

# Intolerant Behaviours-Front Desk Service Sabotage in Budget Chain Hotels

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## ABSTRACT

This study uses semi-structured in-depth interviews with budget hotel front desk staff to extract and summarize the types of service sabotage behaviour and motive. Simplifying the service process and rejection of customers are discovered to be the most common types of service sabotage, whereas personal convenience, vindictive psychology on customers, stereotyping, and work pressure are the main motives for sabotaging service. In addition, this study clarifies the difference between the antecedents and motives of service sabotage and analyses the difference between service sabotage phenomena in budget hotels and international hotels.

**Keywords:** Service sabotage; Motive; Behaviour; Budget hotel; Front desk

## INTRODUCTION

Service sabotage refers to employees' conscious actions that are designed to negatively affect customer service. This has been an emerging issue in the recent decade within the service industries that are the mainstay of economic activity, including the service-oriented hospitality industry. Studies have confirmed that service sabotage is relatively common in the hospitality industry. For example, Harris and Ogbonna conduct 182 in-depth interviews with restaurant and hotel personnel, and more than ninety percent of the interviewees admitted that service sabotage occurred daily in their workplaces. Harris and Ogbonna also reveal that on average, employees engaged in service sabotage twice every three work shifts. This common phenomenon may not only give customers an unpleasant experience but also reduce service quality and customer satisfaction, thereby resulting in adverse consequences for a company's growth and profitability [1-3].

The concept of service sabotage is different from that of service failure. Lin, Huang, and Huang explain that during service delivery, regardless of whether it is due to personnel, the physical environment, or other tangible and intangible factors, service failure occurs whenever the customer has an unpleasant feeling. Thus, identification of service failures is dependent on the subjective perceptions of customers. By contrast, service sabotage specifically emphasizes the negative intention of the saboteur rather than the emotion of the victim; that is, regardless of whether customers, colleagues, or supervisors are aware of the behaviour, an employee

performs a behaviour knowing that it may negatively affect service standards [4].

Related studies have focused on understanding the motives, antecedents, consequences, and forms of service sabotage [1-3,5]. Although the motives and antecedents of service sabotage both appear to explain why service sabotage occurs, they have different meanings. Motive refers to the reason for doing something, whereas antecedents represent things that exist before an incident occurs or are logically the things that precede the incident [6]. Therefore, a motive can be considered a fuse that is lit and immediately causes an incident, whereas an antecedent can be considered an inherent factor that promotes or inhibits the intention of employees to perform service sabotage. Harris and Ogbonna divide the antecedents of service sabotage into four major types, namely individuals, organizations, groups and roles, and environmental factors [2,7].

This study investigates the behaviours and motives of service sabotage and integrates the findings of relevant studies to summarize seven categories of service sabotage motives (Table 1).

Studies have been conducted by investigating personnel in several industries, such as the banking industry, customer service center, beauty and hairdressing, and nursing. In the field of tourism and hospitality, service sabotage has been discovered in international hotels as well as the food and beverage industry and aviation industry. However, no studies have focused on budget hotel chains, which have expanded rapidly in recent years [8-16].

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Table 1: Categorization of service sabotage motives.

| Authors                                | Harris and Ogbonna [1] | Harris and Ogbonna [3]   | Kuo and Sun [26]                                      | Sun et al. [15]                | Sun and Wang [13]             | Induction of this study  |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Interviewees                           | Hospitality industry   | Hospitality industry     | Hospitality industry                                  | Food and beverage industry     | International hotel industry  |                          |
| Categories of service sabotage motives | Money grabbing         | Financial factors        |   |                                |                               | Financial factors        |
|  | Revenge on customer    | Customer factors         | Troublesome/difficult customer                        | Troublesome/difficult customer | Customer factors              | Customer factors         |
|  | Thrill seeking         | Stress factors           | thrill seeking  | Improper emotional management  | Improper emotional management | Stress factors           |
|  |                        | Group factors            | Seniority culture                                     |                                |                               | Group factors            |
|  |                        | Employee/company factors | Blame from supervisor or disagreement with management | Insufficient staff             |                               | Employee/company factors |
|  |                        | Apathy                   |   | Personal convenience           | Personal convenience          | Personal convenience     |
|  |                        |                          |   |                                | National stereotypes          | National stereotypes     |

Many local budget hotels have developed into small chain brands in Taiwan. Budget hotels generally have smaller organizational scale and structures than international hotels, in which the customer service department is divided into the front desk, switchboard, room reservation group and service centre. Comparing to the international hotel, budget hotels' front desk personnel have multiple roles with complex service tasks. Therefore, whether service sabotage by front desk staff occurs in budget hotels, the form of the sabotage, and how the sabotage differs from that in international hotels is worthy of discussion.

