How uncivil customers corrode the relationship between frontline employees and retailers

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of customers' uncivil treatments on frontline retail employees' emotions, deviant behaviors and relationship with the retail organization. Our theoretical model is based on both marketing and personnel management literatures. 415 frontline retailing American employees answered our questionnaire. Employees treated uncivilly by customers feel angry but have to hide their negative emotions, which leads them to emotional exhaustion and deviant behaviors. Paradoxically, employees' strong commitment to their retailing organization brings about more deviant behaviors. We propose some managerial strategies to cope with uncivil customers, as well as future research on this important and under-researched topic.

1. Introduction

1.1. Shoppers' incivility toward retailers' employees: the elephant in the living room

Failed service incidents involve tensions between customers and frontline employees. They may also involve customers' incivility in the form of verbal aggression, that is, "verbal communications of anger that violate social norms" (Grandey et al., 2004, p. 398). Shoppers are increasingly violent on retail venues (e.g., Anonymous, 2001). Americans have drastically increased their yelling and cursing at customer service representatives between 2011 and 2013: "Yelling rose to 36% from 25% of the time, while cursing jumped to 13% from 7%." (Weisbaum, 2013). 98% of workers experience incivility, with 50% experiencing such conduct at least weekly (Porath and Pearson, 2013). Employees exercise revengeful behavior on their organization, which represents a cost estimated at $14,000 per employee annually (Porath and Pearson, 2013). However, retail organizations request that their contact employees avoid showing their negative emotions and rather fake positive emotions during unpleasant interactions with customers (Goldberg and Grandey, 2007). Because of the intense competition between retailers, customers are granted power over the service organizations (Stern and Barton, 1997; Urban, 2004), which may lead shoppers to uncivil behavior toward employees.

The purpose of this research is to assess the cascade impact of customers' uncivil behavior on employees and on their link with their

retailing organization. Though the literature regarding the impact of uncivil managers on employees is abundant (e.g., Choi, 2008; Stoverink et al., 2014; Tepper et al., 2008), the uncivil customers' treatment of employees is almost ignored. Moreover, these studies focus primarily on employees' ability to hide negative emotions (Medler-Liraz, 2016; Rupp et al., 2008; Yoo and Arnold, 2016) and not on sensitive issues, such as employees' emotional exhaustion, burnout and deviant behaviors, which is the focus of the present study.

We examine the process through which uncivil shoppers' behavior toward frontline employees leads to employees' deviant behavior through the mediation of both genuine emotions (i.e. anger and emotional exhaustion) and fake emotions required by retailing managers, which leads to organizational deviance. We also investigate a paradoxical and significant impact of employees' commitment to their employers, which amplifies the effects of emotional exhaustion on deviant behavior.

1.2. Reversing the "Trickle Down Model of Organizational Justice"

The "Trickle Down Model of Organizational Justice" examines the effects of justice exercised by managers on the way employees treat customers: "employees' perceptions of fairness (...) affect their attitudes toward the organization, subsequently influencing their behaviors toward customers. In turn, customers should interpret these behaviors as signals of fair treatment, causing them to react positively to both the employee and the organization" (Masterson, 2001, p. 594). Ethical

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leadership trickles down from the upper managers to lower level subordinates (Mayer et al., 2012; Schaubroeck et al., 2012). John Willard Marriott, the founder of the Marriott Corporation, translates the Trickle Down Model as follows: "Take good care of your employees and they'll take good care of your customers and the customers will come back" (Marriott, n.d.).

In the present study, we reversed the direction of causality. We develop a Trickle Up Model from uncivil shoppers to the retail organization through its employees, as shown in the next section.

2. Conceptual framework and hypotheses

2.1. The Trickle Up Model of employees' uncivil treatment by customers

Retailers grant customers a status of "second manager", which gives them a significant power over the employees (Grandey et al., 2010, p. 391), and may lead to uncivil treatments (Grandey, 2003). Though justice on the workplace has been researched abundantly, most studies failed to take into consideration the specific sources of injustice (e.g., Hershcovis and Barling, 2010) and neglected customers as a potential source of injustice, which brings about significant biases in the analysis of the impact of organizational justice (Hershcovis et al., 2007). Most organizational justice studies focus mainly on unfair treatment of employees by managers (Kernan and Hanges, 2002; Mackey et al., 2015; Neubert et al., 2009) or by other employees (Harris et al., 2011; Liao and Rupp, 2005; Rupp and Cropanzano, 2002).

However, shoppers' incivility is a major cause of both injustice (Rupp et al., 2008; Rupp and Spencer, 2006; Spencer and Rupp, 2009). Surprisingly, the effects of shoppers' incivility on employees and the retail organization has not been investigated so far. In this section, we examine the cascade of causality from shoppers' incivility to its ultimate consequence, that is, employees' deviant behavior, through the mediation of emotional states (anger and emotional exhaustion) and behavioral state (surface acting) and the interaction effects of affective commitment.

