

**THE EFFECTS OF CUSTOMER INCIVILITY ON HIGH-CONTACT
SERVICE EMPLOYEES AND ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIORS:
A FRAMEWORK AND ANALYSIS OF PROPOSITIONS**

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ABSTRACT

The research objective of this paper is to study a broad context of emotional exhaustion and its importance to hospitality management. This knowledge would provide a better understanding of the factors that contribute to customer incivility, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, employees' perceived performance, and turnover intentions among high-contact service employees. Seven hypotheses are proposed to test the relationships between customer incivility and its determinants which are emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, employees' perceived performance, and turnover intentions. This paper fills a gap in knowledge on the role of emotional exhaustion among high-contact service employees that has an impact on job satisfaction, employee's perceived performance, and turnover intentions. With the proposed conceptual framework, the author aims to clarify the effects of customer incivility on high-contact service employees and organizational behaviors which leads to the protection of employee morale and the pro-action of the management team to deal with the situations. The limitation is that the study should be extended beyond the conceptual stage and conduct the empirical research across the high-contact service employees in different countries, different industrial setting, and to explore the role of cultural differences on emotional exhaustion. The managerial implications would extend to improving the recruitment and evaluating the effectiveness of development programs such as a developing and retaining talent that drive the organization for success.

Keywords: customer incivility, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, employees' perceived performance, turnover intentions

Introduction

The hospitality industry is marked as one of the fastest outgrowing industries globally. This sector has experienced exponential growth, disruptive expansion, and intense competitive pressure over the years. The key success focuses ultimately on customer satisfaction, and employees' job performance and turnover intentions. Thus, customers' point of contact has become the first moment of truth that customers have experience with; the high-contact service employees. At the customer touch points, customers judge and form their attitude during service interactions (Ustrov, Valverde, & Ryan, 2016). By interacting with customers, the high-contact service

employees become the face of the brand who put the customer's high expectations on their shoulders. These expectations are to deliver high service quality, resolve customer complaints effectively, and make customers happy (Karatepe, Yorganci, & Haktanir, 2009), particularly when high-contact service employees encounter difficult customers (H. J. Kim, 2008).

As evidenced in service-oriented organizations literature suggests that the high-contact service employees are exposed to the stressful environment that associated with customer's complaints, demands, and incivility behavior (Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInerney, 2010). The high-contact service employees are enacted to hold the philosophy of 'Customer is always right' and required to operate in unpleasant situations they don't have the right to avoid (Sliter et al., 2010). To please bad-mannered customers by serving them in a friendly and polite manner is not only the misfortune of the high-contact service employees, but also it leads to the exorbitant cost of the firms. Mistreated by customers, high-contact service employees can become exhausted emotionally and may eventually leave the firm (Karatepe et al., 2009). The real cost of employee turnover lies in the loss of productivity during the transition, decreased customer satisfaction, and financial loss including legal compensations, recruiting, hiring, and training (Tuominen, Hirvonen, Reijonen, & Laukkanen, 2016).

Customer incivility is defined as deviant customer behavior that violates workplace norms (Kern & Grandey, 2009), it is an employee's perception that he/she is being treated in an uncivil manner (van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010), with a vague intention to harm an employee, and in violation of social norms of reciprocated respect and is considered one of the most dreadful forms of misconduct on service employees (Sliter et al., 2010). In fact, research confirms that over 98 percent of employees under the study reported experiencing uncivil behavior in their workplace (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2016) whereas nearly 99 percent of 9,000 employees reported as the witness of incivility happening at work (Porath & Pearson, 2010).

A wealth of research on workplace incivility literature denotes that the devastating outcomes of negative deviate customer behavior upon the high-contact service employees; customer incivility, are associated with emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, turnover intentions, and job performance (Arnold & Walsh, 2015; Cheng & O-Yang, 2018; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe et al., 2009; Lam & Chen, 2012; Wilson & Holmval, 2013). The research showed that workplace incivility significantly increases emotional exhaustion (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016; W.-M. Hur, Moon, & Jun, 2016) which in turn, has a negative effect on job satisfaction (Cheng & O-Yang, 2018; W.-M. Hur et al., 2016; Lee & Ok, 2012), has a positive effect on turnover intention (W.-M. Hur et al., 2016; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Yavas, Babakus, & Karatepe, 2008), and has a negative effect on job performance (Cho et al., 2016; W.-M. Hur et al., 2016). Boukis, A., Koritos, C., Daunt, K. L., & Papastathopoulos, A. (2020) emphasizes that supervisor's leadership style and recognize that an empowering leadership style can better relieve the exhausting impacts of both customer incivility forms on high-contact service employees' stress, contemplation, vengeance, and withdrawal intentions.