Currently, no consistent definition of budget hotels exists [17]. However, budget hotels generally have accessibility (including location and room reservation convenience) and offer lower prices and limited facilities and services compared with conventional full-service hotels. Customers do not have to pay for services that usually go unused. A clean and comfortable environment is the core requirement. Therefore, budget hotels can also be named limited-service or economy hotels. Because of the lower investment required and lower operating costs, such budget chain hotels can provide limited but consistent quality of services and facilities at affordable prices different from small local budget hostels that are unable to achieve consistent quality [18-20]. The main target market of budget chain hotels is tourists and business travellers with limited budget, but individuals of many social and economic groups are in fact customers of budget chain hotels. This is because regardless of sex, age, and income, budget chain hotels are the optimal choice for people who wish to stay in basic quality accommodation without wasting extra money.

The emergence of budget hotel chains can be attributed to past recessions and a lack of low price hotel with consistent quality of service and facilities for customers with limited budgets. Since the boom in the 1970s, the number of budget hotels in the United States and Europe cannot be underestimated, as well as that in Asia [21]. For instance, data collected at the end of 2006 revealed that there were approximately 100 budget hotel brands and 1000 budget hotels in China [22]. According to Chinese hotel chain development and investment report, the number of budget chain hotels reach 24150 and this segments in China still have potential for high growth [23].

Although the budget hotel industry developed slightly later in Taiwan than in European and American countries, the emergence background is similar. Because of an economic downturn, the travel expenses of business travelers were reduced and more travelers wanted affordable hotels as accommodation. According to the statistics of the Taiwan Tourism Bureau, the number of foreign and domestic visitors in the past 10 years has been rising, and the number of foreign visitors in 2017 exceeded 10 million, with 73% of these visitors choosing to stay in a budget hotel [24].

On the basis of this research background, this study selects budget chain hotels as samples to investigate the phenomenon of service sabotage. The following is investigated:

- (1) The service sabotage behaviours among front desk staff in budget chain hotels;
- (2) The motives for service sabotage among front desk staff in budget chain hotels; and
- (3) The differences in service sabotage behaviours between budget and international hotels.

## RESEARCH METHODS

### Data collection

Service sabotage in work place is a sensitive issue to disclose. Although the use of the focus group method can increase the information richness through member interaction and discussion, a mini focus group of 4-6 people is difficult to implement, because of the small organizational scale of budget hotels, the fewer front desk staff in budget hotels compared with international hotels, time shift differences, and the holding of interviews in different locations. On the other hand, in-depth interviews are usually employed in studies focusing on life experiences because they enable determination of the life experiences, stories, and feelings of interviewees [25]. Therefore, this study uses semi-structured individual in-depth interviews to collect, summarize, and compare the service sabotage behaviours and motives of budget hotel front desk staff. However, data are difficult to collect because although service sabotage occurs universally, it is considered a disgraceful

negative behavior. Thus, the data collected are limited by the interviewees' personal experiences and willingness to share.

The research scope of this study is the nine well-known budget hotel chains proposed by Kuo, namely the Orange Hotel of the Forte Hotel Group, Just Sleep, City Suites, CityInn Hotel, Kiwi Express Hotel, Talmud Business Hotel, Hotelday+, Royal Group Hotel and Motel, and Kindness Hotel. These hotels are mostly located in Taipei, Taichung, and Kaohsiung. The hotel chains are all small chains with at least four business locations. The interviewees are front desk staff or supervisors that have experience working in any of the nine hotel chains. This study expects to obtain diverse information from different perspectives [26,27].

The preinterview preparations include (1) drafting an interview outline, (2) explaining the research objectives and research ethics to the interviewee before the interview to indicate the privacy protection principle, and (3) asking for consent to record during the interview. To ensure the rigor of this study, it is explained to the interviewees that they would be contacted to clarify any uncertainties that arose during data analysis. Finally, the interviewees are asked to sign the interview consent form. The interview duration is set to 60–90 min, adjusted according to the actual interview situation. In addition, suitable restaurants or cafes are employed as interview locations. To enable the interviewees to focus on the research topics and express their opinions and share experiences without restrictions, the interview outline design is supplemented with open-ended guiding questions. These questions are employed to identify service sabotage incidents during the interviewees' daily work, the types of customers who frequently visit their hotels, and how the interviewees got along with colleagues.

