

RESTAURANT EMPLOYEE SERVICE SABOTAGE AND CUSTOMER DEVIANT BEHAVIORS - THE MODERATING ROLE OF CORPORATE REPUTATION

ABSTRACT

This study provides a timely hospitality related exploration of the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors in Taiwan. The authors also examine the mediating role of relational quality and the moderating role of corporate reputation. The proposed research framework was tested using data from 226 customers of casual dining restaurants who responded to a questionnaire-based survey that was administered in the north of Taiwan. The results indicate that employee service sabotage is positively related to customer deviant behaviors and leads to a potential increase in the incidence of the latter. Moreover, the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors is mediated by relational quality, including satisfaction and commitment. It was found that the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors was negatively moderated by corporate reputation. Employee service sabotage has less effect on customer deviant behaviors when customers perceive corporate reputation more positively. The study contributes to knowledge by proposing a conceptual model that has been developed and tested empirically, providing an enhanced understanding of the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors.

KEYWORDS: *employee service sabotage, Taiwan, customer deviant behaviors, relational quality, corporate reputation.*

INTRODUCTION

It has frequently been noted that the physical presence of customers when hospitality services are provided means that production and consumption are scarcely distinguishable (inseparable) (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, & Baloglu, 2017). Though well established, this principle is now being challenged by the disruptive force of food delivery, which diminishes the centrality of face-to-face service encounters and may prompt prospective restaurant patrons to reconsider whether eating out merits the investment of effort. In the case of eat-in restaurants, dining is socially constructed because it involves encounters shared with others, notably family, friends or colleagues (Acosta and Technomic, 2017). However, restaurant ambience and the various contributing interactions are lost when customers opt for food delivery to their home or workplace. The key for food delivery companies that are seeking to retain customers may be to emphasize the food aspect. However, in forming assessments of eat-in restaurant experiences, customers generally rely on a diversity of functional, mechanical, and human clues such as the quality of the food and service, the ambience and other design elements, and the performance and behavior of employees (Wall & Berry, 2007). The focus of the current investigation is casual dining restaurants.

As restaurants owners and operators acknowledge the growing variety of dining options for customers, they are giving them a more active role in the production and delivery of services, an extension of human capital from employees to the inclusion of customers (Zeithaml, Bitner,

& Gremler, 2005). However, in addition to their roles as contributors to business success, these two parties may exhibit deviant behaviors in restaurant settings. Destructive customer behaviors may be directed at either a company's merchandise or its financial assets (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). The impacts of customer deviant behaviors are felt by both employees and organizations (Huang, Greenbaum, Bonner, & Wang, 2019), and may undermine financial performance (Kim & Qu, 2019). In their pursuit of business success, hospitality leaders generally and restaurant managers in particular pursue opportunities to minimize deviant behaviors. This is the background to the current investigation.

Customer-contact employees are integral to high contact services since they can shape customer experiences, attitudes and behaviors (Spiro & Weitz, 1990; Bitner, Booms, & Tetreault, 1990). Deliberate and/or inadvertent deviant behaviors by hospitality employees can influence how customers perceive their experiences. To date, researchers have adopted largely separate approaches when exploring the incidence of deviant employee and customer behaviors and have ignored the potential connections between the two phenomena. Some researchers have given consideration to employee behaviors that potentially influence service outcomes, such as customer satisfaction and commitment. Several have confirmed that customer perceptions of employee behaviors influence their behaviors (e.g., Heskett, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1997). While researchers have considered antecedents of customer deviant behaviors such as satisfaction and emotional support (Bove, Pervan, Beatty, & Shiu, 2009;

Groth, 2005; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007), less attention has been devoted to how employee deviant behaviors affect customer-related outcomes (e.g. Yi & Gong, 2008).

It is widely accepted that customers are more loyal towards highly reputed businesses (Morley, 2002). Firms with loyal customers also enjoy enhanced reputation, indicative of a bidirectional relationship between the two phenomena (de Leaniz, & del Bosque Rodríguez, 2016). The related concept of corporate reputation is a form of market-validated information and a cue to customer perceptions of product/service quality (Devine & Halpern, 2001; Hansen, Samuelsen, & Silseth, 2008). For restaurants managers, reputation shapes how their customers experience products and services (Chang, 2013). A favorable reputation facilitates premium pricing and provides a basis for building a positive corporate identity and image (Shamma & Hassan, 2009; Shamma, 2012). However, despite the potential associations, scant empirical evidence is available about how reputation influences the incidence of deviant customer behaviors.

Noting the preceding observations, this study aims to provide insights about the relationship between employee and customer deviant behaviors. It further examines how the relationship is mediated by relational quality. The researchers place particular emphasis on exploring the moderating role of corporate reputation on the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors. The current study develops and undertakes empirical testing of a conceptual model that seeks to provide an improved understanding of the

relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Employee Service Sabotage

Service sabotage has been defined as any “voluntary, intentional overt or covert behavior by employees that disrupts service encounters and negatively affects the dynamics between the employee and the customer” (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; 2006). Various expressions have been used to describe negative employee actions, including “deviant behavior” (Robinson & Bennet, 1995), “counterproductive work behavior” (Fox & Spector, 1999), “organization misbehavior” (Vardi & Weitz, 2003), and “dysfunctional behavior” (Griffin, O'Leary-Kelly, & Collins, 1998). Unlike employee behaviors that are directed towards firms, team members, or other stakeholders, (Spector & Fox, 2005; Spector, Fox, Penney, Bruursema, Goh, & Kessler, 2006), employee service sabotage covers a variety of employee acts that will negatively affect employee/customer service encounters. Most researchers have made no reference to overarching constructs when examining deviant behaviors. Robinson and Bennett (1995) identified four types of employee deviance in organizations, namely: “production, property, political, and personal aggression.” Meanwhile, Spector *et al.*, (2006) proposed five types of counterproductive work behavior: abusing others, deviant production, sabotage, withdrawal, and theft.

