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Examination of the antecedents and the outcomes of customer incivility: a case study in the Vietnamese hospitality industry

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Abstract: This study aims to test the antecedents and outcomes of customer incivility in the Vietnamese hospitality industry. This study followed a quantitative approach. Data were gathered from a sample of 477 customers who dealt with employees in hospitality organisations. The results of this study suggest that customer incivility is primarily predicted by service environment, service orientation, training/knowledge, and service-representative incivility. The results also showed that customer incivility significantly affects forgiveness and vengeance. Moreover, forgiveness significantly and positively influenced customer-oriented behaviour, and vengeance significantly affected dysfunctional employee behaviour. Finally, demographic factors such as the male sex, low education levels, and younger employees had higher scores on customer incivility than the female sex, high education levels, and older employees. This study investigates the antecedents and outcomes of customer incivility in the Vietnamese hospitality industry.

Keywords: customer incivility; service representative incivility; incivility; hospitality industry; Vietnam.

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1 Introduction

Most service organisations struggle to improve service quality by enhancing staff performance to enhance customer loyalty (Shin and Hur, 2022; Yue et al., 2021; Al-Hawari et al., 2020). According to Al-Hawari et al. (2020) and Balaji et al. (2017), frontline employees (FLEs) are considered a crucial part of expressing service orientation and boosting customer retention by directly attracting trust and faith. However, FLEs are likely to frequently suffer rude actions and uncivil attitudes from their customers when dealing with them in service functions, including in the restaurant and hotel sectors (Pu et al., 2022; Hwang et al., 2022; Frey-Cordes et al., 2020). Under such circumstances, FLEs experience more feelings of unhappiness and disappointment, making it difficult to focus on their job; they are also likely to experience negative outcomes such as job-related stress, diminished motivation, psychologically negative behaviour, and poor performance (Hur et al., 2022; Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Boukis et al., 2020; Kim and Qu, 2019; Torres et al., 2017).

Customer incivility is defined as ‘low-quality interpersonal treatment from customers that employees pick up and stand for during service interactions’ (Boukis et al., 2020). In the service industry, particularly the hospitality field, the slogans ‘the customer is god’ or ‘the customer is always right’ can pose a potential burden towards frontline personnel while trying to please customers and meet their needs (Hwang et al., 2022; Zahoor and Siddiqi, 2023; Yang and Lau, 2019; Han et al., 2016). Empirical studies show that client rudeness can negatively influence FLEs, such as reduced work engagement (Mostafa, 2022; Ugwu et al., 2022), hindered creativity (Zhan et al., 2018; Hur et al., 2021), empirical studies show that client rudeness can negatively influence FLEs, such as reduced work engagement, hindered creativity, and impaired task performance (Hur et al., 2021, 2022). The concept of customer incivility has gained popularity among scholars, including Kamran-Disfani et al. (2022), Li et al. (2021), Cheng et al. (2020), Zhu et al. (2019) and Torres et al. (2017), and the hotel and restaurant sectors. Additionally, it has been found that supervisor trustworthiness determines the quality of their relationships with subordinates, leading to interpersonal liking. This relationship quality significantly influences subordinate reactions to the performance appraisal process and outcomes (Varma et al., 2021).

Previous studies have investigated the different ways FLEs react to customer incivility, that is, through forgiveness and vengeance (Joireman et al., 2016; Sliter and Jones, 2016), leading to customer-oriented behaviour and dysfunctional employee

behaviour (Aquino et al., 2006; Balaji et al., 2020). Understanding FLEs' reactions to customer incivility has important implications for service providers to cement foundational service orientation and upgrade service quality in organisations (Zahoor and Siddiqi, 2023; Balaji et al., 2020; Alola et al., 2019; Kim and Qu, 2019). Discovering the factors contributing to customer incivility can significantly help enterprises address this phenomenon (Chan et al., 2022; Yue et al., 2021; Sliter and Jones, 2016). There are several well-known works regarding customer incivility in developed nations (e.g., Aboodi and Allameh, 2019; Al-Hawari et al., 2020). However, to the best of our knowledge, few have concentrated on emerging market economies, such as Vietnam. Various studies have only discovered antecedents (Kiffin-Petersen and Soutar, 2020; Sliter and Jones, 2016; Sliter et al., 2010) or outcomes (Zhu et al., 2019; Yang and Lau, 2019; Torres et al., 2017), while several others have connected both aspects in an extended model. Several studies focus on the entertainment, education, and nursing fields. However, there is a lack of research in the hospitality industry, despite there being no difference between the restaurant and hotel sectors with respect to this phenomenon. The current study explores the connection between antecedents of customer incivility, (i.e., service environment, service orientation, training/knowledge, and service representative incivility) and outcomes, (i.e., customer-oriented behaviour and dysfunctional employee behaviour) through FLE responses (i.e., forgiveness and vengeance) to fill this gap in the literature.

This study makes three main contributions to the literature. First, we claim that at least four antecedents of services impact customer incivility. Second, we theoretically and empirically investigate the vital roles of FLEs' forgiveness and vengeance in comprehending their response to customer incivility in terms of customer-oriented and dysfunctional behaviour. Finally, we specify several demographic factors, (i.e., gender, age, and education) as control variables in the level of customer incivility and find no difference in this phenomenon between the restaurant and hotel sectors.

