



The Impact of Customer Incivility on Employees' Intention to Leave in Five-Star Hotels: The Moderating Role of Self-Compassion and Workplace Friendship

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ABSTRACT

Building upon social cognitive theory, this study proposed that customer incivility directly influences employees' turnover intention. Furthermore, it posited that self-compassion and workplace friendship act as moderators in the relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave. Leveraging a PLS-SEM approach, the study model was tested using data collected from 392 employees working in five-star hotels within the Greater Cairo area. The results provide empirical support for the hypothesized positive relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave. Furthermore, self-compassion and workplace friendship were identified as significant moderators, with a negative moderating effect on the relationship between customer incivility and intention to leave. These findings contribute valuable theoretical and practical insights into understanding customer incivility within the Egyptian hotel sector. The study highlighted the importance of cultivating a culture that promotes self-compassion and workplace friendship. By recommending strategies that foster these resources, hospitality organizations can effectively mitigate the detrimental effects of customer incivility on employee retention.

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KEYWORDS

Customer incivility, intention to leave, self-compassion, workplace friendship, five-star hotels.

تأثير فضاظة العملاء على نية الموظفين لترك العمل بفنادق الخمس نجوم: الدور المعدل للتعاطف الذاتي والصدقة في مكان العمل

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الملخص

بناءً على النظرية المعرفية الاجتماعية، افترضت الدراسة أن فضاظة العملاء تؤثر بشكل إيجابي على نية الموظفين لترك العمل، مع الأخذ في الاعتبار الدور المعدل للتعاطف مع الذات والصدقة في مكان العمل. ومن خلال الاستفادة من منهج PLS-SEM، تم اختبار نموذج الدراسة باستخدام البيانات التي تم جمعها من 392 موظفًا يعملون في فنادق خمس نجوم داخل منطقة القاهرة الكبرى. قدمت النتائج دعمًا تجريبيًا للعلاقة الإيجابية المفترضة بين فضاظة العملاء ونية الموظفين لترك العمل. علاوة على ذلك، تم تحديد التعاطف الذاتي والصدقة في مكان العمل كعوامل معدلة ذات دلالة معنوية، مع تأثيرها السلبي المعدل في العلاقة بين فضاظة العملاء ونية الموظفين لترك العمل. وتساهم هذه النتائج برؤى نظرية وعملية قيمة في فهم فضاظة العملاء داخل قطاع الفنادق المصري. وسلطت الدراسة الضوء على أهمية تنمية ثقافة تعزز التعاطف مع الذات والصدقات في مكان العمل. ومن خلال التوصية باستراتيجيات تعزز هذه الموارد، يمكن لمؤسسات الضيافة أن تخفف بشكل فعال من الآثار الضارة لفضاظة العملاء على الاحتفاظ بالموظفين.

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الكلمات الدالة

فضاظة العملاء، نية العاملين لترك العمل، التعاطف الذاتي، الصدقة في مكان العمل، فنادق الخمس نجوم.

Introduction

The hospitality industry grapples with a persistent challenge: high employee turnover. This phenomenon has a significant impact on organizations and is preceded by employees' intention to leave (Khairy et al., 2023a). Employees' intention to leave refers to the conscious thought process and active steps an employee takes to explore and pursue new job opportunities elsewhere within a specific timeframe (Chan et al., 2013). Working in the hotel industry can be demanding. Long hours, limited advancement opportunities, and difficulty balancing work and personal life can lead to employee burnout. Additionally, the emotional labor required and heavy workloads contribute to high employees' intention to leave the hospitality industry (Park & Min, 2020). Beyond the inherent challenges, customer behavior also significantly influences employee intention to leave the hospitality industry (Pu et al., 2022). According to Bandura's (1989) Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), employees working in environments characterized by frequent customer incivility (rudeness or discourtesy) are more likely to exhibit similar behaviors themselves (incivility contagion) or engage in withdrawal behaviors such as job turnover (Huang & Lin, 2019). So, understanding the multifaceted reasons behind an employee's intention to leave is crucial for improving retention rates (Pakeh & Azmy, 2023).