2.1.1. Effects of uncivil customers on service quality

Contact employees need to deal with two opposite constraints. On the one hand, service managers want their employees to display emotions conform to emotional norms set by organizations (Ekman, 1973). On the other hand, most service employees are not trained to cope with their genuine feelings. Customers are used to perceive the faked emotions (Grandey et al., 2005), which affects the quality of services negatively (Liu et al., 2013). These faked emotions have been analyzed as "surface acting".

2.1.2. Surface acting

The general process of hiding genuine emotions is called "emotional labor", defined as "the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7), or as "the effort, planning, and control needed to express organizationally desired emotion during interpersonal transactions" (Morris and Feldman, 1996, p. 987). Employees who are "surface acting" try neither to understand the customers' feelings (such as frustration) nor to modify their own genuine feelings. Instead they limit themselves to simulate positive emotions toward the customers (Cropanzano et al., 2000; Gross, 1998; Rupp et al., 2008; Rupp and Spencer, 2006; Spencer and Rupp, 2009).

Interactional justice refers to the quality of the interpersonal interaction between individuals. It is defined as "actions displaying social sensitivity, such (…) respect and dignity" (Skarlicki and Folger, 1997, p. 435) and it is a major antecedent of surface acting (Medler-Liraz, 2016; Rupp et al., 2008; Yoo and Arnold, 2016): the lower the interactional justice, the higher employees are "surface acting". In other words, shoppers' incivility toward employees is expected to trigger surface acting.

Is the relation between interactional justice and surface acting

mediated by negative emotions, such as anger? Rupp et al. (2008)[1] did not find such a mediation. We follow Chebat and Slusarczyk (2005) who found that the effects of interactional justice are mediated by emotions, that is, in this study, anger. This leads to the first hypothesis:

H1. Interactional (in)justice (that is, shoppers' incivility) toward frontline employees increases surface acting through the mediation of anger.

2.1.3. Emotional exhaustion

Surface acting drives emotional exhaustion and harms employees' psychological health (Grandey, 2003; Wang et al., 2018). As shown in the next paragraphs, verbal mistreatment by the public and the suppression or modification of emotional expressions lead to emotional exhaustion and burnout (Grandey et al., 2012).

Emotional exhaustion is characterized by "a lack of energy" (the "tank is empty" (Babakus et al., 1999, p. 58)). Individuals feel "drained or used up" (Ledgerwood et al., 1998, p. 31). Emotional exhaustion is a major issue for employees in burnout (Maslach and Jackson, 1981), which is a common issue: in the United States, 40% of hotel middle managers score high on the Emotional Exhaustion scale (Hoel et al., 2003). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H2. Surface acting increases emotional exhaustion.

2.1.4. Organizational deviance

Emotional exhaustion brings about organizational deviance (e.g., Mulki et al., 2006). Employees treated unfairly by a supervisor may develop organizational deviant behavior in order to get even with the organization (Wang et al., 2012) and may sabotage it, which reflects the concept of reciprocity (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Abusive supervision is positively associated with employees' service sabotage through surface acting (Chi et al., 2018). In this study, abusive behavior is that of shoppers which in turn causes surface acting.

We propose that employees uncivilly treated by shoppers may also seek to punish the retailers. This paradoxical behavior is explained by the "Displaced Aggression Theory" (Tepper et al., 2008). It predicts that, an individual treated unfairly may behave uncivilly toward a third party (Dollard et al., 1939) in order to restore his/her psychological balance. This individual does not aim at the actual source of the uncivil treatment, because this source is too powerful and may exert retaliation.

This study focuses on shoppers as the source of interactional injustice felt by frontline employees. Employees may consider that shoppers, who are empowered as the "second manager" (Grandey et al., 2010, p. 391), are too powerful to be the direct target of their revenge. Employees may also consider that retailers are responsible for creating (or at least not avoiding) situations where customers treat them in an uncivil way.

Employees may seek revenge on the organization through organizational deviant behaviors like absenteeism (to call in sick, to take a long break or to come late) or "presenteeism" (to work slow deliberately, not to respect supervisors' instructions or to put little effort into their work). This leads to the following hypothesis:

H3. Emotional exhaustion is positively related to organizational deviance.

In the next paragraphs, we show how the negative effects of surface acting and emotional exhaustion are amplified by organizational rules

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[1] They concluded that employees had to go through two processes simultaneously in order to display the normative emotions required by the organization: a "physiological modification" to cool down their own anger and a "response modification" to fit the emotions desired by the organization (Cropanzano et al., 2000, p. 59).

(called display rules) regarding employees' behavior on retail venues.

2.2. The effects of negative display rules on surface acting and emotional exhaustion

Frontline employees have to follow display rules. The "negative display rules" that service organizations impose on contact employees are meant to suppress the expression of negative emotions (Diefendorff et al., 2005; Ekman, 1973). Compliance with such display rules amplifies surface acting (Diefendorff et al., 2005; Gabriel et al., 2015).

Such display rules are more tolerable in collectivistic cultures than in individualistic cultures, because "collectivistic cultures have a shared norm supporting emotional control and group harmony" (Allen et al., 2014, p. 31). Consequently, we control for this potential cultural effect by focusing solely on the most individualistic culture, that of the USA (Hofstede, 2013). We argue that, in the case of such a culture, the more employees follow negative display rules, the higher their emotional exhaustion is. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H4. Negative display rule perception increases:

H4a. surface acting.

