**Do morally disengaged employees withdraw from customer-oriented citizenship behavior in response to customers’ uncivil behavior?**

**ABSTRACT**

Leveraging moral disengagement theory, the objective of this study is to explore the underlying mechanisms and boundary conditions under which frontline employees withdraw from customer-oriented citizenship behavior (CCB) in response to customer incivility. We test moderated mediation models in the hotel context using a three-wave survey with 307 employee–supervisor dyads. Our findings suggest that employees encountering uncivil customer interactions withdraw more from CCB. This relationship is mediated by moral disengagement. Moral identity and ethical climate moderate this mediated relationship such that when moral identity and perceived ethical climate are high, there is less moral disengagement in response to uncivil behavior. Consequently, withdrawal from CCB is also less in the presence of high values of these moderators. Our findings have implications for frontline employees’ management.

**Keywords:** customer uncivil behavior, moral disengagement, moral identity, ethical clime, customer citizenship behavior

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1. Introduction

Higher levels of customer service often require employees to go “above and beyond” their standard job requirements, which is generally accomplished through customer-oriented citizenship behavior (Vuong, 2022). Customer-oriented citizenship behavior (CCB) refers to extra-role behavior employees display to help customers and enhance their service experience (Vuong, 2022). For instance, if a customer is a tourist and wants to know good places to visit in a city, a frontline employee serving food is not obligated to advise the customer on tourist places. Being local and well aware of the city, the employee may help the customer by suggesting such places. This would be a CCB. However, studies exploring customer incivility’s influence on Front line Employees’ (FLEs) extra-role behaviors towards customers, such as CCB, are scant in the management literature (Cheng *et al*., 2020; Deng *et al.*, 2015). Studies that explore employee responses to customer incivility emphasize employee retaliation through uncivil behavior (Kim and Qu, 2019a). Those studies exploring the influence on citizenship behavior investigate *organization citizenship behavior* (OCB), i.e., citizenship behavior towards employees and not customers (Liu *et al*., 2019). CCB is different from OCB. CCB is concerned with employees’ extra-role behavior with customers, whereas OCB is about employees’ extra-role behavior towards the organization, such as helping other employees (Kim and Qu, 2019a).

Customer incivility is an increasing problem. A recent survey in 2022 based on 2000 employees suggested that 76% of employees experienced customer uncivil behavior at least once a month, with 70% experiencing the same 2-3 times a month (Botros, 2022). Research studies like Shin et al. (2022) found customer incivility's effect on employee's job performance to be 0.115 times higher than abusive supervision. In Table 1, we present the literature gaps in the customer incivility literature. As can be observed from Table 1, most studies on customer incivility have either focused on employee retaliation through reduced OCB or incivility towards the customer but not CCB.

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With this study, we intend to close these research gaps in the literature. Research suggests that CCB enhances customer satisfaction and results in higher profits (Gong and Yi, 2021). Thus, knowing CCB’s antecedents, especially the underlying mechanisms that drive FLEs to withdraw from CCB, would help service managers set up policies and practices under which FLEs do not reduce their CCB in response to customer incivility. CCB enhances the positive reputation of firms among customers, leading to positive word of mouth and potentially more future revenues (Dost et al., 2019).

Specifically, in this study, we have two objectives: a) What is customer incivility’s influence on the customer-oriented citizenship behavior of frontline employees, i.e., do FLEs withdraw from CCB in response to customer incivility; and b) What are the moderating and mediating mechanisms influencing this relationship, i.e., what are the underlying cognitive and psychological mechanisms that drive such behavior among FLEs? In this context, we explore the mediating role of the moral disengagement of FLEs in response to customer incivility and the role of a) the moral identity of FLEs and b) the ethical climate of the organization as moderators, moderating the mediating relationship (i.e., a moderated-mediation mechanism). We present our conceptual framework in Figure 1.

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The extant literature in hospitality management has primarily focused on the emotional mechanisms of FLEs, such as burnout, role stress, or emotional intelligence, to gauge their influence on CCB (Agnihotri and Bhattacharya, 2022; Hu and King, 2017; Kim and Qu, 2019b). Since extra-role behavior is considered more of an ethical responsibility of employees (Caldwell, 2011), it is vital to explore how the ethical and moral attributes of FLEs drive them to withdraw from CCB.

Customer -oriented citizenship behavior can effectively calm difficult customers and improve upset customers’ experiences with the service, resulting in possible word of mouth (Kim and Qu, 2019b). When customers show uncivil behavior, FLEs may diminish their CCB instead of redeeming customers’ experiences with the service. We assert this may happen because FLEs may feel morally disengaged to serve an extra-role for uncivil customers. However, personal traits such as moral identity or organizational traits such as ethical climate can diminish the level of moral disengagement that employees experience with uncivil customers (Guo *et al.*, 2022; Seriki *et al.*, 2020).

This study makes three contributions to the literature, which we discuss in detail in Section 5. Briefly, extant literature explains how modes of employee retaliation, such as reduced job engagement, lead to a negative spiral with more incidences of service failure and customer uncivil behavior for service organizations (Grandey et al., 2012). Our study extends the customer incivility literature by investigating CCB in response to uncivil customer behavior. CCB is an extra-role behavior that FLEs are not expected to perform as a part of their job profile but may make customers happy or reduce their anger, thus avoiding any negative spiral of service failure and uncivil behavior (Cheng et al., 2020). Extant research also suggests that CCBs can be a potential competitive advantage source for firms, as they enhance customer and employee relationships during service encounters (Yi et al., 2011). Despite significant insights from previous studies, researchers have only scantly explored CCB. We intend to fill this gap in the literature.

*Second*, our research explores the mechanism through which uncivil behavior impacts frontline employees’ CCB. Through moral disengagement, which is the cognitive mechanism that permits individuals to enact unethical behaviors without any guilt or self-censure (Bandura, 1986), we find that FLEs tend to associate themselves less with uncivil customers or believe that uncivil customer behavior deserves penalization, which results in reduced customer-oriented citizenship behavior. As research has only scantly explored CCB in response to customer uncivil behavior, we know less about the mechanism through which customer incivility influences FLEs’ customer-oriented citizenship behavior. Exploring moral disengagement adds to the CCB and customer incivility literature.

*Finally*, recent research has investigated several moderating variables influencing customer incivility and employee outcome relationships. However, since research has not explored the ethical perspective on uncivil behavior and the CCB relationship, we extend this stream of uncivil behavior literature. We examine the influence of individual-level traits, i.e., moral identity, and firm-level aspects, i.e., ethical climate, on influencing the moral relationship between customer incivility and the customer-oriented citizenship behavior of employees. Employees’ personal traits and the organizational environment they operate influence employees’ behavior in an organization (Chernyak-Hai et al., 2021). Given that employees’ moral identity and the organization’s ethical climate influence customer incivility and frontline employees’ CCB, managers should try to match the organization’s ethical climate with employees’ moral cognition through better human capital development interventions and policies. This could help maintain a strong relationship between customers and employees and thus better support organizational goals (Wang et al., 2017).

The paper proceeds as follows. We first review the literature and then develop our hypotheses. This is followed by the methods, data analysis, and results sections. We finally present the discussion and conclusion section with theoretical contributions and managerial implications.

1. Theory and hypothesis development
   1. *Customer incivility*

Customer incivility refers to rude and disdainful behaviors of customers toward employees (Walker et al., 2014). Customer incivility may include demeaning remarks by customers towards FLEs (Kamran-Disfani et al., 2022), insults (Sliter et al., 2010), unkind words (Medler-Liraz, 2020), and negative behaviors (Walker et al., 2017). Customers frequently abet interpersonal maltreatment of employees during service interaction (Grandey et al., 2007). Customer incivility relates to a wide range of divergent behaviors, such as violating integrity standards (Blickle et al., 2006), exercising power over FLEs (Sliter and Jones, 2016), disregarding a hotel’s policy, and creating interpersonal injustice for FLEs (Miner and Cortina, 2016). Scholars have explored customer incivility and how employees retaliated to uncivil behavior. For instance, Yue et al. (2021) reported that service employees withdrew from work in response to customer incivility. Kamfan-Disfani *et al.* (2022) suggested that FLEs could constructively resist incivil behavior from customers. However, research has not explored what happens when FLEs reduce their CCB, i.e., continue to perform tasks per the job description but do not make those extra efforts to help the customer or delight the customer. In this study, we assert that uncivil customer behavior undermines frontline employees’ CCB because when customers indulge in uncivil behavior, they end up disregarding, belittling, or intimidating FLEs. In response, FLEs may indulge in inefficient work practices (Balaji et al, 2020; Bani-Melhem, 2020) and turnover pretensions (Rahim and Cosby, 2016). Accordingly, they can also be expected to indulge less in CCB.