2 Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1 Customer incivility

Andersson and Pearson (1999) provide the most widely cited definition of workplace incivility. They stated that incivility is a low-intensity deviant behaviour with an ambiguous intent to harm the target, violating workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviours are described as rude, disrespectful, and impolite actions with an ambiguous intent to harm the target (Loh et al., 2022; Szczygiel and Bazińska, 2021; Loh and Loi, 2018). Workplace incivility has typically been investigated from the perspective of employee-to-employee interactions. However, incivility also occurs when the customer perpetrates incivility towards an employee of the organisation (Kuok et al., 2022; Yue et al., 2021; Sliter et al., 2010). As a branch of study on workplace incivility (Andersson and Pearson, 1999), studies on customer perpetration have increasingly focused on the hospitality industry, wherein FLEs are constantly exposed to high-stress environments that involve customer incivility (Hwang et al., 2022; Shin and Hur, 2022; Cheng et al., 2020).

Customer incivility is defined as low-intensity deviant behaviour perpetrated by someone in a customer or client role with ambiguous intent to harm an employee, violating social norms of mutual respect and courtesy (Cheng et al., 2020; Sliter et al., 2010). It is also defined as employees' perceptions that customers treat them in a rude, impolite, and discourteous manner (Hur et al., 2022; Alola et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2014). Customer incivility includes rudeness, inappropriate behaviours, verbal abuse, derogatory remarks, and over-demanding requirements, which can harm face-to-face service employees (Chan et al., 2022; Yang and Lau, 2019; Sliter and Jones, 2016). This phenomenon in the service field could have harsh consequences for both service FLEs and organisations (Mostafa, 2022; Zhu et al., 2019; Walker et al., 2014) and could lead them to bend over backwards to meet customers' requests (Yue et al., 2021; Yang and Lau, 2019; Han et al., 2016).

Customer incivility can be considered a form of customer mistreatment, a low-quality interpersonal skill that service representatives acquire during service interactions (Pu et al., 2022; Szczygiel and Bazińska, 2021; Yang and Lau, 2019). This is particularly true for FLEs in restaurant and hotel functions (Hwang et al., 2022; Kim and Qu, 2019; Torres et al., 2017; Han et al., 2016). In this study, customer incivility is considered a mediator of the model.

2.2 Antecedents

2.2.1 Service environment

The service environment is considered to be closely connected not only with organisational commitment but also with job satisfaction via citizenship and prosocial behaviours (Williams and Anderson, 1991). To enhance service quality, the influence in the service environment is said to be one of the customers' evaluations directly linked with service employees' performance (Loh et al., 2022; Bettencourt and Brown, 1997). Moreover, it is reasonable to believe that an attempt by an organisation relating to the service environment can dramatically improve service quality and considerably improve customer perceptions (Kuok et al., 2022; Testa, 2001).

Several scholars have indicated that service quality and delivery processes are related to customer satisfaction (Sliter and Jones, 2016). This is why many environmental factors, (i.e., layout, long lines, noise, cleanliness of the store, and temperature) were noted to directly affect negative results for customers and pose them to act uncivilly. Therefore, most believe that failure in a service environment is easily comprehensible to drive almost all customers into disagreeable feelings and even lead to uncivil attitudes. Conversely, the more satisfactory the service environment, the more pleasure clients can obtain, preventing dissatisfaction (Bettencourt and Brown, 1997).

In addition, according to Sliter and Jones (2016), Turley and Milliman (2000), and Schappe (1998), it is completely reasonable to assume that various aspects of the service environment, including stressors, can cause several customers to display uncivil actions on FLEs. Consequently, customer perceptions of lower service quality can significantly lead to incivility toward service representatives. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 The service environment negatively influences customer incivility.

2.2.2 *Service orientation*

There is a basic measurement scale for service orientation comprised of ten dimensions: servant leadership, service vision, customer treatment, employee empowerment, service training, service rewards, service failure prevention, service failure/recovery, service technology, and service standards communication (Lytle et al., 1998). According to Homburg et al. (2002), in addition to awareness of policies, procedures, and practices, service orientation is examined through internal design characteristics.

Service orientation toward FLEs is a potential antecedent of customer incivility. It can be conceptualised as a variable that upgrades attentiveness, responsiveness, and customer demand (Mostafa, 2022; Sliter and Jones, 2016). Previous studies on service orientation support the statement that service employees with high service orientation can exhibit good behaviours towards their customers, reducing incivility and meeting customer needs.

Lytle and Timmerman (2006), Homburg et al. (2002), and Lytle et al. (1998) explain that FLEs were regarded as unprofessional when they ignored a client because they attended to others or when they responded to a customer without smiling. Many potential customers believe that service employees cannot meet their standards, resulting from a lack of service orientation. Along with a better and clearer service orientation, the service staff must have a stable foundation to satisfy their clients and eliminate their incidentally negative feelings. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2 Service orientation negatively influences customer incivility.