H4b. emotional exhaustion.

2.3. Paradoxical negative effects of affective commitment on organizational deviance

Employees' affective commitment to the organization increases service quality (Malhotra and Mukherjee, 2004). Affective commitment is a component of organizational commitment, along with normative and continuance commitment (Meyer and Allen, 1991). We propose that, when employees' well-being is high and they do not feel emotionally exhausted by unfair customers, affective commitment improves service quality. Also, in such situations, employees tend to perform less organizational deviant behaviors. Conversely, when they are exhausted, high affective commitment may bring about serious negative effects. High affective commitment increases employees' sense of belongingness to the company (Mercurio, 2015; Rhoades and Eisenberger, 2002); the higher the affective commitment is, the higher the expectations from the employees toward their organization (He et al., 2012). This is more likely to happen in companies that pretend to treat their employees as members of the family.

If a "family member" is disappointed by the "family", love may become hate. Grégoire et al. (2009) showed empirically that customers who love a given service provider could turn against it after a failed service and failed service recovery. We argue that the same process may occur in the relation between employees and their organizations: the more the employees are affectively committed to the organization, the more they hate their organization if they feel a lack of support from the organization when confronted with uncivil shoppers. This relation is expressed in the next hypothesis:

H5. Emotional exhaustion increases organizational deviance, significantly more in the case of highly committed employees than in the case of low committed employees.

3. Methodology

3.1. Survey on the Internet

A survey was administered on 502 American contact employees in retail organizations in the US. 415 questionnaires were completed. The survey contained sensitive issues (e.g., behavioral deviance, burnout), which implies a risk of a social desirability bias. In that case, a self-administered survey on the Internet is recommended (Malhotra, 2007). Online data are "not adversely affected by non-serious or repeat

responders, and are consistent with findings from traditional methods. It is concluded that Internet methods can contribute to many areas of psychology" (Gosling et al., 2004, p. 93).

Respondents were recruited on Amazon's Mechanical Turk (aka, MTurk) panel. This panel is the most effective Internet panel in terms of errors and completion rate (Paolacci et al., 2010). Each respondent received one-dollar-compensation[2] for answering the questionnaire, which took some ten minutes to complete. A number of studies show that the MTurk does not bring about sample biases (Paolacci et al., 2010) and that "respondents recruited in this manner are often more representative of the U.S. population than in-person convenience samples" (Berinsky et al., 2012, p. 351). However, American workers responding MTurk questionnaires are younger and more highly educated than the rest of the American population (Ross et al., 2010). We took care of the potential biases by using age and education level as control variables, as shown in Section 3.5 (SEM Findings).

Three filter questions were asked. The first one was used to make sure that the respondents were 18 years old or more. The second question was meant to select only respondents who were contact employees in the retail sector ("I work face-to-face with customers in retailing"). The third question checked that the respondents have been "in the same company for over 6 months", as Rupp et al. (2008) did.

3.2. Composition of the sample

The demographic and work experience statistics of the sample are shown on Table 1.

The complete model based on the five hypotheses is shown in Fig. 1.

3.3. Scales employed

All scales had been validated in studies published in major research journals; they are described in detail in Table 2, along with the measures of validity. They are 7-point-Likert scales between "Totally disagree" and "Totally agree".

The Interactional Justice scale (Spencer and Rupp, 2009) includes nine items. Anger is measured by a 9-item scale designed by Spencer and Rupp (2009). The 7-item scale designed by Diefendorff et al. (2005) was employed to assess Surface Acting. The 3-item Negative Display Rule Perception scale is borrowed from Diefendorff et al. (2005). The 7-item scale designed by Mulki et al. (2006) was employed to assess Emotional Exhaustion. The 6-item Affective Commitment scale is borrowed from Meyer et al. (1993). The 7-item scale designed by Mulki et al. (2006) measures Organizational Deviance.

This research employed the Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) technique of Partial Least Squares (PLS) using the statistical software SmartPLS 3 (Ringle et al., 2015) to test the model. PLS has a strong statistical power (Chin, 1998; Fornell and Bookstein, 1982; Hulland, 1999; Reinartz et al., 2009), which makes this method increasingly popular in marketing research (Reinartz et al., 2009). The PLS method was conducted with a two-sided test procedure based on 300 iterations. Before performing the structural model, an evaluation of the measurement model was made, as recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988).

3.4. Measurement model

The reflective measurement model is evaluated by the verification of internal consistency reliability as well as convergent and discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2017). All Cronbach's alpha and composite reliability values (CR) are greater than 0.7, which indicates a sufficient internal consistency reliability (Nunnally and Bernstein,

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[2] Usually, MTurk compensations are between $.10 and $1 (Paolacci et al., 2010). Thus, the compensation level of the present study seems to be adequate.

Table 1
Demographic and work experience statistics.

