

A Social Informational Processing Lens on Multi-Foci Mistreatment: Roles of Customer Orientation and Power Distance

Highlights

- A multi-foci approach to hospitality employees' workplace mistreatment;
- Individual differences in reacting to multi-foci mistreatment;
- Salient role of supervisor in mitigating the downside of customer mistreatment.

Abstract

Drawing upon the social information processing theory, this set of studies aims to examine hospitality frontline employees' sabotage toward customers following workplace mistreatment, namely customer incivility and abusive supervision. In addition, employees' power distance belief and customer orientation are identified as individual contingency factors that alter employees' sabotage behavior following mistreatment. A multi-method approach with cross-sectional and experimental designs was adopted. In Study 1, 347 Chinese hospitality frontline employees provided survey data in a cross-sectional design. In Study 2, 191 U.S. hospitality frontline employees were recruited for a between-subjects scenario-based experiment. The findings reveal the complementary roles of customers and supervisors as informational sources that jointly determine employees' sabotage behaviors. In addition, in line with the social information processing theory, employees' personal characteristics regarding the perception of informational sources (power distance belief and customer orientation) were found to significantly alter employees' sabotage behavior derived from multi-foci workplace mistreatment.

Keywords Social information processing, Sabotage toward customers, Power distance belief, Customer orientation

Introduction

“Whether you work with us, stay with us, live with us, discover with us, we believe our purpose is to create an impression that we will stay with you for a lifetime. It comes from our belief that life is richer when we truly connect to people and the world around us.”

The statement introducing this article is taken from a promotional video for Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts. It suggests that Four Seasons considers its customers and employees to be equally valuable stakeholders. Hospitality frontline employees often face two types of “bosses”: internal (i.e., supervisors) and external bosses (i.e., customers; Skarlicki et al., 2016). On the one hand, customers occupy a predominant position in the service value chain as they are both the end users and final judges of service products (Wang et al., 2021). On the other hand, supervisors wield power over employees’ performance appraisal, promotion, and compensation (Eisenberger et al., 2010). As a result, in the relational network composed of customers, supervisors, and employees, frontline employees are located in a relatively inferior position due to the power asymmetry and are thus likely to experience mistreatment from customers and supervisors alike (Ram, 2018).

To illustrate, 85% of the frontline employees in the fast food and retail industries in Australia have experienced uncivil treatment from customers (SDA, 2021). Ram (2018) revealed that 30% of hospitality workers in Europe report experiencing at least one instance of mistreatment from their supervisors at work annually (e.g., violence, verbal aggression, bullying,

or sexual harassment). This puts hospitality workers second only to workers in the health and education industries across 11 industries. The media also showcases the mistreatment experienced by hospitality frontline employees. In the BBC television sitcom *Fawlty Towers*, the well-meaning Spanish waiter Manuel is constantly verbally and physically abused by his boss, Basil Fawlty.

Although previous research advanced our understanding of employee responses to mistreatment by supervisors or customers (Baker & Kim, 2021), these previous studies examined mistreatment by either supervisors or customers in an independent way (Zhou et al., 2021). However, employees receive and process information from multiple sources. For instance, following a service failure, an employee may receive affirmative feedback from customers as he/she enacts successful service recovery while at the same time facing criticism from their supervisor for the occurrence of service failure (Li et al., 2021). This is in line with the social information processing perspective which proposes that various informational resources jointly determine one's attitude and behaviors (Miller & Monge, 1985). Nonetheless, research that integrates treatments of both customers and supervisors to understand job behaviors of hospitality employees is scarce. To address this important research gap, this set of studies draws upon the social information processing (SIP) theory (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978) to examine hospitality employees' behavioral reactions to mistreatments enacted by both customers and supervisors.

A salient tendency following mistreatment is for employees to engage in counterproductive or withdrawal work behaviors (Chi et al., 2018). In the hospitality context, when exposed to customer incivility, employees have the tendency to initiate sabotage toward customers as a typical situational counterproductive behavior to damage the interests of customers and

organizations (Wang et al., 2011). This behavioral tendency, according to the SIP theory, is likely to be influenced by social informational cues captured by employees in their work environment. This research considers abusive supervision as critical social information that employees refer to when determining their sabotage toward customers derived from customer incivility. Moreover, abusive supervision shares the similar mistreatment nature with customer incivility, thereby serving as a relevant social informational reference (Brees et al., 2014). As such, hospitality employees' sabotage toward customers is likely to be a function of the multi-foci mistreatments that hospitality employees receive from both customers and supervisors.

Importantly, individual factors that pertain to altering one's perception of informational sources play important roles in influencing one's processing of social information and subsequent behavioral reactions (Miller & Monge, 1985). As a result, we draw on the SIP theory to propose that employees' reactions to multi-foci mistreatment by customers and supervisors are not homogenous, but rather, contingent on employees' individual differences that are likely to influence their perceptions of customers and supervisors. Previous research has revealed both adaptive (i.e., job performance; Tepper, 2007) and deleterious (i.e., employee emotion exhaustion; Yu et al., 2020) influences of abusive supervision, implying the existence of contingency factors in this process. Besides, prior studies have identified contextual factors (i.e., organizational support and transformational leadership; Sommovigo et al., 2019; Arnold & Walsh, 2015) in the effects of customer incivility. Nonetheless, the exploration toward personal factors in altering the relationship between customer incivility and employee outcomes is scarce (for a notable exception, Jang et al., 2020).

Respectively, we identified one individual characteristic that influences employees' perception of customers (customer orientation) and one individual characteristic that pertains to

employees' views of their supervisors (power distance belief), as boundary conditions that alter behavioral reaction to negative social information received from customers (customer incivility) and supervisors (abusive supervision). We investigate whether customer orientation, as an individual characteristic that tends to optimize customers as informational source, would mitigate frontline employees' sabotage toward customers as a result of mistreatment from supervisors and customers. Moreover, we propose that power distance belief, as a supervisor-directed individual factor, could significantly influence employees' behavioral reactions called forth by mistreatments from supervisors and customers.