Employee service sabotage is the behavior that affects customers directly and is

discernable by them. It is viewed as deviant, dysfunctional, or general misbehavior for the purposes of the present research. Employee actions such as absenteeism, production deviance, and acts against fellow employees are outside the scope of the present study. Harris and Ogbonna (2009) identified four types of service saboteur: thrill seekers, apathetics, customer revengers, and money grabbers. A study of fast food workers reported that over 1/3 of respondents were involved in property deviance with an altruistic intent, 4/5 were involved in counterproductive activities against the organization, and 3/5 were engaged in personal property deviance (Hollinger, Slora, & Terris, 1992). Employees in upscale hotels reported greater deviance for production matters than for property and interpersonal concerns (Chen, Hu, & King, 2018). A survey of part-time restaurant industry workers in the USA found that 37% of respondents made fun of coworkers' or customers' accents and 12% prepared or served intentionally contaminated food to customers (Berta, 2003). Such service sabotage behaviors are widespread across the hospitality industry (Edmondson, Matthews, & Ward, 2019).

Customer Deviant Behaviors

A variety of terms have been used to describe negative customer behaviors. Examples include: “deviant consumer behavior” (Mills, 1981), “jaycustomer behavior” (Lovelock, 2001), “dysfunctional customer behavior” (Harris & Reynolds, 2004) and “aberrant consumer behavior” (Fullerton & Punj, 1993). Fullerton & Punj (1993, p. 570) defined the term ‘aberrant consumer behavior’ as “behavior in exchange settings which violates the generally accepted

norms of conduct in such situations and which is therefore held in disrepute by marketers and by most consumers.” Harris and Reynolds (2004) consider a dysfunctional customer behavior as being “actions by customers who intentionally or unintentionally, overtly or covertly, act in a manner that, in some way, disrupts otherwise functional service encounters” (Harris & Reynolds, 2003, p. 145). Jaycustomers are noted for behaving in destructive ways, often as being ‘thoughtless or abusive’ and as eroding relationships within a company and between employees and customers (Lovelock, 2001, p. 73).

Drawing upon these various terms and related definitions, the present study defines the term “deviant behavior” as being intentional behavior in exchange settings which ‘violates the generally accepted norms of conduct in such situations’ (Fullerton & Punj, 1993, p. 570). Fullerton and Punj (1993) proposed three types of aberrant consumer behaviors: (1) destruction of marketer property, (2) abuse, intimidation, physical and psychological victimization of other customers and service employees and (3) material loss through various forms of theft, including insurance, credit card, check fraud, and shoplifting. “Consumer misbehavior” is defined as customer actions that are not normally accepted behavioral conduct in a consumer role. It includes “vandalism”, “retaliation”, and “violence” (Fullerton & Punj, 1997). Harris and Reynolds (2004) reported eight types of prevalent jaycustomer behaviors in the hospitality industry, namely: compensation letter writers, undesirable customers, property abusers, service workers, vindictive customers, oral abusers, physical abusers, and sexual predators. Focusing

on service-specific customer deviance, Lovelock (2001) classified six jaycustomer behaviors: the thief, the rule breaker, the belligerent, the family feuder, the vandal, and the deadbeat. Hu, Hu, and King (2017) identified activities of misbehaving air passengers as illegal smoking, physical abuse, disobeying instructions, verbal abuse, drunk and disorderly conduct. Boo, Mattila, and Tan's (2013) restaurant study identified smoking and noise as the most commonplace customer deviant behaviors. The frequent incidence of customer misbehaviors has been reported as a notable phenomenon across the hospitality industry (Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002).

The Relationship between Employee Service Sabotage and Customer Deviant Behaviors

The theories of social exchange and of equity provide a potential theoretical foundation for exploring correlations between the respective behaviors of customers and service employees. Employee and customer behaviors and employee-to-customer interactions may be considered as a social exchange process, since the contexts within which they occur are social. According to social exchange theory, social behaviors involve at least two people that exchange costly or rewarding activity whether tangible or intangible (Homans, 1961). Blau (1986) further defined social exchange as actions that are motivated by the expectation of returns from others and/or social relationship exchanges. In the context of service encounters, it would be anticipated that customers who are treated well by contact employees would be willing to contribute beyond their prescribed roles.

Researchers have often used equity theory and the negative norm of reciprocity to explain customer deviant behaviors. A negative norm of reciprocity concerns any harmful act towards people by an individual, based on the belief that the individual was wronged by them during a social exchange (Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003). From the perspective of such negative reciprocity, customers who perceive that they are treated unfairly by contact employees, may feel wronged or dissatisfied by the employee/customer relationship, thereby experiencing 'cognitive dissonance' (Ho, Weingart, & Rousseau, 2004). A customer who is seeking to rebalance a perceived inequity or cognitive dissonance, may resort to curtailing positive behaviors or even display negative behaviors to avenge/exchange the perceived inequity, thereby achieving a cognitive balance in the customer/employee relationship (Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003).

Employee service sabotage is unlikely to generate high-quality social exchanges and may decrease the frequency of customer citizenship behaviors and increase deviant customer behaviors. Various studies have substantiated such predictions. Spector and Fox (2002) noted that individuals will react to hurt feelings induced by another person through engaging in dysfunctional behaviors which seek redress through retaliation. Patterson and Baron (2010) also addressed this concept of power by exploring the relationship between dysfunctional customer behaviors during service exchanges and perceived negative employee behaviors. They described customer misbehaviors as a result of cynicism and as a means of reclaiming power over perceived employee misbehaviors. Porath, MacInnis, and Folkes (2010) showed

that customers engage in negative behaviors when they observe employees misbehaving. Plé and Cáceres (2010) also noted that employee misbehaviors destroy value creation and hence impact negatively on customers.

Emotional contagion provides a potential explanation for the impact of employee service sabotage on deviant customer behaviors. It describes a tendency to “automatically mimic and synchronize facial expressions, vocalizations, postures, and movements with those of another person and, consequently, to converge emotionally” (Hatfield, Cacioppo, & Rapson, 1992). In other words, emotional contagion may mean that the emotions expressed by person A may directly affect the emotions of person B. Several studies have reported emotional contagion in service contexts where negative emotions prevail (e.g. Medler-Liraz, 2016). It may, therefore, be reasonable to assume that employee service sabotage can lead to customer negative emotions that prompt them to engage in deviant behaviors. Drawing upon the previous discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 1₀ (H1₀): Employee service sabotage has no impacts on customer deviant behaviors.

Hypothesis 1_a (H1_a): Employee service sabotage has a positive impact on customer deviant behaviors.

