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## **Intervening Role of Emotional Exhaustion and Perceived Organizational Support between Customer Mistreatment and Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels**

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### **Abstract**

The main objective of the study is to investigate the impact of customer mistreatment behaviors, such as customer verbal abuse, illegal customer complaints, and unreasonable customer demands, on employee turnover intention. Utilizing a quantitative approach, this study adopts and modifies a questionnaire to collect data from the frontline employees in 329 star-rated hotels in Sichuan, China using a simple random sampling technique. This study uses Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to assess the relationship between Customer Mistreatment and Employee Turnover Intention, as well as the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and the moderating role of perceived organizational support. This study focuses on identifying the factors contributing to reduced employee turnover in the hospitality industry, which is of practical significance for improving the efficiency of human resource management. Signifying the importance of employee turnover intention, this conceptual study sheds light on the intervening role of emotional exhaustion and perceived organizational support.

**Keywords:** Customer mistreatment; Employee turnover intention; Perceived organizational support; Emotional exhaustion

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### **Introduction**

A staff member at a prestigious hotel decided to resign following a distressing incident of verbal abuse by a customer at the hotel's front desk. During the researcher's interaction with the employee, it became evident that the customer's disrespectful behavior significantly contributed to the employee's emotional exhaustion. This emotional strain ultimately influenced the employee's decision to quit, prompting the initiation of the current study to delve into the broader implications of such incidents in the hospitality industry. Resignation reports have surfaced due to the repercussions stemming from the external conduct of the

organization, specifically customer mistreatment. This study, through a comprehensive analysis of pertinent literature, reveals that employee turnover triggered by customer mistreatment stands as a significant factor impacting organizational progress. The spectrum of customer mistreatment encompasses three primary facets: verbal abuse, unjust complaints, and unreasonable demands.

The financial repercussions associated with employee turnover are substantial, with estimates suggesting that the replacement of a salaried employee could entail costs equivalent to 6 to 9 months of their average earnings (Chiu, 2023). Notably, managers are increasingly alarmed by the burgeoning expenses linked to staff turnover, which can surpass 200% of the annual salary (Ganong et al., 2020). While extant research extensively examines internal factors such as job satisfaction, developmental opportunities, and corporate culture concerning employee departures, there exists a discernible gap in understanding the influence of external factors, particularly customer mistreatment behaviors (Palomino et al., 2020).

Against the backdrop of the rapidly evolving digital economy and the "post-pandemic" era, turnover rates have surged, reaching unprecedented levels in 2021 (Oğuz, 2022), a global trend observed across industries. The underlying reasons driving this pervasive turnover phenomenon (W. Jones et al., 2022) and the factors prompting frontline employees to exit their organizations have piqued the interest of economists, organizational behavior researchers, and business leaders (Weatherly, 2021). Given the substantial cost implications of employee turnover in service-oriented firms (Al-Suraihi et al., 2021), deciphering the rationale behind this phenomenon assumes paramount importance.

Empirical evidence signifies the influence of demographic characteristics, perceived organizational support, and emotional exhaustion among employees (Marchand & Vandenberghe, 2016), as well as workplace environment factors (e.g., mistreatment by supervisors, abusive leadership, etc.), promotion prospects, compensation, and benefit packages on employees' intentions to leave their jobs (J. Yang et al., 2022). Moreover, the differentiation between voluntary and involuntary turnover underscores the necessity of distinguishing between the two, as this paper primarily focuses on intentional employee separation.

The correlation between employee turnover intention and emotional exhaustion received notable contributions in the recent literature such as Gull et al. (2022) highlighting the significant impact of employee emotional exhaustion on turnover tendencies. Existing literature suggests that emotional exhaustion serves as a crucial mediator of turnover propensity among frontline employees with perceived organizational support moderating the impact of career assignments on turnover intention (Wiriattmaja et al., 2021). Despite the rapid growth of the hospitality industry in China, research examining the effect of customer misbehavior encountered by frontline hotel employees on turnover intentions remains limited (Kaushal & Srivastava, 2021).

Recent studies have explored the impact of individual employee variables on turnover intention (Islam & Chaudhary, 2022), organizational affective commitment (Elisabeth et al., 2021), and workplace climate factors (De Clercq et al., 2021). However, there is comparatively less focus on the influence of external behaviors of hotel patrons on frontline employees (Lin et al., 2021) and the reasons motivating employees to depart from hotel establishments (Kang et al., 2021). Hence, the role of verbally abusive behavior, illegal customer complaints, and unreasonable demands from patrons affect turnover intention among hotel employees remains imperative.

This study aims to examine the mediating role of emotional exhaustion in assessing the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee turnover intention, besides investigating the moderating role of perceived organizational support.