Frontline employees are likely to withhold customer citizenship behavior for several reasons. *First*, though CCB enhances customer satisfaction, it is still a voluntary behavior not formally required for FLEs to perform (Aljarah, 2020). If FLEs do not want to perform it, they can easily detach themselves from CCB. *Second*, when withdrawing from CCB in response to customer incivility, FLEs may think that the act may draw less criticism and only minimally influence performance evaluation (Zellars *et al*., 2002) compared to retaliating with uncivil behavior. *Third*, FLEs may feel that withdrawing from CCB would penalize the customer subtly, as customers were probably not expecting an extra-role behavior as a part of customer service. Thus, to restore their perceived control over the situation (Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007), ill-treated FLEs may choose to diminish CCB. Hence, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 1.** Customer uncivil behavior has a negative influence on frontline employees’ CCB.

* 1. *Moral disengagement*

*Moral disengagement* is “a set of interrelated cognitive mechanisms that allow people to perform unethical behaviors without apparent guilt or self-censure” (Zhao et al., 2016, p. 86). Employees have several ethical duties to perform as part of their psychological contract with an organization, such as depicting CCB (Caldwell, 2011). When employees fail to oblige to these contracts and do not perform their ethical duties, this amounts to unethical behavior. Thus, when FLEs do not perform CCB, which is required as a part of the psychological contract but not as a part of their job responsibilities, they fail to perform their ethical duties, making moral disengagement an appropriate framework for understanding the reason for the same (Gong and Wang, 2022).

The concept of moral disengagement evolved from Bandura’s (1986, 1991, 1999) research. According to the social cognitive theory given by Bandura, individuals' moral standards regulate their feelings and sentiments (Bandura et al., 1996). However, when individuals experience difficult or unaccepted circumstances such as insult due to customer incivility, they may not follow these moral standards and deviate from the moral behavior.

This deviation from moral standards occurs through a four-stage cognitive mechanism (Bandura, 1991). The first stage of the cognitive mechanism is behavioral. Employees justify their immoral conduct by comparing the intended moral misconduct against other possibly worse instances of misconduct. This helps them to make the intended actions appear more morally acceptable (Bandura, 1999). For instance, an FLE disassociating from CCB may believe that withdrawing from CCB is better than retaliating through raised voice at a customer.

The second stage of the cognitive mechanism is the locus of disengagement mechanism. This mechanism deals with how individuals justify their choices and actions. It includes the mechanism in which the focal actor emphasizes that they are not responsible for immoral conduct and that it lies with some external force or authority higher in power (Bandura, 1999). For instance, an FLE may believe that their withdrawal from CCB is not voluntary but forced and initiated by customer misbehavior. This thought and feeling may further help them to disassociate from moral engagement.

The third mechanism consists of dehumanization. By dehumanizing or devaluing the recipients, actors reduce their identification with the target and feel less unprincipled. Here, an FLE may feel that withdrawing from CCB is not hurting someone known to them but just a random customer who may or may not revisit the facility. The fourth mechanism, labeled outcomes, implies disregarding the harm they have caused and assuming that no real harm has been done (Bandura, 1999). Here, the FLE may believe that by withdrawing from CCB, no real harm is being done to the customer, as it was an extra-role behavior, such as suggesting a good tourist location in the city. Leveraging social cognitive theory, we propose that customer incivility leads to employees’ moral disengagement. We explain our propositions and mechanism for moral disengagement below.

Customer uncivil behavior would drive FLEs to morally justify their CCB withdrawal intention by believing that the behavior serves the moral purpose of penalizing the customers who broke the psychological contract with FLEs through uncivil behavior. Through advantageous comparison, FLEs would compare the intended moral misconduct of CCB withdrawal against other possible immoral actions, such as retaliation with anger. They would believe that the intended act of CCB withdrawal is more acceptable than angry retaliation and portrays their response to withdrawing from voluntary citizenship behavior as less deviant.

For the second mechanism of disengagement, agency (Bandura, 1999), FLEs would justify their intended choice through the displacement of responsibility, i.e., by emphasizing that customers are responsible for CCB withdrawal, as they are the ones who initiated the uncivil behavior.

The third mechanism, consisting of dehumanization, would imply that FLEs reduce their identification with customers and feel less unprincipled. A customer who has abused frontline employees is less likely to be admired by the FLEs. Consequently, FLEs would identify less with the customer and begin to devalue the customer for uncivil behavior (Frey-Cordes *et al.*, 2020).

The final moral disengagement mechanism involves distortion and disregarding of consequences. Here FLEs may believe that as they reduce engagement in CCB, it will likely to go unnoticed. This is because, as mentioned earlier, CCB is not a part of FLEs’ job responsibility, making FLEs feel that the consequences of non-participation in CCB would not be an issue. For instance, not asking a customer if “anything else is needed” would be a minor incident and likely go unnoticed.

Moreover, retaliation through the absence of CCB is more implicit than an explicit way of expressing discontent associated with mistreatment by the customer, where the response is likely to have adverse consequences for the employee as well. Taken together with these four mechanisms, FLEs who experience customer incivility would disengage. Taken together with these four mechanisms, FLEs who experience customer incivility would disengage. Hence, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 2**. Customer uncivil behavior positively influences moral disengagement.

The social cognitive theory also suggests that once moral self-regulation processes are deactivated, it would significantly influence individuals’ deviant behavior, including workplace harassment or unethical behavior (Beaudoin et al., 2015; Christian and Ellis, 2014). Extant research suggests that ethical individuals exhibit a higher degree of OCB than less ethical individuals (Turnipseed, 2002). Since CCB is a subdimension of OCB, it has become an ethics-based phenomenon. Therefore, once FLEs become morally disengaged in response to customer incivility, they would withdraw from the ethical act of CCB.

As employees can reduce self-sanctions due to reduced moral disengagement, they develop a greater proclivity to indulge in reduced CCB (Harris and He, 2019). Once employees are morally disengaged, they would justify themselves rationally in pursuing deviant behavior. Consequently, when employees experience customer incivility, moral disengagement paves the way for avoiding CCB as an effective behavioral strategy for adjusting to interpersonal injustice faced due to customers' incivility. Thus, morally disengaged, mistreated employees are likelier to avoid CCB. Given that FLEs, in response to customer uncivil behavior, experience moral disengagement, which then drives them to withdraw from CCB, moral disengagement acts as a mediator of customer incivility and the CCB relationship. Hence, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 3.** Moral disengagement mediates the customer incivility and CCB relationship.

* 1. *Moral identity as a moderator*

Moral disengagement does not invariably violate individuals’ self-sanctions against harming others (Aquino *et al.*, 2007). This led us to probe what factors might neutralize an individual’s tendency to be morally disengaged. We examine another postulate of social cognitive theory, moral identity, which is rooted in standards associated with the moral self (Bandura, 1999).

Moral identity refers to the “extent to which one’s self-concept incorporates the importance of being a moral person” (Wang *et al*., 2019, p. 476). Individuals may benchmark moral traits against a social referent that may be a well-known figure (e.g., Mother Teresa) or unknown person (e.g., God), or any membership group (e.g., Red Cross) (Aquino and Reed, 2002).

Individuals use moral identity as a basis for self-definition. Blasi (1980) suggests that moral personality results when individuals develop their identity on moral grounds and when moral commitments are critical to their self-definition. Although a negative relationship exists between moral identity and retaliation (Barclay *et al.*, 2014; Skarlicki *et al.*, 2008), few studies suggest that individuals high in moral identity may react more strongly when they witness mistreatment and injustice (Greenbaum *et al.*, 2013).