The Mediating Role of Relational Quality

According to Kalbfleish (2001), relational quality is “a global assessment of the express

nature of a relationship.” In service delivery situations involving high level customer-employee interactions, relational quality forms a fundamental part of the customer-employee relationship. Prime examples of relational quality include customer perceptions and assessments of employee helpfulness, warmth, courtesy, and respect as exemplified by interactions and behaviors (Kose, *et.al.*, 2003). Relational quality involves customer-employee interactions that effect emotional states and feelings. Customers may encounter a variety of factors through the course of service delivery, including inconsistent performance, complexity, and intangibility. A service employee’s ability to lower perceived uncertainty amongst customers will enhance relational quality (Roloff & Miller, 1987). High relational quality is based on customer confidence that the employee will demonstrate integrity in their future performance, based on their prior consistency.

Three dimensions are commonly used to measure relational quality: “trust”, “commitment”, and “satisfaction” (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Researchers have previously viewed trust as forming an integral part of interpersonal relationships. Generally, parties experience trust when they accept the vulnerability involved in accepting that their expected behaviors and performance are important to both parties (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995). Roy, Sivakumar, and Wilkinson (2004) defined trust as the degree to which, “one partner can depend on another to protect his/her interests.” The definition of customer confidence occurs in a relational context where service employees exhibit behaviors contributing to the longer-

term customer interest. Commitment forms a core component of relational quality (Cheng, Chen, & Chang, 2008). It is commonly defined as the extent to which one party “believes and feels that the relationship is worth spending energy to maintain and promote” (Hon & Grunig, 1999, p. 20). According to public relations researchers, individual commitments to an organization contribute to the longer-term growth and maintenance of the relationship. Satisfaction is a potential tool for assessing how employees and customers perceive each other and for predicting the customer desire to maintain a relationship with the organization (Dwyer & Oh, 1987). Westbrook (1981) viewed satisfaction as an “emotional state that occurs in response to an evaluation of these interaction experiences.” Satisfaction in a relationship revolves around the ability of the service employee’s role performance in a long term service context that will improve the customer’s perception of the employee’s efforts to manage the relationship over the long term (Frazier, 1983).

The effect of employee citizenship and sabotage behaviors on the quality of customer relations may be explained using socialization theory. Organ’s (1988) original conceptualization of Organizational Citizenship Behavior (OCB) was as “employees’ behaviors that are discretionary and not explicitly recognized by organizations’ reward systems.” An organization’s individual socialization process aims to encourage OCBs in the pursuit of more positive customer outcomes (Netemeyer, Boles, McKee, & McMurrian, 1997). Customer evaluations of service delivery rely on the customer-contact employee’s

“competence”, “attitude”, and “expertise”. Therefore, customer-contact employee behaviors will substantially affect the future service relationship (Paulin, Ferguson, & Payaud, 2000). It has previously been found that extra-role activities, such as organizational citizenship behaviors are critical to customer satisfaction (Yoon & Suh, 2003). Hongbo, Waqas, & Tariq (2019) also suggested that customer satisfaction is strongly influenced by personal interactions between customers and employees. Hansen, Sandvik, & Selnes (2003), showed that customer commitment to a service organization is strongly influenced by the behaviors of customer-contact employees. The authors found that OCBs improve customer commitment to the organization. In contrast, negative employee activities, such as service sabotage, will also influence the relationship with the customer and with customer evaluations of the service (Zhou, Ma, & Dong, 2018). Based on the preceding arguments, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2₀ (H2₀): Employee service sabotage has no effect on relational quality : (a) trust, (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment.

Hypothesis 2_a (H2_a): Employee service sabotage has negative effects on relational quality : (a) trust, (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment.

Some previous studies have examined factors that influence customer deviant behaviors, including customer satisfaction and commitment (Bettencourt, 1997), and customer-oriented behaviors (e.g. Kelly & Hoffman, 1997; Rosenbaum & Massiah, 2007). Mills (1981) explored misbehaviors and observed an empirical link between customer dissatisfaction and deviant

customer behaviors. Focusing specifically on acts of consumer retaliation, Huefner and Hunt's (2000) insights depicted how customers pursue misbehaviors to express dissatisfaction with an individual employee or organization ranging from theft and vandalism, to physical violence. Similarly, Bechwati and Morin (2003) offered empirical evidence of an association between customer dissatisfaction and revengeful behaviors. Customer dissatisfaction has also been linked to a wider variety of customer misbehaviors (Wirtz & Kum, 2004; Yi & Gong, 2008). Accordingly, the present authors infer that negative actions may diminish when service providers show concern for the quality of employee-customer relationships. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

Hypothesis 3₀ (H3₀): Relational quality has no impact on the incidence of customer deviant behaviors : (a) trust, (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment.

Hypothesis 3_a (H3_a): Higher quality relations reduce the incidence of customer deviant behaviors : (a) trust, (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment.

Relational quality may serve as a medium between employee and customer behaviors, as well as an antecedent to customer behaviors. The stimulus–organism–response (SOR) approach may explain the mediating role of relational quality. It posits that environmental stimuli can affect a customer's emotional state, thereby determining approach or avoidance behaviors (Sherman, Mathur, & Smith, 1997). When this model is applied in service delivery contexts, the stimulus is conceptualized as an influence “that arouses the individual” (Eroglu,

Machleit, & Davis, 2001). Research on service encounters has indicated that employee behaviors can influence how the customer perceives the service (Hartline & Ferrell, 1996). Employee behaviors may be viewed as providing the stimulus within the S–O–R framework. Relational quality may be conceptualized as the organism and customer citizenship and deviant behaviors can be classified as response. For the purposes of the present investigation, relational quality may be hypothesized as mediating the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors.

Hypothesis 4₀ (H4₀): Relational quality : (a) Trust, (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment does not mediate the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors.

Hypothesis 4_a (H4_a): Relational quality : (a) Trust, (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment mediates the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors.

The Moderating Role of Corporate Reputation

The current researchers view reputation as the most relevant corporate asset for the purposes of the present investigation. They note that scholars have proposed various definitions of corporate reputation, notably as “a perceptual representation of a firm’s past actions and future prospects that describes the firm’s overall appeal to all of its key constituents when compared with other leading competitors (Fombrun, 1996, p. 72). Although there is wide

scholarly acceptance of the concept of corporate reputation, the multiplicity of alternative definitions has proliferated the number of measurements (Eckert, 2017; Lange, Lee, & Dai, 2011; Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, & Beatty, 2009; Wartick, 2002).