Taken together, the present research aims to answer the following questions: (1) What is the relationship between the mistreatments that employees receive as social information from customers and supervisors and employees' sabotage toward customers? (2) How do employees' individual characteristics related to the two informational sources—namely, customer orientation and power distance belief—moderate the impacts of multi-foci mistreatments on employees' sabotage toward customers? Accordingly, the objectives of this research are to examine the joint effects of abusive supervision, customer incivility, and the individual characteristics of (1) customer orientation and (2) power distance belief on employees' sabotage toward customers. The current set of studies contributes to the workplace mistreatment literature mainly in two ways. First, research on mistreatments from either customers or supervisors has significantly advanced. In spite of this, important research gaps exist in that although hospitality employees interact with both customers and supervisors, little is known about how mistreatments from supervisors and customers are collectively perceived by employees and thus determine their behavioral responses. To fill this research gap, the current research derives from a novel perspective of SIP theory to consider both customers and supervisors as critical informational

sources and regard their mistreatments as crucial social informational cues to guide behaviors of hospitality frontline employees. The examination of customer-directed sabotage derived from different informational cues (mistreatment by supervisors and customers) takes into consideration the work characteristics of hospitality frontline employees and provides a novel theoretical lens on understanding employee mistreatment. Second, drawing on the SIP theory that considers individual differences as critical contingencies to explain the influence of various social information, we identify customer orientation (customer-directed) and power distance belief (supervisor-directed) as two individual factors that alter employees' perception of informational sources (supervisors and customers), thereby influencing employees' customer-directed sabotage enacted by mistreatment from both customers and supervisors. By doing so, for the first time, we take the SIP view to identify two individual factors that moderate the impacts of mistreatment by both customers and supervisors on employees' sabotage toward customers.

Literature review and hypothesis development

Customer incivility

Customer incivility refers to “the low-quality interpersonal treatment that employees receive from their customers during service interactions” (Koopmann et al., 2015, p. 34). Incivility depicts an ambiguous deviant behavior with vague intentions to harm a target, yet it still violates workplace norms and the value of mutual respect (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Kim & Qu, 2019). This low-intensity deviant and discourteous behavior shown by customers toward employees takes various forms ranging from yelling and swearing to purposefully ignoring employees (Cheng et al., 2020; Sliter et al., 2010). According to the SIP theory, these deviant

behaviors are interpreted by employees as salient social information that helps them understand the workplace and guide their behaviors (Goldman, 2001). Customer incivility is common in the hospitality industry due to the customer-focused and quality-oriented business philosophy (e.g., the expectation that employees always treat the customer with courtesy; Boukis et al., 2020). Customer incivility exerts harmful impacts on employees, leading to emotional exhaustion (Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Sliter et al., 2010) and stronger turnover intentions (Han et al., 2016). While internal incivility can be controlled via zero-tolerance organizational policies and supportive climate, external incivility (e.g., customer incivility) is perpetuated by customers who are out of managers' reach (Pearson & Porath, 2005).

Abusive supervision

Abusive supervision refers to “subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (Tepper, 2000, p. 178). Abusive supervisors treat subordinates without respect, and they may fail to acknowledge employees’ efforts or even humiliate the employees (Baumeister et al., 2001; Al-Hawari et al., 2020). From the SIP perspective, similar to customer incivility, abusive supervisors’ words and deeds constitute important social information that influences employees’ work behaviors (Brees et al., 2014). Abusive supervision negatively influences job attitudes and behavioral outcomes, such as organizational identification (Liu et al., 2016) and job performance (Farooq & Sultana, 2021; Walter et al., 2015).

Leaders’ words and deeds are regarded not only as personal discretionary behaviors but also as embodiments of the organization (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 2010). The organizational support theory views leaders as agents of the organization, which explains why leaders’ abusive behavior is able to elicit employees’ behavioral reactions to the organization beyond the leaders

themselves (Shoss et al., 2013). In other words, employees are likely to attribute abusive supervision to the organization and try to get even by withdrawing or engaging in counterproductive work behaviors that undermine organizational performance, including behaviors that undermine the interests of customers and that eventually harm the organization (Velez & Neves, 2017). With respect to the current research, we propose that employees would resort to leaders' attitudes and behaviors in order to construct the meaning of work events or situations (e.g., customer incivility), which influences their responses to customer incivility.

The interactive influence of customer incivility and abusive supervision on employee sabotage toward customers

Counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) are behaviors that employees initiate to intentionally harm the interests of their organizations. CWB take different forms with various degrees of severity, ranging from coming to work late and leaving early or being absentminded at work, to engaging in theft, aggression, and incivility (Marcus et al., 2016). Given the customer-centered nature of the hospitality industry, sabotage toward customers may be the most deleterious form of CWB (e.g., Park & Kim, 2019). Sabotage toward customers refers to “a counterproductive work behavior whereby an employee intentionally harms the legitimate interests of a customer” (Wang et al., 2011, p. 312). Sabotage toward customers is initiated not only to hurt customers, but also retaliate against organizations in general (Hu et al., 2020). Experience of mistreatment is often the elicitors of customer-directed sabotage (Wang et al., 2011).

To understand the outcomes of frontline employees' information processing from different sources (i.e., supervisors and customers), the present research proposes that employees' sabotage toward customers is a function of mistreatments by both customers and supervisors as social

information. According to the SIP theory, individuals obtain social information from multiple sources, in which one information source could compensate or substitute one another (Haunschild & Beckman, 1998; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In this regard, the treatment by supervisors and customers, as two independent social information cues, may compensate each other and impact employees' behavioral outcomes. Compared to customers, supervisors possess a more proximal interaction with employees since they are perceived as organizations' agents, and hence, their words and deeds could exert significant influences on employee outcomes, which is referred as "agent-dominance effect" (Fassina et al., 2008; Skarlicki et al., 2016; Van Jaarsveld et al., 2021). Building on previous findings, we argue that in addition to mistreatment by customers (i.e., customer incivility), supervisors' behavior could exert a critical impact on employees' sabotage toward customers. Specifically, we posit that the influence of customer incivility on employees' sabotage toward customers is different based on how employees are treated by their supervisors. On the one hand, when there is supervisor support, employees are less likely to engage in sabotage behaviors following customer incivility since their interpretation of customer incivility as one informational cue is compensated by positive supervisory treatment as another informational cue (Haunschild & Beckman, 1998; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). This is also in line with the previous findings revealing that supervisors' support tends to mitigate followers' maladaptive affective experiences and counterproductive work behaviors (i.e., emotion exhaustion and turnover intentions) caused by customer injustice (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2021). On the other hand, when abusive supervision is high, it can intensify employees' sabotage toward customers that was called forth by high customer mistreatment. For instance, empirical evidence reveals that the supervisors' unjust treatment could exacerbate employees' sabotage toward customers even following customer justice (Skarlicki et al., 2016). Therefore, we argue a

two-way interaction that supervisor support can buffer, whereas abusive supervision can aggravate, the negative impact of customer incivility on employees' sabotage toward customers.