Recognizing the previous research has dedicated considerable effort in examining customer incivility using different kinds of high contact service industries including banks (Sliter et al., 2010; Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012), department stores (W.-M. Hur et al., 2016), restaurants (Han, Bonn, & Cho, 2016), and call centers (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010) to name just a few, there have been limited studies that investigated the influences of customer incivility in the hospitality industry (Cho et al., 2016; H. Kim & Qu, 2018). In addition, when applied to the field of hospitality management, several critical questions regarding more specific roles of customer incivility remain unanswered.

First, the existing literature that although focused on customer incivility and investigated its relationship on emotional exhaustion, it is failed to extend the research on the effect of both customer incivility and emotional exhaustion on turnover intentions and job performance, but on employee incivility (H. Kim & Qu, 2018; van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), and some did on the customer orientation or customer service quality (Sliter et al., 2010). Second, though emotional exhaustion, turnover intention, and job satisfaction have gained attention from researcher, customer incivility had failed to put into a comprehensive view as one of the most significant antecedences in the existing hospitality literature; hotel industry literature in particular (Chen & Kao, 2012; Cheng & O-Yang, 2018; Chu, Baker, & Murrmann, 2012; W.-M. Hur, Moon, & Han, 2015; Karatepe, 2013; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe et al., 2009; Lam & Chen, 2012; Lee & Ok, 2012). Third, even though the majority of workplace incivility research drawing their study by using the most frequently used instrument so called Workplace Incivility Scales (WIS) developed by Cortina, Magley, Hunter, and Day (2001) to investigate the effect on emotional exhaustion, the studies did not include customer-experienced incivility. If it did, it did not examine the differential effects of customer incivility directly on the high-contact service employees that was the main purpose of this research (Schilpzand et al., 2016).

Because of the nature of hotel business, hotel guests are with high expectation to be served. These customers are easy to get fussy when things are not going as they expected (Torres, van Niekerk, & Orłowski, 2017). The high-contact service employees are those with direct responsibility to solve problems and to please customers for their satisfaction. These make the high-contact service employees vulnerable especially when tasks require them to remain friendly and smiling in situations that evoke a stressors and strain triggering a reduction in individual emotional resources caused by excessive psychological demands (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009). In addition, Schilpzand et al., (2016) commended that the uncivility experiences have been studies far and wide but intacted with problematic resulting from various factors involved. The authors recommended for the greater good that researcher indicates the source of incivility such as supervisor, coworker, or customer), the type of incivility (i.e., experienced, witnessed, or instigated), the method of inquiry (i.e., questionnaires, experimental study, or qualitative inquiry) and the time frame (i.e., retrospective, cross-sectional, and longitudinal) for a better interpretation and implication by practitioners. Furthermore, even though most of the empirical studies on experience customer incivility have focused on its consequences, there is rare research categorized the consequences into affective, attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioral outcomes.

To fill this void, this paper offers the holistic view of the relationships between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, employees' perceived performance, and turnover intentions. This study purposely extends the existing hospitality theory by developing and testing a comprehensive conceptual research model that, for the first time, encompasses all aforementioned constructs, takes the above recommendation into consideration, and applies to the context of the hotel industry. To be precise, this study seeks to investigate the relationships between how uncivil conduct made by hotel guests and its consequences. The hotel guests are indicated as the source of incivility. The high-contact service employees are categorized as experienced – type of incivility. This study includes emotional exhaustion as an affective outcome, job satisfaction as attitudinal outcome, employees' perceived job performance as cognitive outcome, and turnover intentions as behavioral outcome (Schilpzand et al., 2016). This cross-sectional study will be administered by questionnaires and the findings will yield a variety of useful management implications such as strategic directions for hotel managers in human resource management and organizational behaviors.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Despite the insights from previous research, one of the most important questions about the effects of customer incivility remain unanswered in the field of hotel management, namely how customer incivility influences employees' emotional exhaustion, and specifically the precise mechanism through which customer incivility may increase emotional exhaustion, and its consequences for the targets of uncivil experiences. To void this gap in literature, this study explores a role for customer incivility and emotional exhaustion towards jobs satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intentions by drawing upon Conservation of Resources theory (COR) developed by Hobfoll (1989) and Affective Event Theory (AET) developed by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996).

