



Research Paper

Consumer aggression and frontline employees' turnover intention: The role of job anxiety, organizational support, and obligation feeling

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ABSTRACT

In the hospitality industry, frontline employees' turnover poses a challenge because it involves immense human and financial costs. This study innovates by investigating the impact of consumer aggression on frontline employees' turnover intention using conservation of resources and social exchange theories. A survey conducted with 300 frontline employees working for 15 hotels confirms that (1) their job anxiety mediates the relationship between their perceived consumer aggression and their intent to quit; (2) their perceived organizational support reduces the positive relationship between their perceived consumer aggression and their job anxiety; and (3) their felt obligation reduces the positive relationship between their job anxiety and their intent to quit. We discuss managerial implications, limitations, and future research directions.

1. Introduction

In an increasingly knowledge-focused economy, talent management has become crucial to remain competitive (Rotolo et al., 2018) because a firm's ability to survive depends on its capacity to attract and retain its employees (Forbes, 2018). Frontline employees' turnover poses a significant challenge because it involves immense human and financial costs. Issues include the risk of reduced perceived quality and quantity of the organization's products and services (Yang et al., 2012), given the loss of knowledge and, ultimately, the adverse impacts on organizational performance (Cho et al., 2006; Rafaeli et al., 2012; Tracey and Hinkin, 2008) and competitive advantage (Wright et al., 1994). There is also the investment of resources in recruiting, training new staff, reorganizing daily operations, and the stress and work overload experienced by the remaining employees. In addition, frontline employees' turnover reduces the attractiveness of an employer's branding on the job market (King and Grace, 2010).

Frontline employees' behaviors strongly influence consumers' or clients' buying decisions and satisfaction level (Liao and Chuang, 2004) in a market where they can switch to the competition. Traditionally, top managers have often adopted the premise that "the consumer is always right" (Li and Zhou, 2013) in seeking to increase consumers' satisfaction at the expense of considering the emotions of frontline employees.

However, consumer aggression is an increasingly severe problem among service organizations (Baranik et al., 2017; Fong et al., 2017; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Consumer aggression is defined as a state in which customers misbehave, disrespect, and devalue employees by their harsh words (Li and Zhou, 2013). Authors also refer to consumer aggression as disruptive, violent, deviant, or dysfunctional customer behavior (or misbehavior or jay-customer behavior) and customer incivility (Fong et al., 2017; Habel et al., 2017; Han et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2018). Consumer aggression has adverse impacts on employees' stress, anxiety, and turnover (Alola et al., 2019; Cho et al., 2006; Jensen et al., 2013; Mulki and Wilkinson, 2017; Vanderpool and Way, 2013). Most prior studies have focused on the impact of consumer aggression in sensitive occupations, frequently in the caring professions and service occupations (Yeh, 2015).

In particular, in the hospitality industry (e.g., hotels), frontline employees face high levels of strain and role stress, excessive workloads, and aggressive customers (Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe et al., 2012; Kim, 2008; Kim et al., 2009). In this sector, consumer aggression is frequent (Karatepe et al., 2009; Li and Zhou, 2013) and higher than in other industries (Huang and Miao, 2016; Torres et al., 2017). Clients maltreat employees (Harris and Reynolds, 2003; Kashif and Zarkada, 2015), mainly frontline ones (Choi et al., 2014). For example, hotel frontline employees frequently experience touching,

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sexual harassment, physical violence, consumer misbehavior, and verbal aggression (Yagil, 2008). Clients' aggressive complaints about dirty rooms or low-quality food or services (Bloisi, 2021; Sherman, 2011) make the workplace stressful (Sakurai and Jex, 2012; Sliter et al., 2010).

Many researchers have examined consumer aggression in the hospitality industry (Alola et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2020; Cho et al., 2006; Han et al., 2016; Hur et al., 2016; Karatepe, 2011; Kim and Qu, 2019; Torres et al., 2017). Their findings show that hotel frontline employees feel considerable stress and job anxiety due to consumer aggression, which leads to employee turnover intention (Jensen et al., 2013; Mulki and Wilkinson, 2017; Vanderpool and Way, 2013). This study examines how the relation between consumer aggression and hotel frontline employees' turnover is moderated by their perceived organizational support and their felt obligation and mediated by their anxiety. In so doing, our study is in line with the research stream in the hotel industry context seeking to understand the complexity, dynamics, and mechanism of consumer aggression to reduce its impact on turnover (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007, 2017; Karatepe, 2010).