Raithel and Schwaiger (2015) noted that superior corporate reputations are of strategic value to firms. Corporate reputation results from the receipt of direct and indirect experiences and of information (Fombrun & Shanley, 1990; Ruth & York, 2004; Yoon, Guffey, & Kijewski, 1993) and from prior actions by the firm (Weigelt & Camerer, 1988). Firms interact with a multiplicity of stakeholders, each exhibiting different attributes. Fombrun (1996) adopted an attitudinal definition of corporate reputation. He contends that it represents net affective or emotional reaction and involves the overall estimation of a firm by its constituents. Operational definitions of corporate reputation have centered on the object specific components which form a basis for the overall evaluation, considering the extent to which a firm is well known; good or bad, reliable, trustworthy, believable and reputable (Brown, 1995; Levitt, 1965). A strong corporate reputation provides a company “signal” and potentially reduces transaction costs, as well as other beneficial outcomes for the company (Einwiller, Fedorikhin, Johnson, & Kamins, 2006; Rose & Thomsen, 2004). Walsh and Beatty (2007) proposed five information content dimensions of customer-based corporate reputation. These include customer orientation, employer quality, financial strength, product and service quality, and social responsibility. Customer orientation refers to customer perceptions about the willingness of company

employees to satisfy their needs. Employer quality concerns customer perceptions about how the company treats its employees and considers their interests. Financial strength considers customer perceptions of the company's competence, solidity and profitability. Product and service quality refers to customer perceptions of the quality, innovation, value, and reliability of the firm's goods and services. Finally, social responsibility captures the customer belief that the company has a positive role in society and towards the environment (Yasin & Bozbay, 2011). The present investigation adopts Walsh and Beatty's (2007) definition of the customer-based reputation construct as the customer's overall evaluation of a firm. This is based on his or her reactions to the services provided, communication activities, interactions with the firm and/or its representatives or constituencies (such as employees, management, or other customers) and/or known corporate activities.

Despite widespread agreement that positive perceptions of a firm's reputation are positively related to customer satisfaction, trust, loyalty, and commitment (e.g., Sung & Yang, 2008; Walsh, Mitchell, Jackson, & Beatty, 2009), researchers have been unclear about how corporate reputation affects the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors. One possible explanation is the so-called halo effect. This is a cognitive bias that has been extensively documented by psychologists (e.g., Thorndike, 1920). It may be defined as the extent to which overall evaluations of an object influence evaluations of the specific properties of that object (Beckwith, Kassarian, & Lehmann 1978; Thorndike 1920).

The “halo as shield” explanation is part of the larger psychological phenomenon of expectancy confirmation. Traut-Mattausch, Schulz-Hardt, Greitemeyer, and Frey (2004) observed a reluctance amongst respondents to revise their initial expectations, even when confronted with clearly disconfirming evidence. For favorable reputations, customers may be inclined to discount or ignore negative information or reactions about the organization. According to the halo as shield explanation, customers will focus on the positive aspects of the organization and ignore negative employee behaviors. A favorable reputation halo may also lead customers to dismiss employee service sabotage. Sung and Yang (2008) suggested that customers of well-reputed organizations tend to engage in supportive behaviors. They attribute higher levels of competence and quality to firms with a positive reputation and proceed to support them. Furthermore, people will ignore contradictory information once an organization has acquired a positive reputation (Coombs & Holladay, 2001). Following this reasoning, a favorable reputation may create a halo that effectively shields the firm from any negative customer reactions arising from employee service sabotage. Correspondingly, the present authors postulate that the effect of employee service sabotage on customer deviant behaviors is weaker when corporate reputation is favorable and is stronger when corporate reputation is unfavorable.

Hypothesis 5₀ (H5₀): Corporate reputation does not moderate the effect of employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors.

Hypothesis 5_a (H5_a): Corporate reputation moderates the effect of employee service

sabotage and customer deviant behaviors.

-----*Insert Figure 1 here*-----

METHODOLOGY

Sample and procedures

The authors tested the proposed research framework using data that were collected via a questionnaire based survey. The participants were made up of the customers of casual dining restaurant chains located in Northern Taiwan. The authors opted for restaurants as the research object because frontline employees in these settings engage in frequent face-to-face interactions with customers. Since interactions occur through the course of delivering service, they result in high intensity involvement and customer participation, especially as customers are prone to sharing their preferences with others. First, the researchers assembled three chain groupings, based on the number of local outlets. Restaurants in each group were then sampled randomly, with probability being proportionate to the number of establishments. Ultimately, one third of the sample was derived from each group. The customers of twenty-two restaurants participated in the present survey. Diners were intercepted conducted outside restaurants at the immediate conclusions of their service interactions, thereby eliminating potential memory lapses and offering convenient timing. Each survey completion lasted approximately 5-7 minutes and a total of 226 questionnaires were gathered for the purposes of further analysis. The respondents' gender based demographics consisted of 64% women and 36% men, with

almost half (43%) being aged between 21 and 30. The educational level of respondents was high, with 74% having completed college or University.

Measures

The authors drew extensively from the relevant literature when preparing the questionnaire, which consisted of four parts. The employee service sabotage component was an adapted version of Harris and Ogbonna's (2006) measure. Examples of behavior included: the server ignoring restaurant service rules to make things easier for themselves. A 5-point Likert scale was used to assess a total of 9 items ranging from "Never" to "Often." A 5-point rather than a 7-point scale was chosen since the smaller number of alternatives allowed easier communication with the respondents (Olakunke, 2003) as well as increasing response rates and response quality along with reducing respondents' "frustration level" (Babakus & Mangold, 1992). Six dimensions of customer deviant behavior were measured, including thief, rule breaker, belligerent, family feuder, vandal, and deadbeat. These drew from the work of Lovelock (2001), Fullerton and Punj (2004), and Harris and Reynolds (2004), King, Dennis, and Wright (2008). The 5-point Likert scale provided responses ranging from "never" to "always." Three aspects of relational quality were assessed: trust, satisfaction, and commitment. The present study uses and adjusts Crosby, Evans, and Cowles' (1990) trust measuring scale which consists of five items (e.g. the restaurant can be relied upon to keep its promises). The authors applied the four-item measure of customer satisfaction that was developed by Gremler

and Gwinner's (2000) (e.g. I am happy with the restaurant's performance). Commitment for each customer was measured using Meyer, Allen, and Smith's (1993) and Roberts, Varki, and Brodie's (2003) four-item scale (e.g. I continue to deal with the restaurant because I like being associated with it). Corporate reputation followed Walsh and Wiedmann's (2004) approach by viewing customer-based corporate reputation as a multidimensional construct. It was measured using Walsh and Beatty's (2009) customer-based corporate reputation (CBR) scale. This included customer orientation, employer quality, financial strength, product and service quality, and social responsibility and applied a 5-point agreement scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree". Noting that the various scales were originally designed for administration amongst English native speakers, they were translated into Chinese for the purposes of the present study and then back into English, thanks to a professional translator and a bi-lingual scholar. This process ensured the comparability of scale content for cross-linguistic users.