Building upon COR theory, it provides a useful framework for the relationship between the two constructs. The COR theory suggests that resources are identified as environments including objects, personal characteristics, conditions, and energies that are valued by the individual who attempts to acquire, maintain, and preserve it (Stevan E. Hobfoll, 2001). The high-contact service employees are bonded to the mottoes of 'The Customer is King' when they encounter mistreated conducted by a bad-mannered customer. Based on the COR theory, the relationship between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion is explained by those the high-contact service employees' tolerant is depleted through the process of protecting organization's reputation, which in turns, causing emotional exhaustion.

Alike the COR theory, the AET contends that workplace events or experiences are agent of affective responses among the high-contact service employees. The experiences of customer incivility influence the high-contact service employees' subjective emotional reactions that expressed through deviate behaviors, which in turn determine their job-related attitudes and behaviors (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Furthermore, according to the literature review of workplace incivility by Schilpzand et al. (2016), the authors suggest that the consequences of customer incivility is found to be related to various affective (i.e., emotional exhaustion), attitudinal outcome (i.e., job satisfaction), cognitive outcome (i.e., perceived job performance), and behavioral outcome (i.e., turnover intentions, job performance). Against this backdrop, the proposed research model suggested in this study is broadly consistent with the COR and AET theory (see Figure 1).

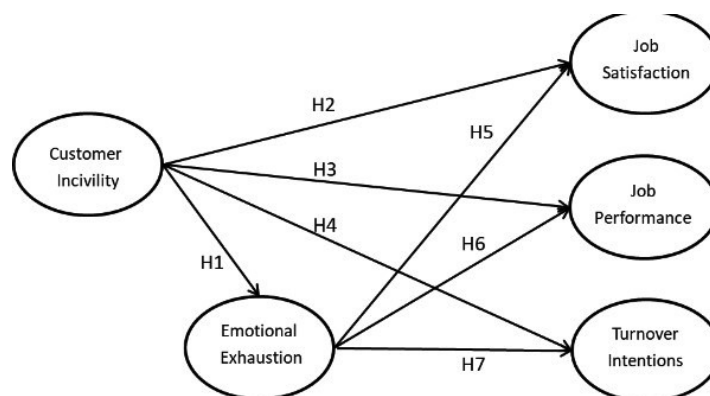


Figure 1 The Proposed Research Model

Customer incivility is defined as a perception of employee on customers that treating him/her in an uncivil manner (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Uncivil behaviors are seen as rude, discourteous, and showing no regard for others (Sliter et al., 2010). Although a one-time event of incivility in the workplace might not conjure

the high-contact service employees, the continued occurrence of incivility can gradually create unpleasant outcomes. As the fact that high-contact service employees are not capable of maintaining or preserving resources operated in the workplace due to its downward spiraling and pervasive nature while dealing with incivility customer, they are losing the resources provided by service-oriented organization and then are prone to strain such as emotional exhaustion (W. M. Hur, Kim, & Park, 2015).

Emotional exhaustion is defined as a feeling of “being over-extended and depleted of one's emotional resources” in response to “chronic interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001, p. 399). It is arising from persistent high demands on time and energy that causes continual physical and psychological depletion. High-contact service employees work on a face-to-face and voice-to-voice basis when interact with customers to ensure delivering over expected service quality and gain customer satisfaction (Karatepe et al., 2009). When confronting with uncivil customers, high-contact service employees are threatened of losing their accumulated resources and become stressed about losing their conservation of resources while maintaining high afford to appear pleasant, creating a warm - welcoming environment, and controlling emotions in a process of service delivering to uncivil customers (Chu et al., 2012).

Extensive evidence in the study of workplace incivility is largely concerned with the occurrence of uncivil behaviour among co-workers or employee-to-employee interaction and its consequences on work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008), job performance (Yavas et al., 2008), turnover intentions (Sharma & Singh, 2016), and absenteeism (Sliter et al., 2012). While the workplace incivility has gained attention from the majority researcher, the evidence of customer incivility or customer-to-employee interactions and its consequences have gradually emerged (Han et al., 2016; W.-M. Hur et al., 2015; H. Kim & Qu, 2018).

Empirical studies show that customer incivility is positively related to emotional exhaustion in sales department setting (W.-M. Hare et al., 2015), in a retail setting (Kern & Grandey, 2009), and in bank setting (Sliter et al., 2010). Workplace incivility significantly increases emotional exhaustion and leads to low levels of job service performance in a restaurant setting (Cho et al., 2016) and in a hotel setting (Yavas et al., 2008). The experience of incivility is negatively related to job satisfaction and is positively related to turnover intentions (Karatepe et al., 2009; Lim et al., 2008). Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1. Customer incivility has a significant and positive influence on emotional exhaustion.

Hypothesis 2. Customer incivility has a significant and negative influence on job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 3. Customer incivility has a significant and negative influence on job performance.