This study innovates in many ways. First, it responds to the call to investigate the dark side of consumer aggression that influences adverse outcomes and disrupts the workplace environment (Gong et al., 2018) in the hotel industry (Karatepe and Olugbade, 2016; Schilpzand et al., 2016). Second, in line with prior studies (Alola et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2020; Karatepe et al., 2009; Torres et al., 2017), we draw from conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) and social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) to develop our research hypotheses. To date, only a few studies have investigated the relationship between abusive consumers and employees' turnover through specific variables such as emotional exhaustion and dissonance (Alola et al., 2019; Karatepe et al., 2009), distributive justice and organizational pride (Kashif et al., 2017), organizational atmosphere and psychological capital (Gong et al., 2018), job satisfaction and employee burnout (Han et al., 2016; Walsh, 2011), and perceived organizational support (POS) (El Demerdash and Said, 2018). To our knowledge, we are the first to examine the extent to which the relationship between consumer aggression and frontline employees' turnover intention is mediated and moderated by their job anxiety, POS, and felt obligation. Our results may then carry major implications for theory in managing frontline employees in many sectors. Finally, from a business practices perspective, our findings may be helpful to policymakers and managers in service industries, and the hotel industry in particular, by prompting them to adopt approaches and strategies to control and lessen the negative consequences of consumer aggression on their frontline employees.

We structure this article as follows. First, we present the research model and hypotheses. Next, we successively describe the methodology and results. Finally, we discuss the findings, their implications, and the study limitations and put forward future research directions.

2. Literature review

This study aims to test the research model illustrated in Fig. 1 and explained in this section.

2.1. The direct impact of frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression on their intention to quit

According to COR theory, employees endeavor to gain, retain, and foster material, social, and personal resources, which help protect them from stressful issues (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Resources correspond to "things that people value, with an emphasis on objects, states, conditions, and other things" (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 519). COR theory also posits that resource loss is more prominent than resource gain (Hobfoll, 1989, 2001, 2002). This theoretical perspective might explain why frontline employees who perceive themselves as suffering from clients' aggression are more likely to express an intent to quit. As frequent episodes of violence or misbehavior from clients (Echeverri et al., 2012) reduce their resources, employees are more likely to look for another employer. Quitting will allow them to maintain, protect, and use their resources to reduce their stress.

Some turnover models also consider the influence of contextual characteristics (e.g., consumer aggression) on turnover or intention to leave (Porter and Steers, 1973; Price, 2001). Many studies confirm the various disruptive impacts of consumer aggression on employees, mainly frontlines ones, namely discomfort, stress, anxiety, loss of well-being, misbehaviors, demoralization, and unsatisfactory performance (Alola et al., 2019; Bedi and Schat, 2007; Boyd, 2002; Choi et al., 2014; Grandey et al., 2004; Karatepe and Uludag, 2007; Kim and Qu, 2019; Porath and Pearson, 2010; Schilpzand et al., 2016; Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). These negative emotional states and consequences lead employees to adopt withdrawal behaviors such as voluntary turnover and intention to leave (Gong et al., 2018; Karatepe et al., 2009; Konig et al., 2010; Li and Zhou, 2013; Yagil, 2008). Some studies confirm the positive link between frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression and their turnover or intention to leave (Bamfo et al., 2018; Poddar and Madupalli, 2012; Yeh, 2015). In line with this theoretical and empirical development, we posit a positive link between perceived consumer aggression and hotel frontline employees' intent to quit.

H1. Frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression is positively related to their intention to quit: the higher their perception of consumer aggression, the higher their intent to leave.

2.2. The mediating impact of frontline employees' job anxiety on the relationship between their perceived consumer aggression and their intention to quit

COR theory posits that employees who cannot maintain their resources feel more stress. It also states that undue pressure and stressful

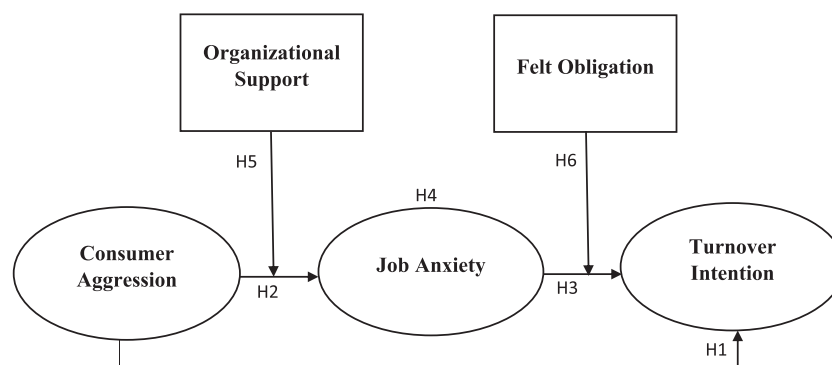


Fig. 1. Research model and hypotheses.

challenges may induce employees' negative and dysfunctional behaviors. To protect their resources, employees may reduce the energy invested at work to avoid stressful situations (Konig et al., 2010), causing job anxiety and turnover intention (Jensen et al., 2013; Vanderpool and Way, 2013). Muschalla et al. (2013) state that job anxiety is an intense feeling that occurs whenever employees overthink their work. Karasek (1979) defines mental strain as an emotional state of perceived anxiety in the context of job demands.

