemen

Suites and ties

The study noted that the respondent's gender influenced their attitude toward men wearing suits and ties while on duty. There were more men 47% as compared to the females 45% who were comfortable with men wearing suits and ties. The finding was significant ($\chi2$=8.128, df =2, p<0.017) meaning that gender influenced the perception of ties and suites. (Table 2)

Dreadlocks for men

Discussions on dreadlocks have been going on in Kenya for some time. Dreadlock has been associated with religious beliefs, cultural liberations, and freedom from slavery while to others, Rastafarian movement. Today dreadlock have seen their way in all professions amongst them being the hospitality industry. Other individuals, careers, and professions are against the hairstyle.

Are dreadlocks an acceptable hairstyle for men in hospitality? These are the questions the study wanted to respond to. The study noted some relationship between opinions on hairstyles and respondents' age. The majority 67% of respondents of both genders were against men having dreadlocks while on duty. Those against dreadlocks were those aged from 30 years and above while those aged below 25 years 24% of them did not have any problems with men having dreadlocks while on duty.

These findings were significant at ($\chi2$=14.113, df =8, p<0.079), meaning that respondents' ages influenced their perception of whether men should have dreadlocks or not and the majority was against it.

Table 2: *Relationship between gender, age, and grooming for gentlemen.*

Independent variables	Dependent variables	Agree	NotSure	Disagree	Pearson's Chi-Square TestOf Independence
Establishment	Have Dyed Hair	10%	7%	83%	($\chi2$=36.357, df =24, p<0.051)
	Have Short Hair	95%	2%	3%	($\chi2$=56.958, df =24, p<0.001)
Gender	Wearing Suits And Ties	48%	13%	38%	($\chi2$=8.128, df =2, p<0.017)
	Have Dreadlocks	24%	9%	67%	(χ^2=4.979, df =2, p<0.083)
	Have Dyed Hair	10%	7%	83%	($\chi2$=13.100, df =2, p<0.001)
Age	Have Dreadlocks	24%	9%	67%	($\chi2$=14.113, df =8, p<0.079)
	Have Braided Hair	9%	8%	84%	($\chi2$=14.182, df =8, p<0.077)
	Have Dyed Hair	10%	7%	83%	($\chi2$=15.233, df =8, p<0.055)
	Have ear piercings	6%	9%	85%	($\chi2$=18.350, df =8, p<0.019)
Work experience	Wear jeans and T-shirts	22%	16%	62%	($\chi2$=17.327, df =8, p<0.027)
	Wearing suits and ties	48%	13%	38%	($\chi2$=15.544, df =8, p<0.049)
	Have dreadlocks	24%	9%	67%	($\chi2$=14.964, df =8, p<0.060)
	Have a long beard	7%	10%	83%	($\chi2$=13.553, df =8, p<0.094)
	Have dyed hair	10%	7%	83%	($\chi2$=14.429, df =8, p<0.071)
Hotel rating	Wear uniforms	95%	2%	2%	($\chi2$=16.899, df =8, p<0.031)
	Have short hair	95%	2%	3%	($\chi2$=14.537, df =8, p<0.069)

The study also noted that the respondent's work experience also influenced their opinion on dreadlocks. The majority 67% of respondents who had more than 10 years of work experience were against dreadlocks as compared to 24% of respondents with less than 10 years' work experience who did not have any problem with dreadlocks.

This finding indicated that there were significant ($\chi 2$=14.964, df =8, p<0.060) relations between respondents' work experience and perception towards men having dreadlocks while on duty.

Braided hair for men

Some employees in the hospitality industry have guidelines on acceptable hairstyles. Some accept braids for men while others are against them. For those against it, they may not employ those with braids. This is discriminatory as different hairstyles are rooted in ethnic, cultural, and faith- based practices. To some establishments, some hairstyles are associated with a violation of that established perceived hair standard. Is it acceptable for me while on duty to have braided hair? The study found that respondent's ages also influenced their perception of whether men should have braided hair or not. The majority 84% of both genders aged 30 years and beyond were against men braiding their hair. The minority 9% of respondents who were ages below 25 years did not have any problem with men braiding their hair. This relationship was significant at ($\chi 2$=14.182, df =8, p<0.077) meaning that age influenced opinions on braided hair for men.

Dyed hair for men

The majority 83% of respondents aged above 30 years were against men dying their hair while on duty as compared to the minority 10% of respondents aged below 25 years who did not have any problem with men dying their hair. This finding was significant at ($\chi 2$=15.233, df =8, p<0.055) meaning that age influenced respondents' opinion on whether men should dye their hair or not while on duty. Likewise, the study noted that respondents' work experience also influenced their perception of whether men should dye their hair while on duty. It was noted that 83 % of respondents who have been in the industry for more than 5 years were against dying hair as opposed to 10% of those with less than 5 years of experience who did not see any problem with dying hair. The relationship was significant at ($\chi 2$=14.429, df =8, p<0.071) meaning that work experience influences opinion on men dying their hair while at work and those opposed were the majority who have more than 5 years of work experience.

Size of beard for men

This study also noted that there was a significant ($\chi 2$=13.553, df =8, p<0.094) relationship between respondents' perception of whether men should have long or short beard while working. The majority 84 % who had worked in the industry for more than 5 years were against long beards as opposed to 7% who were aged below 5 years who thought otherwise. These findings mean that respondent's work experience influences their perception of the size of beards of men working in the hospitality industry.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that respondent's age. Gender and work experiences influenced their perception of grooming. It was noted that there are no any universally accepted grooming standards as it was influenced by other variables such as organizational culture age and gender of respondents. However, the majority of respondents recommended that ladies should have short braided hair for those who love braids. Likewise dying of hair, high-heeled shoes, long nails, and striking lipstick were not recommended. Whether ladies should have some dreadlocks or not, the majority of male respondents were against it as compared to the females, meaning gender significantly influenced the perception of dreadlocks. For those who would like to pierce their ears, the study concluded that the majority of respondents opined that ladies should not have more than one ear piercing. Unless on special occasions, most respondents were not comfortable with ladies putting on jean trousers or T- shirts while on duty. Although dreadlocks as a hairstyle have gradually been accepted in the tourism industry, the majority of respondents of both genders were against men having dreadlocks while on duty. Men should avoid having braided hair or dying it while on duty. This was exceptional for those working in entertainment and animation where braids are attire. The beard should be short and well-maintained. Like-wise, respondents' age, gender, and work experience influenced their perception of what constitutes to proper grooming.

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