Hypothesis 4. Customer incivility has a significant and positive influence on turnover intentions.

Provided by the COR theory as a useful guideline for relationships, the further hypotheses examine the impacts of emotional exhaustion on job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intentions. When employees interact with uncivil customer, they feel that they are losing scarce resources and tend to have emotional exhaustion, which in turn create employees' negative job-related outcomes (Karatepe et al., 2009). Alike the COR theory, the AET posits that the experiences of events at work (i.e., customer incivility, co-worker incivility, workplace incivility) create employees' responses or subjective emotional reactions (i.e., emotional exhaustion), that influence their job-related attitudes (i.e., job satisfaction), cognitive (i.e., employees' perceived job performance, and behaviours (i.e., turnover intentions) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Empirical evidence on emotional exhaustion literature suggests that it is an antecedent of various negative outcomes in the workplace

including customer orientation (W.-M. Hur et al., 2015), employee incivility (van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), service recovery performance (Karatepe et al., 2009), job performance (Cho et al., 2016; Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009), job satisfaction (Cheng & O-Yang, 2018; W. M. Hur et al., 2015; Karatepe et al., 2009; Lee & Ok, 2012), and turnover intention (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe et al., 2009).

Job satisfaction refers to an employee's overall affective evaluation of the jobs and the organization to the degree to which an employee feels that his or her job-related needs are being met; it is a positive emotional state resulting from the consideration of one's job experience (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012; Locke, 1976). Employees with emotional exhaustion often experience feelings of frustration, anxiety, depression, or indifference toward their work (Yavas et al., 2008). These negative feelings which result from emotional exhaustion have a negative influence on the magnitude of employees' job satisfaction. Recent research has reported the link between emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction (W. M. Hur et al., 2015; Karatepe et al., 2009; Lee & Ok, 2012; Yavas et al., 2008). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 5. Emotional exhaustion has a significant and negative influence on job satisfaction.

In this study, job performance is defined as a mountable productivity, behavior, and outcomes that employees, in relative to his or her peers, contribute to the effectiveness of organization and to overall organizational performance (Babin & Boles, 1998; Viswesvaran & Ones, 2000). Turnover intentions as suggested by Carmeli and Weisberg (2006) refers to the withdrawal process, denoting the thoughts of quitting, the intention to search for a new job, and the intention to leave the organization. As discussed in the AET, emotional exhaustion is not the only a determinant of incivility from a customer, it is also a significant antecedent of job outcomes like job performance and turnover intentions.

Nevertheless, the impact of emotional exhaustion on job performance is varied. For instance, Cropanzano, Rupp, and Byrne (2003) reported subordinates and supervisors working for the large hospital in the western United States experiencing the emotional exhaustion demonstrated lower job performance. Janssen and Huang (2010) have shown a similar finding that there was a significant and negative relationship between emotional exhaustion and four indicators of job performance in the fashion chain stores in Mainland China and Hong Kong. In the food service business in the United States, the results showed that emotional exhaustion has a significant and negative relationship with service performance (Cho et al., 2016). Some researchers such as Karatepe and Aleshinloye (2009) reported that emotional exhaustion did a lower job performance but was not a significant relationship on the full-time high contact employees of five-star hotels in the sub-Saharan Africa context. Thus, the hypotheses are derived.

Hypothesis 6. Emotional exhaustion has a significant and negative influence on job performance.

Drawing upon the COR theory, once employees find they lose their scarce resources when interact with uncivil customers, they cannot perform effectively in a workplace and demonstrate turnover intentions as a result of resource loss and depletion of emotion (Karatepe & Aleshinloye, 2009). Empirical studies denoted the relationship between emotional exhaustion and turnover intention. For example, in the study conducted with retail bank employees in South Korea, Hur et al. (2015) found that emotional exhaustion has negative impact on job performance and positively related to turnover intentions. Likewise, junior personnel with psychological strain experiencing emotional exhaustion exerted a diminishing level of a job commitment and amplified the level of turnover intentions (Bridger, Day, & Morton, 2013). Similarly, in the hotel industry in Turkey, high-contact

service employees demonstrated a significant and positive effect of emotional exhaustion on turnover intentions (Yavas et al., 2008). In the light of the aforementioned research findings, the following hypothesis is presented.

Hypothesis 7. Emotional exhaustion has significant and positive influence on turnover intentions.