In the service industry, employees are susceptible to strain such as emotional dissonance, emotional exhaustion, depression, stress, job anxiety (Chen and Kao, 2012; Karatepe and Aleshinloye, 2009; Karatepe et al., 2009; Pizam, 2008; Zopiatis et al., 2014), which induce turnover intention. In particular, consumer aggression exhausts frontline employees (Ben-Zur and Yagil, 2005; Harris and Reynolds, 2003; Poddar and Madupalli, 2012) and increases their anger, hurt, frustration, and disappointment (Groth and Grandey, 2012; Rupp et al., 2007), their stress or anxiety and, ultimately, their turnover (Bamfo et al., 2018; Choi et al., 2004). Mulki and Wilkinson (2017) also find that interpersonal conflict with consumers increases employees' stress and turnover intention. Similarly, the relationship between customer incivility and employee turnover intention is increased (negatively mediated) by burnout, emotional dissonance, or exhaustion, and reduced (positively mediated) by job satisfaction (Alola et al., 2019; Han et al., 2016; Karatepe et al., 2009; Walsh, 2011). This study proposes that frontline employees' job anxiety positively mediates the relationship between consumer aggression and their intention to quit.

H2. Frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression is positively related to their job anxiety.

H3. Frontline employees' job anxiety is positively related to their turnover intention.

H4. Frontline employees' job anxiety mediates the relationship between perceived consumer aggression and turnover intention: consumer aggression enhances frontline employees' job anxiety, which increases their intention to leave.

2.3. *The moderating impact of frontline employees' perceived organizational support (POS) on the relationship between their perceived consumer aggression and their job anxiety*

According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002), having considerable resources increases a person's ability to solve problems and cope with stressful situations. Under this theoretical perspective, resources are viewed as those things that employees value, such as energies, conditions, and personal characteristics (Hobfoll, 1989). If employees cannot cope internally with external negative attitudes and behaviors, they may hope to deal with these stressful situations using the external support of the organization. Such organizational supportive resources meet employees' socioemotional needs and enable them to perform better and accomplish organizational goals (Karatepe, 2015).

Similarly, organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) states that employees who perceive their employers look after their well-being and value their contribution are less likely to feel stress or anxiety and to quit (Chiang and Hsieh, 2012; Eisenberger and Stinglhamber, 2011). As a resource, organizational support might include funding, equipment, technology, physical assistance, ideas, and socioemotional assistance (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS is considered essential in understanding employee-organization relationships (Han et al., 2016). When they receive support from their employers, employees feel committed to their job, which buffers the negative effect of job anxiety on their intention to quit (Fuller et al., 2006). Studies confirm that POS triggers employees' resources that reduce anxiety or stress (Jones et al., 2016). It also moderates the effects of adverse work conditions and job stress factors (Cheng and Yi, 2018; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Wood, 2008). Consequently, corporate support as a job resource

can alleviate the detrimental effects of consumer aggression on job anxiety. We expect that frontline employees who benefit from more organizational support would be more inclined to react in front of aggressive consumers (in zero-tolerance environments) and less likely to feel stressed about the incident.

H5. Frontline employees' POS negatively moderates the positive relationship between their perceived consumer aggression and their job anxiety: the higher the POS, the lower the strength of the positive relationship between consumer aggression and job anxiety.

2.4. *The moderating impact of frontline employees' felt obligation on the relationship between their job anxiety and their intention to quit*

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) posits that employees want more than an economic relationship with their organization (Hom et al., 2009). Based on this perspective, there is a series of reciprocity activities among two parties over time: when individuals are well treated, an exchange norm leads them to give back to others (Cotterell et al., 1992). Such a norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) is considered similar to the notion of "returning the favor" (Lambert, 2001). When employers care about their employees, the latter are more likely to express better attitudes and behaviors such as commitment (Eisenberger et al., 2001; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002) and prosocial behaviors (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Similarly, the more employees receive socioemotional and economic benefits from their employers, the more they feel obliged to use their resources to achieve organizational goals (Resick et al., 2013).