2.2.3 *Training/knowledge*

Knowledge is a key foundation for every value in society and the physical world along with the inevitable era of the ‘knowledge boom’ has resulted from globalisation trends and technological expansion (Stromquist and Monkman, 2014); however, various training approaches boost reflection in the learning process (Hwang et al., 2022; Hwang, 2003). Intending to enhance knowledge, Dodgson (1993) assumes that the learning process has different levels (e.g., individual, group, and corporate). Preferably, the majority consider training to be a transmission towards abstract knowledge (Cunningham, 1992) and a keyway to nurturing both knowledge transfer and construction (Kuok et al., 2022; Hwang, 2003).

Training for service employees plays a potential role in improving staff soft skills to lessen customer dissatisfaction, rudeness, and incivility, as well as in reducing or preventing service representatives’ mistakes. Sliter and Jones (2016) proposed that training FLEs can offer them more opportunities to absorb and comprehend specific knowledge and social skills and utilise them to advocate for their scholars. With the leaven that knowledge value is accidental to everyone’s purpose and greed, and how much we possess, it is no exaggeration to say that we are under the trend of endeavouring to conquer our goal of comprehending and satisfying customers.

The lack of training or competency of FLEs, (i.e., indicating inaccurate information, fixing incorrect issues, not comprehending matters, and giving incorrect answers) is the reason ‘why customers acted uncivil or became uncivil’, which demonstrates service workers’ unprofessionalism in the customers’ minds (Hwang et al., 2022; Liu et al., 2019; Milam et al., 2009; Sliter and Jones, 2016). Training from the organisation is crucial in improving academic knowledge and upgrading indispensable skills for every

staff's career path, which advocates better service quality and prevents clients' uncivil behaviour. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3 Training/knowledge negatively influences customer incivility.

2.2.4 Service representative incivility

Service employee incivility or service representative-perpetrated incivility considers that a service representative initially perpetrates incivility and, in turn, elicits uncivil behaviours from their customer (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Listed as a practical instance according to Sliter and Jones (2016), this phenomenon occurs when FLEs have incorrect body language, (e.g., not making eye contact, not smiling, or having a curling lip), ignoring attitudes, (e.g., playing on their mobile phones), and use rude language (e.g., raising voice).

According to appraisal theorists, service employees' actions include verbal and non-verbal, promoting reserve impacts on customer perceptions (Testa, 2001); in contrast, service-representative emotions involve two general stages: suppressing negative emotions and faking positive emotions (Glomb and Tews, 2004), leading to the relationship between customer incivility and their outcomes, as indicated in Sliter et al.'s (2010) study. Following the efforts of Hur et al. (2022) and Walker et al. (2014), it seems obvious that customer incivility can easily drive FLEs to provide uncivil service and then complete an uncivil service interaction.

Service representative incivility is a key reason for customers' rudeness and uncivil attitudes (Walker et al., 2014). This indicates that when FLEs display bad behaviour towards their customers (considered as treating customers uncivilly); customers will become rude and give incivility back to service employees. This means that rudeness from FLEs will result in consistent incivility among their customers (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Sliter and Jones, 2016). There is no denying that 'an eye for an eye' is an inevitable phenomenon with an obvious consequence on human society, leading to continuous interaction between two objects (customer and service employee). Overall, the worse the attitudes the FLEs display, the more client incivility they may receive, and vice versa. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 4 Service representative incivility positively influences customer incivility.

2.3 Outcomes

2.3.1 Forgiveness and vengeance

Forgiveness is a culturally available category in which humans tend to associate with a frequently defined set of behaviours and attitudes, including making sense, offering a new interpretation of any past actions, overcoming anger or guilt, gaining a clean feeling, and being able to consider or interact with any offending aggrieved individuals (Wuthnow, 2000). There has been a boom in forgiveness development theories in human society over the past two decades (Enright and Fitzgibbons, 2000; Fincham, 2000).

According to Worthington and Sandage (2016), forgiveness and empathy have been identified in human brain zones and negatively correlate with anxiety in clinical observations. Forgiveness is significantly crucial to curing harsh conflicts in the daily rat race and is a key internal process to relinquish anger and resentment towards

discourteous customers. According to previous studies, the forgiveness process includes three main stages: decreasing negative cognitions, removing negative feelings, and transferring potentially hostile behaviours.

FLEs can suffer pain while maintaining new attitudes through internal processes. However, internal morality drives FLEs to forgive uncivil customers. To achieve organisational goals, service providers should maintain forgiveness as a crucial factor in customer-serving roles. Therefore, service providers often intend to serve discourteous customers in the future to some extent (Balaji et al., 2020). In summary, professional reactions in unexpected situations during service stages can raise the value of a service provider. Customer incivility could be considered a harsh case for a key choice and vital ideal, making FLEs directly choose forgiveness, patience, and empathy as wise responses. Moreover, customer incivility is typically framed as a social job stressor associated with negative outcomes (Walker et al., 2014), such as forgiveness (Balaji et al., 2020). Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5 Customer incivility negatively influences FLEs' forgiveness.

As vengeance is an integral part of being human, vengeful behaviour is common and natural (Mocan, 2008). However, Elster (1990) defines vengeance as an attempt to impose suffering on those who have made one suffer at the cost of oneself. Generally, it has been argued that vengeful behaviour or revenge could stop various potential offenders from committing and considering similar crimes (Cota-McKinley et al., 2001).