Customer interactions are a defining characteristic of the service industry. However, these interactions can sometimes become negative, with customers exhibiting uncivil behavior towards employees (Torres et al., 2017). This incivility, encompassing rudeness, verbal aggression, and even harassment, contributes to significant emotional strain for service workers (Alola et al., 2019). Studies (e.g., Jung & Yoon, 2018; Karatepe et al., 2019; Morgan & Pritchard, 2019) revealed a disturbing trend of customer incivility in hospitality, a sector notorious for high emotional labor and stressful environments. Further fueled by the "customer is always right" mentality, workers face a barrage of mistreatment, including rudeness, bullying, and even sexual harassment (Wang et al., 2020). Shockingly, surveys showed that over half of hospitality employees experience daily abuse, highlighting the pervasiveness of this issue (Sherwyn & Wagner, 2018; Dhanani et al., 2021). While seemingly minor, customer incivility has a profound impact on employees (Williams, 2021). This constant barrage of disrespect leads to a multitude of negative consequences, including psychological distress, anxiety, and physical health problems (Lim et al., 2008; Lim & Lee, 2011; Kabat-Farr et al., 2018). Furthermore, incivility is linked to increased stress, work-family conflict, and burnout (Geldart et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019).

Drawing on the SCT, the current study proposes that self-compassion and workplace friendships may act as crucial self-regulatory mechanisms during cognitive processing. These factors can buffer the negative effects of workplace incivility, support ethical decision-making despite challenges, and aid in recovering from setbacks (Anjum et al., 2022; Ugwu et al., 2022). Self-compassion is a positive self-attitude that fosters resilience in the face of adversity. It is operationalized through three distinct but interrelated components: self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness (Neff, 2003). It was posited that these components interact synergistically. For instance, mindfulness facilitates self-kindness by allowing for a clearer understanding of emotional pain, thereby reducing over-identification with

negative emotions (Neff et al., 2007). Similarly, recognizing the shared nature of human struggles lessens feelings of isolation and fosters mindfulness. All these components cultivate a "compassionate frame of mind" (Neff, 2016). Empirical evidence supports a robust association between self-compassion and individuals' emotional well-being. Studies have demonstrated positive correlations with markers of emotional and subjective well-being (e.g., optimism, happiness, and life satisfaction) and negative correlations with psychopathology (e.g., anxiety, depression) (Neff et al., 2007; Muris & Petrocchi, 2017; Neff et al., 2018; Stoeber et al., 2020). Furthermore, self-compassion has been linked to reduced burnout (Dev et al., 2018), emotional exhaustion, and turnover intention (Reizer, 2019; Anjum et al., 2022).

Workplace friendships, those bonds forged between colleagues, are not only common but crucial for a positive work environment (Sias et al., 2020). More than just casual acquaintances, workplace friendships are built on mutual trust, shared values, and a commitment between colleagues (Berman et al., 2002; Sias et al., 2012; Khairy et al., 2023b). Workplace friendships are defined as friendships among colleagues who hold similar positions without direct control over each other (Ugwu et al., 2022). These connections create a vital resource: social support (Duan et al., 2019). Research consistently highlights a positive association between workplace friendships and positive organizational outcomes. These include increased job satisfaction (Huang, 2016), improved job performance (Li et al., 2018), heightened employee commitment and motivation (Potgieter et al., 2019), lower turnover intentions (Namin et al., 2022), and mitigating the detrimental impact of customer incivility on employee work engagement (Ugwu et al., 2022). Despite the prevalence of customer incivility, a concerning number of employers fail to recognize incivility as a serious issue. This lack of awareness hinders efforts to create a positive work environment (Lassiter et al., 2021). Further research is needed to fully understand the impact of customer incivility, particularly within the hospitality sector (Jin et al., 2020; Yao et al., 2022; Xiao & Mao, 2022). Therefore, this study aimed to demonstrate how customer incivility affects employees' intention to leave. In addition, investigates the moderating effects of workplace friendship and self-compassion in the relationship between customers' incivility and employees' intention to leave.

Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

Customer Incivility and employees' intention to leave

Employee turnover within the hospitality industry presents a significant challenge for managers (Ghani et al., 2022). High turnover rates are well-documented across hospitality, tourism, and food service industries (Han et al., 2016; Afsar et al., 2018). These high rates can lead to increased recruiting costs, inconsistencies in service delivery, and a negative impact on the overall workplace environment (Afsar et al., 2018). Understanding the factors influencing employee turnover intentions is crucial for effective management strategies. Numerous studies have explored the impact of work-life balance, compensation packages, job options elsewhere, workplace incivility, and workplace climate on employee retention (Han et al., 2016; Khairunisa & Muafi, 2022). Incivility in the workplace, particularly from customers, has emerged as a major concern within the hospitality industry (Hur et al., 2016; Alola et al., 2019; Boukis et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2021; Pu et al., 2022). Sliter et al. (2010) define

customer incivility as rude or disrespectful behavior directed towards service employees. SCT suggests that exposure to incivility in the workplace can negatively impact emotional well-being and job satisfaction, ultimately leading to employee turnover (Lim et al., 2008; Sakurai et al., 2011). Empirical research supports this notion, demonstrating that incivility can hinder task performance, decrease job engagement, and stifle creativity (Porath et al., 2015; Schilpzand et al., 2016).