Obtaining and retaining personal, social, and material resources creates a sense of obligation and the feeling that employees can meet stressful challenges (Hobfoll, 2002) such as consumer aggression. Felt obligation refers to "the extent to which employees are committed to developing new procedures and correcting problems in their organization" (Liang et al., 2012, p. 73). Some authors consider employees' felt obligation as an essential internal motivation that drives them to show the desired behavior to reciprocate organizational supportiveness (Fuller et al., 2006). According to COR theory, individuals with resources (e.g., a high sense of obligation) are also less negatively affected by the resource drain or loss brought by stressful conditions. Hence, we propose the following hypothesis:

H6. Frontline employees' felt obligation negatively moderates the positive relationship between their job anxiety and their turnover intention: the higher their felt obligation, the lower the relationship between their job anxiety and intention to quit.

2.5. *Alternative model or hypothesis: the moderating impact of frontline employees' POS on the relationship between their job anxiety and their intention to quit*

Considering that few studies have investigated the topic, we examine an alternative model that proposes that frontline employees' POS moderates the association between their job anxiety and their intention to quit. Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) posits that POS conveys a sense of caring and regard for employees' well-being when they are confronted with challenges. Similarly, organizational support theory postulates that care from corporate agents (e.g., offering involvement in decision-making, providing appropriate incentives, offering development opportunities) reduces employee turnover intention (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 2004). More precisely, studies confirm that receiving support from other people or organizations helps workers cope with stress and anxiety and reduces their turnover intention (Akgunduz and Sanli, 2017; Rhoades et al., 2001; Eisenberger et al., 2002; Sakurai and Jex, 2012). Hence, we propose the following alternative hypothesis:

Alternative hypothesis. Frontline employees' POS negatively moderates the positive relationship between their job anxiety and their

turnover intention: the higher their POS, the lower the negative relationship between their job anxiety and intention to quit.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design and sampling

We used a snowball technique (Creswell and Creswell, 2017) to approach 20 three-star hotels in the city of Lahore (Pakistan), and 15 of them agreed to participate. A questionnaire-based survey was designed and distributed among their frontline employees. We conducted multi-wave surveys to minimize the common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2012). A time-lagged research design was selected, with two waves of data obtained from frontline employees. The first wave survey (T1) measured consumer aggression and related demographic information. Two weeks later, we conducted the second wave survey (T2) to measure employee job anxiety, employee turnover intention, perceived organizational support, and felt obligation.

Using a purposive sampling technique (Saunders, 2011), we asked 350 frontline employees to complete the questionnaire in T1. A letter attached to each questionnaire explained that the investigation was for academic purposes and that all information collected would be kept secret and anonymous. Almost 91% ($n = 320$) of employees completed it. In T2, we approached the employees who responded the first time and asked them to complete another questionnaire: 300 valid completed ones were returned (response rate: 94%). According to the rule of item ratio (10:1) (Randall and Gibson, 2013), the sample size would be 260 because the questionnaire contains 26 items. In this study, we used a sample size of 300 respondents to avoid non-responsiveness or generalizable issues (Bryman, 2016) and to lessen sample error.

3.2. Measurement of variables

3.2.1. Consumer aggression

We used the 5-item scale for consumer aggression developed by Dormann and Zapf (2004), ranging from (1) Never to (5) Always. Example items include "Our customers always push us" and "Our customers often shout at us." Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .86.

3.2.2. Job anxiety

We retained the 4-item scale for job anxiety developed by Parker and DeCotiis (1983), ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. Example items include "I have felt fidgety or nervous as a result of my job" and "My job gets to me more than it should." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .77.

3.2.3. Turnover intention

We adopted Ganesan and Weitz's (1996) measure of employee turnover intention on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. Two sample items are "I don't think I will spend all my career with this company" and "I intend to leave this company shortly." Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .85.

3.2.4. Perceived organizational support

We used the 6-item scale of Eisenberger et al. (1986) ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. Two sample items are "My organization takes pride in my accomplishments" and "My organization cares about my well-being." Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .84.

3.2.5. Felt obligation

We adopted the 6-item scale of Eisenberger et al. (2001) ranging from (1) Strongly disagree to (5) Strongly agree. Two sample items are "I feel a personal obligation to do whatever I can to help my company achieve its goals" and "I owe it to my work organization to give 100% of my energy to its goals while I am at work." Cronbach's alpha for this scale is .79.

3.2.6. Control variables

We introduced some demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, and experience) as control variables to rule out their potential impacts on the links among the variables of interest.

3.3. Description of the sample and the research variable profile and quality

Half of the respondents are female ($n = 154$, 51.3%). Half of them have a graduate education level ($n = 161$, 54%) and the remaining either a MS/M.Phil. ($n = 82$, 27%) or an undergraduate level ($n = 57$, 19%). The majority of the frontline employees are between 20 and 29 years old ($n = 210$, 70%). Half of the respondents have between 1 and 5 years of job seniority ($n = 145$, 48.3%); the others have between 6 and 10 ($n = 113$, 37.7%) or above ten years ($n = 42$, 14%).

