Customer incivility and employees' turnover intention in China's hotel: a chain Mediating model

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Abstract

This study explores the relationship between customer incivility and hotel employees' turnover intention in China. The mediating effects of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity were also investigated. The proposed research framework was tested using data from 500 hotel employees who responded to an online questionnaire. The results show that customer incivility affects employees' turnover intention by affecting emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity. Among the three mediating variables, the mediating effect of emotional fatigue is the most obvious. When hotel employees encounter customer incivility, it improves their emotional exhaustion, which will reduce job satisfaction, weaken professional identity, and finally lead to the enhancement of turnover intention. This study proposes a conceptual model of experience development and testing, which enhances the understanding of the relationship between customer incivility and employees' turnover intention and enriches the research on customer incivility.

Introduction

Front-line service employees often have close face-to-face interactions when providing services to customers (Cheng et al., 2020). When interpersonal interaction becomes more and more complex and frequent, the need for civilization becomes more intense (Andersson et al., 1999). In the hotel environment, the visit time of customers is longer, so the interaction between customers and employees is more intense, which increases the possibility of customer incivility (Huang & Miao, 2016; Torres et al., 2017). Customer incivility is defined as treating employees in an uncivilized way, such as rudeness, disrespect or insult (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). Customer incivility is on the increase (Kim & Baker, 2019), such as customers verbally reprimanded employees, bossed employees around, and rudely blamed employees for their service (Baker & Kim, 2020).

In most interactions, front-line employees should smile and be cheerful, regardless of personal feelings or emotions, as service moves towards a service-oriented concept (Chu et al., 2012;). In service workplaces, employees have close contact and communication with customers inevitably. However, when the communication is not pleasant, employees are required to put more energy into the customer, that is, to apologize with words or more considerate service, which is the customer first service principle. In contrast, few people care about the psychological state of hotel employees. Most attacks that occur in the workplace are of a less intense form: verbal rather than physical, passive rather than active, indirect rather than direct, and subtle rather than overt (Baron & Neuman, 1996). In fact, hotel employees not only need to complete their work tasks through partial mental and physical work, but also need to adjust and manage their own emotions timely and strive to maintain a good relationship with customers (Li & Zhou, 2012).

Customer incivility as a research topic has sparked thinking in a number of industries, including bank tellers (Sliter et al., 2010), call centers (Han et al., 2016; Li & Zhou, 2012), tour guides (Wen & Liang, 2020), retail staff (Kern & Grandey, 2009), hotel staff (Alola et al., 2019; Chen & Wang, 2019; Wang et al., 2020), etc. Most studies on customer incivility and turnover intention take emotional exhaustion as the mediating variable to explore (Karatepe et al., 2009; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Sliter et al., 2010; Chu et al., 2012; Li & Zhou, 2012; Alola et al., 2019; Kim and Qu, 2019; Yang and Lau, 2019). In fact, customer incivility is accompanied by other adverse consequences after affecting the emotional exhaustion of employees. Customer incivility will deepen employees' work stress (Baker & Kim, 2020), which is considered as a major source of work stress. It will also aggravate psychological loss, which will affect work behavior, such as performance, job satisfaction and commitment (Nasr et al., 2015). Disrespect in the workplace can lead to depression, disappointment, melancholy, fear, anxiety, confusion, injury and loneliness among employees (Pearson et al., 2001). In addition, it can also affect organizational performance, leading to delays in working hours, decreased employee productivity, low job satisfaction and performance, and weakened organizational loyalty (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Lim et al., 2008). The research on the mechanism of customer incivility affecting turnover intention is insufficient. Therefore, in addition to

emotional exhaustion, it is necessary to introduce two variables, job satisfaction and professional identity, to make a clear and complete discussion of the whole process of influence, to understand the impact of customer incivility on employees' psychology, to help managers to be timely relieve employees' bad emotions and provide a working environment.