In addition, according to Kim and Smith (1993), revenge is frequently linked to an originally offended individual's self-worth; nevertheless, an individual with only a little power is likely to seek vengeance against more powerful adversaries, even if overwhelming costs are indicated because of their actions. In the contemporary service industry, vengeance is an awareness of revenge as a desire to take revenge on rude customers towards a service employee and the agency in general.

Vengeance is also defined as FLEs' thoughts and feelings towards uncivil customers regarding perceived harm or wrongdoing. Intending to reveal employees' self-esteem, they intend to act on revenge cognition and feelings differently (Balaji et al., 2020). While many FLEs can keep their heads down and control themselves by withholding benefits and help, others choose vengeance by being aggressive or rude towards their uncivil customers (Hongbo et al., 2019; Bedi and Schat, 2017). There are debates regarding give-and-take; therefore, it is critical for the majority's mindset that revenge-oriented reactions frequently occur and are considered appropriate after anyone, particularly an FLE, receives unacceptable attitudes from clients. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6 Customer incivility positively influences FLEs' vengeance.

2.3.2 Customer-oriented behaviour and dysfunctional employee behaviour

Customer orientation is described as enterprise orientation on customer needs that are planned and designed in official corporate strategies (Saura et al., 2005) or as a belief to catch customers' interest in upgrading a profitable long-term organisation (Hartline et al., 2000). Thus, owing to customer-oriented behaviour, service staff can adjust their behaviours according to special customer circumstances (Lanjananda and Patterson, 2009). Therefore, customer-oriented behaviours include specific behaviour displayed by

personnel during the entire service interaction or encounter, leading to more satisfaction with their customers (Farrell et al., 2001).

Customer-oriented behaviour is represented as an essential element of market orientation, while it is also defined as which FLEs are willing to express and customise customers' service delivery following customers' needs and requirements to some extent (Lanjananda and Patterson, 2009). According to Bettencourt and Brown (2003) and Balaji et al. (2020), customer-oriented behaviours include the following three dimensions: concern by showing empathy and responsiveness; civility by not displaying anger, annoyance, or arrogance through ignoring customers; and congenial contact by showing a smile to reveal their happiness and enthusiasm. Customer-oriented behaviour results in a significant relationship between customers and FLEs, subsequently improving business performance (Balaji et al., 2020).

According to Chow et al. (2006), FLEs are vital in explaining and providing indispensable responses to clients. Customer-oriented behaviour is considered one of the most critical tools for FLE with direct contact with clients (Dimitriades, 2007). FLEs offer forgiveness to customers during their service encounters for several reasons. Thus, the essential role of customer-oriented behaviour is to encourage an increase in their performance (Balaji et al., 2020). If an FLE decides to be patient, empathic and forgiving to their customer, they will have a substantial tendency towards oriented behaviour, as is evident from service-oriented employees. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 7 Forgiveness from FLEs positively influences customer-oriented behaviour.

Dysfunctional employee behaviour is defined as actions that violate the norms of employee behaviour in a typical employee-customer encounter (Balaji et al., 2020) and as actions relating to violating norms by FLEs during employee-customer encounters. FLEs' dysfunctional behaviours towards their customers include verbal abuse, such as insulting and yelling, and violence, such as abuse and threatening (Griffin and Lopez, 2005). Dysfunctional behaviour may also involve deliberate actions that harm customers and adversely influence customer satisfaction and loyalty. Consequently, dysfunctional behaviours negatively affect service employees, customers, and the organisation (Balaji et al., 2020).

Dysfunctional employee behaviour should be considered to encumber service workers, particularly FLE goals and processes, in accordance with operational theories (Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). Moreover, this behaviour violates norms that advocate for more effective service staff performance (Felps et al., 2006), even though there are negative connotations for FLEs (Cole et al., 2008). Generally, because many potential factors pose dysfunctional behaviour, vengeance is considered a priority antecedent for this risk incident in social lifestyles and services.

According to Balaji et al. (2020), it is not disputed that while having attitudes or existing vengeful feelings and thoughts about treating customers, FLEs are more likely to display dysfunctional behaviour towards customers with no choice. In summary, when someone maintains a negative status, including vengeful thoughts or hostile feelings, they will strongly demonstrate dysfunctional behaviour towards others as a basic causality principle. Thus, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 8 Vengeance from FLEs positively influences dysfunctional employee behaviour.

3 Methodology

3.1 Measurement

Though the measures used in this study were originally developed in English, they were administered in Vietnamese. Therefore, to guarantee accuracy and reliability, we followed a back-translated approach to ensure proper translation from English to Vietnamese (Brislin, 1970). In addition, to certify that all items applied to the current research context, two resource managers and ten frontline service employees from a hotel and restaurant were invited to evaluate the content (these hotels and restaurants were not included in our formal study). Based on their feedback, minor modifications were made to ensure the generalisability of all items.

