



A Meta-Analysis of the Relationship Between Dysfunctional Customer Behavior and Burnout in Hospitality: The Moderating Effect of Cultural Values

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Abstract

Dysfunctional customer behavior poses significant risks to employee mental health in hospitality, yet limited attention has been paid to its impact across cultural contexts. This meta-analysis examined the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and employee burnout, and the moderating role of national cultural values. We analyzed 66 independent samples comprising 27,862 hospitality employees worldwide. Results revealed a significant moderate positive association between dysfunctional customer behavior and employee burnout ($r = 0.32$, 95% CI [0.26, 0.38], $z = 10.37$, $p < .001$), with substantial heterogeneity ($I^2 = 96.77\%$), suggesting cross-country variability. Moderation analyses drawing on conservation of resources theory and cultural value frameworks showed that assertiveness, in-group collectivism, and uncertainty avoidance significantly strengthened the customer mistreatment-burnout relationship, while performance orientation weakened this association. Power distance, institutional collectivism, humane orientation, and future orientation exhibited limited or inconsistent effects. Findings demonstrate the culturally contingent nature of emotional labor and stressor-strain processes in service roles, contributing to theory by integrating culture into workplace stress models. Organizations operating in high assertiveness, high in-group collectivism, or high uncertainty avoidance cultures should prioritize comprehensive burnout prevention programs, including mental health screenings, counseling services, and culturally appropriate peer support networks. These insights offer guidance for developing culturally responsive HRM practices to protect employee well-being in the global hospitality industry.

Keywords: Customer incivility, jay customer, burnout, meta-analysis, hospitality industry

1. Introduction

It is generally believed that “the customer is always right.” Businesses that adopt this philosophy often assume that prioritizing customers’ needs will enhance service experience, foster loyalty, and improve organizational success. However, empirical evidence increasingly challenges this notion, revealing that customers may engage in disruptive, aggressive, or abusive

behaviors—collectively termed dysfunctional customer behavior- which can have damaging consequences for organizations, especially their employees (Grandey et al., 2004; Harris & Reynolds, 2003; Kura, 2016; Kura et al., 2012, 2013, 2019). Frontline employees, particularly in the hospitality industry, are frequently exposed to dysfunctional customer behavior due to the interactional nature of their roles.



Researchers have labeled such behaviors in various ways, including customer incivility, verbal aggression, customer mistreatment, jay customer behavior, among others (Liu et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2022). Regardless of the terms used, these behaviors share a common feature: they violate significant organizational norms and mutual respect in service encounters. Such behavior is not only prevalent but also has profound implications for employee well-being, organizational functioning, and societal health (Bapuji et al., 2020; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009; Zhou et al., 2021).

The hospitality sector, while economically vital, with global revenues exceeding \$4.9 trillion in 2024 and projected to reach \$5.7 trillion in 2025, faces persistent employee burnout and turnover, largely due to emotionally taxing work environments and frequent customer mistreatment. Industry reports indicate that nearly 3 million hospitality workers resigned in early 2024 alone, reflecting burnout and job dissatisfaction rates that are 204% higher than the national average (Crist, 2024). Furthermore, hospitality roles are considered among the most stressful in service sectors, with frontline employees often needing to hide their emotions, suppress reactions to incivility, and maintain consistent service quality in high-pressure situations (Karatepe, 2013). This emotionally demanding atmosphere is worsened by increasing consumer entitlement, social media criticism, and heightened expectations for flawless service, which amplify the psychological pressures hospitality workers face.

Although the effects of customer mistreatment on employee outcomes have been examined across individual studies, these efforts remain fragmented, inconsistent, and culturally narrow. Much of

the existing literature is grounded in Western-centric perspectives, limiting its generalizability to the global workforce. Additionally, variations in operationalization of what counts as "mistreatment" and which aspects of burnout are measured complicate efforts to compare findings or inform practice. There is also a lack of systematic integration across these studies, making it difficult to understand the average strength and boundary conditions of the dysfunctional customer behavior–burnout relationship in hospitality contexts.