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics and reliability and correlation test results. We used the Harman single factor test (Podsakoff et al., 2003) and multi-wave response method (Podsakoff et al., 2012). All scale items load into a single latent variable that explains 25.5% of the total variance, below the 50% threshold, indicating no issue of common bias (Mattila and Enz, 2002). All the scales show adequate internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha greater than 0.70 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Multicollinearity is not an issue as the correlation among study variables is less than 0.70 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 1996).

Unsurprisingly, frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression appears positively related to their job anxiety ($r = 0.57$, $p \leq 0.01$) and their intent to quit ($r = 0.34$, $p \leq 0.01$). Job anxiety is also positively associated with turnover intention ($r = 0.38$, $p \leq 0.01$). There are no significant relationships between all control variables (age, gender, experience, education level) and all key variables. The lack of a link between the gender of participants and their intention to leave is congruent with prior studies (Kim, 2005; Lambert et al., 2001; Mor Barak et al., 2005). Moreover, the participating employees are overwhelmingly young and with little seniority, which may explain why their intention to leave is not related to these individual characteristics, as previous studies show (Griffeth et al., 2000).

According to Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the measurement model is a prerequisite to testing the structural model. Table 2 shows that the proposed 5-factor model results indicate good fit values ($\chi^2 = 567.772$, $df = 288$, $\chi^2/df = 1.971$, RMSEA = 0.057, CFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.91) that meet the criteria of suggested standard values ($\chi^2/df < 3$, RMSEA < 0.08, CFI > 0.95, NNFI > 0.95) (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Hu and Bentler, 1999). Additionally, a comparative fit index (CFI) and a non-normed fit index (NNFI) value should be ≥ 0.90 to be acceptable (Cheung and Rensvold, 2002). As shown in Table 2, a single-factor model provides a poor fit ($\chi^2 = 2180.390$, $df = 299$, $\chi^2/df = 7.292$, RMSEA = 0.145, CFI = 0.423, NNFI = 0.373). Hence, we retained the proposed 5-factor model as it indicates the best fit values.

Finally, Table 3 also confirms that convergent validity is fully satisfied (AVE is ≥ 0.5 , CR values are > 0.7 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), and item factor loadings are ≥ 0.5). Tables 1 and 3 also confirm that the research data satisfy the discriminant validity criteria since the square root value of AVE is higher than the correlations of constructs (Zait and Berteau, 2011).

3.4. Data analysis

We used the Statistical Package of social sciences (SPSS 22) and analysis of moment structures (AMOS 22) to test our hypotheses through structural equation modeling (SEM). We tested the mediation effect through the direct and indirect path (Iacobucci et al., 2007) using the bootstrapping technique (with 10,000 bootstrap samples and a confidence interval of 95%). To test the moderating impact of POS and felt obligation, we used Baron and Kenny's (1986) method and plotted the

Table 1

Descriptive statistics, internal reliability, and correlation (r).

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Consumer aggression	(.86)								
2. Job anxiety	.57**	(.77)							
3. Turnover intention	.34**	.38**	(.85)						
4. Perceived organization support	-.29**	-.19**	-.17**	(.84)					
5. Felt obligation	-.31**	-.26**	-.27**	.39**	(.79)				
6. Gender	-.030	.023	-.010	.017	-.110	NA			
7. Age	-.038	-.052	-.037	.058	-.051	-.134*	NA		
8. Experience	.058	.044	.003	.040	.073	.037	.078	NA	
9. Education	-.046	.003	.076	-.037	-.001	.071	.125*	.246**	NA
Mean	3.13	3.32	3.38	3.58	3.79	1.51	1.42	1.68	2.12
SD	.93	.83	.94	.72	.67	.51	.76	.77	.76

Cronbach's alphas (α) are on the diagonal in parentheses.

Gender: 1 = male, 2 = female.

Age: 1 = 20–29, 2 = 30–39, 3 = 40–49, 4 = 50–59, 5 = 60 or above.

Experience in years: 1 = 1–5, 2 = 5–10, 3 = 11–15, 4 = 16–20.

Education: level 1 = undergraduate, 2 = graduate, 3 = M.S/M.phil.

* $p \leq 0.05$.** $p \leq 0.01$.**Table 2**

Confirmatory factor analyses results.