Nine constructs were used in this study: service environment, service orientation, training/knowledge, service representative incivility, customer incivility, forgiveness, vengeance, customer-oriented behaviour, and dysfunctional employee behaviour. Service environment was measured using four items, five items measured service orientation, training/knowledge was measured using three items adapted from Sliter and Jones (2016), and service representative incivility was measured using five items adapted from Sliter and Jones (2016). Customer incivility was measured using the five items adapted from Walker et al. (2014). Forgiveness was measured using three items, vengeance using four items, customer-oriented behaviour using four items, and dysfunctional employee behaviour using five items, all of which were adopted from Balaji et al. (2020). All items are measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The survey questionnaire consisted of two sections: Section A (profile of the participants), which measured and identified key demographic characteristics, such as gender, age group, categories, and educational level, and Section B (main variables of the study).

3.2 Sampling and data collection

This study used a quantitative approach. The primary data were numerical and collected from a questionnaire-based face-to-face survey. The questionnaire was then translated into Vietnamese. A back-translation method was used to ensure that the meaning of the questionnaire text in the target language was accurate (Tyupa, 2011). To minimise response bias and help respondents comprehend the statements, a native speaker distributed the final version of the survey to the respondents. Respondents were allowed to complete the questionnaire online or on paper to increase the probability of completing it. Data were collected through a survey of FLEs working in hospitality organisations, including hotels and restaurants in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam's largest city). The researcher accessed organisations willing to participate through personal and professional connections. There are two different hospitality categories: restaurants and hotels. Convenience sampling was then performed. The questionnaires were distributed to the respondents by an interviewer with instructions on completing them. The instructions emphasised that the study focused only on personal opinions to minimise possible response bias. Respondents were advised that they would be entitled to small gifts in return for their participation. Cover letters were provided for all surveys to explain the aim and purpose of the study, and respondents were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity of their responses. Trained interviewers were instructed not to interview more

than five employees from the same organisation to avoid potential bias from a ‘sameness’ in FLEs working in the same hospitality organisations. Respondents were asked to complete the self-administered questionnaire onsite within approximately 15 minutes. Of the 600 questionnaires distributed between December 2020 and March 2021, only 477 completed questionnaires were returned and used for the study. Participants with incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the study. Overall, a response rate of 79.5% was observed.

3.3 *Data tools and analytical techniques*

The results from the statistical data analysis were used to assess the measurement and structural models and to determine hypothetical relationships. The measurement model was estimated using reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2006). The structural model and hypothesised relationships were assessed using structural equation modelling.

4 Results

4.1 *Description of the research sample*

The majority of the respondents were women (59.7%), members of Generation Z (64.2%), and undergraduates (65.6%). The sample consisted of 49.7% hotel and 50.3% restaurant employees. Table 1 provides details of the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics (*N* = 477)

| <i>Demographic profile</i> | | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percent (%)</i> |
|----------------------------|---------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Gender | Male | 192 | 40.3 |
| | Female | 285 | 59.7 |
| Generation | Generation Z | 306 | 64.2 |
| | Before Generation Z | 171 | 35.8 |
| Education level | Undergraduate | 313 | 65.6 |
| | Graduate and above | 164 | 34.4 |
| Categories | Hotel | 237 | 49.7 |
| | Restaurant | 240 | 50.3 |

4.2 *Assessment of the measurement model*

The descriptive analysis of the nine concepts with 38 measurement items is presented in Table 2. The construct reliability was measured using composite reliability. The value ranged from 0.805 to 0.899, higher than the recommended criteria of 0.6 (Hair et al., 2010). We measured the internal consistency of the items of each construct using Cronbach’s α ; the value ranged from 0.805 to 0.898, higher than 0.6, and met the criterion of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). Convergent validity was measured using factor loading, and average variance was extracted. The standardised factor loading of all items

ranged from 0.666 to 0.867, higher than the recommended criteria of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010). The value of the average variance extracted ranged from 0.505 to 0.690, higher than the criterion of 0.5 (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 3 shows that the correlation between the constructs is less than 1, with $p < 0.1$, which ensured adequate discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2010).

Table 2 Constructs with items and reliability and validity

| <i>Constructs</i> | <i>SFL</i> | <i>Alpha</i> | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> |
|--|------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Service environment (SE). Mean (SD) = 2.253 (0.846) | | | | |
| Overall, this facility's layout makes it easy to get where you want to go. | 0.679 | 0.835 | 0.837 | 0.563 |
| Overall, this is an attractive facility. | 0.728 | | | |
| Overall, this facility is kept clean. | 0.742 | | | |
| Overall, my facility is typically busy. | 0.843 | | | |
| Service orientation (SO). Mean (SD) = 3.224 (0.832) | | | | |
| Interacting with customers is enjoyable. | 0.758 | 0.882 | 0.882 | 0.600 |
| It is important to me that the customer is satisfied. | 0.829 | | | |
| The employees at my restaurant provide excellent service. | 0.732 | | | |
| Customers treat me with respect. | 0.785 | | | |
| At peak hours it's so busy we cannot provide excellent service. | 0.764 | | | |
| Training/knowledge (TK). Mean (SD) = 2.394 (0.922) | | | | |
| My training has prepared me for the work that I do. | 0.782 | 0.836 | 0.836 | 0.630 |
| I have received adequate training to perform my job correctly. | 0.784 | | | |
| I have the knowledge I need to do my job. | 0.813 | | | |
| Service representative incivility (SR). Mean (SD) = 2.687 (0.785) | | | | |
| I escalated my tone of voice with a customer. | 0.749 | 0.866 | 0.866 | 0.565 |
| I ignored a customer. | 0.785 | | | |
| I spoke over a customer. | 0.783 | | | |
| I made gestures (e.g., sighing, eye rolling) to express my impatience with a customer. | 0.730 | | | |
| I was derogatory to a customer. | 0.708 | | | |
| Customer incivility (CI). Mean (SD) = 2.620 (0.406) | | | | |
| My customers spoke aggressively toward me. | 0.707 | 0.814 | 0.814 | 0.523 |
| My customers used a tone when speaking with me. | 0.747 | | | |
| My customers asked aggressive questions (e.g., 'Really? Are you kidding?') | 0.706 | | | |
| My customers made curt statements toward me. | 0.733 | | | |