A growing body of cross-cultural organizational behavior literature indicates that individuals' cognitive appraisals and emotional reactions to workplace stressors are significantly influenced by cultural values (Barker et al., 2021; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2020). For instance, in societies characterized by high uncertainty avoidance, unpredictable customer behaviors may be perceived as highly threatening, leading to increased emotional strain. In collectivist cultures, mistreatment might be viewed as an offense not only to the individual but to the group, thereby heightening emotional consequences. Conversely, performance-oriented cultures may encourage employees to reframe negative encounters as challenges to tackle, potentially reducing burnout. However, these insights have seldom been tested within the hospitality industry, where service interactions are frequent, emotionally intense, and socially regulated by both organizational and cultural expectations.

This study addresses significant theoretical and practical gaps. By utilizing the conservation of resources theory, which suggests that psychological stress occurs when valued resources are threatened or depleted, we investigate how dysfunctional customer behavior contributes to resource



loss, ultimately leading to burnout. Additionally, we incorporate national cultural value dimensions to analyze how societal norms and expectations influence the strength of this relationship across countries. To this end, we conduct a meta-analysis to (1) estimate the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and overall burnout in hospitality settings and (2) examine how eight national cultural dimensions moderate this relationship, highlighting the culturally contingent nature of emotional labor in hospitality settings.

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout across countries?

Research Question 2: How do national cultural value dimensions influence the strength of the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and employee burnout across countries?

This study makes several contributions. First, our study contributes to organizational behavior literature in hospitality by providing a better understanding of when and why dysfunctional customer behavior undermines employee mental health in the form of burnout. Second, it offers a cumulative and quantitative synthesis of the link between customer mistreatment and employee burnout in the hospitality industry, providing a much-needed benchmark for future research. Third, it is the first known meta-analysis to empirically test the moderating role of national cultural dimensions on this relationship, thereby extending both conservation of resources theory and cross-cultural organizational behavior frameworks. Finally, our study applied Hunter and Schmidt's (2004)

approach to correct for dependence among effect sizes and sampling error.

2. Literature Review and hypotheses

2.1 Dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout

Burnout is a psychological syndrome that frequently affects frontline employees in high-contact service roles (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), especially within the hospitality industry. It arises from prolonged exposure to interpersonal stressors and comprises three interconnected dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Lee & Ashforth, 1990; Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources (COR) theory provides a framework for understanding the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout. The theory posits that continuous exposure to dysfunctional customer behavior can be a significant source of burnout. Consistent with COR theory, increasing evidence highlights dysfunctional customer behavior, such as verbal aggression, incivility, and sexual harassment, as a major contributor to burnout in the hospitality sector (Alola et al., 2019; Han et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2025; Lei et al., 2025; Shahzad et al., 2023). These customer behaviors impose significant emotional strain, depleting psychological resources and affecting all facets of employee well-being.

Emotional exhaustion, the core component of burnout, refers to the depletion of emotional energy due to sustained work-related stress. Frontline hospitality workers are frequently subjected to mistreatment, ranging from overt verbal abuse to recurring rudeness, and report significantly higher levels of emotional fatigue (Alola et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2012). The constant need to maintain composure and provide



courteous service in the face of hostility places a heavy burden on employees' emotional reserves. Over time, these demands hinder recovery and lead to chronic exhaustion, undermining the employee's ability to remain engaged and effective. This emotional depletion can foster a sense of detachment from the service role, giving rise to depersonalization. Employees dealing with repeated incidents of customer incivility or aggression may start to distance themselves from guests to protect their mental health emotionally (Alola et al., 2019; Turkoglu & Dalgic, 2019). As a coping mechanism, this detachment often appears as cynicism, reduced empathy, or treating customers impersonally. While it may buffer the immediate impact of customer hostility, depersonalization erodes the relational quality of service and reflects an internal withdrawal from the professional role.

As emotional exhaustion and depersonalization escalate, employees may also experience a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. When persistent customer mistreatment makes employees feel ineffective, unappreciated, or unable to meet service expectations, it undermines their sense of competence (Han et al., 2016; Shahzad et al., 2023). The lack of recognition and repeated interpersonal strain can lead to feelings of failure and disengagement. In the hospitality context, where positive customer feedback often reinforces job meaning, continuous exposure to negative customer behaviors can severely impact employees' perceptions of their work value and efficacy. Taken together, we contended that dysfunctional customer behavior is a key antecedent of burnout across all three dimensions in hospitality settings. Thus, the following hypothesis is advanced:

Hypothesis 1: Dysfunctional customer behavior will be positively related to overall burnout across countries.