Individual contingencies of power distance belief and customer orientation

The SIP theory holds that in processing social information cues, individuals demonstrate variance in their way to interpret and react to information as a function of difference in personal ability, relevance and disposition (Lemerise & Arsenio, 2000). The individual characteristics influence the social information processing and subsequent reactions by altering one's attention to informational cues, judgment of information credibility, attribution and importance about informational source (Forgas & George, 2001). In particular, individual factors that pertain to one's perception about their informational sources are important contingencies when predicting one's reactions to various social information (Skarlicki et al., 2016). As such, the current research identifies one supervisor-directed individual characteristic (i.e., power distance belief) and one customer-directed individual characteristic (i.e., customer orientation) that influence employees' perception of two informational sources: supervisors and customers, which are likely to moderate the impacts of multi-foci mistreatment on employees' behavioral response.

The moderating role of power distance belief

Power distance belief refers to "the degree to which individuals accept and believe that organizational, institutional, or societal power should be distributed unequally" (Lian et al., 2012, p. 107). Power distance belief is shaped by individual life narratives and influenced by both macro (e.g., national culture, religious belief) and micro (e.g., organizational climate) factors (Adamovic, 2022). Followers perceiving high levels of power distance at work accept the power asymmetry between frontline employees and supervisors and react more favorably to abusive supervision, making fewer negative assessments of interpersonal justice (e.g., Kirkman

et al., 2009; Peltokorpi, 2019). From the SIP theoretical perspective, power distance belief is a key individual factor that shapes employees' perception of their leader as one informational source, thereby influencing their interpretation of social information delivered by leaders and subsequent reactions (Hsiung & Tsai, 2017). Employees with high power distance beliefs strictly adhere to rules and guidance from their supervisors (Lian et al., 2012), and are more tolerant of and less sensitive to workplace mistreatment (Liu et al., 2014). We thus posit that individuals high in power distance expect their leaders to be superior and authoritative, and tend to consider social information received from leaders to be irrefutable and reasonable. Given this mindset, leaders' abusive behavior is likely to be tolerated by followers with high power distance beliefs, thus altering their behaviors that called forth by customer incivility. Accordingly, we argue that employees' sabotage toward customers is a function of customer incivility, abusive supervision, and power distance belief, namely a three-way interaction. Taken together, we propose as follows:

Hypothesis 1. There is a three-way interaction between customer incivility, abusive supervision, and power distance belief on employee sabotage toward customers. Specifically,

Hypothesis 1a. Customer incivility is not related to service sabotage when there is supervisor support, and the relationship is consistent across different levels of power distance belief.

Hypothesis 1b. Customer incivility is positively related to service sabotage, which is stronger under abusive supervision. This relationship is magnified when power distance belief is high than low.

The moderating role of customer orientation

Customer orientation reflects service employees' beliefs about their abilities to satisfy customers' demands as well as the employees' levels of enjoyment when serving customers (Brady & Cronin, 2001). Customer orientation at the individual level has long been construed as an individual characteristic that varies among individuals, which is a function of personal traits, life narratives, and work environment (Brown et al., 2002; Chu-Mei & Kuang-Jung, 2006; Ro & Chen, 2011). From the SIP viewpoint, customer orientation reflects one's holistic view toward customers who serve as one social informational source for hospitality frontline employees (Lam & Mayer, 2014). As such, individuals' customer orientation alters their perception of customers as social informational source and accordingly influence the behavioral response to customers. Employees with high customer orientation are resolute to overcome obstacles at work, control negative emotions, and enjoy solving customer issues (Brown et al., 2002). According to the SIP theory, one's attitude toward the informational source influences their perception about this informational source's behaviors (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). We propose that employees' sabotage following mistreatment can vary because workplace mistreatment is likely to be interpreted differently based on the variance of customer orientation. On the one hand, when employees are low in customer orientation, they tend to lack the motivation to serve customers (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). In this regard, even when employees are presented with low levels of mistreatment from customers and supervisors, they will likely resort to high sabotage behaviors during the service production and delivery. On the other hand, frontline employees with high customer orientation care about customers and are dedicated to service quality for the sake of customer satisfaction (Lam & Mayer, 2014). Hence, they are likely to perceive the customer as a paramount social informational source compared to other sources. As a result, even under supervisor support, high customer orientation may magnify the negative impacts of customer

incivility on employee consequent behavioral reactions. Accordingly, employees' sabotage toward customers is a function of customer incivility, abusive supervision, and customer orientation, namely three-way interaction. Specifically, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2. There is a three-way interaction between customer incivility, abusive supervision, and customer orientation on employee sabotage toward customers. Specifically,

Hypothesis 2a. When customer orientation rating is low, hospitality frontline employees' sabotage toward customers is high regardless of the levels of customer incivility and abusive supervision.

Hypothesis 2b. When customer orientation is high, hospitality frontline employees' sabotage toward customers is higher with customer incivility (vs. support), only in the presence of supervisor support but not abusive supervision.

Overview of research

Figure 1 depicts the overall conceptual model for this research. The overall goal of the research is to draw upon the SIP theory to examine how employees' sabotage toward customers is a joint function of multi-foci social information (customer and supervisor mistreatment), as well as the individual contingencies of power distance belief and customer orientation.

Following the recommendations on examining workplace unethical behaviors by using multi-method approach (e.g., DeCreme & Moore, 2020; Fischer et al., 2021), we developed two studies with cross-sectional and experimental designs to ensure both internal and external validity of the research findings. As suggested by Fischer et al. (2021), abusive supervision is a phenomenon with a low base rate, meaning it is a rare workplace event. Therefore, Fischer et al. (2021) suggested using experiment to ensure that meaningful levels in abusive supervision can

be observed. Specifically, study 1 utilized a cross-sectional design in which hospitality employees' abusive supervision, customer incivility, power distance beliefs, and sabotage toward customers were measured based on employees' actual work experience (Hypothesis 1). In study 2, we designed scenarios in which uncivil and supportive types of treatment by supervisors and customers were manipulated following service failure. We then investigated how employees' customer orientation influenced the proposed relationships (Hypotheses 2).