Note: SFL: standardised factor loading, CR: composite reliability, AVE: average variance extracted.

Table 2 Constructs with items and reliability and validity (continued)

| <i>Constructs</i> | <i>SFL</i> | <i>Alpha</i> | <i>CR</i> | <i>AVE</i> |
|--|------------|--------------|-----------|------------|
| Forgiveness (FG). Mean (SD) = 3.299 (0.889) | | | | |
| Following customer incivility incidents, I... | | | | |
| Let go of the bad feelings | 0.785 | 0.805 | 0.805 | 0.579 |
| Let go of the resentment | 0.762 | | | |
| Forgave the customer who was uncivil to me. | 0.736 | | | |
| Vengeance (VG). Mean (SD) = 3.447 (0.924) | | | | |
| Following customer incivility incidents, I... | | | | |
| Felt that I should do something to get even. | 0.871 | 0.898 | 0.899 | 0.690 |
| Thought to get revenge. | 0.764 | | | |
| Thought to make the customer regret. | 0.817 | | | |
| Thought it was important to get back. | 0.867 | | | |
| Customer-oriented behaviour (CB). Mean (SD) = 3.207 (0.904) | | | | |
| Following customer incivility incidents, I... | | | | |
| Actively listened to what the customer had to say. | 0.806 | 0.877 | 0.877 | 0.641 |
| Appropriately (satisfactorily) dealt with customers' complaints | 0.787 | | | |
| Did everything in my power to satisfy customers' needs. | 0.803 | | | |
| Correctly answered customers' questions. | 0.807 | | | |
| Dysfunctional employee behaviour (DE). Mean (SD) = 2.785 (0.342) | | | | |
| Following customer incivility incidents, I... | | | | |
| Took a long-time to serve customers. | 0.559 | 0.856 | 0.857 | 0.509 |
| Purposely served customers incorrectly. | 0.576 | | | |
| Purposely served customers slowly. | 0.573 | | | |
| Purposely failed to understand customer expectations. | 0.920 | | | |
| Ignored customers at work. | 0.806 | | | |
| Blamed customers for an error I made. | 0.764 | | | |

Note: SFL: standardised factor loading, CR: composite reliability, AVE: average variance extracted.

4.3 *Result of common method bias (CMB)*

CMB may result in observed and true relationships by inflating or deflating the estimate. Thus, several procedural remedies were considered during the survey design and data collection to ensure minimal CMB in interpreting the results. For example, we protected respondent anonymity, reduced evaluation apprehension, used verbal midpoints for measures, and reversed the coded questions. Harman's single-factor test was used to check for CMB (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The first unrotated factor captured only 27.61% of the variance in the data. Therefore, these results suggest that CMB was not an issue in this study.

Moreover, this study evaluated the potential problems of multicollinearity and CMB using VIF. If the VIF value is less than 3.0, multicollinearity and CMB are not

problematic (Hair et al., 2010). The results show that all VIF values are less than 3.0 (from 1.091 to 2.844 for the constructs), and it can be affirmed that the model is free of the problems of multicollinearity and CMB.

Table 3 Results of test for discriminant validity

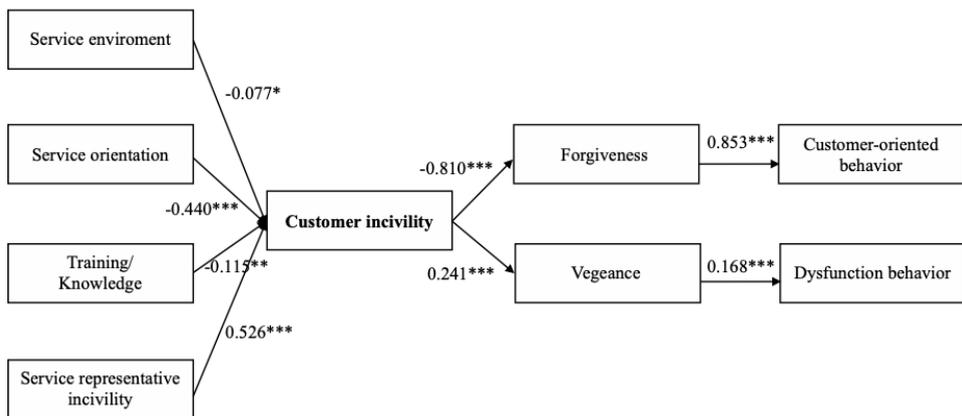
| | <i>SE</i> | <i>SO</i> | <i>TK</i> | <i>SR</i> | <i>CI</i> | <i>FG</i> | <i>VG</i> | <i>CB</i> | <i>DE</i> |
|----|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| SE | <i>0.750</i> | | | | | | | | |
| SO | 0.091 | <i>0.775</i> | | | | | | | |
| TK | 0.092 | 0.113 | <i>0.794</i> | | | | | | |
| SR | -0.144 | -0.307 | -0.148 | <i>0.752</i> | | | | | |
| CI | -0.046 | -0.138 | -0.065 | 0.169 | <i>0.723</i> | | | | |
| FG | 0.163 | 0.340 | 0.167 | -0.347 | -0.171 | <i>0.761</i> | | | |
| VG | -0.170 | -0.112 | -0.076 | 0.118 | 0.074 | -0.173 | <i>0.831</i> | | |
| CB | 0.219 | 0.437 | 0.240 | -0.479 | -0.219 | 0.506 | -0.240 | <i>0.801</i> | |
| DE | -0.037 | -0.134 | -0.043 | 0.124 | 0.063 | -0.151 | 0.064 | -0.192 | <i>0.713</i> |