The negative consequences of customer incivility extend beyond job performance, impacting employees' well-being. Loh et al. (2022) highlight emotional exhaustion as a key negative effect of customer rudeness. This exhaustion, as noted by Hur et al. (2016), can lead to further personal and professional challenges, including stress, low job satisfaction, and withdrawal behaviors. Customer incivility can thus be seen as a potential source of emotional exhaustion, contributing to significant personal and organizational issues (Sliter et al., 2012). A growing body of research underscores the detrimental impact of customer incivility on employee attitudes and intentions. Studies by Karatepe et al. (2019) and Yürümezolu & Kocaman (2019) demonstrated that workplace incivility reduces job satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological well-being, while simultaneously increasing job stress and turnover intentions. Similarly, Huang & Lin (2019), Magdy et al. (2022), and Moon & Morais (2022) concluded that continued exposure to customer incivility decreases employee engagement, organizational loyalty, and job satisfaction, ultimately leading to increased emotional exhaustion and turnover intentions. Moreover, recent studies consistently identify a positive correlation between customer incivility and employee turnover intentions (e.g., Huang & Lin, 2019; Namin et al., 2022; Pu et al., 2022; Pu et al., 2024). Based on this well-established relationship, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: Customer incivility positively influences employees' intention to leave.

Customer incivility, self-compassion, and intention to leave

Customer incivility significantly impacts employee well-being, leading to decreased organizational commitment and heightened turnover intentions (Karatepe et al., 2019; Pu et al., 2022). SCT, a prominent psychological framework, offers valuable insights into how employees can cultivate resilience against workplace stressors. This theory emphasizes the role of self-regulatory mechanisms – internal processes individuals utilize to manage their thoughts, emotions, and behaviors (Bandura, 1989). One such mechanism gaining traction in the context of customer incivility is self-compassion (Qian et al., 2022). Employees high in self-compassion are better equipped to manage the stress of rude customer interactions and maintain a positive work attitude (Ma et al., 2022). Self-compassion, as defined by Neff (2003), involves treating oneself with kindness (self-kindness), understanding and acknowledging one's experiences (mindfulness), and recognizing that challenges are a shared human experience (common humanity) (Bayir & Lomas, 2016; Dreisoerner et al., 2021). This approach fosters emotional resilience, empowering employees to navigate challenging customer interactions (Amarnani et al., 2019). By promoting self-acceptance and emotional regulation, self-compassion acts as a protective shield against negativity, regardless of the source (Leary et al., 2007; Knott, 2020).

The buffering effect of self-compassion extends beyond emotional regulation. Studies have shown that self-compassion moderates the impact of stressful events, such as customer incivility, by mitigating negative consequences (Yip & Tong, 2021). In contrast to customer incivility, which can trigger a cascade of negative emotions like anxiety, anger, and depression (Baker & Kim, 2020; Cheng et al., 2020; Li et al., 2021), self-compassion has been consistently linked to positive mental health outcomes, including reduced levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Farr et al., 2021; Kotera et al., 2022; Martínez-Rubio et al., 2023). This positive emotional state fostered by self-compassion likely translates into a stronger emotional attachment to the organization. Employees who experience greater self-compassion may be more likely to perceive their job as a source of personal well-being and satisfaction, consequently reducing their desire to seek employment elsewhere (Knott, 2020). Furthermore, self-compassion may buffer the indirect effect of job insecurity on turnover intentions stemming from customer incivility (Qian et al., 2022). Hence, the study posited the next hypothesis:

H2: self-compassion moderates the relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave; it dampens the customer incivility → employees' intention to leave relationship.

Customer incivility, workplace friendship, and intention to leave

The hospitality industry is a breeding ground for interpersonal stress, with customer incivility being a major culprit (Han et al., 2016; Rosen et al., 2016). When faced with such rudeness, employees often resort to indirect coping mechanisms like avoidance or denial (Salin et al., 2014; Burns, 2022). However, research suggests a more powerful antidote: social support, particularly from close colleagues (Ugwu et al., 2022). Studies within hospitality reveal the positive influence of workplace friendships on employee well-being, social support, job satisfaction, and even feeling embedded within the organization (Hsu et al., 2019; Yang & Wong, 2020). Social support, defined as the network of relationships that provides a sense of belonging and access to resources, acts as a buffer against the negative effects of incivility (Nielsen et al., 2020). A hostile work environment, fueled by customer incivility and a lack of social support, can trigger employee turnover (Kaur et al., 2013). Feeling unsafe and unsupported leads to negative emotions, stress, and ultimately, a desire to leave (Geldart et al., 2018). Conversely, strong workplace friendships offer a source of comfort and support. Friends provide advice, reassurance, and encouragement, which can significantly reduce stress, tension, and the intention to leave (Duan et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2019). Supportive managers can also play a crucial role, as employees who feel understood are more likely to be engaged and productive (Li et al., 2018).