RESULTS

Measurement Model Evaluation

Prior to testing the hypothesized relationships, analyses were undertaken to assess whether the scales achieved satisfactory levels of reliability and whether factor loadings were significantly related to the corresponding constructs. Table 1 shows that the CFA results lend strong support to the convergent validity of all measures, because the estimated loadings of the various indicators for the underlying constructs exceeded 0.5 and are statistically significant at

the 0.05 level. All Composite Construct Reliabilities (CCRs) were 0.90 or higher and exceeded the cut-off value of 0.70 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The average variances extracted (AVE) for all constructs are higher than the 0.5 cut-off, and thus exhibited convergent validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Evidence of discriminant validity can be demonstrated when the squared root of the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct is higher than the correlations between it and all other constructs. As is shown in Table 2, the square roots of the AVE ranged between 0.81 and 0.91 for all constructs, which exceeds the correlation between that construct and any other. On this basis, all constructs have adequate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). It may be concluded that the overall measurement properties were acceptable.

-----*Insert Table 1 & 2 about here*

Structural Model Evaluation

The conceptual model was tested, and the fit of the model was assessed once the measurement of the latent variables had been confirmed. Overall, the results of the structural test provided strong support for the proposed model. The fit indicates that the concept is parsimonious and fits well (RMSEA = .08; CFI = .94; IFI = .94), thereby providing a sound basis for testing the paths.

According to Table 3, the path was significant ($\beta = 0.86$, $t = 8.72$, $p < .01$) because a relationship was expected between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors. The results suggest that customers who perceive service sabotage on the part of frontline

employees, would be more likely to participate in deviant behavior themselves. Employee service sabotage evidently has a directly positive effect on customer deviant behaviors; thus, H1_a (employee service sabotage has a positive impact on customer deviant behaviors) was supported. Moreover, the results of the structural model showed that in examining the effect of employee service sabotage, there appeared to be a significant, negative impact on relational quality constituting of trust, satisfaction, and commitment ($\beta = -0.36, t = -5.04$; $\beta = -0.27, t = -4.15$; $\beta = -0.21, t = -3.03$; all $p < .01$). The results suggest that higher employee service sabotage may lead to a decrease in the incidence of customer trust, satisfaction, and commitment; thus, H2_a, H2_b, H2_c (employee service sabotage has negative effects on relational quality : (a) trust, (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment) were supported. Furthermore, the relationships were statistically significant between satisfaction, and commitment as well as customer deviant behaviors ($\beta = -0.37, t = -2.93$; $\beta = -0.45, t = -4.08$, all $p < .01$); thus H3_b, H3_c (higher quality relations reduce the incidence of customer deviant behaviors (b) satisfaction, and (c) commitment) were supported. Additionally, the results show that trust has no significant effect on customer deviant behaviors ($\beta = -0.19, t = -1.67$); thus H3_a (higher quality relations reduce the incidence of customer deviant behaviors : (a) trust) was not supported.

-----*Insert Table 3 here*-----

Testing of Control Variables

Once the researchers found support for the main effects, the next step was to acquire further insights by incorporating the control variables within the model. Multi-group analysis was performed to assess the control variables of gender, age, and education level. The analysis follows the multi-group analysis procedures that were proposed by Palmatier et al. (2007). As is shown in table 4, the results reveal that gender moderated the impacts of relationships (1) between employee service sabotage and trust ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.72, p < .05$; for male group, $\beta = -.10$; for female group, $\beta = -.39$), (2) between employee service sabotage and satisfaction ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 10.46, p < .05$; for male group, $\beta = -.04$; for female group, $\beta = -.33$), and (3) between satisfaction and customer deviant behaviors ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 4.52, p < .05$; for male group, $\beta = .15$; for female group, $\beta = -.18$). Employee service sabotage had stronger relationships with customer trust and satisfaction for female consumers. Additionally, females perceived stronger relationships between satisfaction and customer deviant behaviors. Moreover, the analysis shows that age has a moderator effect on the relationships (1) between trust and customer deviant behaviors exhaustion ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 6.89, p < .05$), (2) between satisfaction and customer deviant behaviors exhaustion ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 8.90, p < .05$), and (3) between commitment and customer deviant behaviors exhaustion ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 12.68, p < .01$). The results suggest that the influences of trust, satisfaction, and commitment on customer deviant behaviors are higher for customer who are 31-40 years old ($\beta = -.36, \beta = -.29, \& \beta = -.35$, accordingly). As the last control variable, education level has moderator effects on the relationships between (1) employee service

sabotage and trust ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 13.02, p < .01$), (2) employee service sabotage and satisfaction ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 11.37, p < .01$), (3) employee service sabotage and commitment ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 8.40, p < .05$). In other words, customers with lower education level ($\beta = -.65, -.56, \& -.52$, accordingly) perceived stronger relationships between employee service sabotage and trust, satisfaction, as well as commitment.

Testing of Mediation

To test for indirect effects in the mediation models, the researchers performed percentile bootstrapping and bias-corrected percentile bootstrapping at a 95% confidence interval with 2,000 bootstrap samples. The bootstrap framework is particularly useful and may even be applied in the case of small or moderately sized samples (Efron & Tibshirani, 1993). Bootstrap tests are powerful because they detect when the sampling distribution of the mediated effect is skewed away from 0 (Shrout & Bolger, 2002). The researchers followed the Preacher and Hayes (2008) approach and calculated the confidence interval of the lower and upper bounds to test the significance of the indirect effects. The SEs and critical ratios for these effects and the estimates and 95% CIs (percentile and BC) are reported in Table 4. The confidence intervals in Table 4 exclude zero for relationship quality, constituting of trust, satisfaction, and commitment, which means that they are statistically significant by conventional standards.