Variables	χ^2	Df	Ratio χ^2 / df	CFI	NNFI	RMSEA
1-factor model ^a	2180.390	299	7.292	0.423	0.373	0.145
2-factor model ^b	1871.989	298	6.282	0.517	0.474	0.133
3-factor model ^c	1290.383	296	4.359	0.695	0.665	0.106
4-factor model ^d	783.819	293	2.675	0.849	0.833	0.075
5-factor model ^e	567.772	288	1.971	0.920	0.913	0.057

^a Consumer aggression, job anxiety, turnover intention, perceived organizational support (POS) and felt obligation, all combined as one-factor.^b Consumer aggression, job anxiety, turnover intention and POS in a single factor, felt obligation in a single factor.^c Consumer aggression, job anxiety, turnover intention in a single factor, POS in a single factor, and felt obligation in a single factor.^d Consumer aggression, job anxiety in a single factor, turnover intention in a single factor, POS in a single factor, and felt obligation in a single factor.^e Consumer aggression, job anxiety, turnover intention, POS, and felt obligation, each, in a single factor.

interaction plot. We developed a structural model for analyzing and testing hypotheses. The results show that the model satisfied the criteria of good fit ($\chi^2 = 156.779$, $df = 72$, $\chi^2/df = 2.177$, $RMSEA = 0.063$, $CFI = 0.96$, $NNFI = 0.95$).

4. Research results

Table 4 shows the results of our analyses aimed at testing the first six hypotheses, and Fig. 2 represents them using the research model. Perceived consumer aggression is linked to frontline employees' turnover intention, but the relation is not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.137$, $p > 0.05$), which does not support Hypothesis 1. Our results support Hypotheses 2 and 3: customer aggression is positively linked to frontline employees' job anxiety ($\beta = 0.722$, $p < 0.05$), and the latter is positively related to their intent to quit ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < 0.05$).

Results in Table 5 confirm Hypothesis 4. As expected, frontline employees' job anxiety mediates the relationship between perceived consumer aggression and turnover intention: consumer aggression enhances frontline employees' job anxiety and increases their intention to leave.

Results in Table 4 also confirm Hypotheses 5 and 6 regarding two moderator variables. As illustrated in Fig. 3, frontline employees' POS has a significant negative moderating impact on the relationship between their perceived consumer aggression and their job anxiety ($\beta = -0.149$, $p < 0.001$): the higher the POS, the weaker the negative link between consumer aggression on job anxiety (and vice versa). Fig. 4 shows that frontline employees' felt obligation negatively moderates the

Table 3

Factor loading and scale validities.

Variables	Items	Loading	CR	AVE	Square root of AVE
Consumer aggression	CA1	.815	0.86	0.56	.75
	CA2	.585			
	CA3	.744			
	CA4	.952			
	CA5	.556			
Job anxiety	JA1	.681	0.77	0.50	.71
	JA2	.558			
	JA3	.500			
	JA4	.923			
Turnover intention	TI1	.576	0.86	0.55	.75
	TI2	.830			
	TI3	.858			
	TI4	.769			
	TI5	.643			
Perceived organizational support	POS1	.607	0.83	0.50	.71
	POS2	.881			
	POS3	.713			
	POS4	.640			
	POS5	.689			
	POS6	.559			
Felt obligation	FO1	.549	0.80	0.50	.71
	FO2	.647			
	FO3	.689			
	FO4	.613			
	FO5	.704			
	FO6	.545			

Table 4

Structural model results.

Hypotheses	Hypothesized paths	(β)	t-value	p-value
H1	CA→TI	.137	1.521	.128
H2	CA→JA	.722	6.658	***
H3	JA→TI	.369	4.629	***
H5	CA→JA	.548	11.760	***
	POS→JA	-.034	-2.810	***
H6	CA*POS→JA	-.149	-3.565	***
	JA→TI	.326	6.469	.040
	FO→TI	-.196	-3.788	***
	CA*FO→TI	-.068	-2.477	***

CA: Consumer aggression//JA: Job anxiety// TI: Turnover intention//POS: Perceived organizational support// FO: Felt obligation.

* $p \leq 0.05$.*** $p \leq 0.01$.

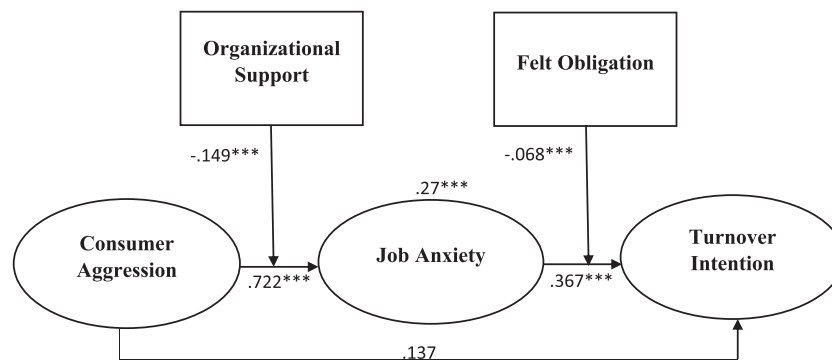


Fig. 2. The results of the structural equation modeling. ***, $p < 0.01$, **, $p < 0.05$, *, $p < 0.10$.