2.2 The moderating role of cultural values
Frontline service employees do not respond to customer mistreatment in a vacuum. Their broader cultural environment heavily influences their reactions, whether internalizing the stress, confronting the behavior, or seeking support. Cultural values help shape what employees view as acceptable behavior, how they interpret disrespect, and whether they feel empowered or restrained in addressing it. According to the GLOBE framework (House et al., 2004), national cultures vary along several key dimensions that can meaningfully shape employees' psychological responses to dysfunctional customer behavior, especially in emotionally demanding settings like hospitality. Depending on how they shape emotional regulation, support-seeking, and social expectations, these dimensions may either magnify or buffer the link between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout.

2.2.1 Uncertainty avoidance

Uncertainty avoidance reflects the "extent to which a society, organization, or group relies on social norms, rules, and procedures to alleviate unpredictability of future events." (House et al., 2004, p. 30). In high uncertainty avoidance cultures, ambiguity and unpredictability are viewed as stressful and even threatening. When a customer behaves in a way that defies expected norms, such as raising their voice, skipping procedures, or becoming erratic, employees in such cultures may feel more disoriented and anxious. This can make even relatively minor customer misbehavior feel psychologically overwhelming, thereby



increasing the likelihood of burnout (Schneider et al., 2013). Studies by Hofstede (2001) and subsequent cross-cultural research have found that service role stressors are magnified in environments where ambiguity is feared or discouraged.

Hypothesis 2a: Uncertainty avoidance moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is stronger in high uncertainty avoidance cultures.

2.2.2 Future orientation

Future orientation emphasizes “the extent to which individuals engage in future-oriented behaviors such as delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future.” (House et al., 2004, p. 30). Employees in high future orientation cultures are more likely to place negative customer experiences in perspective. Rather than ruminating on an unpleasant moment, they may view it as a passing obstacle in a long-term goal trajectory. This mindset promotes emotional resilience and has been associated with reduced emotional exhaustion in hospitality and service industries (Balaji et al., 2020; Karatepe & Olugbade, 2016). Future-oriented individuals tend to engage in anticipatory coping and goal-directed regulation, which buffer the emotional fallout of daily stressors.

Hypothesis 2b: Future orientation moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is weaker in high future orientation cultures.

2.2.3 Power distance

Power distance refers to the “degree to which members of a collective expect power to be distributed equally.” (House et al., 2004, p. 30). In high power distance cultures, customers are often viewed as superior in status, and employees may feel

obligated to tolerate mistreatment to maintain respect and compliance. This imbalance increases emotional suppression and the likelihood of burnout (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). Research in Asian and Middle Eastern hospitality settings have shown that such hierarchical structures discourage feedback and assertiveness, creating stress-accumulating conditions for service employees (Karatepe, 2011a; Li et al., 2019).

Hypothesis 2c: Power distance moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is stronger in high power distance cultures.

2.2.4 Institutional collectivism

Institutional collectivism reflects the “degree to which organizational and societal institutional practices encourage and reward collective distribution of resources and collective action.” (House et al., 2004, p. 30). High collectivism fosters a strong sense of team identity and encourages coworkers to help each other manage stressful situations. In such environments, when an employee experiences customer hostility, their coworkers or supervisors are more likely to step in or offer emotional support, buffering the individual against long-term burnout (Alola et al., 2019; Han et al., 2016). Prior research has shown that collectivist cultures improve perceived organizational support and resilience while reducing emotional exhaustion (Chen et al., 2024; Hussain, 2024; Rehman et al., 2025).

Hypothesis 2d: Institutional collectivism moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is weaker in high institutional collectivism cultures.

2.2.5 Humane orientation

Humane orientation describes the “degree to which a collective encourages and rewards



individuals for being fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kind to others." (House et al., 2004, p. 30). In such cultures, coworkers and managers are more likely to recognize employee distress and offer emotional or instrumental support. This helps employees reinterpret negative customer interactions as temporary or manageable, lowering the risk of depersonalization or exhaustion (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2020). Humane orientation is also associated with prosocial service climates, where concern for others is not only encouraged but institutionalized in training and leadership expectations (Chatterji & Zsolnai, 2016).