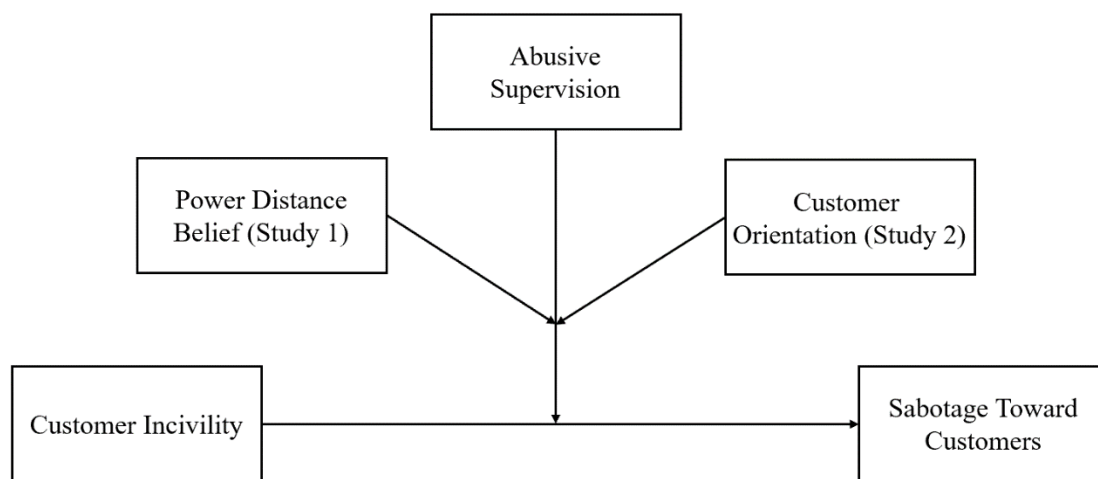


Figure 1. Conceptual Model

Study 1

Methodology

Participants and procedures

Resorting to one co-author's alumni network, study 1 adopted convenience sampling method by recruiting participants among Chinese hotel frontline employees working at one five-star local hotel located in southeast China. Among 373 surveys distributed, 347 were returned and completed. Upon the agreement of participants, the hotel HR department provided the list of

the cell phone numbers of participants who were willing to participate in this study, without the names of participants in order to keep the survey anonymous. The survey was distributed via Wenjuanxing, a Chinese online data collection platform, with one independent link created for each participant, sent via SMS to participants' cell phone. Participants needed to click the survey link shown in the SMS they received on their cell phone to get access to the survey questions. By doing this, we created a direct contact channel with survey participants without involving hotel HR or other management teams, thereby reducing the possible biases due to the concern of privacy and data security. Hotel management team had no access to the collected data. The average age of our participants was 37 years old ($SD = 9.69$). Fifty-four percent of them were males, with an average of three years of job tenure and twenty-five percent of them had an associate degree.

Measures

All measures used a seven-point Likert scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree. Abusive supervision was measured with five items adopted from Mitchell and Ambrose (2007). A sample item is "My supervisor ridicules me." Customer incivility was measured with a 5-item scale adopted from Kim and Qu (2019). One sample item includes "Customers make insulting comments to me." Eight items by Earley and Erez (1997) were used to measure employees' power distance belief. A sample item is "Employees who often question authority sometimes keep their managers from being effective". We used the five items developed by Skarlicki et al. (2008) to assess employees' sabotage toward customers. A sample item is "I intentionally put the customer on hold for a long period of time".

Study 1 results

Measurement model

Results from confirmatory factor analysis showed that all standardized factor loadings were above 0.5 and were significant at a level of $p < 0.01$, demonstrating a good convergent validity (see supplementary file, Table S1). The composite reliability (CR) for customer incivility, abusive supervision, power distance belief and sabotage toward customers were 0.93, 0.95, 0.93, and 0.97, respectively, exceeding the 0.7 cutoff point (Hair et al., 2010). Average variance extracted (AVE) values for customer incivility, abusive supervision, power distance belief, and sabotage toward customers were 0.71, 0.80, 0.63, and 0.87, respectively, all of which were greater than the 0.5 cutoff value. The measurement model indices indicated a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 863.025$, $df = 224$, $p < .01$; $RMSEA = .08$, $SRMR = .05$, $CFI = .92$, $TLI = .92$). Discriminant validity was ensured as the AVE value of each construct (ranging from 0.628 to 0.873) exceeded its squared correlation coefficients with other constructs (ranging from 0.00 to 0.35; see supplementary file, Table S2).

Hypothesis testing

To test H1, we used PROCESS (Model 3; Hayes, 2017). The independent variable is customer incivility, the first level moderator is abusive supervision, the second level moderator is power distance belief, and the dependent variable is sabotage toward customers. The overall regression model was significant ($F(7, 339) = 35.42$, $p < 0.01$, adjusted R -square = 0.42). The main effects of abusive supervision ($t(339) = 2.48$, $p < 0.05$) and power distance belief ($t(339) = 2.41$, $p < 0.05$) were significant. The two-way interaction between customer incivility and power distance belief ($t(339) = -2.49$, $p < 0.05$) and the two-way interaction between abusive

supervision and power distance belief ($t(339) = -2.48, p < 0.05$) were significant. More importantly, the three-way interaction was significant ($t(339) = 2.70, p < 0.01$; see Table 1).

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value
Constant	-0.50	0.78	-0.64	0.52
Customer incivility (CI)	0.51	0.28	1.80	0.07
Abusive supervision (AS)	0.95	0.38	2.48	0.01
Power distance belief (PDB)	0.46	0.19	2.41	0.02
CI x AS	-0.14	0.10	-1.33	0.19
CI x PDB	-0.17	0.07	-2.49	0.01
AS x PDB	-0.24	0.10	-2.48	0.01
CI x AS x PDB	0.07	0.03	2.70	<0.01

Table 1. PROCESS results from Study 1

To decompose the three-way interaction, we used a floodlight analysis via Johnson-Neyman technique (Spiller et al., 2013). Figure 2 shows that when respondents gave low ratings of abusive supervision, sabotage toward customers is invariantly low regardless of customer incivility and that this pattern is consistent across low and high power distance belief conditions, supporting H1a. Conversely, when respondents gave high ratings of abusive supervision, sabotage toward customers is higher for higher ratings of customer incivility and this pattern is magnified for the high (vs. low) power distance belief condition, supporting H1b. In sum, H1 is supported.