Table 5

The mediating role of frontline employee's job anxiety.

Bootstrap BCa 95% confidence intervals				
	Estimate	Lower	Upper	P
Relation between customer aggression and turnover intention	.14	-.08	.35	.15
Mediating impact of job anxiety	.27	.15	.46	.00

BCa: bias-corrected and accelerated bootstrapping confidence intervals. Estimate based on 10,000 bootstrap samples.

Table 6

Structural model results.

Alternative hypothesis	Hypothesized paths	(β)	t-value	p-value
	JA $\rightarrow$ TI	.341	6.391	***
	POS $\rightarrow$ TI	-.106	-1.978	.048
	JA*POS $\rightarrow$ TI	.071	1.543	.123

JA: Job anxiety// TI: Turnover intention//POS: Perceived organizational support.

* $p \leq 0.05$.

*** $p \leq 0.01$.

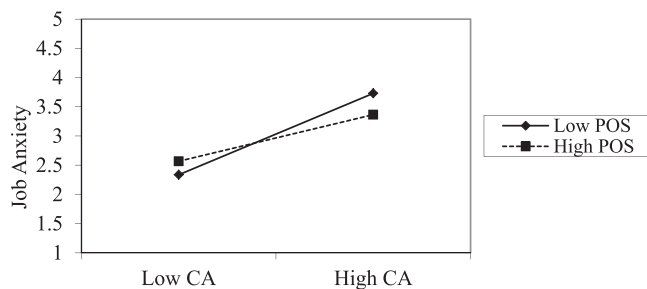


Fig. 3. The moderation plot of frontline employees' perceived organizational support (POS) on the relationship between their perceived consumer aggression and their job anxiety.



Fig. 4. The moderation plot of frontline employees' felt obligation on the relationship between their job anxiety and their turnover intention.

positive relationship between their job anxiety and their turnover intention: the higher their felt obligation, the weaker the relationship between their job anxiety and intention to quit ($\beta = -0.068$, $p < 0.001$).

Finally, the results reported in Table 6 do not support the alternative model or hypothesis. Frontline employees' POS does not significantly negatively affect the positive relationship between their job anxiety and turnover intention ($\beta = 0.071$, $p > 0.05$).

5. Discussion

Based upon COR and social exchange theories, this study explores whether the relationship between customer aggression and frontline employees' turnover intention is mediated by their job anxiety and moderated by their POS and their felt obligation.

Results show that frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression is not significantly positively related to their intention to quit, as expected in Hypothesis 1. This result is not congruent with previous results that confirm a positive link between consumer aggression and frontline employees' turnover or intention to leave (Bamfo et al., 2018; Poddar and Madupalli, 2012; Yeh, 2015). This non-significant direct impact of consumer aggression on frontline employees' turnover intention indicates that other factors mitigate this relationship, which relates to our other hypotheses regarding job anxiety, organizational support, and felt obligation. According to job embeddedness theory (Mitchell et al., 2001), many factors that are not linked to job attitudes and job context (e.g., a partner's relocation, the birth of a child) may explain an employee's departure or intention to quit.

Our results confirm Hypotheses 2 and 3: customer aggression is positively linked to frontline employees' job anxiety, and the latter is positively related to their intent to quit. As expected in Hypothesis 4, frontline employees' job anxiety mediates the relationship between perceived customer aggression and their intention to leave. In other words, frontline employees who are victims of consumer aggression experience increased job anxiety, which leads them to express higher turnover intention.

Our results confirm the moderating impact of employees' POS and felt obligation predicted in Hypotheses 5 and 6, in line with COR and social exchange theories and previous studies. As expected in Hypothesis 5, the higher frontline employees' POS, the weaker the negative link between their perceived consumer aggression and their job anxiety (and vice versa). Muschalla et al. (2013) argue that providing social support to employees positively affects their well-being, which helps control the negative aspects of anxiety or stress. In line with Hypothesis 6, employees' felt obligation reduces the relationship between their job anxiety and their intention to quit. This result is congruent with Zhu and Akhtar's study (2017), which indicates that the relationship between

managerial openness and employee voice behavior is positive only among employees with a high felt obligation for constructive change. Finally, our results do not support the **alternative model or hypothesis**: frontline employees' POS does not significantly negatively affect the positive relationship between their job anxiety and their turnover intention. The effect of organizational support lies in reducing the frontline employees' anxiety generated by violent clients (proactive strategy). POS is ineffective in lowering their intention to leave when offered after the frontline employees have experienced consumer aggression (reactive strategy).