Description	Statistics[a]				
	7 months – 2 years	**3–5 years**	**6–10 years**	**11 years and more**	**No Answer**
Work experience	17%	31%	30%	22%	0%
	Full-time	**Part-time**	**Part-time and Students**		**No Answer**
Employment status	66%	20%	9%		5%
	Single	**Married or living with a partner**	**Divorced or separated**	**Widowed**	**No Answer**
Marital status	45%	46%	8%	1%	0%
	18–24 years	**25–34 years**	**35–44 years**	**45 years and more**	**No Answer**
Age category	24%	42%	20%	14%	0%
	High school	**College or technical School**	**Undergraduate university degree**	**Graduate university degree**	**No Answer**
Last degree completed	25%	30%	32%	12%	1%
	$10,000–$19,999	**$20,000–$29,999**	**$30,000–$39,999**	**$40,000–$49,000**	**No Answer**
Annual income before taxes	14%	26%	19%	13%	28%

[a] Some statistics may not add up to 100% because respondents were allowed not to answer demographic questions as they can seem too personal for some people, like the annual income question.
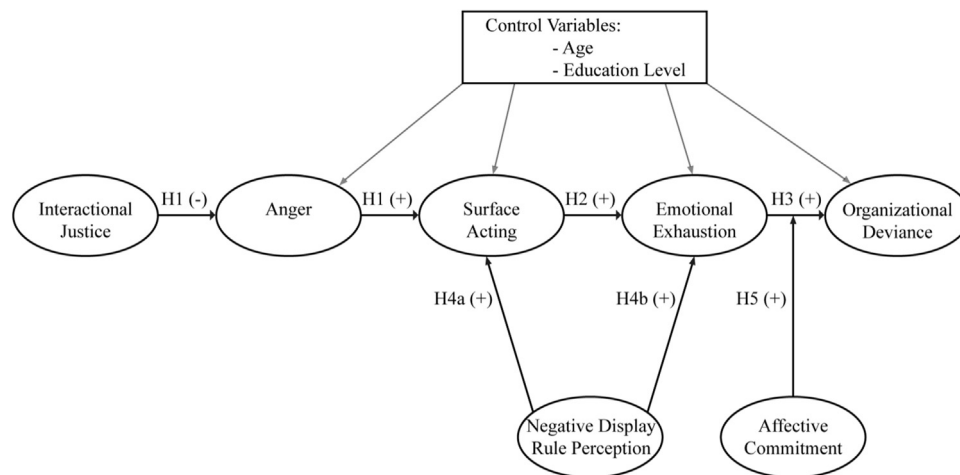

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework.

1994). All loadings of the measures are greater than 0.7 (except one at 0.68) and the average variance extracted values are equal or greater than 0.5, which shows the convergent validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988) (see Table 2).

To test the discriminant validity, we used the Fornell and Larcker (1981) criterion, that is, the Square Root of the Average Variance Extracted (SRAVE), and the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) criterion (Henseler et al., 2015). The SRAVE of each latent variable was compared to its correlations with other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981; Hulland, 1999). All values of the square root of the average variance extracted of each construct were greater than values of its other correlations (see Table 3). As required by the HTMT criterion, the values are lower than 0.9 (Gold et al., 2001) and the confidence intervals are lower than 1 (Henseler et al., 2015) (see Table 4). Thus, discriminant validity was confirmed.

Variance Inflated Factor (VIF) scores were assessed to ensure absence of multicollinearity. With the highest VIF value below 3.3 (1.67), results indicate there was no multicollinearity issues (Kock, 2015).

3.5. SEM findings

Bootstrapping was performed through 9000 samples, beyond Hair et al. (2011) recommendations. See Fig. 2.

Interactional justice was negatively and significantly related to anger ($p < .001$; t-value = 16.77) and anger was positively and significantly related to surface acting ($p < .001$; t-value = 7,69). The mediation was tested according to the Sobel (1982) paradigm. The absolute value of the Sobel test (-7.33) was greater than 1.96. (two-

tailed's $p < .001$), which confirmed the mediation of anger between interactional justice and surface acting. The t-statistic of the effect of interactional justice on surface acting was lesser than 1.96 (1.531). Then, anger is a full mediation. These results confirmed H1.

As predicted, surface acting was positively and significantly related to emotional exhaustion ($p < .001$; t-value = 9.55) which in turn impacts positively organizational deviance ($p < .001$; t-value = 6.25). These findings support respectively H2 and H3.

The emotional process was also affected by the negative display rule perception. Consistent with H4, negative display rule perception was positively and significantly related to both surface acting (i.e. H4a, $p < .001$; t-value = 6.32) and emotional exhaustion (i.e. H4b, $p < .05$; t-value = 2.29).

Affective commitment interacted on the relation between emotional exhaustion and organizational deviance (H5). H5 was supported ($p < .001$; t-value = 4.02). Following Kenny (2015), the effect size (f-square = 0.042) was considered large (f-square > 0.035). In low emotional exhaustion situations, the effect of the emotional exhaustion on organizational deviance was significantly weaker when affective commitment is high (-0.602 versus −0.134). In highly emotional exhaustion situations, the effect of the emotional exhaustion on organizational deviance is significantly stronger when the affective commitment is high (0.476 versus 0.260). Fig. 3 shows this interaction.