This study aims to clarify the influence mechanism of customer incivility on turnover intention. The specific objectives are to measure the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity on the relationship between customer incivility and turnover intention, and to clarify the relationship between emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity. This study has made contributions in both theory and practice, which explains the specific process of customer incivility affecting employees' turnover intention, to help managers understand the harm of customers incivility, and suggest that managers should timely relieve the negative emotions of employees caused by customer incivility rather than letting them tolerate it all the time. In addition, this study enriches the research on customer incivility in the hotel industry.

Literature Review

Customer incivility

When the customer has violated the mutual respect and mutual expression of polite social norms, we say this is customer incivility (Sliter et al., 2010); it is a typical example of the customer's deviant behavior of minor injury. Customer incivility is often seen as a part of work (Han et al., 2016). Because the severity of workplace incivility seems to be mild without any obvious intention of harm, managers think it is unnecessary to pay due attention to it and therefore do not make any necessary intervention, this makes it ubiquitous (Cortina, 2008).

The direct influence of Customer incivility on Turnover intention

Turnover intention describes a psychological tendency of employees to leave their current career, which is the sum of dissatisfaction with the current job, the intention to leave, the willingness and the possibility to find another job (Mobley et al., 1978). Turnover intention is an important antecedent variable to predict employee turnover behavior (Shore & Martin, 1989), and can play a proactive role in employee turnover management. There are many factors affecting the turnover intention of knowledge workers, including macroeconomic factors, enterprise factors, individual attitude towards work, individual demographic variables and personal characteristics, and individual factors unrelated to work (Zhao et al., 2003).

Hershcovis (2011) believes that uncivilization and bullying in the workplace almost have a serious impact on job satisfaction and turnover intention. After dealing with customers incivility, employees have some psychological changes and have a negative attitude towards their work. In a survey conducted by Baker and Kim, 38% of respondents would like to resign to escape (2020). Customer incivility will increase the turnover intention of tour guides (Karatepe et al., 2009), restaurant employees (Han et al., 2016) and hotel employees (Jung et al., 2015; Alola et al., 2019). Thus, when a hotel employee encounters customer incivility, the turnover intention may arise.

Hypothesis 1

Customer incivility will positively influence employees' turnover intention.

Mediating effect of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity

American sociologist Hochschild (1975) explains the concept of emotional discipline and emotional work. Emotional rules are our “should feel” in a variety of situations. By pointing out what is appropriate and desirable expression, emotional work provides a standard for emotional expression. Emotional work measures the efforts made by social members in emotional management, and will be affected by the situation, especially the cultural background.

Emotional exhaustion refers to a state in which “emotional resources are used up”, is employees’ emotional and physiological resources are sense of exhausted and burnout due to the large of emotional resources they spend in work (Li & Shi, 2003), it refers to a state in which emotional resources and associated physical resources are exhausted, is an important element of job burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Emotional labor does not lead to job burnout necessarily, and emotional regulation may alleviate emotional exhaustion and prevent job burnout effectively (Liao & Yan, 2016). When the loss of emotional resources cannot be replenished timely, employees will suffer from emotional exhaustion (Zhao & Xi, 2017). Conservation of resources theory (COR) points out that individuals always tend to strive to obtain, maintain, and preserve valuable resources (Hobfoll, 1989). If the resources owned by the individual are lost and consumed, then new resources need to be obtained to supplement them to ensure that the total amount of resources of the individual reaches a balance. Once the consumed resources are not replenished in a timely manner, individuals produce a series of negative attitudes and behaviors (Vohs et al., 2000).