### **Research Questions**

This study examined the mediating and moderating effects of emotional exhaustion and perceived organizational support in customer misconduct on turnover intention among front-line employees in the star-rated hotel industry in Sichuan province. Through an in-depth literature review and field investigation, there is still a lack of research on the influence of customer misconduct on frontline staff turnover rate in the Sichuan province star hotel service industry. This paper fills the gap in research on the impact of customer misconduct on employee turnover. This study aims to answer the following questions:

Therefore, this study raises the following questions:

1. To what extent does Customer mistreatment influence Front-line employees' Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China?
2. Does Emotional Exhaustion affect employees' Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan province, China?
3. Does Perceived Organizational Support influence employees' Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan province, China?
4. Does Emotional Exhaustion mediate the relationship between Customer mistreatment and Front-line employees' Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan province, China?
5. Does Perceived Organizational Support moderate the relationship between Customer mistreatment and Front-line employees' Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan province, China?

### **Scope of the study**

The scope of this study is the front-line employees of Star Hotels in Sichuan Province, China. The primary data is collected using a simple random sampling technique from the front-line employees to ensure that the findings are representative of the research population. The research respondents are working at a hotel serving clients face-to-face and should be employed at their position for at least 6 months (Cohen et al., 2020). In this study, the first batch of data was obtained by analyzing and evaluating the turnover intention of front-line employees in 30 to 50 star-rated hotels randomly selected from 329 star hotels in Sichuan. To ensure the accuracy of the analysis results, the boundaries of the study need to be determined. In this study, participants were required to meet specific criteria:

1. They serve as front-line employees in a prestigious hotel enterprise located in Sichuan, China.
2. They have actively engaged in necessary face-to-face customer service within the enterprise for more than six months, ensuring they have experienced improper customer behavior.
3. They hold Sichuan household registration to maintain a consistent cultural background.
4. The electronic questionnaire will be dispatched to the HR department of the target corporate sector for comprehensive data collection.

The outcomes of this study introduce novel management and service concepts to hotel managers and staff in star hotels, establishing a robust groundwork for future research endeavors (Xie et al., 2023). The primary contribution of this study lies in the identification

of external factors influencing employee turnover intention. Additionally, it assesses the mediating role of emotional exhaustion and the moderating impact of perceived organizational support.

### **Significance of the study**

This research is mainly concerned with perceived organizational support, affective event theory (Weiss & Beal, 2005) and resource conservation theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Holding the potential to generate diverse theories and models, shaping and validating existing theoretical frameworks, while also introducing new ideas. Notably, theories such as emotional event theory, perceived organizational support theory (Kurtessis et al., 2017), and resource conservation theory are pivotal in elucidating the impact of customer abuse on employee turnover intention (Raza et al., 2021). The integration of these theories into a cohesive research framework marks the first significant contribution of this study, fostering the development of new theories (Venkatesh et al., 2016). Furthermore, by focusing on Star hotel companies in Sichuan, China, the research aims to address gaps in understanding customer misconduct and its correlation with employee turnover (J. Zhang et al., 2023).

The theoretical underpinning of this study significantly contributes to our comprehension of the relationship between client abuse and employee turnover intention (Pu et al., 2022), constituting another notable contribution. The study has the potential to assist researchers in related fields in understanding the impacts of customer verbal abuse, unreasonable complaints, disproportionate demands, emotional exhaustion, and perceived organizational support on the turnover intention of front-line employees. Moreover, the outcomes of this research are expected to benefit hotel management, hotel scholars, and HR managers of star hotels, particularly in terms of addressing customer misconduct and employee turnover in star hotel companies (Nagar et al., 2023).

As of December 2023, Sichuan, China, possessed a total of 329 star-rated hotels, forming the focal point for this study. The projected survey outcomes strive to illustrate that comprehending customer misconduct and dissecting its origins, combined with maintaining low emotional exhaustion and fostering high perceived organizational support, can effectively alleviate the risk of turnover among front-line employees in a company. This holds significant relevance, particularly against the backdrop of surging staff turnover rates in China, notably within service hotel companies. The study aims to showcase the tangible impact of factors such as emotional exhaustion and perceived organizational support in curtailing employee turnover intention. By doing so, it is poised to generate both direct and indirect economic benefits for China's star hotel industry, opening new avenues and establishing a robust theoretical foundation for subsequent academic exploration and practical initiatives.

## **Literature Review**

### **Employee Turnover Intention**

Employee turnover has long been the focus of attention in business and academia (Sainju et al., 2021). According to recent statistics, the average turnover rate of employees is as high as 20% in China's call industry and manufacturing industry (Ma et al., 2021). The higher turnover rate leads to the lower production efficiency and product quality for the enterprise (F. Liu et al., 2021). An excessively high turnover rate causes negative outcomes such as increased personnel costs for many service enterprises (Jie et al., 2023; Sun et al., 2024).

A thorough examination of recent literature on employee turnover intention reveals a robust association between this intention and actual turnover behavior. Given the challenges associated with directly measuring turnover behavior due to its often-swift occurrence,

scholars often initiate their inquiries by investigating turnover intention, which is more readily measurable (Boyce, 2021).

Furthermore, employee turnover can be influenced by a multitude of factors, extending beyond job-related aspects to encompass personal and family considerations (Marescaux et al., 2020). Typically, employee turnover is regarded as a result of a combination of various factors, highlighting its multifaceted nature (Namin et al., 2022). Realistically, putting an end to the phenomenon of employees leaving their positions is impractical. Instead, encouraging appropriate employee mobility can invigorate the enterprise.