Controlling for potential biases on age and education level caused by the MTurk method: Data showed no significant effects of education level on anger, organizational deviance and surface acting (all p's > 0.05; all t-values < 1.96). However, education level was negatively and significantly related to emotional exhaustion (path coefficient =

Table 2
Measures and Loadings.

Items	Loadings
Interactional Justice - Spencer and Rupp (2009)	
α = 0.92 (*t*-value = 133.12); AVE[a] = .57 (*t*-value = 23.81);	
CR[b] = 0.92 (*t*-value = 121.40)	
1 - The customers treated me in a polite manner.	0.84
2 - The customers treated me with dignity.	0.84
3 - The customers treated me with respect.	0.85
4 - The customers refrained from improper remarks or comments.	0.74
5 - The customers were clear in their communications with me.	0.74
6 - The customers explained things thoroughly.	0.77
7 - The customers' explanations were reasonable.	0.83
8 - The customers communicated details in a timely manner.	0.75
9 - The customers seemed to tailor their communications to my specific needs.	0.71
Anger - Spencer and Rupp (2009)	
α = 0.96 (*t*-value = 284.05); AVE = 0.71 (*t*-value = 41.71);	
CR = 0.95 (*t*-value = 272.13)	
While interacting with the customers I felt…	
1 - Pissed	0.90
2 - Irritated	0.86
3 - Angry	0.92
4 - Mad	0.91
5 - Displeased	0.86
6 - Resentful	0.84
7 - Bitter	0.87
8 - Furious	0.81
9 - Annoyed	0.81
Surface Acting - Diefendorff et al. (2005)	
α = 0.96 (*t*-value = 243.07); AVE = 0.79 (*t*-value = 42.93);	
CR = 0.96 (*t*-value = 242.56)	
1 - I put on an act in order to deal with customers in an appropriate way.	0.87
2 - I faked a good mood when interacting with customers.	0.91
3 - I put on a "show" or "performance" when interacting with customers.	0.91
4 - I just pretended to have the emotions I needed to display for my job.	0.92
5 - I put on a "mask" in order to display the emotions I needed for the job.	0.92
6 - I showed feelings to customers that were different from what I felt inside.	0.88
7 - I faked the emotions I showed when dealing with customers.	0.91
Negative Display Rule Perception - Diefendorff et al. (2005)	
α = 0.90 (*t*-value = 57.25); AVE = 0.77 (*t*-value = 28.17);	
CR = 0.90 (*t*-value = 66.78)	
1 - I am expected to suppress my bad moods or negative reactions to customers.	0.84
2 - This organization expects me to try to pretend that I am not upset or distressed.	0.95
3 - I am expected to try to pretend I am not angry or feeling contempt while on the job.	0.94
Emotional Exhaustion - Mulki et al. (2006)	
α = 0.95 (*t*-value = 231.08); AVE = 0.75 (*t*-value = 43.77);	
CR = 0.95 (*t*-value = 230.55)	
1 - I feel emotionally drained from my work.	0.88
2 - I feel fatigued when I get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job.	0.92
3 - I feel burned out from my work.	0.93
4 - I feel frustrated by my job.	0.91
5 - I feel used up at the end of the workday.	0.90
6 - I feel like I'm at the end of my rope.	0.86
7 - I feel I am working too hard on my job.	0.80
Affective Commitment - Meyer et al. (1993)	
α = 0.96 (*t*-value = 223.19); AVE = 0.78 (*t*-value = 39.06);	
CR = 0.95 (*t*-value = 102.62)	
1 - I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organization.	0.84
2 - I really feel as if this organization's problems are my own.	0.87
3 - I feel a strong sense of "belonging" to my organization.	0.94
4 - I feel "emotionally attached" to this organization.	0.94
5 - I feel like "part of the family" at my organization.	0.91
6 - This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me.	0.93
Organizational Deviance - Mulki et al. (2006)	
α = 0.88 (*t*-value = 79.55); AVE = 0.50 (*t*-value = 18.29);	
CR = 0.87 (*t*-value = 64.00)	

Table 2 (*continued*)

Items	Loadings
1 - I spent too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working.	0.74
2 - I have taken longer break than is acceptable at my workplace.	0.72
3 - I called in sick when I was not.	0.68
4 - I neglected to follow my boss's instructions.	0.83
5 - I intentionally worked slower than I could have worked.	0.81
6 - I came in late to work without permission.	0.71
7 - I put little effort into my work.	0.82

- P-values of Cronbach alphas, average variance extracted and composite reliability values are all less than 0.001.
  - [a] Average variance extracted.
  - [b] Composite reliability.

−0.107 ; $p < .01$; *t*-value = 2,65). The effects of age on emotional exhaustion and surface acting were not significant ($p > .05$; all *t*-values < 1.96). Yet, age was negatively and significantly related to anger (path coefficient = −0.092 ; $p < .05$; *t*-value = 2.53) and organizational deviance (path coefficient = −0.148 ; $p < .001$; 3.54).