Obviously, when a hotel employee is subjected to customer incivility, the internal resources of hotel employee are consumed (Hobfoll, 2001). If new resources cannot be supplemented timely, the possibility of negative emotions and even negative behaviors will be enhanced. For employees, when resource consumption and replenishment are at a relatively balanced and sustainable level, the work pressure at this time helps them focus work and promote work performance (LePine et al., 2004). When the resource consumption caused by work exceeds the sustainable level, the pressure of individual resource imbalance will cause physical and mental fatigue of employees, leading to a significant decline in their work enthusiasm and even aversion to work (Zhang et al., 2014). Some scholars analyzed this by combining ethnic factors (Kern & Grandey, 2009). These researchers pointed out that ethnic identity of minority employees strengthened the connection between customer incivility and emotional exhaustion. Han et al. (2016) reported a significant positive correlation between customer incivility and job burnout among first-line restaurant employees. Customer incivility can lead to emotional exhaustion (Grandey et al., 2004; Karatepe et al., 2009; Sliter et al., 2010). In the process of service, employees need to display emotions in their interactions with customers, such as smiling service, to improve service quality and customer satisfaction (Grandey, 2003). High-intensity emotional labor consumes a large number of emotional resources of employees, which leads to emotional exhaustion. Emotional exhaustion will make employees work passively (late, absent) and quit (resign or retire) (Stephane et al., 2002). According to COR and the research of scholars, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 2

Emotional exhaustion will mediate the influence of customer incivility on turnover intention.

Job satisfaction is defined as a positive and pleasant emotional state, which is generated by employees’ evaluation of their work (Locke, 1976), refers to a person’s satisfaction with the job he or she is engaged in. It is a kind of evaluation of the job. Job satisfaction has an impact on employees’ work efficiency and service quality. There are many factors affecting job satisfaction, and some scholars believe that Job motivation is one of them (Silva et al., 2021). The interaction between employees and customers is a dynamic interaction process running through the process of customer consumption, which may have both positive and negative effects (Huang & Xie, 2017). Wang et al. (2008) analyzed the influencing process of customer participation on employee job satisfaction. Shore and Martin (1989) examined the influence of job satisfaction, organizational commitment and job performance on turnover intention.

Employees' turnover is generally not just due to emotional impulse, but more likely to be the accumulation of long-term negative emotional experience that leads to changes in job satisfaction, organizational commitment and other work attitudes. After careful consideration, an overall evaluation judgment of the work is formed, such as "I feel that this will not have development prospect", and then make decisions (Weiss, 2002). During the interaction between employees and customers, any rude or disrespectful customers will increase the pressure, which may affect their overall work and well-being (Chu et al., 2012). Customer incivility creates a deviant working environment, in which employees are vulnerable to emotional fluctuations, resulting in negative feelings towards work, that is, reduced job satisfaction. Thus, turnover intention is generated (Chen & Wang, 2019). Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed.

Hypothesis 3

Job satisfaction will mediate the influence of customer incivility on turnover intention.

Professional identity refers to an individual's consistency, perception and belonging to the occupation he/she is engaged in. It is the individual who defines himself in terms of his occupation (Gu et al., 2019), which reflects the extent to which an individual defines himself/herself based on his/her perception of the occupation characteristics (Ashforth et al., 2008). Research on professional identity mainly focuses on university teachers (Sachs, 2001; Beijgaard et al., 2004; Wei et al., 2017), medical personnel (Applebaum et al., 2010; Chen, 2015; Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2015) and other groups, and there are insufficient studies on the professional identity of hotel employees (Wang et al., 2020). Employees with a high level of professional identity have a clear understanding and recognition of their career and will make corresponding attitudes and behaviors according to occupational requirements (Hekman et al., 2009). Teachers with different levels of professional identity have different characteristics of social cognitive processing of professional life events, comparatively speaking, teachers with the high level of professional identity have more positive and effective social cognitive processing (Wei et al., 2017).

When people identify strongly with a group, they are very concerned about the welfare of that group and their place within it (Tyler & Blader, 2003). Professional identity is the perception of occupational identity and belonging, that is, how individuals view their relationship with their occupation. If a person identifies with his occupation, he may realize his value from it or the occupation reflects his ability (Ashforth et al., 2008). Customer incivility damages employees' sense of belonging to work and weakens their loyalty to the organization (Pearson & Porath, 2005; Lim et al., 2008), employees may choose to leave the enterprise. Thus, leads to the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 4

professional identity will mediate the influence of customer incivility on turnover intention.

Customer incivility can affect several aspects of the hotel employees (behavior, thoughts, emotions, etc.), such as hotel employee's mental health and quality of life (Baker & Kim, 2020). In addition to work, it also has a negative impact that cannot be ignored in non-work areas (Kim M & Kim B, 2017).