6. Theoretical implications

From a theoretical perspective, the results demonstrate the value of examining the incidence of frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression using COR theory and social exchange theory. This study confirms the relevance of organizational support as a contextual resource and felt obligation as a personal resource to alleviate the incidence of customer aggression on employee turnover. Consequently, it confirms that strategic resource possession at organizational and individual levels, stipulated by COR theory, gives employers opportunities to gain competitive advantage (Barney, 1991). Our results are also congruent with organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986), which stresses the significance of employees' belief that their employers are concerned about their well-being and value their contribution.

7. Managerial implications

The study results provide new insights for employers in the hospitality, service, and tourism industries who should view frontline employees as an investment to gain competitive advantage. Hotel frontline employees frequently experience aggressive complaints about low-quality food or service and dirty rooms. In this industry, frontline employees have to face frequent episodes of consumer misbehavior and aggression. The study confirms that hospitality frontline employees' perceived consumer aggression affects their physiological state and creates job anxiety that may induce employee turnover. Our results may prompt policymakers and managers in service industries and the hotel industry to adopt approaches and strategies to control and lessen the negative consequences of consumer aggression on their frontline employees.

To offer a supportive environment, employers need to take care of their frontline employees' well-being by providing evidence of appreciation to increase employees' POS (an organizational resource) and their felt obligation (an individual resource). Organizations should pay attention to both their frontline employees' and their customers' satisfaction. They need to obtain feedback from frontline employees regarding their customer interactions and to find strategies to control the frequency of client aggression incidents. Employers have a legal responsibility to ensure a safe workplace. Organizations would benefit from promoting a culture of zero tolerance toward customer aggression. They should adopt and facilitate the use of various management practices conducive to a respectful environment (e.g., a well-advertised policy, regular communication, employee assistance programs). It is crucial to adopt written procedures and policies regarding employees' rights, including specifying the maximum verbal abuse tolerated when dealing with customers and the cutoff points observed with verbally aggressive customers. Employers need to support their frontline employees in various areas to show that they are committed to their well-being: scheduling practices (e.g., flexible schedules, job rotation), incentives (e.g., awards, benefits, stress days), proper staffing (e.g., sufficient staff), communication/collaboration (talking to staff, individual sessions), etc. Employers need to audit employees' complaints and record consumer aggression so as to be in a position to take corrective actions to deal with abusive customers.

Increased supervisor support constitutes another crucial step in

controlling or minimizing the dark side of consumer aggression. Formal and informal training, counseling, and mentorship advice to supervisors and frontline employees could go a long way toward alleviating the stress caused by complicated customer-employee interactions. Organizational and supervisor support creates obligation feelings. Employees feel more engaged, have sufficient resources to cope with abusive customers, and are less likely to consider quitting. Offering working conditions that respect frontline employees' skills and needs and providing a supportive workplace promotes employee accountability. Promoting a positive and supportive workplace culture and providing some measure of job autonomy to frontline employees could help them manage abusive customers and enhance their service-oriented behaviors, which would induce greater customer satisfaction and firm profitability (Heskett et al., 1994).

8. Limitations, future directions, and conclusion

Although this study provides significant theoretical and managerial contributions, it is not without its limitations. The most severe limitations concern the cross-sectional approach used. However, in using a two-time lag survey, we reduced the possibility of common method bias (Ployhart and Vandenberg, 2010). In addition, our results cannot be generalized to the whole hospitality industry and other countries. We conducted this study with a relatively small number of frontline employees from hotels in Pakistan. Researchers should replicate this study with other samples to respond to authors who have called explicitly for further empirical evidence from different cross-cultural contexts to broaden the theoretical underpinnings of the effects of consumer aggression on employee job-related outcomes (Gong et al., 2018; Konig et al., 2010; Li and Zhou, 2013; Schilpzand et al., 2016). This study investigates the impact of organizational support as a contextual resource and felt obligation as a personal resource. Future studies could focus on the effects of various other personal resources needed to cope with stressful consumer interactions, namely physical (e.g., energy, health), affective (e.g., mood, empathy), intellectual (e.g., skills, experience), capital (e.g., time, money), and psychological (e.g., optimism, resilience, self-esteem, or core self-evaluation) resources.

Based upon COR and social exchange theories, this study shows that the relationship between customer aggression and frontline employees' turnover intention is mediated by their job anxiety and moderated by their POS and their felt obligation. Management practices that strengthen frontline employees' POS and their felt obligation are often overlooked but relatively straightforward to implement, and they benefit employees, employers, and consumers alike.

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