Research suggests that employees with close workplace friends have lower absenteeism and turnover rates (Ozbek, 2018). This sense of belonging and support fosters loyalty to the organization (Tews et al., 2019). Conversely, a lack of social support can lead to negative emotions and, eventually, increased turnover (Yu-Ping et al., 2020; Namin et al., 2022). Workplace friendship may lessen the negative impacts of mistreatment on some organizational outcomes, such as withdrawal or decreased job satisfaction (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). Studies within hospitality specifically show that strong friendships can mitigate the detrimental effects of customer incivility on

employee engagement (Ugwu et al., 2022). Similarly, social support weakens the link between workplace mistreatment and mental health issues (Behrendt et al., 2022). The current study, grounded in SCT, proposes that fostering positive work environments through strong coworker friendships can serve as a buffer against the detrimental effects of customer incivility within the hospitality industry. Conversely, the absence of social support, when compounded by customer rudeness, is likely to heighten employee turnover intentions. Consequently, the study hypothesized that:

H3: Workplace friendship moderates the relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave; it dampens the customer incivility → employees' intention to leave relationship.

The conceptual framework of the study is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

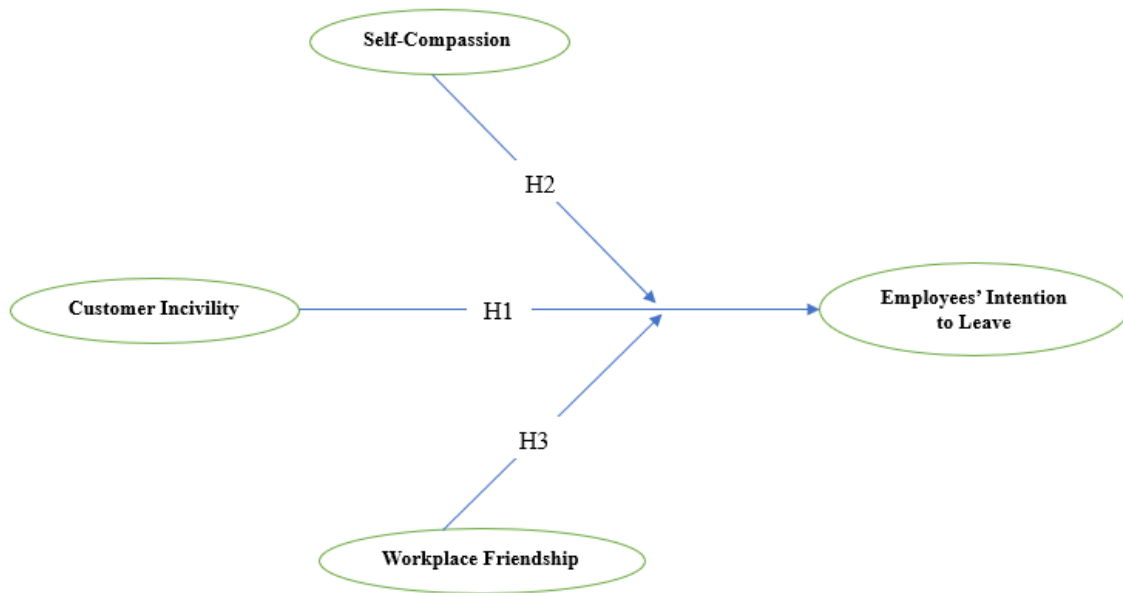


Figure (1): Conceptual framework of the study

Methods

Data collection and sampling

This research employed a quantitative approach to examine customer incivility within Greater Cairo's prestigious five-star hotel industry. The region's dominance in Egyptian hospitality and tourism (Hashad et al., 2023), with its 30 luxury hotels (The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism, 2022), made it a prime location for the study. Due to limitations in accessing hotel staff directly, a convenience sample was used. Frontline employees at 21 five-star establishments in Cairo participated by answering self-administering questionnaires. Human resource departments at each hotel facilitated the distribution process, as direct data collection by the research team was not authorized. To determine an appropriate sample size in the absence of official employee data, the study utilized Cochran's (1963) sampling formula (refer to appendix). The formula indicated a target sample size of 385 responses. To exceed this target, 500 questionnaires were distributed, from January to May 2024. A total of 407 were returned, but 15 were excluded due to incompleteness. This left a final

sample of 392 responses, reflecting a strong response rate of 78.4%. Details of participants' demographics can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Participants' demographics (N=392)