Cognitive-affective personality system theory (CAPS) believes that the events that people encounter will interact with the complex cognitive-emotional units (CAUs) in the personality system, and ultimately determine people's behavior. CAPS pointing out that individual cognitive-emotional units are not isolated and static, but interact and influence each other to form a unique personality network structure in a stable manner (Mischel et al., 1995). When faced with an event or situational feature, certain cognitive-affective units will be activated and produce specific interaction effects, thereby producing specific situational alienation of cognitive emotions and behaviors. Therefore, we believe that emotional exhaustion may affect other emotional units of hotel employee in the process of affecting turnover intention. In the medical field, research by Zhao et al. (2016) showed that nurses' job satisfaction can predict turnover intention

significantly. Chen (2015) pointed out in her research that nurses' professional identity has a significant impact on the turnover intention.

Employees' emotional reactions can affect their work attitudes (such as job satisfaction, etc.). When employees are in the condition of emotional exhaustion, they will show a series of negative work attitudes and behaviors, such as reducing effort, perfunctory, and even adopting evasive strategies to protect and maintain their emotional resources. In the long run, they will have the idea of leaving. (Zhao & Xi, 2017), Emotional exhaustion has a significant negative effect on job satisfaction, and has a positive effect on turnover intention (Jung et al., 2015). An increase in mood disorders can lead to a decline in job satisfaction, with more emotionally 'tired' employees reporting lower job satisfaction (Chu et al., 2012). The improvement of job satisfaction is of great significance to the improvement of professional identity (Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2015). According to CAPS, add to some evidence from earlier studies, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 5

Emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity have a multiple mediating effect between customer incivility and turnover intention.

Method

Sampling and data collection

Online R software was used to measure the minimum sample size (Preacher & Coffman, 2006). A power analysis for the not close model fit ($\alpha = 0.05$; statistical power = 0.8; null root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.05; and alternative RMSEA = 0.08 (MacCallum et al., 1996); $df = 160$) showed the minimum sample size of 97.

Due to the work characteristics of hotel employee, it is difficult to conduct a field survey of hotel employee. Therefore, this paper adopts the method of online questionnaire survey to collect data. In this study, we used the Credamo platform to issue questionnaires and collect data. To ensure the accuracy of the data, we conducted simulation answers before the questionnaire was given. Verify the logic of the questionnaire by simulating the answers, and then modify the items of the questionnaire. The survey was conducted in September 2020 and collected 654 pieces of data. After collecting enough questionnaires, the collected data should be screened and eliminated, such as deleting the questionnaires with short answer time and inconsistent logic. This step was to prevent the collection of invalid data. Finally, 500 valid questionnaires were collected, with an effective recovery rate of 76.45%. The sample size exceeded 97, met the quantity requirement and had an adequate level of statistical power which was over 0.99.

Measurement item

Questionnaire mainly includes customer incivility, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, professional identity, turnover intention and personal information six parts, These items were evaluated on 5-point Likert-type scales (from 1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). To improve the accuracy of the questionnaire, based on the existing scale and combined with the results of simulation responses, the structure, layout and item description of the questionnaire were modified to determine the formal questionnaire suitable for the study.

Customer incivility was measured by 5 items using a scale developed by Martin et al. (2005) and Wilson et al. (2013), the Cronbach's alpha for scores from this five-item scale was 0.842.

Emotional exhaustion was measured by 4 items using a scale developed by Maslach et al. (2001), the Cronbach's alpha for scores from this four-item scale was 0.896.

Job satisfaction was measured by 3 items using a scale compiled by Brayfield and Rothe (1951), the Cronbach's alpha for scores from this three-item scale was 0.901.

Professional identity was measured by 5 items using a scale developed by Mael and Ashforth (1992), the Cronbach's alpha for scores from this five-item scale was 0.928.

Turnover intention was measured by 4 items using a scale developed by Griffeth and Hom (1995), the Cronbach's alpha for scores from this four-item scale was 0.930.

The basic information of the sample includes sex, age, working hours, monthly salary and other 10 aspects.