We suggest that the moral identity of FLEs would interact with the moral disengagement process such that FLEs with high moral identity would be more worried about harming others than those with low moral identity. This would reduce their likelihood of disengaging from moral self-regulatory functions (Detert *et al*., 2008; Hwang *et al*., 2021), resulting in less deterioration of CCB. For instance, despite being treated in an uncivil manner, FLEs high in moral identity may not dehumanize the customer, which is one of the mechanisms through which moral engagement is disabled. This reduced tendency to morally disengage will have a lesser influence on deviant CCB. This is because a high moral identity level would imply that moral self-schemas are easily primed and activated (Lapsley and Lasky, 2001). Consequently, in response to customer incivility, employees with a high level of moral identity self-regulate their behavior and thereby exhibit less moral disengagement (Hart *et al.*, 1999). As moral disengagement reduces CCB, our arguments on moral identity as a moderator imply a moderated mediation relationship between customer incivility and CCB. Thus, in response to customer uncivil behavior, employees with high moral identity levels will be less likely to engage in moral disengagement, diminishing its negative influence on CCB. Hence, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 4.** The relationship between customer incivility and frontline employee CCB through moral disengagement is moderated by moral identity in such a manner that the relationship becomes less negative when FLEs have a high moral identity.

* 1. *Ethical climate as a moderator*

When employees find their organization’s climate ethical, it distorts the natural link between customer incivility and moral disengagement. A highly ethical climate would suppress the pursual of immoral notions (Schwartz, 2016) and promote eternal thinking when faced with morally questionable events (VanSandt et al., 2006) as well as offer direction for managing immoral affairs (Fournier et al., 2010; Kaptein, 2011). Organizations with ethical climates also advocate for ethical behavior by holding formal and informal policies (Schwepker and Hartline, 2005). FLEs exposed to such an ethical climate would follow high moral standards to ensure smooth working in the organization (Greenberg, 2002). This would undercut FLEs’ tendency toward moral disengagement in response to customer incivility and thereby reduce CCB. Thus, FLEs whose organizations have an ethical climate would diminish their tendency to respond to customer incivility through reduced CCB, which would go against the moral values held by the organization (Schwartz, 2016). Specifically, a strong ethical climate will diminish customer incivility’s impact on employees’ moral disengagement and reduce the negative association between uncivil customer behavior and FLEs’ customer-oriented citizenship behavior through moral disengagement. Hence, we hypothesize:

**Hypothesis 5.** Ethical climate moderates the indirect relationship between customer incivility and frontline employee CCB through moral disengagement such that the relationship would be less negative when FLEs work in an organization with a strong ethical climate.

* 1. *Scales employed in the present study*

In the present study, we have five primary constructs, namely, customer incivility (predictor variable), moral disengagement (mediating variable), moral identity and ethical climate (moderators), and customer-oriented citizenship behavior (outcome variable). We measured: customer incivility using Walker et al.’s (2014) four-item scale; moral disengagement using the 24-item scale of Detert et al. (2008) scale; moral identity using Gerpott et al.’s (2019) twelve bipolar characteristics scale; ethical climate using Schwepker et al.’s (1997) five-item scale; and a seven-item CCB scale developed by Dimitriades (2007). Walker et al. (2014) and Detert et al. (2008) initially measured customer incivility and moral disengagement, respectively, using five-point Likert scales. While scale items of ethical climate (Teng et al., 2020) and CCB (Dimitriades, 2007) were measured using a seven-point likert scale. In the present study, we considered a seven-point Likert scale to measure the scale items of customer incivility and moral disengagement a) for convenience and uniformity in the questionnaire (Choudhary *et al.*, 2013), b) because Nunnally (1978) found a seven-point scale to reach the upper limits of a scale’s reliability more than a five-point scale, and c) Rensis Likert (1932) and other researchers have recommended it best to use a broader scale to increase sensitivity (Allen and Seaman, 2007).

1. Methods
   1. *Participants and procedure*

We started the study by pilot testing the questionnaire. A friend of one of the coauthors who owns a four-star and a three-star hotel in Noida, a city in the north of India, agreed to pilot test the questionnaire. A pilot test was necessary to improve the measurement scales, check and enhance the quality of the survey questions, and test and calibrate the three-wave survey. There were 266 FLEs (51% female) and 19 supervisors (63% female) working in the two hotels. After three waves, we received responses from 170 FLEs (56% female) and their corresponding 19 supervisors (58% female). Based on the responses obtained in the pilot test, we made necessary improvements to the questionnaire and calibration in the distribution of the survey questionnaires for the three waves. After making the required improvements, we proceeded with the main study.

In the main study, which we conducted between January 2019 and August 2019, the participants were FLEs and their immediate supervisors at seven Indian hotels. The north of India has some of the country’s major cities in terms of population and business potential. For this study, we randomly selected six cities, Agra, Chandigarh, Delhi, Gurgaon, Kanpur, and Varanasi, from a list of the 25 major cities in the north of India, as published on Findeasy.in (Find Easy, 2021). We then randomly generated a list of 10 hotels for each of the six cities as published on Tripadvisor and Booking.com. Finally, from the 60 hotels in our consolidated list, we randomly selected 30 hotels. We invited the 30 hotels to take part in our research. Only seven hotels agreed. These hotels were in Delhi, Gurgaon, Varanasi, and Chandigarh. Of these seven hotels, two were five-star hotels, three were four-star hotels, and two were three-star hotels. The hotels were of varying sizes, from 71 to 322 employees, and the mean number of employees was 171. In total, there were 855 FLEs in the seven hotels and 126 supervisors. Among the twenty-three hotels, which did not agree to participate in this study, three were two-star hotels, ten were three-star hotels, seven were four-star hotels, and three were five-star hotels. A Google search and search of hotel websites and other trade journals revealed that the hotels employed approximately 60 to 341 employees. Qualitatively, we did not observe any difference between the sample of hotels in our study *versus* those that did not agree to participate.

A human resource department manager from each of the seven hotels randomly selected 60% of FLEs, totaling 510 FLEs out of 855 FLEs. We contacted the selected FLEs and assured them a) of confidentiality, b) that the responses provided by them would not be made available to their organization, and c) that the study was only for academic research. This also helped us control for self-selection bias (Mody et al., 2017). Corresponding to these 510 FLEs, there were 97 supervisors. The co-authors contacted the supervisors as well and provided assurances similar to those provided to the FLEs.

The study data were collected using survey-based questionnaires in three waves to reduce common method variance. In the first wave, participants reported their demographics, customer incivility perceptions, and moral identity. In Wave 2 (two months later), we captured participants’ feelings about moral disengagement and ethical climate. In Wave 3 (two months after the second wave), we received CCB ratings for the participants from their immediate supervisors. We observed that supervisors had a match of between 2 to 11 FLEs. FLEs and supervisors were also informed about a lucky draw, which the authors would conduct after the three waves, and based on which, ten FLEs and five supervisors would receive US$20 Amazon India gift cards. The draw was open to only those FLEs and supervisors who completed all three survey waves.

At the end of Wave 1, we obtained 419 completed questionnaires out of 510 distributed questionnaires, i.e., an 82.16% response rate. In the second wave, participants who returned the completed questionnaire during the first wave were sent the next questionnaire. We received 362 valid responses, i.e., an 86.40% rate of response. In the final wave (i.e., Wave 3), we asked the immediate supervisors (a total of 79) of the 362 participants to report participants' performance on CCB. Each of the supervisors rated between two to nine employees. In this wave, 325 FLEs completed the questionnaire (i.e., a response rate of 89.78%). We also received 307 completed questionnaires from 68 supervisors (a response rate of 86.08%). Therefore, in the final sample, we had 307 employee-supervisor dyads. Based on a confidence interval of 95%, a population size of 855, and a margin of error of 5%, the appropriate sample size for this study was 266. Therefore, we can claim that the final sample of this study (i.e., 307 FLEs) was appropriate.