4. Summary of findings

Employees who feel they have been treated uncivilly by customers are more likely to be angry, which increases their surface acting and, in turn, their emotional exhaustion. The higher the emotional exhaustion is, the higher the likelihood of organizational deviance is. The higher the negative display rule perception is, the higher are the surface acting and the emotional exhaustion.

In the case of employees who are not emotionally exhausted, affective commitment decreases the impact of emotional exhaustion on organizational deviance and consequently the propensity to deviant behaviors. Conversely, in the case of employees who are emotionally exhausted, affective commitment paradoxically amplifies the impact of emotional exhaustion on organizational deviance.

5. Discussion

5.1. Theoretical contributions

5.1.1. Contribution to the Affective Events Theory (AET)

Affective Events Theory (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996) proposes that events that happen in the workplace trigger affective reactions that in turn, elicit specific attitudes and behaviors. This theory deals with the effects of supervisors' and coworkers' incivility on employees' health and turnover (Lim et al., 2008). Incivility leads to reciprocation of the uncivil behavior toward the source of such behavior (Bunk and Magley, 2013).

However, AET fails to take into account the impact of shoppers on employees: our findings complement it. Also, AET studies did not identify the specific emotions that lead employees to reciprocate: our study points out the anger is the emotion involved in the process. In addition, the reciprocation process may be more complex than predicted by AET: employees that shoppers treat uncivilly do not necessarily get even directly with the shoppers but through deviant behavior that harm their own organization.

5.1.2. Contributions to the role of emotions in justice theory

Our findings confirm Weiss et al. (1999) on the effects of justice on emotions. They also confirm works by Rupp et al. (2008) and Rupp and Spencer (2006) on the relation between interactional justice and surface acting. However, Rupp and her colleagues failed to find that anger mediates the relation between interactional justice and surface acting. They surmised that employees "cool down" their anger. Our findings show that employees do not "cool down": since anger fully mediates the

Table 3
Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for key constructs.

Construct scale				Correlations						
(items)	M	SD	SRAVE[a]	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Anger (9)	3.3	1.7	0.84	1						
2. Negative Display Rule Perception (3)	5.9	1.3	0.88	0.12	1					
3. Emotional Exhaustion (7)	4.1	1.9	0.87	0.58	0.30	1				
4. Interactional Justice (9)	4.8	1.4	0.75	− 0.62	− 0.07	− 0.42	1			
5. Affective Commitment (6)	3.5	1.9	0.88	− 0.36	− 0.29	− 0.49	0.37	1		
6. Organizational Deviance (7)	2.8	1.7	0.71	0.41	− 0.11	0.40	− 0.21	− 0.25	1	
7. Surface Acting (7)	4.8	1.8	0.89	0.50	0.37	0.52	− 0.36	− 0.43	0.30	1

[a] Square root of the average variance extracted.

effects of (in)justice on behavior, as found by Chebat and Slusarczyk (2005), anger triggers a cascade of effects : surface acting, emotional exhaustion and deviant behavior.

5.1.3. Reciprocity and displaced anger theories

When facing an organizational injustice, employees try to compensate their frustration and anger through deviant behaviors in order reach a better emotional balance (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Our findings show that revenge may not be directed at the actual source of the frustration that is, uncivil customers, but at the retailer, which is explained by the theories of reciprocity (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005) and displaced anger (Dollard et al., 1939).

Such deviant behaviors directed at the retail organization are not necessarily motivated by a desire of revenge against the retail organization. First, employees' revenge is redirected at the corporation because empowered customers may be viewed by employees as too strong a target. Second, absenteeism, a major deviant behavior, is also a measure of self-protection (Grandey et al., 2004): Employees may avoid the workplace where they are treated uncivilly by customers. Presenteeism, also a deviant behavior; is a more subtle and less risky way of getting even with the employer; still it costs firms hefty amount of money, more than medical costs (Goetzel et al., 2004).

5.1.4. Contributions to the "Love Becomes Hate" Paradigm

The present study shows that employees' strong commitment to the organization may backfire and enhance organizational deviance. This paradoxical finding can be explained by the "Love Becomes Hate" paradigm (Grégoire et al., 2009). The more the employees are committed to the organization, the more they expect to be protected by the organization managers. Employees who are most trusted by their supervisors are paradoxically more inclined to develop deviant behaviors when they feel mistreated by their supervisors (Mackey et al., 2015).

5.2. Contributions to the managerial literature

Our findings question three well established managerial practices.

5.2.1. Company as a Family

Our finding and the "Love becomes Hate Paradigm" contradict a practice widely accepted in the managerial literature, that is, "Company

as a Family" strategy: a highly affective commitment from employees implies that employees have higher expectations from the organization. When expectations are not met, organizational deviance is amplified.

5.2.2. Service with a Smile

The present study shows the paradoxical counterproductive effect of "Service with a Smile" strategy, at least in an individualistic society (Allen et al., 2014). The more North American employees have to suppress their negative emotions, the higher the emotional exhaustion is, which brings about negative effects such as organizational deviance, especially in individualistic societies.