Data analysis

The measurement model (convergent and discriminant validity) and internal consistency reliability (composite reliability) were tested with confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). A bootstrapping method with 5000 sample-size generated at 95% confidence interval (CI) was adopted to test the significance of the indirect effect analysis via SPSS. Minimum discrepancy (CMIN) with degrees of freedom (DF); parsimony normed fit index (PNFI); incremental fit index (IFI); comparative fit index (CFI); standardized root mean square residual (SRMR); root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) were used to estimate the measurement and structural models.

Results

Sample characteristics

The results of sample characteristics are shown in Table 1. A total of 500 participants participated in the study, including 217 males (43.4%) and 283 females (56.6%). The 500 respondents were mainly between the ages of 23 and 35 (90.2%). Employees are well-educated and have a high school education or above (93.2%). In these answers, most employees have long-term work experience. 80.8% of employees have worked for 2 to 10 years, and some employees even have more than 10 years of work experience (5.6%). More than half of the respondents' monthly salary ranged from 3000 yuan to 6000 yuan (55.4%), and the proportion of respondents with 6000 yuan was 36.0%. Most employees come from four-star hotels (47%).

Table 1

Demographic profile of respondents (N=500)

Variables	Options	Frequency	Proportion%
Gender	male	217	43.4
	female	283	56.6
Age	Age 22 and under	12	2.4
	23 to 25 years old	112	22.4
	26 to 28 years old	193	38.6
	29 to 35 years old	146	29.2
	More than 35 years old	37	7.4
Educational level	Under the high school	34	6.8
	college	141	28.2
	Undergraduate course	314	62.8
	Master and above	11	2.2
Work Experience	Less than 2 years	68	13.6
	2 to 5 years	278	55.6
	6 to 10 years	126	25.2
	More than ten years	28	5.6
Monthly income	2000 yuan and under	1	0.2
	2001 to 3000 yuan	42	8.4
	3001 to 6000 yuan	277	55.4
	More than 6000 yuan	180	36.0
The hotel level	No level (including homestay)	29	5.8
	Three stars and below	145	29.0
	Four-star	235	47.0
	Five-star	91	18.2

Measurement model

AMOS 26.0 was used in this study to verify the structure of each measurement variable. A stable factor structure ($\chi^2/df = 1.692$, NFI = 0.964, RFI = 0.958, IFI = 0.985, TLI = 0.982, CFI = 0.985, RMSEA = 0.037) was obtained by deleting the items with factor load less than 0.7 and correction coefficient higher in both dimensions. The data analysis results (see Table 2) show that the factor loading coefficient of each item on the measured potential variables is greater than 0.7, and the average extracted variance value (AVE) of latent variables is more than 0.5, indicating that the variable has a high convergence validity. The Cronbach's α and the combined reliability coefficient (CR) of all variables are both higher than 0.7, showing good reliability. AVE square root of latent variables are greater than the latent variables and other latent variable correlation coefficient (below the diagonal data), this indicates that the latent variable factor to explain with the corresponding measurement variance of the project, is far greater than the project for the other measurement variance

explained, as a result, the distinguish between latent variables have good validity (see Table 3). The variance inflation factor (VIF) of latent variables is all less than 5, far less than the warning value of 10, and there is no serious multicollinearity problem between variables.

Table 2

Convergence validity.

Variable	Item	Parameter significance estimation				Factor loading	The questions the reliability	Composite Reliability	Convergent validity
		Unstd	S.E.	T-value	P				
Customer incivility	Customers use body language to show me their impatience	1.000				0.716	0.513	0.843	0.518
	Customers complain that my service is too slow at the peak of the hotel reception	1.075	0.078	13.822	***	0.695	0.483		
	Customers make negative comments about the hotel in my presence	1.013	0.070	14.533	***	0.737	0.543		
	The customer blamed me for nothing	1.083	0.075	14.432	***	0.731	0.534		
	The customer complained to me about the goods and service of the hotel	1.009	0.071	14.254	***	0.720	0.518		
Emotional exhaustion	I am very tired at times when I work in a hotel	1.000				0.816	0.666	0.898	0.691
	I'm afraid the work will affect my mood	0.907	0.055	16.623	***	0.686	0.471		
	I often feel exhausted	1.262	0.052	24.156	***	0.907	0.823		
	I feel very tired when I finish the day's work	1.184	0.050	23.859	***	0.896	0.803		
Job satisfaction	I am satisfied with my work	1.000				0.865	0.748	0.904	0.759