* 1. *Measures*

In the main study, which we conducted between January 2019 and August 2019, the participants were FLEs and their immediate supervisors at seven Indian hotels. Across all three waves, respondents were provided the questionnaire in both English and Hindi (India’s national language). Using a professional translator's services, the questionnaires (used in all three waves) were translated from English to Hindi. Next, we employed the services of another translator for the back-translation of the questionnaires. An exact match was achieved from the back-translation of the questionnaires (Hui et al., 2011). In our final sample of 307 employee–supervisor dyads, all the supervisors and 91% of the FLEs responded using the English questionnaires. Nine percent of the FLEs who responded in Hindi always used the Hindi questionnaire across all the waves. Mean comparisons of the constructs across employees who responded in Hindi with those who responded in English did not significantly differ. Thus, we used the entire sample for the main analysis.

* + 1. *Customer incivility*

We measured the construct of customer incivility using Walker *et al.*’s (2014) four-item scale. All the scale items were measured on a seven-point likert scale (1= never to 7= in all of the interactions). Sample scale items were: “The customer used a tone when speaking with the employee” and “The customer made curt statements toward the employee.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.87.

* + 1. *Moral disengagement*

This was measured using the 24-item scale of Detert *et al.* (2008). We measured each of the scale items on a 7-point likert scale, where “1” was strongly disagree and “7” was strongly agree. Sample items included: “It is alright to fight to protect your friends” and “You can’t blame a person who plays only a small part in the harm caused by a group.” The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.89.

* + 1. *Ethical climate*

Following extant literature (Teng *et al.*, 2020), we used Schwepker *et al.*’s (1997) five-item perceived ethical climate scale. Sample items included: “The top management enforces codes on ethical behavior” and “The top management has policies on ethical behavior.” All the scale items were measured on a seven-point likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.91.

* + 1. *Moral identity*

Following extant literature (e.g., Gerpott et al., 2019), we used a 12 bipolar characteristics moral identity scale developed by Stets and Carter (2012). This scale of Stets and Carter (2012) was based on Aquino and Reed’s (2002) study, which, to measure the moral identity of individuals, explored a set of traits that could stimulate moral identity. Following Stets and Carter (2012, p. 129), we asked respondents to “think about what kind of person they thought they were for each pair of characteristics and to place themselves along a continuum between the two contradictory characteristics.” Sample of bipolar traits included: “helpful/not helpful” and “selfish/selfless.” For each bipolar trait, “1” indicated agreement with one trait and “7” indicated agreement with the other trait (Stets and Carter, 2012, p. 129). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.86.

* + 1. *Customer-oriented citizenship behavior (CCB)*

We used a seven-item CCB scale developed by Dimitriades (2007). Sample items included the following: “I am assisting co-workers to deliver high-quality customer-oriented services” and “To serve my customers, I volunteer for things that are not required.” All the scale items were measured on a seven-point likert scale (1= strongly disagree to 7= strongly agree). The Cronbach’s alpha for this scale was 0.84.

* + 1. *Control variables*

Based on extant literature, we controlled for frontline employees’ demographic information: gender, age, and work experience (Garba *et al.*, 2018). Age was categorized as “0” = 30 years old and below; “1” = 31 years old and above. Gender was dummy coded as 0 for males and 1 for females. Work experience was operationalized as the total number of years of experience.

1. Results

Among the 68 supervisors, 60.30% were female, and 82.54% had a high school and above education. The median age of the supervisors was 32.70 years. Among the 307 FLEs, 54.3% were female, and 72.7% were in the 18 to 35 years age group (51.5 % in the age group of 25 and 35 years). Of the 307 FLEs, 37.4% had a below-high school education, 21.2% had a high school education, and the remaining had an undergraduate or above degree. Participants of the present study worked in different departments, like 41.9% were in housekeeping, 31.9% in the reception, 16.9% in F&B, and 9.8% in concierge services. The average tenure of the FLEs in the present hotel was 3.60 years. Table 2 presents the demographic information of the sample.

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**Insert Table 2 about here**

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Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables. There is a negative and statistically significant correlation between customer incivility and CCB (r=-0.28, p<0.001), providing preliminary support for the hypothesized customer incivility and CCB relationship. Similarly, there was a negative and statistically significant correlation between moral disengagement and CCB (r=-0.31, p<0.001). The correlation coefficient between customer incivility and moral disengagement was statistically significant (r=0.34, p<0.001). These provide elementary evidence regarding our stated hypotheses about the relationships between moral disengagement and CCB and customer incivility, respectively.

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**Insert Table 3 about here**

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Following De Vellis (1991) and Richins and Dawson (1992), we checked for the possibility of social desirability bias affecting the present study. We employed a short version of the 10-item Crowne and Marlowe’s (1960) social desirability scale in the survey. Sample scale items were: “I’m always willing to admit it when I make a mistake,” and “I always pay attention to the way I dress." We measured each of the scale items using a “True” or “False” dichotomous scale. We introduced the social desirability scale in the first wave for FLEs and during the third wave for supervisors. Correlation analysis of the calculated social desirability and customer incivility items revealed a statistically insignificant correlation. Hence, social desirability did not significantly influence FLEs' responses to customer incivility. Similarly, a correlation analysis of the calculated social desirability and CCB items revealed an insignificant and weak correlation. Thus, social desirability did not significantly influence supervisors’ responses to CCB.

Next, following Garba *et al.* (2018), we employed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to ensure that the study variables, namely, customer incivility, moral disengagement, moral identity, ethical climate, and customer-oriented citizenship behavior, were distinctive constructs. Following the procedure employed by Garba *et al.* (2018) and recommended by Little *et al.* (2002), we also tested whether an adequate indicator-sample size ratio exists. We created three parcels each for customer incivility, moral disengagement, and customer-oriented citizenship behavior while retaining the 12-item measure of moral identity and the five-item measure of ethical climate. The five-factor model fitted the data significantly well (χ2 = 5776.48, df = 1,264, CFI = 0.97, TLI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.04). We report the CFA results in Table 4.

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**Insert Table 4 about here**

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We used the Fornell and Larcker (1981) mechanism to assess the constructs' validity. We calculated the average variance extracted (AVE) and the composite reliability (CR) for each construct to evaluate convergent validity. We compared the square root of AVEs of the constructs with the construct correlations to assess discriminant validity. All the constructs had acceptable discriminant validity. We present the reliability and validity of the constructs in Table 5.

Further, a comparison of the AVEs of customer incivility (0.56) and CCB (0.71) with the square of their correlation (r2=0.282=0.078) indicated discriminant validity. Following the recommendations of Bagozzi *et al.* (1991), we also compared a free model (where we freed the correlation between two theoretically close constructs) with a constrained model (where we fixed the correlation to 1). We also compared the free model with another constrained model (where we fixed the correlation at 0). The chi-square difference test revealed that the free model’s adjustment was better than the two constrained models implying discriminant and convergent validity. Table 6 presents the comparison of the free model with the constraint models.

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**Insert Table 5 about here**

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**Insert Table 6 about here**

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We tested the first, second, and third hypotheses using mediation analysis. For this, Hayes’ Process Macro Model 4 was employed (Hayes, 2018). CCB, customer incivility, and moral disengagement were the outcome, predictor, and mediator variables, respectively. We also performed two separate moderated-mediation analyses to test hypotheses 4 and 5. We used Model 7 of Hayes’ Process Macro for the moderated-mediation analyses (Hayes, 2018). Model 7 is an example of a conditional process model. In a conditional process model, the mechanism linking the predictor variable (customer incivility) and the outcome variable (CCB) is conditional if the indirect effect of the predictor on the outcome variable through the mediator (moral disengagement) is contingent upon a moderator (ethical climate or moral identity) (Haye, 2018). In the first moderated-mediation model, moral identity was the moderating variable, and in the other moderated-mediation model, the ethical climate was the moderating variable. Following Hayes (2018), we employed a bootstrapping re-sample value of 1,000. Results of the models are presented in Tables 7 and 8.