The results of the bootstrap test do not confirm the existence of a significant mediating

effect for trust between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behavior (indirect effect = -0.07, $p > 0.05$) with a Percentile 95% CI of -0.24 to -0.01 and a BC 95% CI of -0.21 to 0.01. On this basis H4a_a (relational quality : (a) trust mediates the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors) was not supported. Moreover, the mediating effect for satisfaction between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behavior was negative and significant (indirect effect = -0.11, $p < 0.05$) with a Percentile 95% CI of -0.34 to -0.01 and a BC 95% CI of -0.29 to -0.01. An examination of the specific indirect effects indicates that satisfaction is a mediator, since its 95% CI do not contain zero. We may thus conclude that when customers perceive employee service sabotage, this may lessen satisfaction and thereby prompt them to engage in deviant behaviours. On this basis, H4b_a (relational quality : (b) satisfaction mediates the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors) was supported. Consistent with the expectation, there was a significant mediating effect for commitment on the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behavior (indirect effect = -0.11, $p < 0.05$) with a Percentile 95% CI of -0.29 to -0.01 and a BC 95% CI of -0.27 to -0.01; thus H4c_a (relational quality : (c) commitment mediates the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors) was supported.

-----*Insert Table 4 here*-----

Testing the Moderator of Corporate Reputation

A multi-group analysis was performed to assess the moderating role of corporate reputation. A K-mean split was used to divide the sample into groups of high and low corporate reputation. The first group consisted of 136 participants that reported low levels of corporate reputation, whereas the second group consisted of 90 respondents whose reported levels were high. The division is supported because the corporate reputation mean for the first group is significantly lower ($t=22.74$; $p < .01$) than for the second group.

In each multi-group analysis, a chi-square difference test was applied to compare a model in which the hypothesized paths were constrained to be equal across both groups. The researchers then used an unconstrained model in which we permitted the hypothesized path to be moderated to vary freely across the groups with high and low levels of corporate reputation. If the unconstrained model has a significantly lower chi-square than the constrained model and if the effect is in the hypothesized direction, the moderating hypothesis is supported (see Table 5). The multi-group moderation test reveals that corporate reputation negatively moderated the impact of the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behavior ($z=-4.08$, $p < .01$; for the group with low levels of corporate reputation, $\beta= .97$; for the group with high levels of corporate reputation, $\beta=.46$). When customers perceived lower corporate reputation, employee service sabotage had a stronger effect on customer deviant behavior. On this basis, H5_a (corporate reputation moderates the effect of employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors) was supported.

-----*Insert Table 5*-----

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study has examined the influence on consumers of deviant behaviors by customer-contact restaurant employees. The research makes an empirically based contribution by testing the conceptual model to provide evidence of the links between frontline employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors. It is evident that restaurant customers engage in more organizationally unwanted behaviors when they perceive employee misbehaviors. This implies a direct consequence from employee service sabotage to deviant behaviors by customers. In terms of implications for practice, restaurant managers who wish to exercise control over deviant customer behaviors should focus their efforts on understanding the underlying factors of employee service sabotage and monitor prospective sabotage activities by employees during service encounters. This suggests a need to develop training manuals and implement guidelines as part of staff orientation and development programs, with instructions about avoiding deviant behaviors in the workplace through an emphasis on the unwanted impacts of employee service sabotage. Restaurant managers may also familiarize their employees with relevant “de-escalation” techniques in order to reduce friction in customer interactions, possibly through role playing during training sessions. There may also be a role for equivalent on-line instruction. Potential de-escalation techniques include avoidance of responding angrily to customers, expressing understanding and empathy, offering action through concrete solutions, avoiding

personalized feelings about customer actions, staying professionally detached, prepared and well-practiced. Restaurant managers are advised to give close attention to the personal qualities of potential recruits. Though no guarantee of success, the recruitment of customer-oriented personnel is likely to contribute to business effectiveness. Restaurant managers must also understand negative employee behaviors, if they are to enhance the quality of customer relations. Though implementation is likely to be particularly challenging for smaller scale operations, it is suggested that restaurants should deploy well-conceived performance management systems that encourage and reward employees and discourage deviant behaviors.

In terms of contributing to theory and filling a research gap and consistent with the researchers' expectations, it was found that employee service sabotage has negative impacts on relational quality. The research findings suggest that employee deviant behaviors are predictors of relational quality in terms of trust, satisfaction, and commitment. This indicates that employee deviant behaviors lead to poorer quality relations. It is evident that staff behaviors are key drivers of customer trust and satisfaction with the restaurant firm and with customer commitment.

Despite its substantive contributions, this study has some limitations. Firstly, the data collection may have inadvertently biased the results. It has been assumed that a particular encounter provides a reliable representation of how customers perceived themselves during service encounters. This potential limitation prompts the question of whether future

investigations would reach similar conclusions using alternative data collection methods, such as experimentation or participant observation. There is also a question of limited external validity, because of the singular focus on restaurants. The nature of the customer interactions that occur in the restaurant industry are not universal across the services sector, though the chosen setting has been deemed as appropriate for purposes of the present study. Using a single industry may also have mitigated some potential risks of handling inter-industry and sectoral differences (eg accommodation or airlines versus restaurants). Whether the results apply to other servicescapes must await the findings of further research. Moreover, the current focus has been on the interactions and the effects of human service. Future researchers may consider the role of digitally mediated relationships between service personnel and their employers. Finally, as this investigation has been undertaken in Asia, there may be some variation in customer behaviors from what applies in other societies and cultures. Further research on the relationships that have been examined would be potentially beneficial to advance international understanding in other cultural settings and to extend the implications into service industries more generally.

Concluding Summary

This study adds to the scholarly domain by developing and empirically testing a conceptual model that can enhance understanding of the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors. It makes several significant theoretical contributions.