Additionally, it's essential to acknowledge that employee turnover rates vary across industries, positions, and job responsibilities (Liu-Lastres et al., 2022). Recognizing and understanding these variations is crucial for developing effective strategies to manage and address employee turnover.

Research indicates a discernible correlation between customer mistreatment and employee turnover across various industries including healthcare, banking, call centers, and insurance sales (Yong et al., 2020). In the context of the hospitality sector, customer mistreatment encompasses instances of subpar interpersonal treatment directed towards frontline service staff during service encounters, representing a unique stressor faced by employees in this industry (Lyu et al., 2016). Customer mistreatment manifests in various forms, including aggressive verbal communication, manipulative language usage (Kramsch, 2020), and challenges to the competence of frontline personnel (Luva & Naweed, 2023). Given the nature of their roles, frontline employees in the hospitality sector encounter such negative interactions with customers frequently, reflecting a prevalent issue in the industry (Simillidou et al., 2020). Consequently, addressing customer mistreatment has emerged as an increasingly pressing concern within the hotel industry (Yang et al., 2020).

These shreds of evidence suggest that the correlation between client abuse and turnover intention is not well studied, and the existing literature does not give a clear answer. Many scholars have studied the effects of internal organizational factors such as harsh leadership, supervisor abuse, colleague abuse, etc., low wages, and long working hours (Yong et al., 2020) on frontline employee turnover. Although external organizational factors also exist, there is still a lack of evidence on the effect of customer abuse and employee turnover intention which needs further research. This paper will test the relationship between customer misconduct and employee turnover intention in star hotels in Sichuan, China.

### **Customer Verbal Abuse**

Customer Verbal Abuse involves aggression toward another person's self-concept to induce psychological distress and is categorized as a subset of hostility (Chin et al., 2020). Studies suggest that individuals often perceive verbal abuse as justified, especially when they feel the need to defend themselves (Dafny & Beccaria, 2020), particularly in situations involving expressions of anger or attempts to manipulate another person's behavior (Jiang et al., 2021).

This study focuses on overt, hostile, and aggressive verbal abuse, as it is linked to psychological harm, diminished morale, lower job satisfaction, and reduced productivity (Khizar et al., 2023). Furthermore, verbal abuse can result in humiliation and demeaning, impacting not only the self-esteem and well-being of frontline service employees but also diminishing their overall productivity (Bernardo et al., 2018). Researchers have delved into the realm of inappropriate treatment of customers in the workplace, with a specific emphasis on interactions between customers and employees (Yagil, 2021). It's noteworthy that customer verbal abuse may target both customers and employees (Huang & Kwok, 2021).



While workplace behavior has been extensively studied in HR and organizational behavior research, this study provides a unique perspective by being the first to incorporate customer abuse and its adverse effects on employees (Brinsfield & Edwards, 2020). Customers often become a significant source of abusive behavior in the workplace, and verbal abuse is particularly prevalent among front-line employees in service companies. Consequently, this area warrants further academic research and exploration.

The expanding body of literature on customer verbal abuse underscores the unique and significant role that customers play in such abusive interactions at the workplace (Arvan et al., 2020). The frequency and characteristics of language-based abusive interactions with customers can differ from uncivil interactions among organization members (Al-Hawari et al., 2020). In fact, there are several reasons why employees may experience worse treatment from customers compared to their interactions with fellow colleagues within the organization (Payne, 2023).

Unlike typical interactions among organizational members, many customer service positions involve employees and customers who lack shared life experiences (Kandampully et al., 2023). Grandey and colleagues propose that in various service-oriented industries, customers represent an uncertain group in terms of their interactions with employees. Furthermore, a lack of familiarity and communication between customers and employees increases the likelihood of customers mistreating employees (Y. Wu et al., 2023). In reality, customers do not bear a clear obligation to be friendly towards employees; rather, they tend to prioritize receiving quality service in exchange for their payment (Abd-El-Salam, 2023). Nevertheless, conflicts can arise between customers' expectations and employers' expectations, leading to uncivilized behavior between customers and employees (Hughes et al., 2023). This raises the question of whether verbal abuse from customers impacts the turnover intention of frontline employees (Raza et al., 2021).

This study aims to concentrate on the phenomenon of customer verbal abuse and thoroughly analyze its effects on employee turnover intention in star-rated hotels in Sichuan. While the existing literature generally tends to focus on studying abusive behaviors exhibited by colleagues or supervisors (Wei et al., 2023), it is crucial to acknowledge that in the service industry, employees have more frequent interactions with customers than their colleagues or supervisors (Robertson et al., 2023).

In addition, employees in the service industry typically face more abusive customer behavior which leads to the following hypothesis:

**H1:** There is a significant relationship between customer verbal abuse and employee turnover intention in Sichuan star hotels.