		Frequency	Percent
Respondent's Gender	Male	331	84.44
	Female	61	15.56
Respondent's age	< 30	122	31.12
	30- < 40	169	43.11
	40-50	62	15.82
	>50	39	9.95
Educational level	High schools/institute	45	11.48
	Bachelor	306	78.06
	Postgraduate degree	41	10.46
Tenure in current job	< 3 years	134	34.18
	3-6 years	78	19.90
	>6 years	180	45.92
Experience in the hospitality industry	< 3 years	67	17.09
	3-6 years	90	22.96
	>6 years	235	59.95

Measures

The research instrument employed well-established, multi-item scales to gauge various constructs relevant to the study with a five-point Likert scale. Customer incivility was measured by the customer incivility scale established by Walker et al. (2014). The scale contains four items. Respondents were asked to indicate the condition in which their customer(s) engaged in each incivility behavior in their organization. Features statements like *"My customers made curt statements toward me"* and *"My customers spoke aggressively toward me"*. Employees' intention to leave was measured by a four-item scale that was developed by Jensen et al. (2013), which included items like *"I often think of quitting this job"* and *"I am always on the lookout for a better job"*. In addition, self-compassion was measured by a 12-item self-compassion scale short form that was developed by Raes et al. (2011), encompassing items such as *"I try to see my failings as part of the human condition"* and *"When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need"*. Lastly, workplace friendship was assessed with the six-item scale developed by Nielsen et al. (2000) and validated by Rai and Agarwal (2018), with items such as *"I have formed strong friendships at work"* and *"I feel I can trust many coworkers a great deal"*. For a detailed list of the measurement items employed in the study, please refer to Appendix A.

Data analysis

In line with established practices within tourism and hospitality research (Hashad et al., 2023; Khairy et al., 2023a; Abouelenien et al., 2024), this study adopted PLS-SEM, to evaluate the research hypotheses. WarpPLS software version 7.0 was employed for the PLS-SEM analysis.

Results

Reliability and validity

Confirmatory factor analysis was employed to evaluate the factor structure of the measurement instrument (see Table 2). All factor loadings surpassed 0.6, exceeding the adequacy threshold of 0.5 established by Hair et al. (2010). Furthermore, composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values exceeded 0.7, providing evidence of scale reliability. Hair et al. (2020) criteria ($AVE > 0.5$) were met, further supporting scale validity. Lastly, VIF values below 3.3 for each latent variable suggest an absence of common method bias (Kock, 2021).

Table 2. Factor loadings, Cronbach alpha, CR, AVE, and VIF.

	Item Loading	CR	CA	AVE	VIF
Customer Incivility (CI)	-	0.866	0.791	0.620	2.308
CI.1.	0.629**				
CI.2.	0.822**				
CI.3.	0.830**				
CI.4.	0.849**				
Employees' Intention to Leave (EIL)	-	0.891	0.836	0.671	1.740
EIL.1.	0.838**				
EIL.2.	0.810**				
EIL.3.	0.831**				
EIL.4.	0.795**				
Self-Compassion (SC)	-	0.919	0.903	0.506	3.118
SC.1.	0.689**				
SC.2.	0.744**				
SC.3.	0.733**				
SC.4	0.754**				
SC.5	0.763**				
SC.6	0.723**				
SC.7	0.661**				
SC.8	0.698**				
SC.9	0.684**				
SC.10	0.646**				
SC.11	0.725**				
SC.12	0.705**				
Workplace Friendship (WF)	-	0.823	0.712	0.623	1.180
WF.1	0.760**				
WF.2	0.791**				
WF.3	0.658**				
WF.4	0.832**				
WF.5	0.833**				
WF.6	0.845**				
“CR: Composite reliability; CA: Cronbach's alpha; AVE: average variance extracted”					
** P value for item loading					

Furthermore, the study successfully established discriminant validity for the proposed model as shown in table (3). This confirmation adheres to the established criteria

outlined by Fornell & Larcker (1981), which require correlations between latent variables to remain below one and AVE to exceed the squared inter-construct correlations (Voorhees et al., 2016).