Note: The italic diagonal elements are the square root of the variance shared between the constructs and their measures; off diagonal elements are the correlations among constructs.

4.4 Assessment of the structural model

Owing to the complexity of the model and the need to test the relationships between the constructs simultaneously, we used structural equation modelling by applying the maximum likelihood method (Amos version 20.0). Figure 1 shows the results of the testing model with $\chi^2 = 1,532.647$, $df = 657$, $Cmin/df = 2.333$, Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI) = 0.901 (> 0.9), comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.907 (> 0.9), and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.053 (< 0.07) (Hair et al., 2010).

Figure 1 Results of model testing



Note: $\chi^2 = 1,532.647$; $df = 657$; $Cmin/df = 2.333$; $TLI = 0.901$; $CFI = 0.907$; $RMSEA = 0.053$; *Significant at 10% level; **Significant at 5% level; ***Significant at 1% level.

Table 4 presents the results of the estimated model, which show that the service environment primarily predicts customer incivility ($\beta = -0.077, p = 0.086$), service orientation ($\beta = -0.440, p = 0.000$), training/knowledge ($\beta = -0.115, p = 0.012$), and service representative incivility ($\beta = 0.526, p = 0.000$). Therefore, Hypotheses 1, 2, 3, and 4 were supported.

In addition, Hypotheses 5 and 6 were supported, as customer incivility was found to have a significant effect on forgiveness ($\beta = -0.810, p = 0.000$) and vengeance ($\beta = 0.241, p = 0.000$).

As hypothesised, forgiveness was found to have a significant and positive influence on customer-oriented behaviour ($\beta = 0.853, p = 0.000$). Therefore, Hypothesis 7 was supported.

These findings support the notion that vengeance significantly affects dysfunctional employee behaviour ($\beta = 0.168, p = 0.000$). Therefore, Hypothesis 8 was supported.

Table 4 Results of estimate model

| <i>Hypothesis</i> | | <i>Path</i> | | <i>Estimate</i> | <i>P</i> | <i>Results</i> |
|-------------------|----|-------------|----|-----------------|----------|----------------|
| H1 | SE | → | CI | -0.077 | 0.086 | Supported |
| H2 | SO | → | CI | -0.440 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H3 | TK | → | CI | -0.115 | 0.012 | Supported |
| H4 | SR | → | CI | 0.526 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H5 | CI | → | FG | -0.810 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H6 | CI | → | VG | 0.241 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H7 | FG | → | CB | 0.853 | 0.000 | Supported |
| H8 | VG | → | DE | 0.168 | 0.000 | Supported |

4.5 Results of independent group t-tests that examine customer incivility based on gender, age group, education level, and categories

The hospitality field’s growth has flourished significantly in Vietnam and countries worldwide over the past few decades (Le and Ho, 2020). There is an enormous gap in the human mindset regarding every issue (Jae and Jeon, 2016), even though it seems evident that Vietnam and other Asian countries have the same cultural norms and social values (Woods and Lamond, 2011). In addition, according to Nguyen and Truong (2016), customer attitudes, particularly uncivil behaviours, pose various difficulties when investigating personality traits and ethical values in almost all developing countries, including Vietnam. Although several demographic factors, such as age, gender, and literacy, should be focused on when considering distinct individual behaviours (Kotler et al., 2016), there may be evidence that scholars have not mentioned and determined the effect of these factors on customer incivility.

Consequently, we further explore how significantly each demographic variable controls for customer incivility. The results show that demographic factors such as males (mean = 2.657), low education levels (mean = 2.644), and younger employees (mean = 2.619) had a significantly higher effect on customer incivility than females (mean = 2.521), high education levels (mean = 2.445), and older employees (mean = 2.498) with sig. < 0.05. Regarding categories, although not statistically significant, restaurants had slightly higher scores than hotels.