Hypothesis 2e: Humane orientation moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is weaker in high humane orientation cultures.

2.4.6 Performance orientation

Performance orientation reflects "the degree to which a collective encourages and rewards group members for performance improvement and excellence." (House et al., 2004, p. 30). In high performance-oriented cultures, employees may experience greater pressure to meet customer expectations—even in the face of mistreatment—because their competence and value are closely tied to outcomes. This "customer first at any cost" culture increases emotional labor and intensifies burnout risks (Karatepe, 2013; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). High-performance expectations often discourage emotional expression and demand composure under pressure, compounding internal strain.

Hypothesis 2f: Performance orientation moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is stronger in high performance orientation cultures.

2.4.7 In-group collectivism

In-group collectivism is "the degree to which individuals express pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness in their organizations or families." (House et al., 2004, p. 30). Employees in cultures with high in-group collectivism often experience stronger social bonds and emotional solidarity with their coworkers. This shared loyalty translates into active support when a colleague is mistreated by a customer. Peer reassurance, substitution in customer interactions, or team-based debriefing practices reduce the isolating effects of emotional labor and help prevent the accumulation of stress-related fatigue (Jung & Yoon, 2018; Karatepe, 2011). Thus, we expect:

Hypothesis 2g: In-group collectivism moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is weaker in high in-group collectivism cultures.

2.4.8 Assertiveness

Assertiveness is defined as the "degree to which individuals are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in their relationships with others." (House et al., 2004). In high assertiveness cultures, employees are more likely to establish boundaries and address mistreatment openly, which can reduce the buildup of frustration and resentment. This self-advocacy may interrupt the emotional toll of dysfunctional customer behavior and foster a greater sense of control and agency (Cheng et al., 2020). Conversely, in low assertiveness cultures, avoidance and deference may lead to emotional suppression and prolonged distress.

Hypothesis 2h: Assertiveness moderates the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, such that the relationship is weaker in high assertiveness cultures.

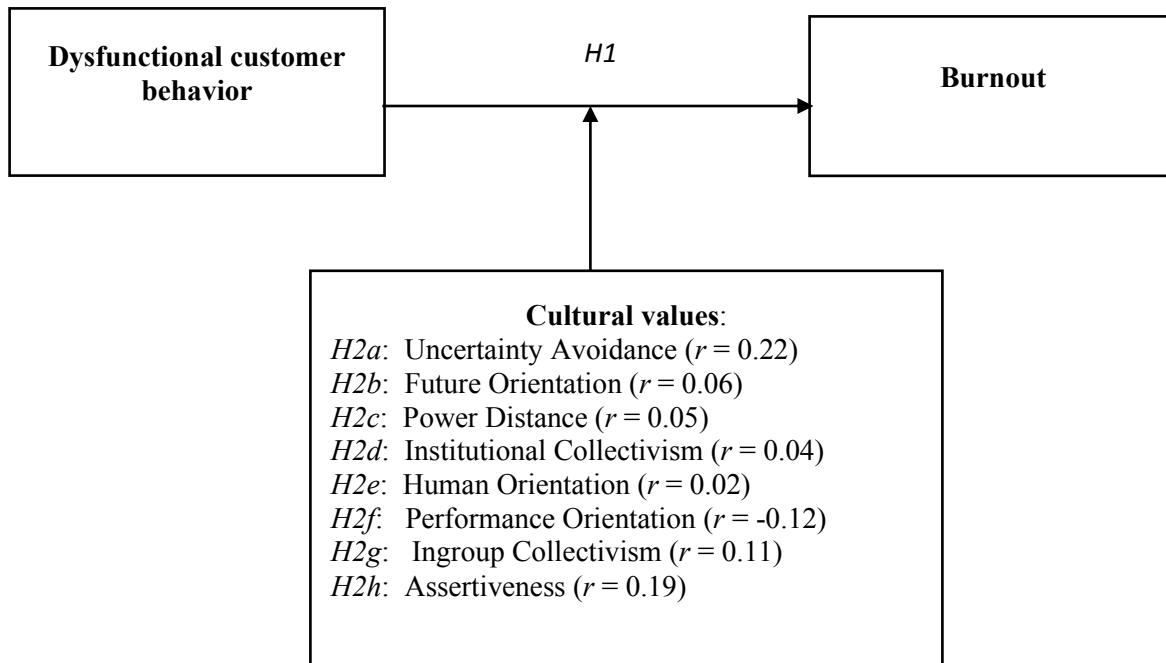


Figure 1. Conceptual model.