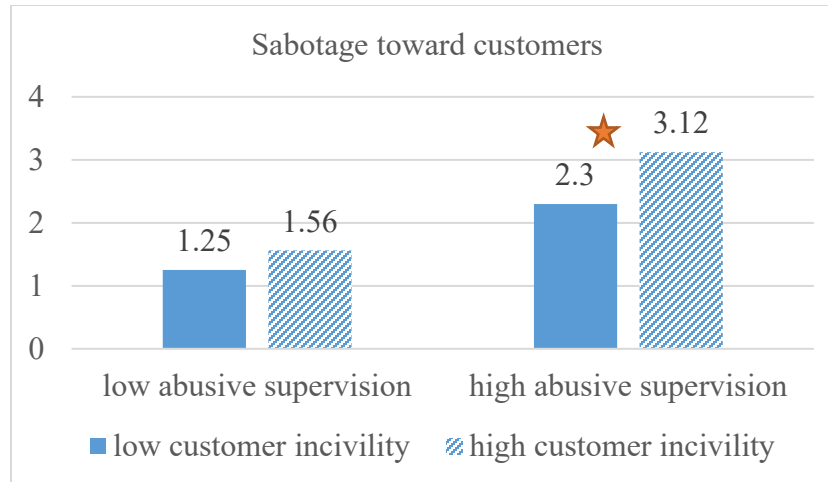


Figure 2a. Low power distance belief

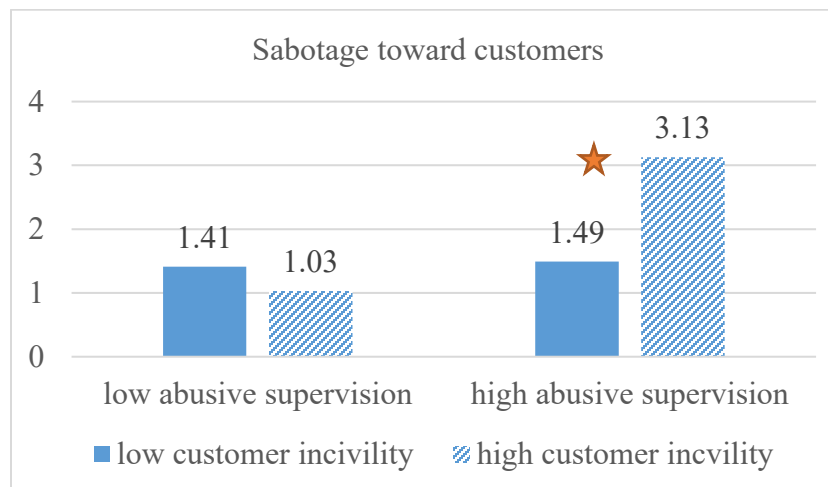


Figure 2b. High power distance belief

The star indicates statistical significance at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Study 2

Methodology

Participants and procedures

To test the H2, a 2 (abusive supervision vs supervisor support) x 2 (customer support vs customer incivility) x 2 (high customer orientation vs low customer orientation) between-

subjects scenario-based quasi-experimental design in a hotel setting was used. Participants in this study are full-time employees who are in the front office department in the hotel industry in the United States. To recruit the qualified participants, data collection was conducted through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) (Chen et al., 2021). We had three qualification questions at the beginning of the survey. First, we showed the participants a list of industries for them to choose from. Only the participants who selected the answer of “hotel industry” were directed to answer the next question. Second, participants were asked to report the department that they were working in. Only the participants who selected the answer of “front office department” were directed to the last question. Third, we asked participants to select their employment status. Only the ones who selected the answer of “full-time employees” were directed to the main survey. To further ensure the quality of the data from MTurk workers, we embedded several attention check questions in the survey. Participants who failed to answer any of the attention check questions were eliminated from the data analysis.

The study was administered at two times to reduce the potential common-method bias. In the phase 1, participants’ customer orientation and demographic information were measured. After around two weeks, participants who successfully completed the phase 1 survey were invited to participate in the phase 2 survey. In the phase 2, participants were randomly assigned to one of the four scenarios. Participants were asked to read the scenario regarding dealing with a guest issue and to imagine themselves as the front desk agent in the scenario. After reading the scenario, participants were asked to rate the questions regarding their intended sabotage toward customers. A total of 215 were with the completed information and passed the attention check questions. After matching with the responses from two phases, there were a total of 191 completed responses. Approximately 59.7% of the participants are males, 52.9% were in the age

group of 25 to 34 years old, and 41.9% of the participants have had 1 to 3 years working experience in the hotel industry.

Scenario development

To develop the scenarios and to ensure the realism, a pre-test was conducted to interview ten full-time employees who were working or had working experience in the front office department in the hotel industry of the United States. The following steps were used to create the scenarios. First, the researchers developed the scenarios based on the previous literature on customer incivility and abusive supervision. Next, before the scheduled interview, the scenarios were sent to each participant's email for them to review. Each participant reviewed four situations, including supervisor support, abusive supervision, customer support, and customer incivility. Then, during the Skype or phone interview, the interviewees were asked to discuss how realistic the examples used in each situation, give specific examples from their perspectives, and offer suggestions for improving the contents each situation. The researchers refined the scenarios based on the interview results with the front office employees. Finally, a survey test involved in a group of hotel front office employees were asked to rate the level of realism again before sending the survey in the major study. The scenarios used in study 2 can be found in Appendix A.

Measures

Customer orientation was measured by using a 5-item scale from Susskind et al. (2003). A sample item is "When performing my job, the customer is most important to me" ($\alpha = .85$). Intended sabotage toward customers was measured by using a 7-item scale from Zhou et al. (2018). A sample item is "I would try to take revenge on this customer described in the scenario" ($\alpha = .95$). All the items in this research were measured on a seven-point Likert scales with 1

represents “strongly disagree” and 7 represents “strongly agree”. Following the previous studies on customer mistreatment and employee sabotage (Wang et al., 2011), we also controlled for gender in this study. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted to examine the distinctiveness of our study constructs (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988). The CFA results showed that the factor loadings of all the measurement items are above .5 and were significant at a level of $p < .001$, demonstrating a good convergent validity. The composite reliabilities (CR) for customer orientation and sabotage toward customers were .85 and .95, respectively, meeting the .7 cutoff point (Hair et al., 2010). Average variance extracted (AVE) were found to be .54 and .77 for customer orientation and sabotage toward customers, which are greater than the .5 cutoff. The measurement model indices indicate a good model fit ($\chi^2 = 65.38$, $df = 43$, $p < .05$; $RMSEA = .05$, $CFI = .98$, $IFI = .99$).