### **Customer Illegitimate Complain**

The current study defined illegal complaints as fabrications, exaggerations, or false accusations of service provider behavior. Increasingly, customers deliberately create problems, which are defined as "Illegitimate complaints". were defined as "complaints that did not experience service failure or dissatisfaction". Ro & Wong (2012) added that complaints also occur when facts or circumstances are exaggerated, changed, or lied about, or when service assurances are misused. In addition, Ro & Wong (2012) pointed out that illegal complaints may also include those who falsely blame the company providing the service. Combining these definitions, we can present three types of illegal complaints: fabricated complaints (complaints that do not experience dissatisfaction), exaggerated complaints (complaints that experience dissatisfaction, but complaints that are exaggerated, fabricated, or lied about), and Illegitimate complaints (the company providing the service is

not to blame). Illegitimate complaints were defined as complaints that fabricated, exaggerated, or falsely blamed the service provider. Given the growing number of Illegitimate complaints, it is important to investigate how to stop such practices (Ding & Kuvaas, 2023). Therefore, important practical insights can be gained by investigating how to stop such Illegitimate complaining behaviour (Yu, 2023). Research on this issue is difficult because it is a sensitive issue, illegal complaints are illegal, and clients are not willing to admit that they engage in such unethical and illegal behaviour (Soliman & Rinta-Kahila, 2023). As an industry known for its willingness to go the extra miles to keep customers happy, the hospitality industry is particularly vulnerable to unjustified complaints (P. Q. Wang, 2024).

Illegitimate complaints will have a variety of negative effects on the hotel company, front-line staff and customers (Wang, 2024); However, many hotel companies seem to turn a blind eye to the illegal practice of customer complaints and tolerate the harm that it causes (Hulsbergen & Nooteboom, 2023). Similar gaps have been identified in academic research: mainly focusing on service quality, satisfaction (Gabbianelli & Pencarelli, 2023), loyalty, and remediation of service failures and how frontline staff perceive, respond to, and respond to illegal customer complaints (Zhao et al., 2023). As the main customer contacts of the hotel business, front-line employees, as boundary crossers, play a significant role in creating a good customer experience in the service delivery process. This paper studies the influence of illegal customer complaints on employee turnover in star-rated hotels. This paper proposes the following hypotheses:

**H2:** There is a correlation between improper customer complaints and employee turnover intention in Sichuan star hotels.

### **Customer Disproportionate Demand**

The perpetrator of disproportionate demands is an external source-customers that exhibit uncivilized behaviors such as unreasonable demands or excessive demands (Kühlein et al., 2023). Unreasonable demand behaviors are excessive, unrealistic, or unreasonable demands from customers that go beyond normal service expectations. Frontline employees may face challenges in fulfilling these requests, which can lead to increased stress and frustration (Kühlein et al., 2023). When employees continually experience the stress of unreasonable expectations, it can negatively impact their job satisfaction and overall well-being, ultimately leading to a higher turnover intention (Liu & Wong, 2023). Disproportionate demands behavior has been defined as customers asking to speak with their direct supervisor for no reason, repeatedly asking for exclusive discounts, and asking employees to ignore company policies. Disproportionate demands made by star hotel customers on frontline employees include asking for unreasonable discounts (Xiang et al., 2023), asking for direct conversations with executives, asking for free lodging and meals (Sana, 2020), and asking for requirements and services that are beyond the scope of the contract (Lei et al., 2023). These disproportionate demands can have a negative impact on employees' stress and emotions at work. The impact of unreasonable customer demands on employee mental health, employee job satisfaction and employee organizational commitment (Nguyen et al., 2022). These disproportionate demands may cause psychological stress, anxiety and emotional fatigue among employees, which may reduce their mental health. Impact of disproportionate requirements on Employee Job Satisfaction (Jasiński & Derbis, 2023). Unreasonable requirements can undermine employee job satisfaction by making them feel disrespected and unrecognized (Dawei et al., 2023; Yao et al., 2024).

These disproportionate demands may reduce employees' sense of loyalty and commitment to the organization and increase their willingness to leave (Lu et al., 2023). (Baquero, 2023), this is because unreasonable demands lead to dissatisfaction and discomfort in the work environment (Mensah et al., 2023), which in turn creates a willingness to leave. These unreasonable requirements lead to increased psychological stress, lower job satisfaction and lower organizational support among employees (Malau, 2023). To mitigate these negative effects, star hotels should enhance employee training to improve their ability to deal with the challenges of customer misbehavior (Choi et al., 2023), improve customer service strategies to increase employee satisfaction, and create a supportive work environment in which the team perceives knitting (Čarnogurský et al., 2022).

Many researchers have found a strong correlation between the number and frequency of unreasonable customer requests and turnover intentions (Yin et al., 2022). Similarly, Layne et al. concluded that willingness to leave corresponds to stress in the work environment. Frequent encounters with unreasonable customer demands in the workplace can be very stressful for employees (Kim et al., 2023), and stressed employees are more likely to leave their organization and seek another job opportunity. In addition, frequently experiencing unreasonable customer demands can also lead to emotional exhaustion and reduced perceptions of organizational support, resulting in higher turnover rates and willingness to leave. Therefore, the more frequently employees experience unreasonable customer demands (Robertson et al., 2023) (L. Lee et al., 2023), the higher the willingness to leave may be. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed in this paper:

**H3:** There is a significant relationship between Customer Disproportionate Demand and Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China

### **Emotional exhaustion**

Historical research on emotional exhaustion stems from Maslach's model of emotional burnout. In the tourism industry (Amissah et al., 2021), in order to improve service quality, frontline employees need to bring positive emotions into their work (Yoo et al., 2023), and in order to maintain a good emotional state, employees need to constantly deplete emotional resources (Mihelič et al., 2023). Because customers vary in their personal qualities, their rude and impolite behavior is not uncommon (Zhan et al., 2023). As a result, employees perceive a negative work atmosphere and need to expend emotional resources to regulate their emotions in order to achieve customer satisfaction (Mayr & Teller, 2023).