5 Discussion and managerial implications

There are several well-known works regarding customer incivility in developed nations. However, to our knowledge, only a few have concentrated on emerging market economies, such as Vietnam. Previous research has highlighted the need for more research efforts to examine the antecedents of customer incivility (Aboodi and Allameh, 2019; Sliter and Jones, 2016) or the outcomes of customer incivility (Balaji et al., 2020; Kim and Qu, 2019; Torres et al., 2017). Still, limited studies connect both aspects in an extended model. This study fills the gaps in the literature by investigating three negative and one positive antecedent of customer incivility towards FLEs in Vietnamese hotels and restaurants. Compared with others, service representative incivility has the most significant influence, whereas service orientation has the strongest negative impact on customer incivility. Furthermore, the final result expresses our expectation of the mediating role of forgiveness and vengeance in the relationship between customer incivility and FLE behaviours. Specifically, our findings indicate that FLEs have a greater tendency to engage in customer-oriented behaviour if they treat customers with empathy and forgiveness and are likely to display dysfunctional behaviours resulting from vengeful feelings and thoughts after engaging in customers' uncivil actions.

Furthermore, three prominent antecedents, (i.e., service environment, service orientation, and training/knowledge) pose negative impacts, and only service representative incivility positively affects customer incivility. Three of these contrasting relationships support the well-known global literature, Sliter and Jones (2016). However, we also have the same conclusion as Hur et al. (2022), Sliter and Jones (2016), and Walker et al. (2014) regarding a positive relationship between service representatives and customer incivility. This is the strongest factor influencing the phenomenon, significantly matching Vietnamese viewpoints on cause-and-effect relationships. As a result, Vietnamese FLEs tend to have customer-oriented and dysfunctional employee behaviours and forgiveness and vengeance perceptions, which is echoed by Balaji et al. (2020). In particular, there is no difference between FLEs' tendency towards customer incivility in restaurant and hotel categories; however, Vietnamese service employees have a much greater tendency toward customer-oriented behaviour via forgiveness because of Asian culture and religious beliefs.

5.1 Theoretical implications

Our study makes three theoretical contributions. First, the findings strongly support the influence of all antecedents on customer incivility in this study. In other words, service environment, orientation, training/knowledge, and representative service incivility are four potential factors. Moreover, we reconfirm the indirect relationship between customer incivility and FLE customer-oriented behaviours through forgiveness, whereas FLE vengeance impacts dysfunctional behaviour and customer incivility.

Second, our findings reveal significant differences in customer incivility related to gender, age group, and literacy. Specifically, men have a higher tendency to perpetrate incivility than women do. In addition, FLEs with higher education (college or higher) experience less uncivil customer attitudes than FLEs with lower education. In addition, younger individuals in Generation Z (born in 1997 or later) are less likely to experience incivility than millennials (born before 1997).

Finally, there is no direct evidence of the difference in experience between FLEs in restaurants and hotels related to customer incivility. We can address this issue through the hospitality industry in Vietnam, where there is a significant connection between the two sectors. For instance, a service provider in a restaurant and a staff working in a hotel have almost the same mindset and training from the organisations; hence, the FLEs in each function can easily swap with each other without considerable challenges.

5.2 Practical implications

Our findings offer several important insights and practical strategies for enterprise managers. First, service-representative incivility is the most important factor in customer incivility. We suggest that organisations should have more lessons and workshops for training to enhance staff knowledge of various soft skills to use when interacting with clients. If a service employee decreases, even though it eliminates incidents of incivility experienced, uncivil behaviours from customers will be significantly reduced. In addition, managers are encouraged to boost their corporation's service orientation and service environments with various implementations to minimise negative, deviant behaviours from clients.

Second, FLEs tend to demonstrate customer-oriented behaviour if they only choose forgiveness in response to clients' negative attitudes. Therefore, enterprises should encourage their staff to welcome customers and open their minds to empathise. Managers need to comprehend and generally convince all FLEs of the key role of internal awareness and external expression: the more vengeful thoughts service providers harbour in their minds, the more dysfunctional the behaviour they will choose and show to customers and themselves.

Third, managers should focus on training FLEs more carefully and according to gender and staff with lower education levels and younger ages. We find that men tend to make customers display bad behaviours more than women, whereas FLEs with higher literacy and maturity eliminate almost all uncivil actions by their experience. Our findings also offer organisations information related to gender, generation, and literacy to separate targets and goals in service orientation for each FLE group.

Finally, we find a significant difference in the functional sectors studied. Managers in the restaurant or hotel fields should focus on encouraging their FLEs to maintain their present professional skills, along with foundational service orientation. Furthermore, to recruit new staff, managers are encouraged to hire someone with swap experience. Because these FLEs, after recruitment, have critical soft skills, they are more likely to be trained for advanced academic knowledge and specialised expertise, which saves the enterprise time on recruitment.

6 Limitations and future studies

In addition to the contributions mentioned, the current study has drawbacks and limitations. First, there were only 477 respondents in Ho Chi Minh City, a small sample from only one location. Future studies should extend the applicability of the study framework by collecting data with a larger sample size and from multiple regions in other developing countries. Furthermore, future research should consider other demographic factors, including income, marital status, and religion. Additionally, there are different

service quality levels in five-star and budget hotels that can directly impact the perception of customer incivility. Thus, scholars could concentrate on the ranks and levels of each hospitality category. Finally, a moderating effect on organisational culture is encouraged for a more extensive investigation, and numerous other antecedents should be considered in the future.

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