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**Insert Table 7 about here**

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**Insert Table 8 about here**

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*Main Effects*. As shown in Column 1 of Table 7, CCB was negatively and statistically significantly associated with customer incivility (β=-0.286, p<0.01). Our first hypothesis stated that customer incivility would lead to reduced CCB by FLEs. Given that the beta coefficient is negative and statistically significant, we receive evidence supporting the first hypothesis. Next, we can observe from the second column of Table 7 that customer incivility had a positive association with moral disengagement (β=0.351, p<0.001). This supports our second hypothesis, i.e., customer incivility is positively associated with moral disengagement.

*Mediation Analysis*. In Column 1 of Table 8, we observe that the estimated path coefficient for the indirect effects of customer incivility on CCB through moral disengagement was statistically significant (θ=-0.0089; LCI=-0.0159; UCI=-0.0019). Our third hypothesis stated that moral disengagement mediated customer incivility and FLE’s CCB. Since the beta is negative and lies between the confidence interval, it implies that customer incivility increased moral disengagement, and moral disengagement reduced CCB intention among FLEs. The findings support our third hypothesis.

*Moderated Mediation Analysis*. To test hypotheses four and five, we performed moderated mediation analysis. Table 8 presents the results of these moderated mediation relationships, i.e., the indirect customer incivility and frontline employee CCB association through moral disengagement for different levels of moral identity and perceived ethical climate.

Hypothesis 4 stated that customer incivility through the mediator, i.e., moral disengagement, has a conditional indirect effect on frontline employee’s CCB, where FLEs’ moral identity moderates the mediation effect, such that customer incivility’s indirect effect on CCB is more negative when the moral identity of FLE is low. We can observe from column four of Table 7 that the beta coefficient of moral identity and customer incivility interaction term on moral disengagement was negative and significant (β=-0.051, p<0.01). In addition, column three of Table 8 suggests that customer incivility’s indirect effect on CCB was more negative and statistically significant at a low level of moral identity (θ =-0.0372; LCI=-0.0446; UCI=-0.0298) than at an average level of moral identity (θ =-0.0204; LCI=-0.0264; UCI=-0.0136) and a high level of moral identity (θ =-0.0036; LCI=-0.0083; UCI=00.0011). Taken together, these provide support for the fourth hypothesis. Further, the index of moderated mediation was 0.0130 (BootLLCI=0.0059/BootULCI=0.0201), implying that the mediation of the effect of customer incivility on CCB through moral disengagement is moderated by moral identity. Hence, the mediation is moderated.

Our speculation through the fifth hypothesis was that customer incivility has a conditional indirect effect on CCB through moral disengagement, where the ethical climate of the organization moderates moral disengagement’s mediation effect, such that customer incivility’s indirect effect on CCB is more negative when the ethical climate is low than normal and high. In column 6 of Table 7, the customer incivility and ethical climate interaction term on moral disengagement was negative and significant (β = -0.045, p<0.01). Further, column 5 of Table 8 reveals that customer incivility’s indirect effect on CCB mediated by moral disengagement was more negative and statistically significant at a low level of ethical climate (θ =-0.0235; LCI=-0.0296; UCI=-0.0174) than at an average level of ethical climate (θ =-0.0114; LCI=-0.0161; UCI=-0.0067) and a high level of ethical climate (θ =-0.0007; LCI=-0.0033; UCI=-0.0047). Thus, our fifth hypothesis is also supported. In addition, the index of moderated mediation was 0.0114 (BootLLCI=0.0045/BootULCI=0.0183), implying that the mediation of the effect of customer incivility on CCB through moral disengagement is moderated by ethical climate. Hence, the mediation is moderated.

* 1. *Robustness Test*

Although we did not theorize about cross-cultural differences in customer incivility of FLEs response through reduced CCB, we conducted a similar study in a developed market context, leveraging a sample from the UK. Following a similar approach to the Indian context (refer to Section 3), we collected data from FLEs and supervisors of three hotels in the Northeast of the UK (one was a three-star hotel, and the other two were four-star and five-star hotels). We collected data between August 2019 to October 2019. After three waves (each conducted at an interval of one month), we received 142 completed questionnaires from 21 supervisors. Therefore, in the final sample, we had 142 employee-supervisor dyads. The median age and income of 21 supervisors [Females= 8] were 31.40 years and £52,000, respectively. The median age and income of 142 FLEs [Females= 79] were 25 years and £23,000, respectively. Our findings suggest that there was no statistically significant difference in response of FLEs to customer incivility, i.e., we received evidence supporting all hypotheses for the UK data.

1. Discussion and Conclusion

National surveys and academic research suggest that customer incivility has an adverse influence on employee morale and subjective well-being, as it results in increased levels of job stress, lower job satisfaction (Baker and Kim, 2020; Shin *et al.*, 2022), lower after-work psychological detachment (e.g., Nicholson and Griffin, 2015), incivility perpetration (Walker *et al.*, 2017), and higher turnover intentions (Wilson and Holmvall, 2013). For instance, in the study by Mostafa (2022), customer incivility decreased employee work engagement by 0.152 units. However, within high-contact service contexts, FLEs’ behavior critically affects not only them but also customer satisfaction and the loyalty and profitability of the firm (Kamran-Disfani et al., 2022). Given the significance of FLE behavior for customer satisfaction, it is vital to explore the antecedents of FLEs’ customer-oriented citizenship behavior.

Our study had two objectives. *First*, we aimed to explore the relationship between customer incivility and CCB. *Second*, we intended to explore the underlying mechanism for the same.Our research suggests that customer incivility reduces FLEs’ customer-oriented citizenship behavior, which research has shown is critical to enhancing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Chan *et al.*, 2022).

Subsequently, we tested a mediation model and two-moderated mediation models. In the mediation model, customer incivility predicted frontline employees’ CCB through the mediation of moral disengagement. In our moderated-mediation models, the indirect association between customer uncivil behavior and moral disengagement was moderated by moral identity and organizations' ethical climate. Our findings suggested that the CCB of frontline employees was adversely impacted by customer incivility and that the moral disengagement of FLEs mediated this effect. CCB was a voluntary behavior not formally required for FLEs to perform as a part of job description. Thus, CCB withdrwal, in response to uncivil behavior was likely to draw less criticism and only minimally influence performance evaluation of FLEs (Zellars et al., 2002).

We also found that the organization's ethical climate and the moral identity of FLEs moderated the relationship, i.e., the association between customer uncivil behavior and moral disengagement weakened in the presence of a strong ethical climate and moral identity. This weakening happened as a strong ethical climate drove FLEs to remain committed to customer service to the best extent possible and not retaliate through reduced CCB. High moral identity FLEs were also more likely to be worried about harming others than those with low moral identity. This reduced their likelihood of disengaging from moral self-regulatory functions (Detert et al., 2008; Hwang et al., 2021), thus resulting in less deterioration of CCB.

Our findings regarding the relationship between customer incivility and frontline employee CCB are congruent with extant research exploring the association between customer incivility and other negative methods of employee retaliation (Kim and Qu, 2019a). This finding may be because the organization's formal reward systems do not include CCB, so skipping it in response to retaliation is likely to go unnoticed (Lavee and Pindek, 2020). Therefore, when faced with customer incivility, FLEs decrease their CCB.

Our findings are also congruent with research on moral engagement. Researchers have observed that moral disengagement influences employees’ unethical behavior within organizations (Yan *et al.*, 2021). Our findings suggest that it also affects unethical behavior in the form of reduced customer-oriented citizenship behavior, where customers are critical people with whom FLEs interact the most. This is likely to happen as employees justify their moral disengagement when they experience inapt or unjust behavior from other peers or customers.

Regarding moral identity, its moderating role in organizational situations has been researched previously. Our findings align with extant research, which has found that moral identity moderates organizational injustice and counterproductive work behavior (Mingzheng et al., 2014). Customer incivility is a kind of unjust behavior to which, as our study suggests, employees respond by withdrawing from CCB. This withdrawal happened as moral identity limited individuals' intention to withdraw from moral behavior, even when they experienced unjust behavior.