	I like my job	1.215	0.048	25.082	***	0.901	0.812
	I like working here in the hotel	1.151	0.049	23.501	***	0.846	0.716
Professional identity	I like my present job very much	1.000				0.832	0.692
						0.930	0.726
	If I had to choose again, I would still choose my current career	1.137	0.047	24.375	***	0.875	0.766
	As long as my financial situation is not tight, I will still pursue my current career	1.001	0.046	21.740	***	0.813	0.661
	The present career is very ideal, I don't want to give up	1.228	0.049	25.172	***	0.893	0.797
	I am now engaged in an ideal career, worth pursuing for a lifetime	1.234	0.053	23.091	***	0.845	0.714
Turnover intention	I often want to leave my present organization or industry	1.000				0.923	0.852
						0.931	0.772
	I have no long-term development plan in this organization or industry	0.908	0.035	25.876	***	0.818	0.669
	I am often bored with my present job and want to change my new company or industry	1.005	0.029	34.136	***	0.922	0.850
	In the next six months, I may leave this	0.887	0.032	27.955	***	0.847	0.717

Note: *** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05. CFA = confirmatory factor analysis; AVE = average variance extracted.

Table 3

Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis.

Variable	Mean	SD	AVE	1	2	3	4	5
1.Customer Incivility	2.497	0.689	0.518	0.720				
2.Emotional exhaustion	3.247	1.040	0.691	0.586**	0.831			
3.Job satisfaction	3.872	0.857	0.759	-0.375**	-0.387**	0.871		
4.Professional identity,	3.658	0.899	0.726	-0.376**	-0.410**	0.915**	0.852	
5.Turnover intention	2.339	1.074	0.772	0.432**	0.514**	-0.834**	-0.820**	0.879

Note: ** means significant at p < 0.01 (bilateral) and * means significant at p < 0.05 (bilateral). Figures in bold of are square root of AVE.

Structural model

Structural equation modelling analysis with a maximum likelihood method was performed to validate the proposed research model depicted in Figure 1. The results indicated a reasonable model fit, $\chi^2 = 254.941$, $df = 160$ ($p < 0.001$), $\chi^2/df = 1.692$, CFI = 0.988, GFI = 0.952, and RMSEA = 0.034. Structural equation models are used to test hypotheses. The direct prediction effect of customer incivility on the turnover intention of hotel employees was not significant ($\beta = 0.10$, $p > 0.05$). According to this result, hypothesis 1 was rejected. However, the turnover intention of employees was positively predicted in general ($\beta = 0.59$, $p < 0.001$). The full model path coefficients were shown in Figure 2.

The mediating effect test

This study adopted the deviation corrected non-parametric percentage Bootstrap test (Fang et al., 2012). This study uses Hayes' SPSS process macro (model 6) to verify the mediation effect. It provides more than 70 models, and model 6 is used in this study, allowing up to four mediators to work in series. This study used a triple intermediary model; after repeated sampling for 5000 times, 95% confidence interval was calculated to test the mediating effects.

Emotional exhaustion played a significant mediating role between customer incivility and turnover intention; the 95% confidence interval of Bootstrap=5000 is [0.1070, 0.2269], hypothesis 2 was verified. Job satisfaction also played a significant mediating role between customer incivility and turnover intention; the 95% confidence interval of Bootstrap=5000 is [0.0475, 0.1855], assuming that hypothesis 3 could be verified. Emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction have significant mediating effects on customer incivility and turnover intention, and the mediating effect is still significant after adding professional identity variables. However, when only professional identity is used as the mediating variable, the mediation effect is not significant (see Table 4). The 95% confidence interval of Bootstrap=5000 is [-0.0153, 0.0487], including 0. Hypothesis 4 is not accepted. Multiple mediating effects of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and professional identity on customer incivility and turnover intention were confirmed, the longest mediating effect was established, hypothesis 5 is verified. In the effect of customer incivility on turnover intention, 92.29% was indirect.