Study 2 results

Realism and manipulation checks

Two questions were used to check if the scenarios were perceived as realistic by participants, namely, “The scenario described above was realistic” and “It was easy to project myself in the scenario” (1 = “not at all” and 7 = “very much”). The means were 6.55 and 6.74 for the two questions, respectively. Thus, participants perceived the scenarios as highly realistic. To examine if participants perceived the scenarios in the expected direction, participants were asked to rate the following questions on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = “strongly disagree” and 7 = “strongly agree”): “In the scenario, the supervisor Julie was supportive;” “In the scenario, the supervisor Julie was abusive and uncivil;” “In the scenario, the customer was supportive;” and “In the scenario, the customer was aggressive and uncivil.” Participants perceived that the supervisor was more supportive in the supervisor support condition (vs. abusive supervision

condition) [$M_{(support)} = 5.62, M_{(abusive)} = 3.98, t = 6.97, p < .001$]. Participants perceived that the supervisor was more abusive in the abusive supervision condition (vs. supervisor support condition) [$M_{(abusive)} = 5.52, M_{(support)} = 4.10, M_{(difference)} = 1.42, t = -5.53, p < .001$]. Participants perceived that the customer was more supportive in the customer support condition (vs. customer incivility condition) [$M_{(support)} = 5.50, M_{(incivility)} = 3.88, t = 4.09, p < .001$]. Participants perceived that the customer was more uncivil in the customer incivility condition (vs. customer support condition) [$M_{(incivility)} = 5.50, M_{(support)} = 4.22, M_{(difference)} = 1.28, t = 4.08, p < .001$]. Taken together, our manipulations were deemed effective.

Hypothesis testing

To test H2, we used PROCESS (Model 3; Hayes, 2017). The independent variable is customer support/incivility, the first level moderator is abusive supervision/supervisor support, the second level moderator is customer orientation, and the dependent variable is sabotage toward customers. The overall regression model was significant ($F(7, 183) = 3.51, p < 0.01$, adjusted R -square = 0.12). The main effects of customer support/incivility ($t(183) = -2.00, p < 0.05$) and customer orientation ($t(183) = -3.34, p < 0.01$) were significant. The two-way interaction between customer support/incivility and customer orientation was significant ($t(183) = 2.39, p < 0.05$). More importantly, this two-way interaction was qualified by the significant three-way interaction ($t(183) = -2.05, p < 0.05$; see Table 2).

	Unstandardized coefficient	Standard error	t -value	p -value
Constant	8.64	1.53	5.63	0.00
Customer incivility/support (CICS)	-4.19	2.10	-2.00	0.04
Supervisory abuse/support (SASS)	-2.50	2.18	-1.15	0.25

Customer orientation (COR)	-0.91	0.27	-3.34	0.00
CICS x SASS	5.58	3.04	1.83	0.07
CICS x COR	0.89	0.37	2.39	0.02
SASS x COR	0.58	0.38	1.52	0.13
CICS x SASS x COR	-1.09	0.53	-2.05	0.04

Table 2. PROCESS results from Study 2

To decompose the three-way interaction, we used a floodlight analysis via Johnson-Neyman technique (Spiller et al., 2013). Figure 3a depicts the interaction between customer support/incivility and abusive supervision/supervisor support for the low customer orientation group. It shows that in the presence of supervisor support, sabotage toward customers is invariantly low regardless of customer support/incivility. However, in the presence of abusive supervision, sabotage toward customers is higher following customer incivility (vs. customer support). Meanwhile, Figure 3b depicts the corresponding interaction for the high customer orientation group. It shows that in the presence of supervisor support, sabotage toward customers is higher following customer incivility (vs. customer support). However, in the presence of abusive supervision, sabotage toward customers does not differ by customer support/incivility. In sum, H2 is supported.