* 1. *Theoretical implications*

The present study has several theoretical implications. First, our study extends the customer incivility literature by exploring its impact on the scantly investigated phenomenon of CCB. Extant literature on customer incivility and its influence on the behavioral response of employees has primarily focused on responses that influence their on-the-job performance, such as service sabotage or absenteeism from work (Boukis et al., 2020; Cheng et al., 2020; Torres et al., 2017). Research exploring employees’ extra-role behaviors toward customers—behaviors that are valorized by ethical norms but are otherwise not part of the job profile—has not received much attention. However, researchers have explored citizenship behavior toward employees and colleagues (Kang and Jang, 2019). Studies on CCB have explored employee response to customer incivility to measure employee revenge or retaliation intention, where FLEs are likely to misbehave (Cheng et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2014). Since CCB implies extra-role behavior towards customers, i.e., a role not part of FLEs' job profile, FLEs may reduce CCB so that they can retaliate without adversely impacting their job performance. By exploring customer incivility and CCB relationship under boundary conditions, we increase the knowledge regarding the influence of customer incivility on FLEs’ behavioral responses. We thus extend the literature on customer uncivil behavior, where employees may protest peacefully through CCB withdrawal and not with revengeful intention or indulging in uncivil behavior. Accordingly, we extend the social cognitive theory to the customer incivility field and explain how FLEs feel morally disengaged due to social influences set by customers behaving in an uncivil manner.

*Second*, we also examined the moral mechanisms through which customer incivility influences the behavioral responses of employees. At the same time, extant literature has primarily focused on the emotional mechanisms of FLEs, such as their burnout, role stress, or emotional intelligence (Hu and King, 2017; Kim and Qu, 2019b). The present research, based on social cognitive theory, suggested that moral disengagement mediated the customer relationship and the CCB relationship, while the moral identity of FLE moderated this mediated relationship. We thus extend the social cognitive theory, where FLEs, based on their experience with customers, determine their behavioral response to customers’ uncivil behavior. The social cognitive theory suggests that the behavioral response to unfair treatment experienced by employees has been largely retaliation through revenge or violent behavior (Cheng et al., 2020). However, our study suggests that unfair and unjust experiences of employees may also result in peaceful protest behavior through CCB withdrawal. We thus extend the behavioral boundaries of social cognitive theory.

Our findings, drawing on moral disengagement theory, suggest that when customers depict uncivil behavior, FLEs tend to cognitively separate moral components from an otherwise unprincipled act to rationalize retaliation behavior. Our findings also extend the moral disengagement theory, which explains how co-workers' helpful behavior helps reduce uncivil behavior in the workplace by limiting moral disengagement (Xiaojun et al. (2019). Our findings suggest that where helpful behavior limits moral disengagement, uncivil behavior may also enhance moral disengagement.

Although the extant literature on moral disengagement has examined the effects of individual differences (such as personality and other dispositional variables) on moral disengagement (Moore *et al.*, 2012), there has been limited research on situational factors that lead individuals to disengage morally. Scholars have called for research on these situational factors (Newman *et al.*, 2020). We respond to this call and explain how customer incivility can drive FLEs to morally disengage and indulge less in CCB. Our findings suggest that when customers mistreat employees, employees tend to morally disengage with such customers through cognitive mechanisms such as the devaluation of targets. Once employees are morally disengaged, they no longer feel morally obligated to depict citizenship behavior toward customers.

Furthermore, our research contributes to the moral identity literature. Scholars have increasingly explored moral identity to examine its effect on moral-related behaviors, with a generally negative influence on unethical or CSR behavior (Aquino et al., 2009; Farmaki and Stergiou, 2021; Sharma *et al.*, 2020; Skarlicki and Rupp, 2010). Though moral identity’s interaction with moral cognition has been explored (Reynolds and Ceranic, 2007), its relationship with moral disengagement remains unexplored (Khan *et al.*, 2021). We extend this stream of literature on moral identity. Recently, researchers explored moral-related behavior as driven by an individual’s moral identity and have found that it reduces the propensity of unethical behavior (Aquino *et al.*, 2009; Skarlicki and Rupp, 2010). Our findings suggest that moral identity reduced not only unethical behavior but also limited the adverse impact of customer incivility on FLEs’ CCB behavior.

Finally, to the best of our knowledge, scant literature explores the influence of ethical climate on workplace deviant behavior (Qin *et al.*, 2014), and none does so in the context of customer incivility. We extend the literature on ethical climate and its role in controlling the retaliation of FLEs through reduced CCB in response to customer incivility. Overall, we discover individual-level (moral identity) and organizational-level (ethical climate) boundary conditions for the mediating relationship between customer incivility, moral disengagement, and FLEs’ customer-oriented citizenship behavior.

* 1. *Managerial implications*

Managers emphasize customer service and train FLEs to exceed customer expectations (Han *et al.*, 2016). As incidences of customer incivility increase, it can adversely influence frontline employees. This requires the formulation of effective strategies in which employees do not adversely respond to uncivil behavior. In this context, our findings have important implications for managers.

Our study suggests that FLEs have a propensity to indulge in CCB declines when they experience uncivil behavior from customers. As only happy employees make happy customers, this is even more applicable for FLEs, who interact more frequently with customers and are more prone to experience customer incivility (Torres *et al.*, 2017). In response to incivility, FLEs may reduce their CCB behavior and thus may not help customers with advice on local transport, tourism plans, etc., which is usually not part of their job description. Managers first need to acknowledge that when customers display uncivil behavior, it will have an adverse impact on FLE behavior. Thus, first, organizations should look for incidents of customer uncivil behavior and encourage employees to share the same. By treating such behaviors as critical incidents, managers can develop scenarios to educate frontline service employees on practices deployed to address specific customer incivilities, so they do not indulge in CCB withdrawal behavior, i.e., reduced CCB behavior that happens because of moral disengagement. For instance, a customer getting angry over delayed time in service could result in moral disengagement of FLEs. FLEs should be encouraged to report such behavior to management and organizations, who then can train FLEs to deal with such situations effectively. For example, in a restaurant, FLEs may engage in the following manner: apologizing for delays in food services, following up in the kitchen, keeping the voice low, presenting a solution, not taking issues personally, not getting upset, and indulging in passive retaliation through reduced CCB.

Every program's result should be constantly monitored and discussed during employee meetings to ensure that the program works or determine what improvements need to be made. However, another dimension of training could focus on aspects such as mindfulness practices. To further encourage employees to continue CCB despite the uncivil behavior of customers, managers can offer rewards and incentives to employees for offering CCB. Managers could reward FLEs, by giving gift cards or cash bonuses or organizing free lunch or tickets for any event. They could also create an environment of empathy and support and help FLEs find the problem's root cause. Managers could also share a similar experience to calm the FLE. Apart from this, managers could randomly take rounds to gauge customer-FLE interaction and manage potentially difficult situations before they escalate into argumentative and uncivil incidents. At the same time, organizations should work on formulating policies where customers are discouraged from showing uncivil behavior. Customers can be educated through awareness campaigns regarding interaction norms with service staff (Bowers and Martin, 2007; Eisingerich and Bell, 2008) so that FLEs remain committed to CCB. A simple orientation through their promotional materials can expose customers to a realistic preview of what services they should expect from FLEs and what actions may indicate volitation of general etiquette toward employees and other customers. This should decrease the incidence of customer incivility and hence retaliation from FLEs, through reduced CCB (Torres et al., 2017).

Our findings suggest that moral disengagement mediates customer incivility and frontline employee CCB relationships. Managers may not easily detect this disengagement, and they need to monitor FLEs’ moral disengagement through different techniques and device measures so that disengagement is reduced. For instance, managers could establish teams to observe customers' incivility. They can also frequently check the state of moral disengagement of FLEs. Organizations can also host training programs to improve employees’ relational skills. For instance, training can cover topics like managing a demanding customer or handling angry customers. Such training programs will ensure that FLEs do not devalue customers performing uncivil behavior or assume that not performing citizenship roles would not cause much harm (Huang et al., 2019), thus resulting in less moral disengagement.