Star hotel companies usually require employees to provide quality service to customers with a sincere attitude, which means that the work itself is a process of psychological resource depletion (Mihelič et al., 2023), the customer and as one of the most interactive external factors with employees in the workplace, customer behavior affects the emotional exhaustion of the employees, customer behavior is overly aggressive (Li & Tuckey, 2023), unreasonable complaints, and unreasonable special service requirements may also have an impact on the industry's front-line employees (L. Zhao et al., 2023). In fact, customer misbehavior does have an impact on the work status and emotions of frontline employees in star-rated hotels. Customer misbehavior is significantly associated with the emotional exhaustion of frontline employees in the service industry (Xie et al., 2023).

Negative customer behavior not only makes the resources consumed by the hotel frontline employees' work uncompensated (Xiang et al., 2023), but also further increases the work pressure of the frontline employees, which ultimately leads to the imbalance of the frontline employees' physical and psychological resources (Riedel et al., 2023). Existing



literature studies have shown that there is a correlation between emotional exhaustion and employees' willingness to leave the company (Baquero, 2023). The results show that employees with low levels of emotional exhaustion have low willingness to leave and employees with high levels of emotional exhaustion have high turnover rates (Parray et al., 2022). Therefore, there is a correlation between customer mistreatment behavior and employee emotional exhaustion.

From the perspective of resource conservation theory, frontline employees in star-rated hotels may deplete their emotional resources in order to take effective self-motivation to maintain good working conditions when faced with negative customer behaviors (Yan et al., 2023). When frontline employees feel that they are not adequately compensated for the depletion of their personal resources (Tham et al., 2023), they tend to be incentivized to protect existing resources and compensate for depleted resources (Mohammadi et al., 2017, 2021; Pan et al., 2023). Related studies have also found that emotional depletion is a good predictor of an individual's willingness to leave a job. Overall, customer misbehavior not only fails to compensate for the depletion of the original emotional resources of frontline employees in star-rated hotels, but also needs to be associated with the additional consumption of more emotional resources by employees to deal with or face customer bullying, which leads to employees' willingness to leave their jobs.

Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypotheses.

**H4:** Emotional Exhaustion has a significant effect on Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China

**H5:** Perceived Organizational Support has a significant effect on Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China

**H6:** Emotional Exhaustion has a mediating effect Customer Verbal Abuse and Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China.

**H7:** Emotional Exhaustion has a mediating effect e between Customer Illegitimate Complain and Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China.

**H8:** Emotional Exhaustion has a mediating effect the relationship between Customer Disproportionate Demand and Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China.

### **Perceived Organizational Support**

Perceived organizational support (POS) can be defined as "the overall extent to which employees believe that their organization values their contribution and cares about their well-being" (Eisenberger et al., 2020).

In the 1980s, the concept of POS was introduced by American psychologists such as Robert Eisenberger, who defined POS as employees' perceptions and opinions about whether or not the employing organization cares about their contributions and interests (Eisenberger et al., 1986). According to McMillin (1997), POS stems from employees' organizational support (Musenze et al., 2020), which includes moral support, and recognition of the importance of the employee (Eloundou et al., 2023). There are two key points of organizational support, i.e., employees' perception of whether the organization observes and serves their contributions, and whether the organization cares about employees' well-being. Therefore, POS can reduce employees' intention to leave. In addition, employees' POS can reduce their stress and burnout.

A high level of perceived organizational support from employees can reduce frustration and stress at work and can also help others reduce their willingness to leave their jobs (Yanbei et al., 2023). Perceived organizational support is influenced by individual perceptions and is an indication of cooperation and fairness within the organization (Utomo et al., 2023). Low perceived organizational support has a negative impact on both the organization and the individual (Utomo et al., 2023). Employees who are inattentive and have difficulty accurately assessing the emotions of others are victimized. Employees with low perceived organizational support can experience a lack of self-confidence, self-esteem (Maulidya, 2023), or motivation that reflects these limitations (Clarke et al., 2023), and employees tend to be more concerned with the negativity they feel when they are treated by a customer than with their job and become physically and mentally disconnected (Sinclair et al., 2023), leading to poor performance and a high willingness to leave the job. Low perceived organizational support may be a key factor in keeping employees engaged and understanding the emotional reasons for the decision to leave (Giao et al., 2020). Therefore, perceived organizational support is one of the important predictors of employees' perceived organizational commitment (Qi et al., 2023; Song et al., 2023).