Table 4

The mediating effect test of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity.

The path	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI	Relative mediating proportion
TOTAL	0.5450	0.0582	0.4324	0.6583	92.29%
CI->EE->TI	0.1625	0.0309	0.1070	0.2269	27.52%
CI->JS->TI	0.1106	0.0352	0.0475	0.1855	18.73%
CI->PI->TI	0.0155	0.0163	-0.0153	0.0487	2.62%
CI->EE->JS->TI	0.0803	0.0188	0.0467	0.1193	13.60%
CI->EE->PI->TI	0.0266	0.0101	0.0091	0.0484	4.50%
CI->JS->PI->TI	0.0866	0.0268	0.0379	0.1440	14.67%
CI->EE->JS->PI->TI	0.0629	0.0163	0.0351	0.0987	10.65%

Note: CI is Customer Incivility, EE is Emotional Exhaustion, PI is Professional Identity, JS is Job Satisfaction, and TI is Turnover Intention.

Discussion And Implications

Instances of service employees being unfriendly or assaulted by customers are common and getting worse (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). A large number of vicious incidents caused by customer incivility and existing studies have shown that employees often find it difficult to adjust their mentality quickly after experiencing rude behaviors from outside, which may lead to serious consequences (Wen & Hou, 2015). The hotel service process is a process in which employees and customers realize the production and consumption of experiential spiritual products in a high degree of contact (Tian & Zuo, 2013). Employees' work skills, social communication skills and psychological emotions can all have a significant impact on the overall service quality and satisfaction perceived by customers (Tian & Zuo, 2010), customers and their behaviors will also change the mood and attitude of employees, thus affecting the service quality (Ma & Dube, 2011; Madupalli & Poddar, 2014). If managers do not deal with the negative emotions of the employees, employees may have turnover behavior and eventually face the deterioration of the hotel service quality.

Companies and academics did not fully appreciate the importance of employees, which ignored employees' feelings and emotional reactions to customers' deviant behaviors (Han et al., 2016). Employees are a significant resource of the enterprise, the turnover behavior of them will lead to the loss of enterprise resources, hotel managers should pay attention to the emotional changes of employees, follow the people-oriented principle. From the research, we can see that customer incivility has an obvious impact on employees' turnover intention. Customer incivility has a significant impact on employees' psychological well-being and work quality-of-life (Baker & Kim, 2020).

This study deeply analyzes the relationship between customer incivility and turnover intention by introducing three mediating variables: emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and professional identity. The results showed that hotel employees experienced a series of psychological changes after customer's uncivilized treatment. Employees who suffer from customer incivility will consume their emotional resources, this once again confirmed the correctness of COR, and more seriously, lead to emotional exhaustion, which will affect their job satisfaction and further reduce their professional identity for hotel work, thus enhancing their turnover intention. As described by CAPS, employees' enthusiasm for work will be reduced after their emotions are consumed, which is also consistent with the previous research. Interestingly, in this study, customer incivility does not directly affect employees' professional identity, but it can directly affect employees' emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. Professional identity is the internalization of one's professional values, the identification of one's career and the psychological unification (Trede, Macklin, & Bridges, 2012). As a sense of

belonging built in employees' hearts, professional identity cannot be easily shaken, which may be the reason why customer incivility cannot directly affect employees' professional identity. On the other hand, the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion is more significant than that of job satisfaction, it echoes some previous studies.