Table 3. Discriminant validity results

	CI	EIL	SC	WF
Customer Incivility (CI)	0.787	0.346	0.698	-0.352
Employees' Intention to Leave (EIL)	0.346	0.819	0.626	-0.138
Self-Compassion (SC)	0.711	0.626	0.711	-0.245
Workplace Friendship (WF)	-0.352	-0.138	-0.245	0.733

Model fit metrics for the research model

Based on the data in Table (4), results demonstrated that the research model satisfactory adherence to established criteria for model fit and quality indices, as outlined by Kock (2021).

Table (4): Model fit results

	Assessment	Criterion	Supported/Rejected
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.187, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.213, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.207, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average block VIF (AVIF)	1.561	acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Supported
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.749	acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Supported
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.391	small ≥ 0.1 , medium ≥ 0.25 , large ≥ 0.36	Supported
Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1	Supported
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1	Supported
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Supported
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	0.767	acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Supported

Hypotheses testing results

Based on the results in Figure (2), findings from the analysis demonstrated a significant positive impact of customer incivility on increasing employees' intention to leave ($\beta = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$), thereby supporting H1, indicating that customer incivility increases an employee's intention to leave the organization. In addition, self-compassion ($\beta = -0.15$, $P = 0.03$) and workplace friendship ($\beta = -0.19$, $P = 0.01$) have a negative moderating impact on the relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave, thus H2 and H3 were also supported. These results indicated that self-compassion and positive workplace friendship dampen the positive impact of customer incivility on employees' intention to leave the organization. Moreover, figure 2 shows that customer incivility is interpreted as 21% of the variance in employees' intention to leave ($R^2 = 0.21$).

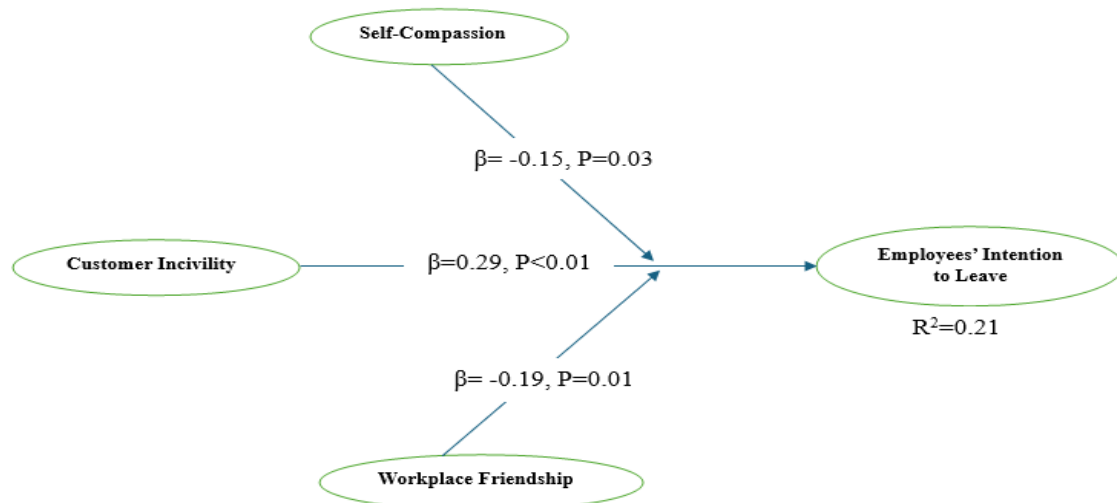


Figure 2: Final study results

Discussion

While most customer interactions are positive, research indicates a concerning rise in customer incivility within the hospitality sector (e.g., Li et al., 2021; Pu et al., 2022; Pu et al., 2024). Anchored in social cognitive theory, the purpose of the present study was to investigate the impact of customer incivility on employees' intention to leave. In addition, understanding how workplace friendship and self-compassion can moderate the negative effects of customer incivility. The study's findings provide empirical support for the suggested hypotheses. The study proposed that individuals who operate in a work environment where rude or discourteous behavior (i.e., customer incivility) is prevalent are likely to have a higher intention to leave their jobs (H1). This aligns with previous research demonstrating a clear link between customer incivility and employee turnover (Huang & Lin, 2019; Loh et al., 2022; Namin et al., 2022; Pu et al., 2022). Specifically, when hospitality workers experience rude or disrespectful behavior from customers, they can develop feelings of psychological distress, anxiety, and even physical health problems (Lim & Lee, 2011; Kabat-Farr et al., 2018). Additionally, customer incivility can lead to increased stress, work-family conflict, and burnout (Geldart et al., 2018; Zhou et al., 2019). These factors contribute to negative emotions and ultimately a strong desire to leave the job (Pu et al., 2022). Furthermore, the study suggests that these negative effects accumulate over time, leading to job dissatisfaction and, ultimately, a higher likelihood of employees wanting to quit (Pu et al., 2024).