Related theories have also suggested a relationship between perceived organizational theory and resource preservation theory with turnover intentions (Clercq et al., 2023); as employees continue to work for the same company, they become increasingly motivated to perform well; and, as their interests become more aligned with the company's values, the chances of them leaving the company decrease (Paelman et al., 2023). In the literature, the concept of organizational support is used synonymously with the concept of "perceived organizational support" (Díaz-Fernández et al., 2023). Perceived organizational support is an abstract concept that is the result of an organization's specific strategies and attitudes toward its employees (Canboy et al., 2023). In other words, perceived organizational support is based on all the positive and negative attitudes and behaviors of employees, on whether their workplace cares about their needs (Ferrinho et al., 2023), respects them, and values their contributions to the organization (Santos, 2023).

Organizational support means that the organization takes into account the well-being of the employees and increases their well-being (Hauth et al., 2023), while perceived organizational support means that the employees are aware of the organization's contribution to them, they feel safe, and they feel that the organization is supporting them. The theory of perceived organizational support is based on social exchange theory (Wu et al., 2023). Trust is an important element that supports this theory. However, if the employer has more control over rewards and outcomes and there is an imbalance of power due to the nature of the business relationship (Jiang et al., 2023), it is difficult for employees to build trust in the organization and the employer.

Therefore, organizational support and how employees perceive support play an important role in whether employees trust and commit to their organization. When POS is higher independent of the level of job resources in the organization, frontline employees experience less burnout (Nargotra & Sarangal, 2023). Meanwhile, perceived organizational support influences employees' willingness to leave through moderating effects (Wang & Wang, 2020). Therefore, increasing perceived organizational support can further reduce employees' burnout and turnover propensity. Based on the earlier literature discussion, this paper proposes the following hypotheses:

**H9.** Perceived Organizational Support moderates the relationship between Customer Verbal Abuse and Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China

**H10.** Perceived Organizational Support moderates the relationship between Customer Illegitimate Complain and Employee Turnover Intention in Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China

**H11:** Perceived Organizational Support moderates the relationship between Customer Disproportionate Demand and Employee Turnover Intention in a Star-Rated Hotels in Sichuan Province, China.

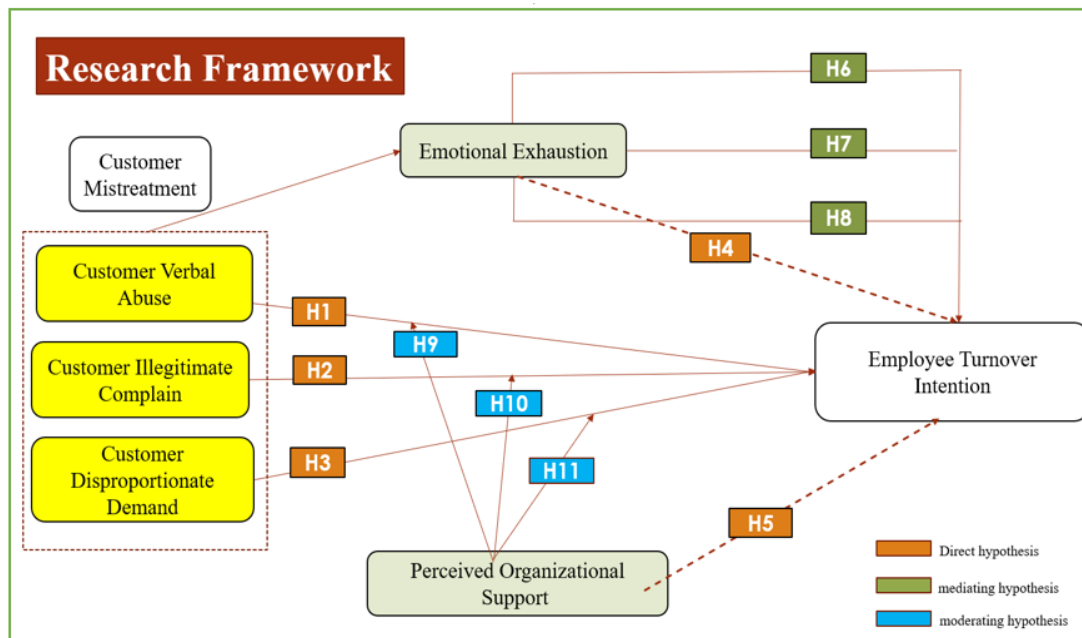


Figure 1: Research framework

## Methodology

### Research Paradigm and Research Design

The term "research paradigm" refers to a methodological approach, framework, or model employed in conducting research. These research paradigms often stem from two primary research techniques, namely positivism and interpretivism, which serve as the foundation for various research paradigms (Mohammadi, 2019; Sun et al., 2022).

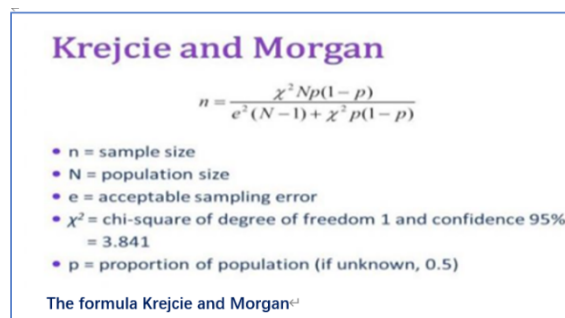
Quantitative research involves the collection and analysis of data in order to examine relationships between variables and test objective theories (Ahmad et al., 2019; Mohajan, 2020). This approach utilizes instruments to measure variables and obtain numerical data that can be analyzed through statistical procedures. The purpose of this particular study is to investigate the correlation between customer verbal abuse, customer illegitimate complaints, customer disproportionate demands, employee emotional exhaustion, perceived organizational support, and employees' inclination to leave their positions within star-rated hotels.