Firstly, the researchers have evaluated if and how the deviant behaviors of restaurant customers are influenced by employee service sabotage. An important finding is that employee service sabotage has direct and positive effects on customer deviant behaviors. Consistent with the findings of Patterson and Baron (2010), Porath, MacInnis, and Folkes (2010), and Plé and Cáceres (2010), the current authors affirm the importance of employee misbehaviors in customer deviant behaviors. By investigating how relationship quality can predict customer deviant behaviors, the preceding study has confirmed a direct causal link between employee-customer relational quality and negative actions on the part of the consumers. Satisfied and committed restaurant consumers engage in fewer deviant behaviors. This suggests that restaurants may benefit from nurturing customer relationships to reduce the incidence of undesirable behaviors and increase willingness to engage in longer-term relationships. Those service delivery practices that enhance personal relationships between customers and restaurants should be promoted.

The study has shown that relational quality is a partial mediator of the effects of employee service sabotage on customer deviant behaviors and that perceived employee service sabotage is an antecedent of lower levels of customer satisfaction and commitment. This is, in turn, associated with customer deviant behaviors. Restaurant managers should take particular account of employee service sabotage to reduce the incidence of customer deviant behaviors, because they influence customer satisfaction and commitment. The empirical findings have

evidenced the value of restaurant employees and suggest active management of employee deviant behaviors in order to enhance the quality of their relationship with customers. The preceding investigation has shown that corporate reputation moderates the effects of employee service sabotage and of customer deviant behaviors. When customers view corporate reputation more poorly, employee service sabotage has a bigger impact on customer deviant behaviors. The customer deviant behaviors that are induced by employee service sabotage are lower when corporate reputation is perceived favourably.

The results indicate that employee service sabotage is positively related to and plausibly induces an increase in customer deviant behaviors. Moreover, the relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors is mediated by satisfaction and commitment as indicators of a good relationship. The relationship between employee service sabotage and customer deviant behaviors was negatively moderated by corporate reputation. When customers perceive corporate reputation more positively, employee service sabotage had less effect on customer deviant behaviors.

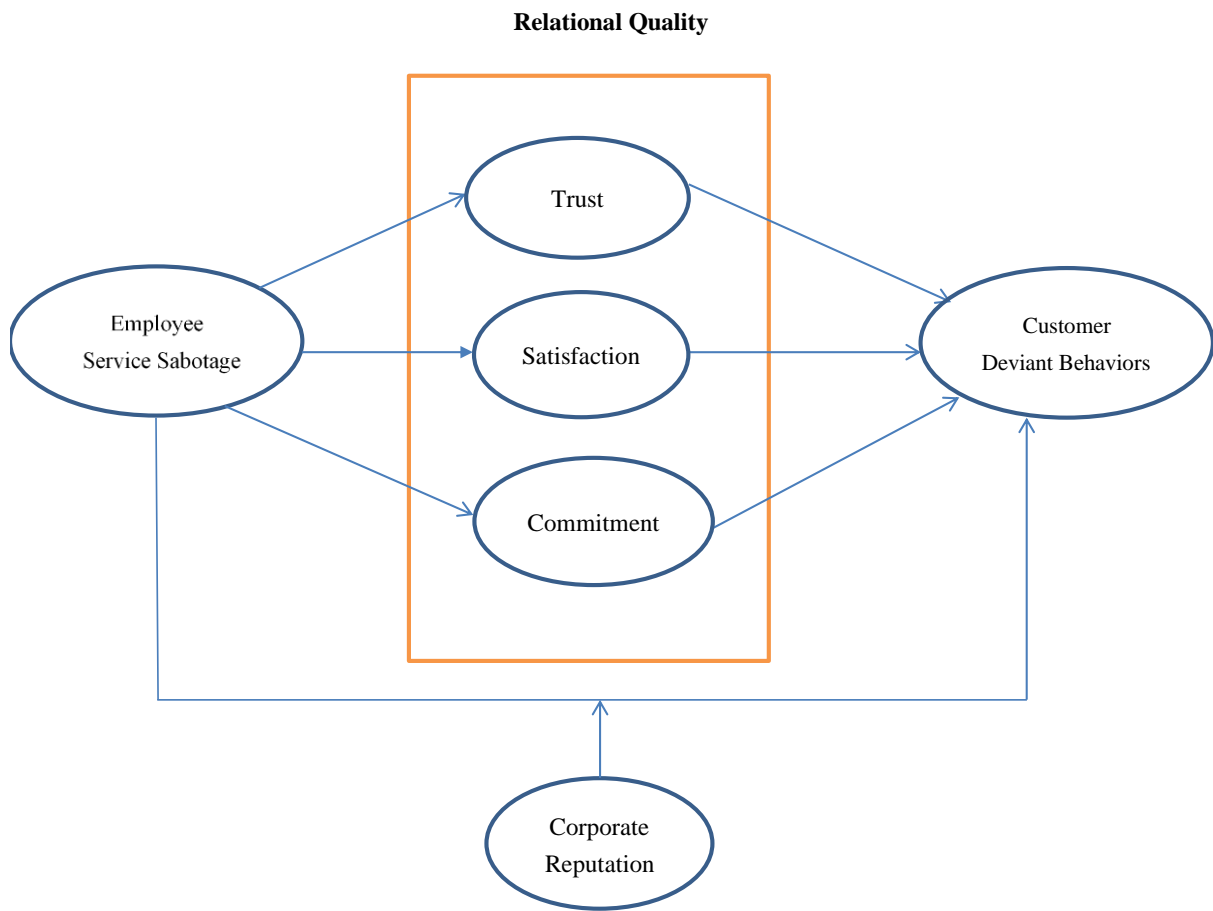


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Table1 Confirmatory Factor analysis. Results and Relevant Composite Reliability

Constructs and items	Loading	Composite Reliability	AVE
Employee Service Sabotage		0.96	0.71
Take revenge on rude customers	0.82		
Hurry customers when they want to	0.85		
It is common practice in this industry to "get back" at customers	0.78		
Ignore restaurant service rules to make things easier for themselves	0.75		
"Get at customers" to make the rest of us laugh.	0.83		
Show off in front of customers	0.83		
Deliberately mess things up when customers aren't looking	0.78		
At this outlet, customers are deliberately mistreated.	0.93		
Slow down service when they want to	0.95		
Trust		0.91	0.64
The restaurant keeps promises	0.72		
The restaurant is sincere	0.76		
The restaurant is reliable	0.78		
The restaurant is honest	0.85		
The restaurant puts customers' interests first	0.86		
Satisfaction		0.91	0.71
Happy with restaurant's performance	0.88		
Satisfied with restaurant's service	0.86		
Satisfied with restaurant's product	0.79		
The restaurant is favorable	0.83		
Commitment		0.90	0.68
Continue to deal with the restaurant because I like to being associated with it.	0.86		
Continue to deal with the restaurant because I genuinely enjoy my relationship with it	0.87		
Emotionally attached to the restaurant	0.78		
Feel a strong sense of identification with the restaurant	0.79		
Customer Deviant Behaviors		0.97	0.83
Thief	0.86		