3. Methodology

3.1 Search strategies

We employed four strategies to identify studies included in the present meta-analysis. First, in line with extant meta-analytic studies, we searched several major databases to locate relevant studies, including Business Source Complete, APA PsycInfo, EBSCO Host, ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, Scopus, and Web of Science from January 1994 through December 2024 (Lim et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2022). We specifically search the following keywords: "dysfunctional customer behavior," "customer incivility," "jay customer behavior," "customer aggression," "customer mistreatment," "customer stressors," "customer injustice", "customer uncivil behavior", "customer verbal aggression", "uncivil behaviors",

"hotel," "tourism", "hospitality," "casino," "restaurant," "leisure" and "cruise." Second, we also conducted a manual search for several hospitality journals, including Cornell Hospitality Quarterly, International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, International Journal of Hospitality Management, Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Research, Journal of Travel Research, Tourism and Hospitality Research, Tourism Management, and Current Issues in Tourism. Third, we manually conducted Google Scholar citation searches to locate additional studies citing the seminal work of Harris and Reynolds (2004). Finally, we carefully checked the reference lists of extant meta-analytic studies for more studies, including Lim et al. (2024), Wang et al. (2022), and Liu et al. (2022).



4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

To examine the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and employee burnout, we conducted a meta-analysis synthesizing 66 independent samples ($N = 27,862$) from the hospitality industry. The overall corrected meta-analytic correlation was $\rho = 0.32$, with a 95% confidence interval [0.26, 0.38], indicating a moderate positive association between customer mistreatment and burnout. Notable heterogeneity in the observed effect sizes ($I^2 = 96.77\%$) suggested the presence of moderating variables and warranted subsequent hypothesis testing. In assessing moderators, we reported both raw relative weights (i.e., the variance uniquely explained by each predictor, R^2) and rescaled relative weights (i.e., each predictor's percentage contribution to total explained variance). These estimates reflect the unique predictive contributions of each GLOBE cultural value dimension to variability in the strength of the dysfunctional customer behavior–burnout relationship across countries. Following Hunter and Schmidt's (2004) recommendation, we did not apply null hypothesis significance testing to our meta-analytic estimates. Instead, we adopted the effect size interpretation framework established by Bosco et al. (2015), who synthesized over 147,000 correlations across management journals to establish empirical benchmarks. Based on this distribution, (1) Effect sizes below 0.09 were considered too weak to suggest practical significance or hypothesis support; (2) Effect sizes ranging from 0.09 to 0.26 were interpreted as moderate; and (3) Effect sizes exceeding 0.26 were classified as strong. This approach enabled a more rigorous, evidence-based evaluation of theoretical predictions by

incorporating the smallest effect size of interest as a criterion for hypothesis testing. Tables 2 and 3 provide a detailed summary of these analyses, including correlation coefficients, relative weights, and hypothesis support.

4.2 Hypotheses testing

As shown in Table 3, the overall random effect model for the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout yielded an effect size of 0.32, with a 95% confidence interval [0.839, 0.866]. Additionally, while researchers have traditionally relied on various heterogeneity statistics, such as I^2 and Q -value, to determine the variability in the effect sizes across studies, but unfortunately, these indices do provide clear information about the amount of heterogeneity in effect sizes (Borenstein, 2019). For this reason, we opted for a prediction interval to determine the amount of heterogeneity in the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout. As shown in Table 1, there is some evidence of heterogeneity in the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout, with a 95% prediction interval [-0.15; 0.78]. Thus, the prediction interval crossing zero suggests the presence of moderators that influenced the relationship, so we moved forward with hypotheses testing.