To achieve this goal, the study employs quantitative research methods to gather and analyze data from the targeted population. As such, it aligns with the quantitative research paradigm. Given the objective of examining the relationships between variables, a correlation design is considered the most appropriate approach for this study. Correlation analysis is utilized to determine the statistical association between two or more variables and further explore the strength and direction of that association. Thus, correlation studies are well-suited for this investigation (Mackey, 2016).

The sample for this study was drawn from star-rated hotel companies in Sichuan Province, China, and the population for this study will include a study of frontline turnover intention in 329 star-rated hotels located in Sichuan, China. To ensure that the sample is representative of the entire population, this study will use random sampling to select a representative sample of 30-50 star-rated hotel companies. Simple randomization will be used throughout the sampling process. Because it ensures that everyone has an equal opportunity to answer the questionnaire and thus be part of the whole sample (Zickar & Keith, 2023).

The minimum sample size required for the study is calculated as 384 frontline employees following Krejcie & Morgan method (Krejcie, V. Morgan, and W. 1970). The HR managers of these star hotels would solicit the opinions of the participants by administering a questionnaire to willing participants to better understand their perceptions of customer misbehavior.

They must be star-rated hotels within Sichuan that have been open for more than one year, and the participants in the study must be frontline employees of star-rated hotel services. Since this study examines the relationship between customers' verbal abuse, customers' unlawful complaints, customers' unreasonable demands, frontline employees' emotional exhaustion, perceived organizational support and employees' turnover intention in star-rated hotels within Sichuan Province, China, the study participants can only be frontline employees, not leaders or managers, in star-rated hotels in Sichuan, China.



**Krejcie and Morgan**

$$n = \frac{\chi^2 N p (1 - p)}{e^2 (N - 1) + \chi^2 p (1 - p)}$$

- n = sample size
- N = population size
- e = acceptable sampling error
- $\chi^2$  = chi-square of degree of freedom 1 and confidence 95% = 3.841
- p = proportion of population (if unknown, 0.5)

The formula Krejcie and Morgan<sup>12</sup>

**Figure 2** : Krejcie and Morgan formula

As of December 5, 2023, the number of people absorbing employment in star hotel companies in Sichuan Province reached 29,600 by calculating  $X^2 = 3.841$ ,  $e = 0.05$ ,  $N = 7026,000$ ,  $n = 384.1$  when  $P = 0.5$ . Simple random sampling is the preferred method when conducting quantitative research because it ensures that all eligible people have the opportunity to participate in the study (Bhag dev, 2021). This study uses a simple random sampling technique. Due to the correlational nature of this study and the use of cross-sectional data, there is a need to investigate the potential causal relationship between the independent variable and the dependent outcome. The study will be conducted in the form of an electronic questionnaire to be distributed to a random sample of frontline employees in star-rated hotels in Sichuan, China.

### Scale Measurement of the Variables

**Measurement of Employee Turnover Intention:** the scale used in this study was the TIS-6 scale, which has been shown to be valid in a number of previous studies. The criterion-based predictive validity of the TIS-6 was determined by comparing the difference in mean scores between quitters and a randomly selected sample group of those who remained with the organization for a specified period of time (Bothma & Roodt, 2013).

**Measurement of Customer Verbal Abuse:** The content of the Customer Verbal Abuse Questionnaire was selected from relevant research (Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002;). Cronbach's alpha value of 0.90 (verbal abuse) in the measurement of verbal abuse scale and the composite reliability of the scale is greater than 0.70, one of the important reasons is that the reliability of the scale has been tested in many studies.

**Measurement of Customer Illegitimate Complain:** the content of the *illegitimate* Customer Complaints Questionnaire was selected from related studies (Grandey, Tam, & Brauburger, 2002;). This questionnaire utilizes a 7-point Likert scale which contains 5 items and the loading factor in the study is greater than 0.75 and the Cronbach's alpha value of 0.86 in the measurement of customer's *illegitimate* complaints scale indicates that the questionnaire has a high level of validity.

**Measurement of Customer Disproportionate Demand:** the disproportionate demands questionnaire utilized the scale used in this study (2008; Monge et al., 1981). The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.88 in the measure of customers' disproportionate demands scale indicates that the questionnaire has high validity. The value of Cronbach's alpha exceeds the critical value of 0.70 suggested by Nunnally and Bernstein (1994).

**Measurement of Emotional Exhaustion:** Emotional Exhaustion Scale was selected from the study of Wharton (Wharton, 1993), a six-item measure was used to derive the Emotional Exhaustion Scale in which the value of Cronbach's alpha in the measure of Emotional Exhaustion was 0.82. It indicates that the questionnaire has a high validity.