Theoretical implications

The theoretical contributions of this study are threefold. First, this study extends the incivility literature, and the mediating role of emotional exhaustion has been confirmed in previous studies (Karatepe et al., 2009; Kern & Grandey, 2009; Sliter et al., 2010; Chu et al., 2012; Li & Zhou, 2012; Alola et al., 2019; Kim and Qu, 2019; Yang and Lau, 2019). However, this study points out that job satisfaction and professional identity can also play a mediating role in the relationship between customer incivility and employees' turnover intention. Second, this study shows the influence process between three mediating variables. Customer incivility can lead to negative psychological state of employees (Pearson et al., 2001; Baker & Kim, 2020) and a series of poor job performance (Stephane & Morgan, 2002; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Lim et al., 2008; Hershcovis, 2011). When customer incivility leads to employees' turnover intention, it is accompanied by a series of psychological changes of employees. This study shows that customer incivility will lead to emotional exhaustion of employees, and then affect their job satisfaction, this will lead to the decline of professional identity and will eventually produce turnover intention. Finally, the data used in this study are from hotel employees in China while researches on customer incivility in China are few and lagging behind (Zhao, Wu, & Gao, 2016). Especially in tourism and hospitality industry, China is relatively under-represented. This study provided significant empirical evidence and a theoretical basis for discussing the service work of hotel employees in China, which is of local representative significance.

Practical implications

This study provided some practical inspirations for management. Although uncivilized behavior in the workplace is essentially a low-intensity and uncertain behavior, it is considered as one of terrifying behaviors, and the improper behavior of service personnel will lead to poor work results (Porath et al., 2015; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Sliter et al., 2012). When employees' emotions are suppressed, and internal resources are consumed, hotel managers should give necessary care to supplement the consumption of "internal resources". Managers are key in alleviating the pain of front-line employees and controlling negative results, they can increase work resources for employees by cultivating resources, thus creating a good resource cycle (Hobfoll et al., 2018). The most common forms of support that employees expect to receive are interactive, emotional and procedural support. Corporate policy and management actions or inaction are important factors that reduce or aggravate the negative impact of customer rudeness. (Baker & Kim, 2020). Hotel management employee in daily work, should pay attention to the occurrence of impolite behavior of customers, can remind customers or relieve employee of the negative emotions caused by this gently and timely. In addition, regular private conversations can be held to learn about employees' psychological state, and programs such as "comfort awards" can be set up to console employees who have been treated impolitely by customers.

Whether to provide staff with material and emotional care, or to strengthen employee's psychological quality in the face of impolite behavior, are not touched to the fundamental method. The most critical, is to prevent the occurrence of customer incivility from the source. For customer incivility, signs can be set up in the hotel to publicize the harm of impolite behavior. Video can be played in the hotel lobby to popularize the knowledge of customer impoliteness. Conduct regular lectures on deviant manners to customers. In short, the hotel needs to make customers understand the meaning of politeness and set up signs in the hotel to remind customers to abide by the code of conduct.

Limitations and future research

While this research contributes to incivility research, it has limitations and offers potential avenues for future research. First, the variable measurement scale adopted in this study is not based on China, while China's culture has a long history and has unique characteristics. Future research should modify the scale design according to the local cultural

background of China. Second, only a few employees working in hotels are selected as samples in this study. The applicability of the research results is limited, so the selection of research samples should be widened to achieve the purpose of closer authenticity and representativeness. Third, this study did not introduce moderator variables. According to the research of other scholars, organizational support, colleague care and so on can be used as the moderating variables in the influencing process of customer incivility to turnover intention (Wen & Liang, 2020; Zhao & Xi, 2017; Li et al., 2020), but this part was not involved in this study. Finally, the antecedent variables of customer incivility are not explored in this study. In the future, new studies will be developed to make up for the deficiencies of this study based on the above aspects.

Declarations

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, B.P. and S.J.; Methodology, B.P.; Formal analysis, B.P. and S.J.; Investigation, B.P., S.J. and W.S.; Writing-original draft preparation, B.P., S.J.; Writing-review and editing, B.P., S.J. and W.S.; Supervision, B.P.; Funding acquisition, B.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Figures

Figure 1. Proposed Research Model.

Figure 1

Proposed Research Model.

Figure 2. Structural model results. Notes: n = 500; * p < 0.05, *** p < 0.001

Figure 2

Structural model results. Notes: $n = 500$; * $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.001$