Furthermore, hotel managers can arrange for job rotations to pacify potential moral disengagement intentions among FLEs. One way to reduce moral disengagement is to create a more ethical climate. Our results suggest that an ethical climate decreases the influence of consumer incivility on moral disengagement. Thus, managers should ensure strict formal policies and informal practices that reflect a highly ethical climate. This way, FLEs experiencing uncivil behavior from customers would be less attuned to diminishing their CCB. Our findings reflect the significance of providing employees working on the front line of service provision with a supportive working environment. Customer incivilities are inflammatory. However, fostering an ethical work climate in which FLEs are encouraged to tackle negative incidences of incivility more morally is likely to increase resilience and create a customer-centric environment where employees could respond to customers’ needs and combat potential situations before they gain traction. In this way, our work demonstrates that the benefits of an ethical climate can go beyond the traditionally documented benefits of positive OCB.

Another way to diminish moral disengagement is to ensure that FLEs have a strong moral identity. Mangers may counsel and coach FLEs to have a strong moral identity. Alternatively, at the time of recruitment, organizations should hire only candidates with strong moral identities. Organizations may also ask scenario-based questions during job interviews to gauge the moral identity of candidates (Aquino et al., 2009). DeGrassi (2019), in a study, explained that in a scenario-based question, researchers asked respondents to elaborate on details of confidential information on a competitor’s project to get the lucrative job, and those with a strong moral identity did not reveal such information. Managers can also inculcate an organizational culture in which morality is highly valued so that employees feel encouraged to develop a strong moral identity (Hwang *et al.*, 2021).

* 1. *Limitations and directions of future research*

Our research has limitations that unlock directions for future research. First, although we used a time-lagged research design and involved multiple sources for responses, the likelihood of common method biasness cannot be completely ruled out, as information on some variables was collected simultaneously from the same source (Fuller et al., 2016). For instance, we measured customer incivility and moral disengagement constructs in the first wave based on the same set of respondents. Future studies can use experimental designs to reduce the likelihood of common method bias and to improve the inference of relationships between variables (Johnson *et al.*, 2011; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003).

In addition, we explored only one dimension of uncivil behavior, i.e., deviant customer behavior and its influence on CCB, and there are other types of workplace incivility types that could influence CCB. Specifically, since happy employees make happy customers, if any other workplace incivility occurs, say, between two FLEs or between the supervisor and FLE, a morally disengaged frontline employee may retaliate by reducing CCB among different types of citizenship behavior. Therefore, a negative influence on the customer experience may occur, even though the customer was not at fault. Furthermore, we explored the influence of customer incivility on employee CCB. However, a customer may retaliate against employee incivility (Bavik and Bavik, 2015; Xiao et al., 2022). Future studies could explore the spiral relationship between customer and employee incivility.

Third, we used moral disengagement theory to explore how customer incivility influences CCB. Other variables could also mediate the relationship between the two. In the future, alternative mediators influencing customer uncivil behavior and FLEs’ customer-oriented citizenship behavior could be investigated. Finally, we explored one firm-level and one individual-level moderating variable, i.e., ethical climate and moral identity, respectively, which moderated the association between customer uncivil behavior and moral disengagement. In the extant literature, there may be other moderating variables, such as leadership traits, that could influence the relationship between customer incivility and moral disengagement relationship. We suggest exploring these alternative moderating variables in future research.

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**Table 1: Literature Review on Impact of Customer Incivility on Employee Outcomes**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Employee outcome** | **Theory** | **Mediator** | **Moderator** | **Findings and focus** | **Source** |
| Customer service quality | Conservation of resources | Emotional exhaustion |  | Customer service quality deteriorates with customer incivility as a result of increase in emotional exhaustion of employees. – | Sliter *et al.* (2010) |
| Work engagement | Conservation of resources |  | COVID-19 pandemic | The adverse impact of customer incivility on work engagement increased during the COVID-19 pandemic. | Hwang *et al.* (2022) |
| Employee incivility towards co-workers and customers | Affective events theory | Emotional job demand |  | More the emotional job demand, stronger is the employee incivility in response to customer incivility. | Kim and Qu (2019a) |
| Work quality of life | Cognitive appraisal theory | Employee psychological well-being |  | Customer incivility reduces employee psychological well-being, which in turn reduces work quality-of-life. | Baker and Kim (2020) |
| Sales performance | Theory of conservation of resources |  | Co-worker incivility | Customer incivility deteriorates sales performance of employees. | Sliter *et al.* (2012) |
| Employee extra-role behavior towards co-workers | Theory of conservation of resources | Employee burnout | Passive leadership and customer orientation | As employee burnout increases with customer incivility, extra role behavior decreases. However, employee customer orientation mitigates this effect and passive leadership increases this effect. | Bani-Melhem (2020) |
| Job performance | Job control demand model | Emotional exhaustion | Job crafting | The adverse impact of customer incivility on job performance is less when employees are involved in job crafting. | Shin and Hur (2022) |
| Job performance | Job demands-resources theory | Emotional exhaustion | Sales control system (outcome and behavior based) | A behavior-based sales control system mitigated the effect of customer incivility on upselling behavior | Hur *et al.* (2021). |
| Employee incivility at workplace | Cognitive appraisal theory | Burnout | Employee emotional intelligence | Employee emotional intelligence moderates the mediating effect of employee burnout on customer incivility and employee retaliation through workplace incivility | Kim and Qu (2019b) |
| Employee revenge intentions | Emotional contagion theory |  | Empowerment and turnover intentions | When empowerment is low and turnover intention is high, employee revenge intentions are higher in response to customer incivility | Bani-Melhem *et al.* (2020). |
| Revenge intention and service sabotage | Negative affectivity |  | Emotion regulation | Customer incivility increased employee’s intention to take revenge and service sabotage where expressive suppression further strengthened the relationship | Cheng *et al.* (2020) |
| Capacity to satisfy customers | Conservation of resources theory | Emotional exhaustion | Employee resilience | Capacity to satisfy customers declines in response to customer incivility and impact is higher when employee resilience is low | Al-Hawari *et al.* (2020) |
| Organization citizenship behavior | Conservation of resources | Emotional exhaustion | Trait conscientiousness | Customer incivility increases emotional exhaustion of employees that decreases their organization citizenship behavior towards organization and trait conscientiousness attenuates this relationship | Wang *et al.* (2022) |
| Retaliation intent | Cognitive appraisal theory of emotions | Anger | Emotion regulation ability | Customer incivility evoked anger among employees which resulted in retaliation intent. Emotional regulation ability mitigates this effect | Li *et al.* (2021) |
| Hostile behavior towards family members | Conservations of resources | Work-to family conflicts | Hostile attribution bias | Customer incivility increases employees’ hostile behavior towards family members and their hostile attribution bias increases the strength of this relationship. | Zhu *et al.* (2021) |
| Employee incivility | Negative affectivity | None | Negative affectivity | Negative affectivity moderates influence of customer incivility on employee incivility | Walker et al. (2014) |
| Employee customer citizenship behavior towards customers |  | Moral disengagement | Ethical climate | Customer incivility reduces CCB | Present Study |

**Table 2: Demography of the Sample**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Supervisors (68)** | | | | **Frontline Employees (307)** | | | |
|  |  | **Male (27)** | **Female (41)** |  |  | **Male (139)** | **Female (168)** |
| **Age** |  |  |  | **Age** |  |  |  |
|  | *<25 years* | 5 | 8 |  | *<25 years* | 28 | 37 |
|  | *25-35 years* | 12 | 15 |  | *25-35 years* | 64 | 94 |
|  | *36-45 years* | 7 | 12 |  | *36-45 years* | 26 | 27 |
|  | *>45 years* | 3 | 6 |  | *>45 years* | 21 | 10 |
| **Education** |  |  |  | **Education** |  |  |  |
|  | *Below High School* | 5 | 7 |  | *Below High School* | 46 | 69 |
|  | *High School* | 5 | 5 |  | *High School* | 32 | 33 |
|  | *Undergraduate* | 13 | 25 |  | *Undergraduate* | 41 | 49 |
|  | *Postgraduate* | 4 | 4 |  | *Postgraduate* | 20 | 17 |
| **Income** |  |  |  | **Income** |  |  |  |
|  | *>$7,000* | 7 | 14 |  | *>$2,500* | 55 | 79 |
|  | *$7,000-$12,000* | 14 | 19 |  | *$2,501-$3,500* | 40 | 57 |
|  | *>$12,000* | 6 | 8 |  | *>$3,500* | 44 | 32 |