**Measurement of perceived organizational support:** The Perceived Organizational Support Scale was selected from the study of (Eisenberger et al., 1997) in which Cronbach's alpha value of 0.9. each statement using a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). (e.g., Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990; Settoon et al., 1996; Shore & Tetrick, 1991; Shore & Wayne, 1993; Wayne et al., 1997). Confirmatory factor analysis of the short version of the SPOS similarly indicated a unitary factor structure, and the items showed high internal reliability. Confirmatory factor analysis of the short version of the SPOS similarly indicated a unitary factor structure, and the items showed high internal reliability.

## Data Analysis

In this study, the proposed methodology includes the utilization of structural equation modeling (SEM) to assess the validity of various hypotheses. The analysis will primarily employ path analysis and the SmartPLS software. PLS-SEM, which combines principal component analysis and multiple regression, is chosen as the causal modeling approach to predict the estimated statistical model and provide causal explanations. In contemporary social science research, SmartPLS emerges as a pragmatic tool for structural equation modeling (SEM) owing to its adaptability to small sample sizes and complex model structures (Joseph F. et al., 2021). Unlike covariance-based SEM methods, SmartPLS operates on a partial least squares (PLS) algorithm, making it well-suited for studies with limited observations commonly encountered in social sciences. This attribute renders SmartPLS particularly appealing to researchers in fields such as psychology and management, where intricate relationships between latent variables are often explored with constrained sample sizes.

Moreover, SmartPLS offers unparalleled flexibility in modeling complex constructs and relationships inherent in social science phenomena. Social science researchers frequently encounter multifaceted theoretical frameworks necessitating the incorporation of both reflective and formative constructs within their models (Joseph F. et al., 2021; Mohammadi, 2019). SmartPLS accommodates such complexities, empowering researchers to construct



and scrutinize intricate models reflective of the nuanced nature of social phenomena. Its capacity to handle intricate models facilitates exploratory analyses and hypothesis testing essential for advancing theoretical understanding in social sciences.

Furthermore, SmartPLS caters to the prediction-focused and exploratory nature of social science research by prioritizing prediction-oriented modeling and facilitating exploratory analysis. Its array of validation and assessment tools enables researchers to evaluate model fit, reliability, and validity, ensuring the robustness of constructs and relationships under investigation. In social science research, where construct validity and reliability are pivotal, SmartPLS validation tools furnish valuable insights into the quality of research instruments and overall model integrity, thus underlining its significance as a preferred tool for SEM in the social sciences.

### **Conclusion and Future Recommendations**

Employee separation stands as a critical focus area within corporate human resource management, garnering extensive attention due to its profound implications. The ramifications of employee turnover transcend mere operational efficiency, often setting off negative ripple effects across an organization's developmental trajectory. Factors influencing frontline employees' decisions to stay or depart encompass not only internal dynamics such as leadership and colleague attitudes but also external constraints imposed by the organization. Notably, the influence of customer misconduct on employees' inclination to remain with the company emerges as a pivotal aspect necessitating thorough examination.

In this decision-making milieu, both the emotional well-being of employees and the organization's provision of support assume pivotal roles, demanding meticulous scrutiny. Thus, a holistic approach encompassing not only internal workplace dynamics but also external factors shaping employees' emotional landscapes within the organization is imperative. Managers should particularly prioritize empirical studies conducted across diverse cultural and geographical contexts to attain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate mechanisms underpinning the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee turnover.

Employee emotional exhaustion stands out as a salient factor shaping employees' intentions to exit their roles, while the perceived level of organizational support emerges as a critical facet warranting nuanced exploration. Future research endeavors in this domain hold immense promise for delving deeper into the multifaceted relationship between customer misbehavior and employee turnover intention across various dimensions. Such research endeavors are poised to empower organizations in crafting more precise and effective talent retention strategies tailored to their unique contexts.

Hence, it remains imperative to persist in studying and comprehending the intricate dynamics between employee turnover intention and customer mistreatment. By garnering deeper insights into these dynamics, organizations can proactively devise measures to mitigate the adverse effects of customer mistreatment, bolster employee well-being, and institute robust retention strategies aimed at cultivating a resilient and engaged workforce.

In addition to current research trajectories, future investigations could delve deeper into the moderating effects of organizational culture and leadership styles on the relationship between customer mistreatment and employee turnover intention. Understanding how organizational values, norms, and leadership behaviors shape employees' perceptions of mistreatment and their subsequent turnover intentions could offer valuable insights for organizational interventions. Moreover, exploring the role of organizational climate in fostering resilience among frontline employees facing customer mistreatment could shed

light on strategies to cultivate a supportive work environment that buffers against turnover intentions.

Furthermore, longitudinal studies tracking employee turnover patterns over extended periods could provide a nuanced understanding of the dynamic nature of the relationship between customer mistreatment and turnover intention. By examining how turnover intentions evolve in response to changes in organizational practices, customer behavior, and external factors, researchers can elucidate the temporal dynamics of this phenomenon. Additionally, qualitative studies that capture the lived experiences of frontline employees facing customer mistreatment could offer rich contextual insights into the psychological processes underlying turnover intentions, thereby informing targeted interventions and support mechanisms.

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