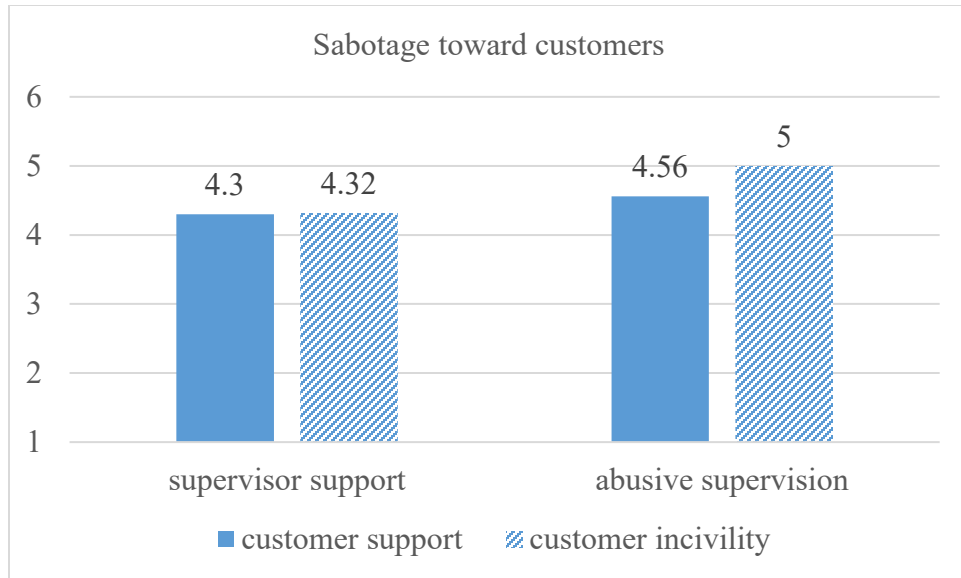


Figure 3a. Low customer orientation

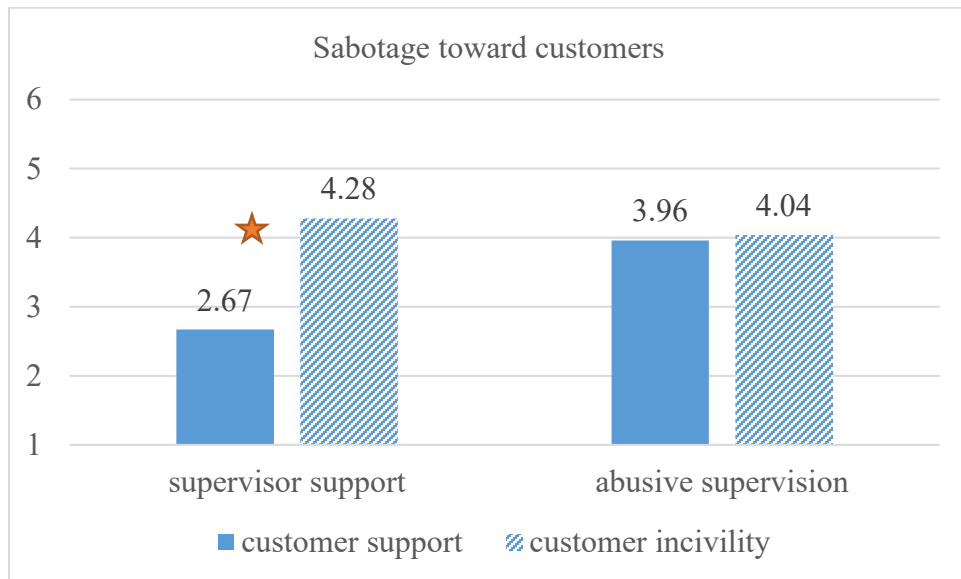


Figure 3b. High customer orientation

Note. The star indicates statistical significance at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Discussion

Theoretical implications

This set of studies makes valuable contributions to the existing literature in three ways. First, studies on workplace mistreatment in the hospitality industry have mainly investigated employees' attitudes toward a single source of mistreatment, either supervisors or customers (Zhou et al., 2021). However, both customers and supervisors are important sources of information that employees may process simultaneously. To fill this important gap, the current research proposes a social information processing perspective as a novel theoretical lens on understanding employees' response to workplace incivility (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). In particular, we extend previous research by revealing that abusive supervision and customer incivility, as two types of salient social information, can jointly influence frontline employees' sabotage toward customers. According to Hershcovis et al. (2020), using a multi-foci perspective to examine workplace mistreatment is crucial as employees can be influenced by multiple social cues. In line with the SIP theory, our study results indicate that abusive supervision intensifies the positive relationship between customer incivility and sabotage toward customers. This finding reveals that both customers and supervisors are critical informational sources for frontline employees, and they complement one the other in jointly determining employees' job behaviors. Moreover, this result responds to a recent call for research examining multiple sources of workplace mistreatment in the hospitality context (Zhou et al., 2021). The results indicate that in case of customer incivility, supervisors are able to either play a conciliatory role in buffering employees' sabotage toward customers, or aggravate employees' sabotage behaviors via abusive supervision.

Second, in a recent review on workplace mistreatment in the hospitality context, Zhou et al. (2021) found that existing studies overlook individual factors related to informational sources (perpetrators) that influence employees' reactions to mistreatment. Drawing upon the SIP theory,

which emphasizes that individual differences influence one's perception of information and subsequent behavioral reactions to it, we took a step further by examining how individual factors affect employees' reactions when they are faced with mistreatment from multiple resources simultaneously. In the current research, we identified two individual factors that account for varying one's perception of supervisors and customers as social informational sources, to further influence their behavioral response to mistreatment. In accordance with the resources causing mistreatment from both customers and supervisors, we identified one customer-directed individual factor (i.e., customer orientation) and one supervisor-directed individual factor (i.e., power distance belief) as the moderators. Our investigation highlights the important role of customer orientation in mitigating the negative effects caused by both abusive supervision and customer incivility simultaneously. Moreover, although previous studies have found that power distance belief influences employees' reactions to abusive supervision (e.g., Lam & Xu, 2019; Lian et al., 2012), our results extend previous literature on workplace mistreatment by showing that power distance belief remains an important boundary condition that influences employees' behavioral intentions when receiving mistreatment from multiple resources (Richard et al., 2020). In this respect, the investigation of three-way interactions through the consideration of mistreatment caused by multiple resources and two individual factors that are closely related to the resources provides a comprehensive multi-foci SIP view of understanding the workplace mistreatment.

Third, as to customer-directed individual factor, we found that frontline employees' customer orientation influences their sabotage toward customers when exposed to supervisor and customer incivility. The findings are in line with the SIP theory in that favorable perceptions of informational sources are likely to result in more favorable behavioral response (Lam & Mayer,

2014). Employees with high customer orientation respond less negatively toward customers following the mistreatment. Taken together, we provide a SIP theory lens on understanding employees' CWB (e.g., sabotage toward customers) by integrating both social information and individual characteristics related to informational sources. In this sense, various social information in the work environment and employees' commitment to their service role together account for employees' sabotage toward customers. Extending previous studies examining the interaction between one source of workplace incivility and individuals' personal characteristics (e.g., Park & Kim, 2020), we examined the influence of customer orientation when employees need to handle incivility from multiple sources.

Practical implications

Our findings have implications for hospitality managers. Previous research indicated that abusive supervision costs around \$23.8 billion annually due to the lower productivity resulting from abuse (Tepper et al., 2011). In addition, the mantra "The customer is always right" somewhat amplifies employees' experience of abusive treatment by customers. Therefore, we suggest that managers undergo annual training in which they are taught to be fairer to and more supportive of employees. Training can provide managers with coping mechanisms that help prevent abusive supervisory behavior (Gonzalez-Morales et al., 2018). However, organizations should also establish leadership development programs for managers to advance their communication skills with employees (Holt et al., 2018) while holding managers accountable for their verbal aggression towards employees. Leaders who supervise managers shall conduct regular meetings in which managers are held accountable and given constructive feedback about their abusive tendencies. The meetings can serve as a learning experience for managers who might not have been aware of their aggressive behaviors. Managers are also encouraged to

partake in mindfulness training, as mindfulness has been shown to alleviate stressors and negative emotions that stem from work (Long & Christian, 2015). Organizations must give managers sufficient breaks to detach themselves from their work responsibilities and fully relax so that they can return to work with a fresh mindset. This can help reduce built-up aggression and lower the chances of managers taking frustrations out on employees.