Analysis and Probable Outcomes

The theoretical underpinning of this paper is that there is an empirical link between customer incivility, emotional exhaustion, job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions, that is yet to be ascertained in the extant literature. Customer incivility will be determined by items designed to tap an employee's perspective as uncivil manner they are treated by customers. Van Jaarsveld et al. (2010) conceptualized customer incivility based on the employee's perception on uncivil manner with ambiguous intent to harm an employee. This paper adopts this principle of customer incivility as a form of psychometric properties of the measures.

Emotional exhaustion will be measured via items designed to tap the feeling of employees who are under pressure and stress from disrespectful customers. Emotional exhaustion is a state of feeling empty and drained of all emotions; it is a feeling incapable to express anything due to physically and mentally energy levels are low. Maslach et al. (2001) conceptualized emotional exhaustion as a feeling of being overloaded and inefficiencies that depleted energy caused by excessive emotional demands made on people interacting with customers or clients. This paper adopts this principle of emotional exhaustion as a form of psychometric properties of the measures.

Job satisfaction will be measured via items designed to tap a degree to which employees enjoy their job. Locke (1976) conceptualized job satisfaction as an employees' overall affective evaluation towards their jobs and the organization which employs them. This paper adopts this principle of job satisfaction as a form of psychometric properties of the measures.

Employees' perceived job performance will be measured via items designed to tap the perception of oneself to the degree to which they provide the services at their top performed to the customers. Zhu, Yang, and Bai (2016) and Cho et al. (2016) conceptualized job performance as discrete activities performed by an individual that contributes to the core of an organization during a standard unit of time. This paper adopts this principle of employees' perceived job performance as a form of psychometric properties of the measures.

Turnover intentions will be measured via items designed to tap the desire or probability that an employee will change his or her job within a certain time. Carmeli and Weisberg (2006) conceptualized turnover intentions as to the withdrawal process including the thoughts of quitting job, the intention to search for another job, and then intention to quit. This paper adopts this principle turnover intentions as a form of psychometric properties of the measures.

The paper's primary purpose is to identify the relationship between customer incivility, emotional exhaustion, employees' perceived job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. This paper also examines the influence of customer incivility and emotional exhaustion on its consequences, including employees' perceived job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. The conceptualization posits a link between customer incivility and its consequences through emotional exhaustion highlighting the central role of emotional exhaustion in determining customer incivility when measured by employees' perceived job performance, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. This is because high-contact service employees are key

resources who make the organization either superior or inferior. Thus, their state of mind certainly has an impact on the organization's performance.

Conclusions and Managerial Implications

This paper has sought to extend previous theoretical and empirical research on emotional exhaustion and customer incivility in the workplace involving face-to-face interactions between high-contact service employees and customers. Specifically, this paper is the very first conceptual framework that suggests investigating the consequences for the targets of uncivil experiences that occur to the high-contact service employees in four types of outcomes: affective, attitudinal, cognitive, and behavioural. Where emotional exhaustion is an affective outcome of customer incivility, it is a cause that has effects on the magnitude of job satisfaction, employees' perceived job performance, and turnover intentions.

The main managerial implications of such an examination would be, firstly, that it will provide a unique and holistic view to understanding the impact of customer incivility on the emotional experience of high-contact service employees. Secondly, it will contribute to a better understanding of how the high-contact service employees are restrained from scarce resources during the service processes to whom treated them with uncivil manner. Next, it will provide a guideline for managers to foresee the magnitude of the impact that uncivil manners have on the high-contact service employees in terms of their job satisfaction, job performance, and turnover intentions. Last, with the magnitude of the impact disclosed, manager will have a direction of human resource strategies to improve the situations. These include to increase job satisfaction, job performance, and retain talents by lower turnover intentions.

Designing proper strategies and programs are not easy if the real causes do not discover. The results of the study will be a tool for this designing process. The importance of such training programs will enhance the ability of the high-contact service employees to handle the situations. The highlight will be on how the high service contact employees shift their attitude when providing services. The strategies that support the high-contact service employees to learn more about their customers, to have empathy to customers' needs, and to deliver an excellent service outcome will be a turning point that benefits both organization and the high service contact employees themselves. Since the high-contact service employees play a significant role on determined the level of satisfaction/dissatisfaction by customers, their emotional disequilibrium should not be underestimated, therefore highlighting the importance of emotional exhaustion in the service encounter.

The managerial implications of such a study would encompass to advance the recruitment process for high-contact service employees, to evaluate the effectiveness of programs such as effective communication, service attitude, building relationship, and problem-solving skills. The implication would be extended to revisiting the management of the staff's performance and satisfaction through the understanding and management factors contributing to emotional exhaustion. These, in turn, should benefits service-oriented managers to weighing up their competitive advantages on customer satisfaction and organizational performance.

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