5.2.3. Customer is King

"Customer is King" is a mantra for service companies who instruct the contact personnel to do their best to retain customers (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1987). As put by Wal-Mart's CEO: "There is only one boss: The customer. And he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money somewhere else." (Stirtz, 2008). However these "kings" may turn into tyrants. "Customers may take advantage of these emotional expectations to express their displeasure, vent a bad mood, or complain in an attempt to obtain compensation (Harris and Reynolds, 2003) with little fear of overt retaliation" (Grandey et al., 2007, p. 76). Their behaviors toward contact employees can be abusive: "Aggression from the people who the employee is there to serve is uniquely stressful. This is because of the customer sovereignty view that governs today's economy" (Grandey et al., 2007, p. 75).

Abusive customers behaviors increase turnover (Wright and Bonett, 2007) and reduces service quality (Bienstock and Demoranvillez, 2006; Hausknecht et al., 2009).

5.3. Managerial implications

5.3.1. Recruiting and managing the right frontline employee

Employees' personality traits need to be checked thoroughly before hiring them. Extraversion and neuroticism are related to employees emotional regulation and performance (e.g., Bono and Vey, 2007; Dahling and Johnson, 2013; Judge et al., 2009). Employees scoring high on narcissism employ aggressive influence tactics (Jonason et al., 2015) but engage in less deviant behaviors, sabotage and theft

Table 4
Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio criterion.

Construct scale	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Anger							
2. Negative Display Rule Perception	0.12 [.07, .22]						
3. Emotional Exhaustion	0.61 [.53, .69]	0.31 [.22, .39]					
4. Interactional Justice	0.64 [.56, .72]	0.12 [.08, .20]	0.44 [.33, .53]				
5. Affective Commitment	0.38 [.28, .46]	0.31 [.21, .40]	0.51 [.43, .60]	0.39 [.30, .48]			
6. Organizational Deviance	0.44 [.34, .53]	0.15 [.08, .25]	0.42 [.32, .51]	0.21 [.13, .32]	0.26 [.16, .37]		
7. Surface Acting	0.51 [.44, .59]	0.40 [.28, .50]	0.54 [.45, .62]	0.38 [.27, .47]	0.45 [.35, .54]	0.32 [.22, .41]	
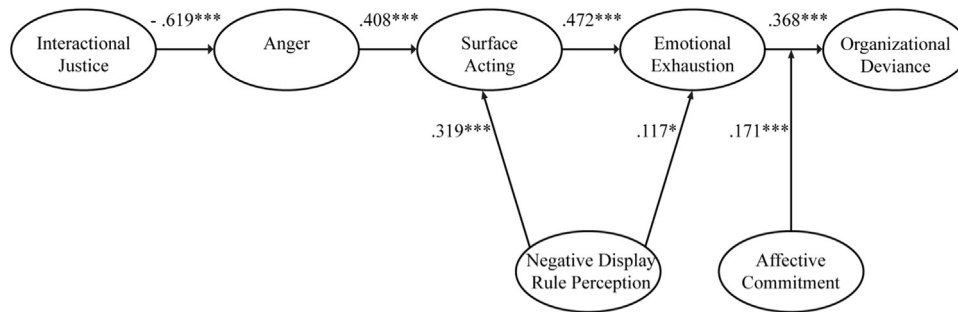
Notes :• * p < .05; ** p < .01; *** p < .001 (two-tailed distribution).
• All coefficients are standardized.
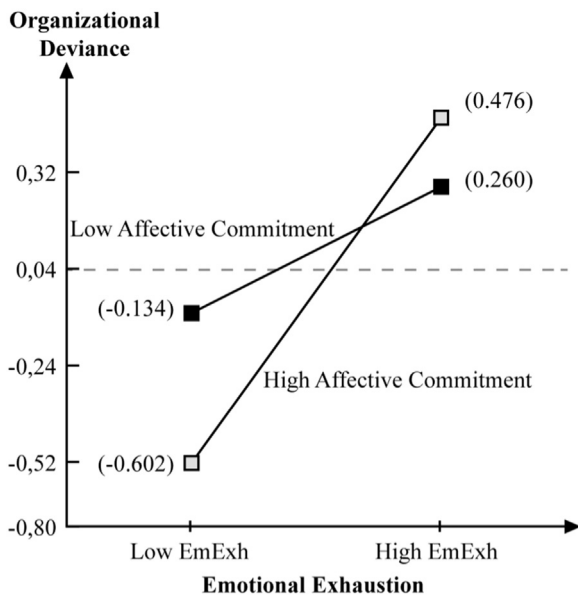
Fig. 2. SEM Findings.

Fig. 3. Interaction between emotional exhaustion and affective commitment in predicting organizational deviance.

behaviors "when they perceived high levels of organizational support" (Palmer et al., 2017, p. 36; our emphasis). In other words, it is the very interest of the retailer to make sure that contact employees feel supported when confronted with customers' incivility.