The current study shows that employees with low customer orientation are more likely than those with high customer orientation to partake in sabotage behaviors directed at customers. Therefore, managers in service organizations must integrate appropriate measures to encourage supervisory behaviors and actions that emphasize an organizational vision dedicated to service delivery. Organizations should assist managers and subordinates in understanding the significance of fostering a work culture that is customer-focused, as such a culture will help organizations gain a competitive advantage. Previous research indicates that organizations often fall short and lack clarity when attempting to instill the importance of customer-oriented behaviors in employees (Feng et al., 2019). Therefore, senior management could cultivate a highly valued customer-oriented culture within employees by repeatedly emphasizing it in the organizational motto and vision statement, during organizational meetings, employee onboarding process and continued trainings, and through team building activities. When managers acknowledge the value of customer orientation and adopt it as their own and a standard way of working, employees are likely to adopt the same mindset. Managers should focus on developing customer-oriented employees so that customer orientation is at the core of the organization's culture. In addition, employees should be trained to be more understanding of customer demands via customer-focused perspective-taking, as prior research shows that it can reduce negative emotions and increase employees' empathy towards customers following difficult interactions

(Lee & Madera, 2021). As a result, managers are encouraged to conduct regular perspective-taking training toward employees, in ways that assist employees with better understanding of customers' demands and enhance their emotion regulation competencies following a customer incivility. In specific, empathy training, such as role-playing activities, could be implemented to coach employees take the perspective of customers.

While managers cannot control customers' incivility toward employees, they must know when to step in and prevent employees from enduring further mistreatment. The "The customer is always right" mindset should be tempered with attention to employees' needs. Managers should take immediate action to comfort and support employees following customer mistreatment. When employees believe that managers have their best interests at heart, they will be inclined to trust their managers, lowering their chances of partaking in CWB. Effective support from managers can also make employees feel empowered, especially during times of distress (Boukis et al., 2020). Managers should develop regulations and formal communication channels to encourage employees to voice their concerns and seek support as needed.

Limitations and future research directions

This study has some limitations that provide opportunities for future research. First, the investigation of employees' reactions toward workplace uncivil treatment in this study is limited at the individual level. The two moderators examined in this study (i.e., customer orientation, power distance belief), can also be shaped by broader external contextual factors. For example, Coelho et al. (2010) suggested that an organization's customer service climate can shape employees' customer orientation. Hon and Lu (2016) found that power distance culture at the organizational level influences how employees perceive abusive supervision. Hence, it would be interesting to take a multilevel perspective by exploring the influences of customer service

climate and power distance at the organization level on employees' reactions toward uncivil treatment at the individual level.

Second, we treated customer incivility and abusive supervision as stable phenomena, and using the between-person approach may not reflect the dynamic nature of service employees' work environment. As reflected in several recent studies on frontline employees' workplace perceptions and experiences (e.g., Yang et al., 2020; Shi et al., 2020; Shi & Wang, 2022), due to the nature of dealing with various customer issues and being assigned to work with different groups of colleagues daily among frontline service employees, employee perceptions of customer mistreatment and abusive supervision may vary on a day-to-day basis. Hence, it would be meaningful to adopt the within-person approach to explore how interactions between employees perceived supervisor and customer incivility influence employees' daily workplace experience.

Third, according to the multi-foci perspective on workplace mistreatment (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010), customers, supervisors, and coworkers all serve as critical sources of workplace incivility or civility. Although our current investigation on customers and supervisors has contributed to understanding multiple resources that cause workplace mistreatment, our study did not explore the role of coworkers. A recent study (i.e., Bendersky & Brockner, 2020) found that a fair treatment from colleagues mitigates the negative influence of mistreatment by authorities on employees' organizational commitment. Hence, future research can extend our study results by simultaneously examining the effects of workplace mistreatment by supervisors, coworkers, and customers on service employees' employment outcomes. Last, study 2 manipulated customer incivility (vs. support) and abusive supervision (vs. support) without including neutral conditions for the sake of strengthening the tone in manipulated scenarios. Future research could

consider including neutral conditions (non-incivility and non-abusive supervision) to better illustrate the results (Frey-Cordes et al., 2020; Sommovigo et al., 2020).

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Appendix A. Scenarios of Study 2

You are a front desk receptionist in the ABC hotel and you have been worked there for a year. You report directly to Julie, the manager of the front office department.

It is a busy evening with an occupancy rate at 100%. A guest walks in. You greet the guest and ask the guest to provide ID for the check in. However, you cannot find any reservation record after putting the guest's name in the system. Following the standard operating procedure, you sequentially try different ways to identify the reservation, including reversing the guest's last and first name, only keying in the guest's last name, inputting the reservation number, etc. However, you still cannot find the guest's reservation.

At that moment, you decide to call your supervisor, Julie, for help. Thus you say to the guest, "I apologize that your reservation is not in our system. Could you please just wait for a moment and I will ask my manager to check the issue immediately?"

[Customer Incivility] The guest looks very unhappy, raises the voice and says: "Really? Are you kidding? I'm 100% sure that I booked the room. Why does it take so long to find a simple reservation? Seriously? How come you are so incompetent that you can't even handle a simple room check-in? It's ridiculous."

[Customer Support] The guest responds, "Sure, don't worry. Please take your time. I can wait here. If you need any more information, just let me know. I am happy to assist."

[Abusive Supervision] Your supervisor raises the voice and says over the phone: "I can't believe you don't know how to handle this simple problem after you have worked here for over a year! What's wrong with you? How many times have I already told you how to fix this?! I have been a front desk manager for so many years, and I can tell you that other front desk receptionists have never bothered me with this question. I'm busy! Ask Lily (a senior front office staff who works in the same shift with you on that day) or call reservation department!" Then, your supervisor hangs up the phone.

[Supervisor Support] Your supervisor says over the phone: "I see. Don't worry. These things happen sometimes. Have you asked the guest if the reservation is made by his friends? It's possible that the reservation is under his friend's name. Also, asking if he books the room through a third-party company. If that's the case, he may give you the wrong confirmation number. Try these first and then call reservation department. I will finish up something urgent and be there with you very soon. See you in a minute." Then, your supervisor hangs up the phone.