Rule breaker	0.88		
Belligerent	0.96		
Family feuder	0.89		
Vandal	0.94		
Deadbeat	0.92		
Corporate Reputation		0.93	0.77
Customer orientation	0.84		
Employer quality	0.88		
Financial strength	0.89		
Product and service quality	0.92		
Social responsibility	0.82		

Table 2 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 Employee Service Sabotage	1.30	0.49	0.84					
2 Trust	3.83	0.66	-0.31a	0.81				
3 Satisfaction	3.93	0.67	-0.20a	0.80 a	0.84			
4 Commitment	3.69	0.73	-0.16a	0.71 a	0.76 a	0.82		
5 Customer Deviant Behaviors	1.24	0.48	0.76 a	-0.11a	-0.02	-0.06	0.91	
6 Corporate Reputation	3.69	0.65	-0.16a	0.79a	0.79a	0.68a	0.05	0.88

a. Correlation coefficients were significant at the .05 level.

b. Square roots of average variances extracted (AVE's) shown on diagonal.

Table 3 Structural Model Results

	Coefficient	T-value	Hypothesis Testing
Employee Service Sabotage → Customer Deviant Behaviors	0.86**	8.72	Supported
Employee Service Sabotage → Trust	-0.36**	-5.04	Supported
Employee Service Sabotage → Satisfaction	-0.27**	-4.15	Supported
Employee Service Sabotage → Commitment	-0.21**	-3.03	Supported
Trust → Customer Deviant Behaviors	-0.19	-1.67	Not Supported
Satisfaction → Customer Deviant Behaviors	-0.37**	-2.93	Supported
Commitment → Customer Deviant Behaviors	-0.45**	-4.08	Supported
Goodness-of-fit statistics			
CFI	0.94		
IFI	0.94		
RMSEA	0.08		
Chi-square	527.60		

*p < .05, **p < .01

Table 4. Multi-Group Analysis: Gender, Age, and Education

	Estimated Coefficient	Estimated Coefficient	χ^2 differences ($\Delta DF = 1$)	
Gender	Male (n = 82)	Female (n = 144)		
Employee Service Sabotage→Customer Deviant Behaviors	.78 (10.02)	.70 (8.10)	0.01	
Employee Service Sabotage→Trust	-.10 (-0.99)	-.39 (-4.10)	4.72*	
Employee Service Sabotage→Satisfaction	-.04 (0.38)	-.33 (3.74)	10.46*	
Employee Service Sabotage→Commitment	-.06 (-0.59)	-.18 (2.04)	1.72	
Trust→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.08 (-0.75)	-.17 (-1.91)	0.27	
Satisfaction→Customer Deviant Behaviors	.15 (1.34)	-.18 (-2.05)	4.52*	
Commitment→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.12 (-0.99)	-.11 (-1.25)	0.15	
	Estimated Coefficient	Estimated Coefficient	Estimated Coefficient	χ^2 differences ($\Delta DF = 1$)
Age	< 30 yrs (n = 98)	31 – 40 yrs (n = 40)	> 40 yrs (n = 88)	
Employee Service Sabotage→ Customer Deviant Behaviors	.71 (5.86)	.74 (7.76)	.75 (8.04)	0.91
Employee Service Sabotage→ Trust	-.20 (-1.41)	-.51 (-4.07)	-.40 (-3.53)	2.40
Employee Service Sabotage→ Satisfaction	-.21 (-1.56)	-.21 (-1.70)	-.35(-3.31)	3.85
Employee Service Sabotage→ Commitment	-.33 (-2.23)	-.13 (-1.14)	-.24(-2.25)	1.68
Trust→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.22 (-1.62)	-.36 (-2.87)	-.02 (0.25)	6.89*
Satisfaction→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.11 (-0.85)	-.29 (-2.34)	-.16 (1.49)	8.90*
Commitment→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.35 (-2.42)	-.30 (-2.50)	-.12 (1.10)	12.68**
	Estimated Coefficient	Estimated Coefficient	χ^2 differences ($\Delta DF = 1$)	
Education	High School or below (n = 59)	Bachelor's degree or above (n = 167)		

Employee Service Sabotage→Customer Deviant Behaviors	.65 (5.98)	.79 (11.22)	0.11
Employee Service Sabotage→Trust	-.65 (-5.30)	-.23 (-2.68)	13.02**
Employee Service Sabotage→Satisfaction	-.56 (-4.68)	-.12 (-1.45)	11.37**
Employee Service Sabotage→Commitment	-.52 (-4.22)	-.12 (-1.42)	8.40*
Trust→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.19 (-1.55)	-.09 (-1.06)	0.38
Satisfaction→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.15 (-1.21)	-.05 (0.65)	1.89
Commitment→Customer Deviant Behaviors	-.12 (-0.98)	-.10 (-1.24)	0.12

*p < .05. **p < .01

Table 5. Mediation of the Effect of Employee Service Sabotage on Customer Deviant Behaviors through Relational Quality

	Bootstrapping					
	Product of Coefficients		Percentile 95% CI		BC95% CI	
	Point Estimate	<i>SE</i>	Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Employee Service Sabotage						
Customer Deviant Behaviors						
Trust	-.07	.05	-.24	-.01	-.21	.01
Satisfaction	-.11	.08	-.34	-.01	-.29	-.01
Commitment	-.11	.07	-.29	-.01	-.27	-.01

Note—BC, bias corrected; 2,000 bootstrap samples.

Table 6. Multi-Group Analysis: Corporate Reputation

	Coefficient (Low)	Coefficient (High)	Z score
Employee Service Sabotage → Customer Deviant Behaviors	.97	.46	-4.08

*p < .05. **p < .01

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