The study's findings further support hypotheses 2 & 3, positing self-compassion and workplace friendship as moderators in the relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave. The current study proposed that employees facing customer incivility may not only develop self-compassion but also find solace in positive coping strategies like workplace friendships. These supportive relationships provide social support, potentially mitigating the negative impact of customer incivility on employees' intention to leave. Self-compassion theory suggests that employees with high self-compassion are less likely to engage in emotional suppression following encounters with customer incivility (Neff, 2003). Instead, they

perceive such experiences as common occurrences within the hospitality industry, fostering a sense of connectedness and mitigating feelings of isolation. This ability to acknowledge and accept negative emotions in a balanced manner reduces rumination and emotional distress (Neff et al., 2018). These findings are consistent with extant research demonstrating that self-compassion facilitates the reframing of stressful situations (Yip & Tong, 2021) and buffers the negative impact of customer incivility (Ma et al., 2022). In essence, self-compassion functions as a protective personal resource, diminishing the emotional toll of customer mistreatment and ultimately reducing employee turnover intentions (Reizer, 2019; Anjum et al., 2022).

Additionally, strong workplace friendships can act as a buffer, mitigating the negative impact of customer incivility on employee turnover intentions (H3). These friendships primarily function as a source of emotional support, enabling employees to debrief and release stress following encounters with rude customers (Rai & Agarwal, 2017). Extant research suggests this supportive network extends beyond simply listening. Friends and colleagues can offer valuable advice, reassurance, and encouragement, ultimately empowering employees to develop effective coping mechanisms for dealing with ongoing customer incivility (Rai & Agarwal, 2018). In essence, strong workplace friendships serve as a source of social support, demonstrably reducing stress, tension, and ultimately, turnover intentions (Duan et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2019). These findings resonate with Potgieter et al. (2019) who suggest that a sense of workplace friendship can fulfill psychological needs, potentially leading to feelings of job security and reduced anxiety within the organization (Ugwu et al., 2022). Collectively, these factors create a more resilient workforce, better equipped to manage customer incivility, and ultimately, less likely to consider leaving their jobs.

Theoretical implications

The inherent dynamism and focus on guest interaction within the hospitality industry create a breeding ground for customer incivility (Han et al., 2016). This study investigated the moderating effect of self-compassion and workplace friendship on the relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave, offering valuable insights into the social cognitive theory. First, the study confirmed a positive correlation between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave. Customer incivility likely diminishes job satisfaction, affective commitment, and psychological well-being, leading to decreased employee engagement and organizational loyalty, in addition, it increases job stress and the desire to leave the organization (Huang & Lin, 2019; Karatepe et al., 2019; Magdy et al., 2022; Moon & Morais, 2022). Second, the study provides empirical evidence for self-compassion's significant moderating effect on the relationship between customer incivility and employee turnover intention. This aligns with previous research demonstrating self-compassion's positive role in coping with workplace incivility (Reizer, 2019; Qian et al., 2020). The study findings highlight the importance of self-compassion in an employee's psychological process. By mitigating negative emotional responses to customer incivility, self-compassion can ultimately reduce turnover intentions (Anjum et al., 2022). The development of self-compassion may enhance an employee's sense of control over stressors, potentially buffering against the negative outcomes of incivility and ultimately

reducing turnover intentions (Knott, 2020; Kotera et al., 2022). Furthermore, the study demonstrated the moderating role of workplace friendships in the relationship between customer incivility and employee turnover intentions. This aligns with extant research demonstrating the positive influence of workplace friendships on coping with incivility (Hsu et al., 2019; Ugwu et al., 2022). Workplace friendships demonstrably contribute to employee well-being, social support, job satisfaction, and even a sense of organizational embeddedness (Yang & Wong, 2020). Conversely, a work environment characterized by customer incivility and a dearth of social support fosters employee turnover (Kaur et al., 2013). Feelings of insecurity and lack of support can trigger negative emotions, stress, and ultimately, a desire to leave the organization (Geldart et al., 2018). In contrast, strong workplace friendships serve as a buffer against these negative experiences. Workplace friends provide invaluable social support through advice, reassurance, and encouragement, which can significantly reduce stress, tension, and the intention to leave (Duan et al., 2019; Hsu et al., 2019).