As shown in Table 3, uncertainty avoidance exhibited a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.22$) with the dysfunctional customer behavior–burnout relationship and accounted for 18% of the total variance. This result supports the hypothesis that in cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, ambiguity and deviant behaviors by customers may be perceived as particularly distressing, thus intensifying burnout. Employees in such societies may experience heightened emotional strain due to strong



societal expectations for order and adherence to rules, making customer incivility more disruptive. Thus, Hypothesis 2a is supported. In contrast, future orientation displayed a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.06$) and contributed only 6% to the explained variance. Although the direction was consistent with the hypothesis, the effect size fell below the threshold for practical significance.

Therefore, future orientation does not significantly moderate the relationship

between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout. This suggests that the extent to which a culture values long-term planning over immediate gratification may not significantly influence how employees experience stress from customer mistreatment. Hence, Hypothesis 2b is not supported.

Table 1**Meta-Analytic Results for the Relationship between Dysfunctional Customer Behavior and Burnout across Countries**

Analysis	<i>k</i>	<i>N</i>	\bar{r}	<i>SDr</i>	ρ	<i>SDp</i>	80% Credibility Interval (ρ)	95% Confidence Interval (ρ)	Total variance accounted for
Overall	29	11,125	0.33	0.10	0.37	0.10	[0.23; 0.50]	[0.33; 0.41]	21.62%
China	13	4,771	0.33	0.13	0.37	0.14	[0.18; 0.57]	[0.28; 0.46]	12.71%
Pakistan	3	953	0.27	0.06	0.31	0.03	[0.25; 0.37]	[0.14; 0.48]	76.21%
South Korea	5	3,487	0.31	0.05	0.36	0.04	[0.29; 0.43]	[0.29; 0.43]	42.96%
United States	8	1,914	0.36	0.09	0.40	0.08	[0.29; 0.52]	[0.32; 0.49]	41.46%

Note. *k* = number of studies, *N* = total sample size, \bar{r} = mean observed correlation, *SDr* = Standard deviation of observed correlations, ρ = mean true-score correlation, *SDp* = Standard deviation of true-score correlations



Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1 ρ Dysfunctional Customer Behavior and Burnout	—								
2 Uncertainty Avoidance	0.07	—							
3 Future Orientation	-0.07	-0.49	—						
4 Power Distance	0.06	0.47	-0.92	—					
5 Institutional Collectivism	0.04	0.58	-0.38	0.68	—				
6 Human Orientation	-0.07	-0.56	0.99	-0.86	-0.31	—			
7 Performance Orientation	-0.02	-0.47	-0.18	0.44	0.39	-0.02	—		
8 Ingroup Collectivism	-0.07	-1.00	0.51	-0.47	-0.54	0.59	0.49	—	
9 Assertiveness	0.07	0.61	-0.98	0.96	0.55	-0.96	0.18	-0.62	—
Mean	0.28	4.71	5.24	2.86	4.31	5.48	5.73	5.40	4.55
SD	0.17	0.54	0.42	0.22	0.38	0.13	0.35	0.28	0.70

Note. $N = 4$ countries; $SD =$ Standard Deviation

For Hypothesis 2c, power distance demonstrated a weak positive correlation ($r = 0.05$), accounting for 9% of the variance. This result was not in the predicted negative direction, and the effect size was minimal. Thus, the hypothesis that power distance weakens the link between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout was not supported. The findings suggest that hierarchical cultural norms may not significantly alter how frontline employees interpret and internalize customer incivility. Hypothesis 2c is not supported. For Hypothesis 2d, institutional collectivism showed a small positive correlation ($r = 0.04$), explaining only 3% of the variance. While the result aligned with the predicted direction, the effect size was too weak to lend support to the hypothesis. The minimal impact suggests that institutional-level collectivist norms, such as shared responsibility and institutional cohesion, may not strongly buffer employees from burnout in the face of customer mistreatment. As such, Hypothesis H2d is not supported.

For Hypothesis 2e, humane orientation was positively correlated with the dysfunctional customer behavior–burnout relationship ($r = 0.02$), explaining 5% of the variance. This direction contradicts the predicted negative relationship. The weak effect size further undermines its hypothesized moderating role. In cultures promoting kindness and generosity, customer mistreatment's emotional toll may intensify due to greater expectations for civility and empathy. Moreover, there is insufficient evidence to support hypothesis H2e. Performance orientation demonstrated a moderate negative correlation ($r = -0.12$), accounting for 12% of the explained variance. This result supports the hypothesis that employees may suppress or cognitively reframe emotional responses to customer aggression in cultures valuing achievement and self-improvement, thereby weakening the burnout effect. Performance-oriented environments may foster psychological resilience as a byproduct of emphasizing goal-driven behavior. Therefore, Hypothesis H2f is supported.