5.3.2. Training

Frontline employees need to be trained to cope with stressful situations. As stressed by Grandey and Gabriel (2015, p. 341), who cite the works by Kotsou et al. (2011), "There is evidence for emotional competence training to improve self-efficacy and well-being, as well as other-rated relational outcomes". Employees could be trained to distance themselves psychologically (and in some cases, physically) from uncivil customers. They could also be trained to develop empathy for such customers: This strategy is referred to as "deep acting" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 33). Deep acting could allow employees to modulate their emotions. This can be achieved through social sharing: after a difficult customer exchange with coworkers and/or supervisors (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010), social sharing reduces feelings of anger (Halbesleben and Bowler, 2007; McCance et al., 2013).

5.3.3. Job tenure and financial incentives

Two very different managerial strategies can also reduce employees stress. First, job tenure: it provides employees with social resources, such as strong social networks of colleagues that provides the stressed employees with resources; "selecting employees with higher self-

efficacy for emotional regulation and enhancing employees' service rule commitment" (Wang et al., 2011, p. 328). Second, access to financial incentives reduces the dissatisfaction from surface acting (Grandey et al., 2013).

6. Research limitations and future research avenues

6.1. Research limitations

The scenario method was not employed in this research because it would present artificial situations. We rather asked contact employees to retrieve a real-life situation that had occurred in the last six months, as Rupp et al. (2008) did. This procedure may have introduced a memory bias or a reconstruction of the reality.

Since MTurk is a panel which respondents are generally younger with a higher level of education than the population, this paper controlled for age and education level. But the present research didn't focus on a particular type of store in the retail sector, for instance hedonic stores (e.g., perfumes) vs utilitarian stores (e.g., tools). Showing positive emotions is likely to be more important in the first case than in the second.

6.2. Future research avenues

Future studies may assess the degree to which frontline employees' empowerment may help them counterbalance the effects of the stress caused by aggressive or abusive customers, since empowerment can help reduce service employees' stress (Chebat and Kollias, 2000). For Faulkner and Patiar (1997), empowerment may reduce stress, as it may permit staff to respond more directly to specific customer needs.

It could be interesting to conduct research about customer incivility in various retail sectors. For instance, in utilitarian stores (e.g., tools), the impact of display rules may be less significant than in hedonic stores (e.g., luxury clothes).

Some dimensions of culture could be explored. Collectivistic customers do not necessarily express their negative emotions to contact employees (Baker et al., 2013). Also, individualistic employees may express more openly the frustration caused by customers, just as individualistic customers express more explicitly their frustration to employees held responsible for service failures (Poon et al., 2004). In the same vein, angry shoppers may express their negative feelings differently to a frontline employee who belongs (or not) to the same culture as the shopper (Zourrig et al., 2015). The Individual Power Distance cultural dimension could be explored as well. In high Individual Power Distance societies, customers' power is embedded in the ambient culture (Hofstede, 1980). Consequently, in such societies empowered customers' uncivil behavior toward employees is more likely to generate a lower level of felt injustice.

Another relevant research avenue may stem from the following

questions: when employees face abusive customers, is their deviant behavior the reflection of the desire for vengeance (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005), or a will of self-protection, that is, to stay away from the workplace (Grandey et al., 2004)?

7. Conclusions

This research focuses on the effects of uncivil customers' behavior on the employees' organizational deviance through the mediation of both employees' surface acting and negative emotions (anger and emotional exhaustion). It bridges a gap between the marketing and management literatures by focusing on the intertwined relations between three parties, that is, shoppers, employees and retail firms. Bridging these literatures may permit to consider the problem of customers' incivility under the dual perspectives of employees and the organization.

Some researchers contend that surface acting is here to stay because it is useful to the retailers: "impression management strategies such as surface acting, even though they are inauthentic, are more effective in stimulating positive customer response than deep acting strategies that do not hide negative emotions" (Albrecht et al., 2016, p. 720). We contend that this is a shortsighted perspective : uncivil customers behaviors bring about a hefty amount of losses for retailers : £2 billion annually in the United Kingdom (Hoel et al., 2001) and from US$ 0.6 to $3.6 million per 1000 employees in Australia (Hoel et al., 2003). Some research suggests that customer misbehavior is the norm rather than the exception (Harris and Reynolds, 2004). Is the future of retailing frontline employees dark? In their own interest, retailers need to consider managerial strategies that alleviate the emotional burden on frontline employees caused by customers' uncivil behavior.

Our findings make explicit the process through which interactional (in)justice caused by shoppers' incivility leads to behavioral deviance. The more employees fake emotions, the higher their emotional exhaustion is. Stringent display rules amplify surface acting and emotional exhaustion. Paradoxically, the more employees are affectively committed to their organization, the higher their organizational deviance is.

As suggested by Grandey et al. (2004), managers should think again about the mantra "Customer is Always Right". In their daily contact with customers, employees know that this mantra is far from being always justified. This study goes one step farther with the demonstration of a boomerang effect toward customers themselves, characterized by organizational deviance, which also reduces service quality, by increasing absenteeism or/and presenteeism. "Service with a Smile" may imply some serious drawbacks. While Grandey et al. (2005) show that customers detect fake smiles, this paper points out another negative emotional consequence for the contact employees. In addition, this research tempers the "Company as a Family" strategy: a high affective commitment from employees seems to mean employees with higher expectations.

Declarations of interest

None.

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