Practical implications

Drawing on the study findings, there are three key practical implications for hospitality practitioners and managers to cultivate a healthier work environment characterized by compassion, friendship, and minimal customer incivility. First, hospitality managers should prioritize understanding the detrimental impact of customer incivility on employee well-being and take proactive measures to mitigate its occurrence. This could include implementing a tiered system of consequences for severe customer incivility, ranging from denying service or revoking loyalty benefits to pursuing legal action in extreme cases (Chung et al., 2021). Additionally, signage clearly outlining acceptable customer behavior, combined with robust employee reporting systems and post-incident support protocols, can empower staff and deter potential incivility (Pu et al., 2024). Second, given self-compassion's moderating effect on employee turnover intentions induced by customer incivility, fostering this psychological resource offers a promising avenue for intervention. Notably, self-compassion demonstrates greater malleability compared to self-esteem, facilitating its development through various strategies (Neff, 2003). Interventions range from brief writing exercises designed to evoke self-compassionate reflection to comprehensive programs like Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) (Leary et al., 2007). MSC is effective in enhancing self-compassion, mindfulness, and compassion for others, while concurrently reducing anxiety, depression, and stress (Neff & Germer, 2013). Furthermore, self-help resources like online activities and books empower individuals to cultivate self-compassion independently, fostering resilience against workplace adversities (Anjum et al., 2022). Thirdly, hospitality managers should actively promote workplace friendships, recognizing their significant role in providing social support. Cultivating a culture of mutual respect and appreciation for individual and team contributions serves as a crucial foundation for fostering friendships among employees. This can be achieved by establishing open communication channels that encourage idea-sharing and collaborative problem-solving. Additionally, fostering teamwork through tasks requiring collaboration or open communication during work hours can enhance employee engagement and reduce turnover intentions. Furthermore, extending these efforts beyond work hours through engaging social

events (dinners, reading clubs, sports activities) can provide additional opportunities for employees to build friendships. These initiatives contribute to a more positive and supportive work environment, ultimately reducing employee turnover intentions (Wu et al., 2023).

Limitations and future research

This research underscores the detrimental impact of customer incivility on hospitality employees and explores the moderating roles of self-compassion and workplace friendships. These findings offer valuable insights for future research, with some key limitations to consider. Firstly, the study's sample focused on five-star hotels in Greater Cairo, providing valuable context-specific knowledge applicable to similar establishments. However, investigating these relationships across diverse industries, cultures, and regions could lead to a more comprehensive understanding of these dynamics. Replicating this study in settings like restaurants, coffee shops, or other hotel categories might reveal nuanced variations in the effects of customer incivility. Such explorations would enrich our knowledge of the complex interplay between these variables. Second, the current study examined the moderating role of self-compassion and workplace friendships in the relationship between customer incivility and employees' intention to leave. Therefore, future research should investigate the mediating/moderating role of other aspects like leadership style, employees' self-discipline, organizational culture, emotional intelligence, etc. Finally, the study's reliance on cross-sectional data introduces potential biases. Employees' current moods, job pressures, and organizational climate could all influence their responses. To strengthen the causal inferences drawn from this research, future studies could employ experimental methods or longitudinal surveys.

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Appendix (A) the detailed measurement items	
Customer Incivility (CI)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • My customers spoke aggressively toward me. • My customers used a tone when speaking to me. • My customers asked aggressive questions (e.g., 'Really?' 'Are you kidding?'). • My customers made curt statements toward me.
Employees' Intention to Leave (EIL)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I often think of quitting this job. • I am always on the lookout for a better job. • It is likely that I will look for another job during the next year. • There isn't much to be gained by staying in this job.
Self-compassion (SC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When I fail at something important to me, I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy. • I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like. • When something painful happens, I try to take a balanced view of the situation. • When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am. • I try to see my failings as part of the human condition. • When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need. • When something upsets me, I try to keep my emotions in balance. • When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure. • When I'm feeling down, I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong. • When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people. • I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws and inadequacies. • I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.
Workplace Friendship (WF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I have formed strong friendships at work. • I socialize with coworkers outside of the workplace. • I can confide in people at work. • I feel I can trust many coworkers a great deal. • Being able to see my coworkers is one reason why I look forward to my job. • I do not feel that anyone I work with is a true friend.

Cochran's Formula (1963)

$n_0 = \frac{Z^2 pq}{e^2}$
<p>Where:</p> <p>n_0 is the sample size,</p> <p>Z^2 is the area under the acceptance region in a normal distribution $(1 - \alpha)$ at 95 % confidence (1.96),</p> <p>e is the preferred level of precision (5%),</p> <p>p is the estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population (0.5),</p> <p>q is $1 - p$.</p>