Table 3
Summary of Hypothesis Testing.

Hypotheses	Relationship	r	Raw	Rescaled	Was the Hypothesis in the Predicted Direction?	Was the Effect Size Strong Enough to Support the Hypothesis?
			Relative Weight (R^2)	Relative Weight		
H2a: Uncertainty Avoidance	Positive	0.22	0.024	18%	Yes	Yes
H2b: Future Orientation	Positive	0.06	0.007	6%	Yes	No
H2c: Power Distance	Negative	0.05	0.011	9%	No	No
H2d: Institutional Collectivism	Positive	0.04	0.004	3%	Yes	No
H2e: Human Orientation	Negative	0.02	0.007	5%	No	No
H2f: Performance Orientation	Negative	-0.12	0.015	12%	Yes	Yes
H2g: Ingroup Collectivism	Positive	0.11	0.027	21%	Yes	Yes
H2h: Assertiveness	Positive	0.19	0.033	25%	Yes	Yes
Total				0.129	100%	

Note. $N = 4$ countries. r = zero-order bivariate correlation between (1) the cultural value dimension and (2) the strength of the relationship (p) between dysfunctional customer behavior and burnout. Raw relative weights indicate the amount of variance explained by each predictor (total $R = 12.9\%$). The rescaled relative weights represent percentage contributions out of the 100.00% of explained variance.

For Hypothesis 2g, in-group collectivism showed a moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.11$), explaining 21% of the total variance. This result supports the hypothesis that in societies emphasizing loyalty, social harmony, and group affiliation, interpersonal mistreatment such as customer incivility may be perceived as a stronger violation of collective norms, thus exacerbating emotional exhaustion. In such settings, personal dignity and group identity are tightly coupled, intensifying reactions to disrespect. Accordingly, Hypothesis H2g is supported. Finally, assertiveness yielded a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.19$) and was the most influential moderator, accounting for 25% of the explained variance. This finding strongly supports the hypothesis. In assertive cultures where directness and confrontation are socially sanctioned, employee reactions to incivility may be amplified, resulting in higher burnout. The cultural acceptance of

confrontation may heighten sensitivity to aggressive or hostile customer interactions. Consequently, Hypothesis H2h is supported.

4.3 Discussion

The findings revealed the moderating role of cultural values in the relationship between dysfunctional customer behavior and employee burnout. Two cultural dimensions stood out as particularly influential. Assertiveness had the most substantial amplifying effect. In cultures where confrontation and directness are accepted or encouraged, the link between customer misbehavior and employee burnout was notably stronger, explaining approximately 25% of the variance (Cheng et al., 2020; House et al., 2004). In practice, when employees operate in assertive environments, they may interpret customer hostility as more emotionally charged or personally significant, leading to sharper emotional resource depletion.

In-group collectivism was the next most impactful moderator, explaining 21% of the variance. In cultures where strong social



bonds and loyalty are emphasized, mistreatment by customers may be perceived not just as an individual insult but as a threat to the group's harmony and identity (Jung & Yoon, 2018; Karatepe, 2011). The social context amplifies emotional responses, making the stress more deeply felt and potentially more challenging to recover from. These findings point to the importance of interpersonal norms and relational closeness in determining how emotional labor translates into burnout in hospitality settings.

Other cultural values exerted more moderate effects. Uncertainty avoidance was positively associated with burnout, consistent with prior studies that link discomfort with ambiguity to elevated stress responses (Hofstede, 2001; Schneider et al., 2013). In hospitality environments, where unpredictable customer behavior is frequent, employees from high uncertainty avoidance cultures may find such deviations from norms more distressing, thereby heightening emotional exhaustion. Conversely, performance orientation weakened the dysfunctional customer behavior–burnout link. In performance-oriented cultures, complex customer interactions may be reframed as performance challenges, encouraging emotional regulation or suppression as coping strategies (Karatepe, 2013; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). This suggests that cultures emphasizing goal attainment and improvement may foster resilience or a task-focused perspective that protects against burnout.