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (n=307)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Variables** | **1** | **2** | **3** | **4** | **5** | **6** | **7** | **8** |
| **1** | Customer-oriented citizenship behavior | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **2** | Customer incivility | -0.28\*\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| **3** | Moral disengagement | -0.31\*\*\* | 0.34\*\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |  |
| **4** | Moral identity | 0.24\*\*\* | 0.06 | -0.15\*\* | 1 |  |  |  |  |
| **5** | Ethical climate | 0.26\*\*\* | 0.04 | -0.17\*\* | 0.12\* | 1 |  |  |  |
| **6** | Gender | -0.04 | 0.1# | -0.01 | 0.16\*\* | 0.06 | 1 |  |  |
| **7** | Age | 0.06 | -0.05 | -0.09 | 0.15\*\* | 0.03 | 0.02 | 1 |  |
| **8** | Work experience | -0.07 | -0.07 | -0.03 | 0.09 | 0.01 | 0.04 | 0.41\*\*\* | 1 |
|  | Mean | 5.54 | 5.71 | 5.66 | 5.32 | 5.72 |  |  | 2.24 |
|  | S.D. | 1.15 | 0.84 | 0.81 | 1.28 | 1.05 |  |  | 1.15 |

\*\*\*,p<0.001; \*\*,p<0.01,\*,p<0.05, #, p<0.10

**Table 4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis 5-Factor Model Versus Alternate Models**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Model** | **χ2** | **df** | **RMSEA** | **RMR** | **CFI** | **TLI** | **NFI** |
| 5-Factor Model | 5776.48 | 1,264 | 0.04 | 0.05 | 0.97 | 0.98 | 0.96 |
| 4-Factor (CI and MD merged) | 6923.28 | 1,268 | 0.13 | 0.14 | 0.88 | 0.85 | 0.82 |
| 4-Factor (CI and MI merged) | 7557.28 | 1,268 | 0.17 | 0.19 | 0.87 | 0.86 | 0.81 |
| 4-Factor (CI and EC merged) | 8051.8 | 1,268 | 0.16 | 0.22 | 0.83 | 0.81 | 0.85 |
| 4-Factor (MD and MI merged) | 6644.32 | 1,268 | 0.12 | 0.14 | 0.88 | 0.87 | 0.85 |
| 4-Factor (MD and EC merged) | 8901.36 | 1,268 | 0.19 | 0.25 | 0.89 | 0.84 | 0.82 |
| 4-Factor (CI and CCB merged) | 6859.88 | 1,268 | 0.18 | 0.21 | 0.84 | 0.81 | 0.83 |

Note: N= 307, CI= Customer incivility; MD= Moral disengagement; MI= Moral identity; EC= Ethical climate; CCB= Customer-oriented citizenship behavior

**Table 5: Discriminant and Convergent Validity (n=307)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  | **Convergent Validity** | **Discriminant Validity** | | | | |
|  | **Cronbach's Alpha** | **Composite Reliability** | **AVE** | **Customer-oriented citizenship behavior** | **Customer incivility** | **Moral disengagement** | **Moral identity** | **Ethical climate** |
| Customer-oriented citizenship behavior | 0.84 | 0.90 | 0.56 | **0.75\*** |  |  |  |  |
| Customer incivility | 0.87 | 0.91 | 0.71 | -0.28 | **0.84\*** |  |  |  |
| Moral disengagement | 0.89 | 0.96 | 0.53 | -0.31 | 0.34 | **0.73\*** |  |  |
| Moral identity | 0.86 | 0.94 | 0.69 | 0.24 | 0.06 | -0.15 | **0.83\*** |  |
| Ethical climate | 0.91 | 0.93 | 0.74 | 0.26 | 0.04 | -0.17 | 0.12 | **0.86\*** |

\*Bold values are square root of AVE

**Table 6: Constraint Models versus Free Model**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Specifications** | **χ2** | **df** | **Model Comparison** | **Δχ2** | **Δdf** | **Significance** |
| Constrained model at 0 | 6821.76 | 1,264 | Free model versus constrained model at 0 | 1046.45 | 1 | p<0.001 |
| Constrained model at 1 | 5821.34 | 1,264 | Free model versus constrained model at 1 | 46.03 | 1 | p<0.001 |
| Free model | 5775.31 | 1,263 |  |  |  |  |

**Table 7: Results of Mediation and Moderated-Mediation Regressions (n=307)**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Mediation Model (DV=CCB; Mediator= Moral Disengagement)** | | **Moderated-Mediation Model (DV=CCB; Mediator= Moral Disengagement; Moderator= Moral Identity)** | | **Moderated-Mediation Model (DV=CCB; Mediator= Moral Disengagement; Moderator= Ethical Climate)** | |
|  | **CCB** | **Moral Disengagement** | **CCB** | **Moral Disengagement** | **CCB** | **Moral Disengagement** |
|  | **(1)** | **(2)** | **(3)** | **(4)** | **(5)** | **(6)** |
| **Customer Incivility** | -0.286\*\*  (0.091) | 0.351\*\*\*  (0.104) | -0.286\*\*  (0.091) | 0.261\*\*  (0.083) | -0.286\*\*  (0.091) | 0.302\*\*  (0.091) |
| **Moral Disengagement** | -0.255\*\*\*  (0.072) |  | -0.255\*\*\*  (0.072) |  | -0.255\*\*\*  (0.072) |  |
| **Moral Identity** |  |  |  | -0.121\*\*  (0.038) |  |  |
| **Ethical Climate** |  |  |  |  |  | -0.156\*\*  (0.052) |
| **Customer Incivility \* Moral Identity** |  |  |  | -0.051\*\*  (0.016) |  |  |
| **Customer Incivility \* Ethical Climate** |  |  |  |  |  | -0.045\*\*  (0.014) |
| **Gender** | 0.0493  (0.0347) | -0.0307  (0.0294) | 0.0493  (0.0347) | -0.0296  (0.0195) | 0.0493  (0.0347) | -0.0017  (0.0173) |
| **Age** | 0.0527  (0.0338) | 0.0055  (0.0875) | 0.0527  (0.0338) | -0.0021  (0.0191) | 0.0527  (0.0338) | -0.0019  (0.0165) |
| **Work Experience** | 0.0186  (0.0115) | -0.0067  (0.0064) | 0.0186  (0.0115) | -0.0065  (0.0064) | 0.0186  (0.0115) | -0.0084  (0.0056) |
| *Adjusted R-Square* | 0.176 | 0.199 | 0.176 | 0.215 | 0.176 | 0.223 |

\*\*\*,p<0.001, \*\*,p<0.01, \*,p<0.05; s.e. in parenthesis

**Table 8: Indirect Effects at Different Levels of Moderators (n= 307)**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Mediation Model for Moral Disengagement as mediator** | **Moderated-Mediation Model for Moral Disengagement as mediator and Moral Identity as moderator** | | **Moderated-Mediation Model for Moral Disengagement as mediator and Ethical Climate as moderator** | |
| **Indirect Effect: θ (LCI/UCI)** | **More Identity Level** | **Indirect Effect: θ (LCI/UCI)** | **Ethical Climate Level** | **Indirect Effect: θ (LCI/UCI)** |
| **(1)** |  | **(3)** |  | **(5)** |
| -0.0089(-0.0159/-0.0019) | Low (4.03) | -0.0372 (-0.0446. /-0.0298) | Low (4.67) | -0.0235(-0.0296/-0.0174) |
| Medium (5.32) | -0.0204(-0.0264 /-.0136) | Medium (5.72) | -0.0114(-0.0161/-0.0067) |
| High (6.61) | -0.0036 (-0.0083 / -0.0011) | High (6.77) | -0.0007(-0.0033/-0.0047) |

**Figure 1. Research Models: Mediation and Moderated-Mediation Models**