Several other cultural dimensions demonstrated weak or contradictory effects. Future orientation, which was expected to buffer the burnout response, had a minimal moderating influence. Although theoretically associated with proactive coping and goal setting (Balaji et al., 2020;

Karatepe & Olugbade, 2016), the findings suggest that future-oriented thinking may not substantially affect how employees respond emotionally to customer mistreatment in real-time. Similarly, power distance and institutional collectivism showed negligible effects. While hierarchical structures and collective societal support have theoretical potential to influence stress responses, they may be too distal to impact the immediate interpersonal dynamics of customer interactions (Li et al., 2019; Rehman et al., 2025). Notably, contrary to predictions, humane orientation had a slightly positive, albeit weak, relationship with burnout. One possible interpretation is that employees in compassionate cultures may hold higher expectations for civility, and thus experience customer mistreatment as a more acute violation of social norms (Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2020).

5. Conclusion

5.1 Theoretical implications

These findings contribute to the conservation of resources theory by demonstrating how national cultural values influence the rate at which psychological resources are depleted in response to stressors. While customer aggression generally leads to burnout, the strength of this relationship is shaped by culturally conditioned appraisals and coping mechanisms. High uncertainty avoidance and strong in-group collectivism increase perceived threat, thereby accelerating resource loss, whereas performance orientation provides psychological framing that may help conserve energy (Alola et al., 2019; Hobfoll, 1989). Importantly, the findings differentiate the protective effects of institutional versus in-group collectivism. Whereas institutional collectivism refers to broad, abstract societal norms, in-group



collectivism involves tangible peer relationships, which appear more effective in buffering stress in hospitality contexts (Chen et al., 2024). The foregoing theory and extant research highlight the importance of considering national cultural context in burnout models and stress theories, particularly in global service environments.

5.2 Practical implications

For hospitality managers, these findings emphasize the need for culturally attuned approaches to employee well-being. In high assertiveness cultures, training should focus on constructive communication and emotional regulation to prevent confrontations from escalating. Organizations may also benefit from codifying procedures for handling complex customer interactions to reduce ambiguity and stress. In collectivist environments, peer support systems such as team debriefings or mentoring can help diffuse emotional strain and reinforce solidarity (Han et al., 2016). Where uncertainty avoidance is high, service routines should be clarified and stabilized to reduce anxiety linked to unpredictability.

On the other hand, performance-oriented cultures may benefit from leveraging achievement framing, helping employees interpret difficult interactions as professional challenges that support skill development. Well-being initiatives should be context-sensitive across all cultural contexts. For instance, emotional support programs could be one-on-one counseling in individualist settings or group problem-solving sessions in collectivist cultures. Leaders are to recognize that formal structures like hierarchy (power distance) do not innately mitigate emotional strain and may require matching strategies to foster employee empowerment.

5.3 Future research directions

This study opens several avenues for further inquiry. Future research should examine whether these cultural effects are consistent across different hospitality industry segments, such as food service, accommodation, and tourism, where customer interactions vary in intensity and form. Researchers should also explore whether organizational-level cultural values (e.g., corporate culture) or individual cultural orientations align with or diverge from national norms in shaping burnout responses. Further, longitudinal designs could track how sustained exposure to customer mistreatment interacts with cultural values over time. Testing these effects across cross-cultural models (such as Schwartz's values or the World Values Survey) would also enhance generalizability. Finally, scholars might investigate whether these cultural moderators influence responses to other workplace stressors, such as supervisor incivility or peer conflict, to determine the broader scope of cultural influences on emotional labor and psychological resilience in hospitality.

Taken together, this study offers new insights into how cultural context shapes emotional responses to customer mistreatment. It highlights the importance of incorporating national cultural values into both theoretical models and managerial practices to safeguard employee well-being more effectively in global hospitality settings.

Conflict of Interest Statement

Kabiru Maitama Kura is a member of the Editorial Board of the International Journal of Intellectual Discourse (IJID). To avoid any conflict of interest, this manuscript was handled independently by another editor, and Kabiru Maitama Kura had no



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