Two mock interviews are conducted prior to the formal interviews to check whether the interview outline is appropriate for obtaining the desired information. Most of the incidents collected during interviews are incidents in which customers were troublesome, the interviewee made a complaint, or incidents unrelated to customer service. Therefore, the interview outline is revised to understand the interviewees' service tasks, whether service standards are often difficult to implement, and whether the interviewee has deliberately acted in a manner that negatively affected service. Subsequently, the motives for service sabotage are investigated.

## Data analysis

After each interview, the content of the recording was immediately transcribed into a verbatim script, also noting the tone of voice and silences of the interviewees. To protect the interviewees' privacy, the names appearing in the interview content are treated anonymously, and redundant words are deleted without affecting the original intention to present the verbatim drafts in their original appearance. Data analysis is performed through open and line-by-line coding. In transcript codes, P represents the page number in the verbatim transcript, L represents the line number, and R represents the researcher. The 12 interviewees are represented by the codes A–K and M, with L not used to avoid confusion with the line number. For example, "AP7L30–P8L4" indicates that the quotation is retrieved from the interview content of interviewee A (from page 7 line 30 to page 8 line 4 of the verbatim transcript).

The total number of interviewees is 12, and these interviewees are employed in six hotels within the study scope. The ratio of men to women is 6:6; the interviewees are aged 20–35 years old; four of the interviewees are front desk supervisors, one is an intern, and

the remainder are general front desk staff.

## Triangulation of incident extraction and service sabotage behaviour determination

Incident extraction is initiated after completing the transcription and encoding of the verbatim transcript of each interview. Because this study intends to identify incidents of service sabotage from the interviewees' description of their daily service work, customers encountered, and degree of socialization with colleagues, unrelated information regarding complaints about the company or customers is inevitably obtained. Therefore, the author first screens the incidents according to the definition of service sabotage. After filtering the incidents clearly unrelated to service sabotage, the actual number of incidents is 39.

This study uses the researcher's triangulation to ensure research rigor and avoid bias caused by subjective judgment. In the data analysis process, two other researchers (with master's degrees) who have conducted studies on service sabotage are invited to inspect the data as joint reviewers. The three researchers first determine the categories of service sabotage behaviour, discuss the incidents on which consensus is reached, improve the accuracy of the data analysis results, and finally hold discussions with experts who have been teaching service management; this process leads to a summary of the categories of service sabotage behaviours among front desk staff in budget hotels.

Of the 39 incidents, one incident contains two service sabotage behaviours, resulting in 40 incidents in total. After triangulation, eight of the behaviours are judged to not be service sabotage behaviours but rather pure service failures or over-service behaviours. Another seven behaviours are judged to not be service sabotage behaviours after discussion with the experts, because although those behaviours negatively affected customer service, the motives of the staff members involved were to protect the interests of the company, which is not categorized as deliberate service sabotage. Therefore, the final total number of service sabotage behaviours is 25. Finally, service sabotage behaviours were classified by the categorization of Sun and Wang, which include reject customer; hint to customer; disturb customer; ignore customer; Tease customer; treat customer poorly; deceive customer; simplify process and take advantage of customer [13].

## Reclassification of service sabotage motive categories and triangulation

After completing the data analysis on the categories of service sabotage motive, the overlapping ambiguity of the original motive categories is considered, and the motive categories are reclassified into six categories, as displayed in Figure 1. This study renames the categories financial factors, group factors, stress factors, and nationality stereotypes and combines customer factors with employee and company factors to form the category vindictive psychology. The number of incidents in each motive category after triangulation is listed in Table 2.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Judgment of service sabotage incidents

Sabotage behaviours on the basis of protecting the company's interests

Table 2: Number of incidents of service sabotage of various motives.

| Interviewee                                | Material temptation | Vindictive psychology |            |           |          | Work pressure | Teamwork atmosphere | Personal convenience | Stereotypes |
|--|---------------------|-----------------------|------------|-----------|----------|---------------|---------------------|----------------------|-------------|
|  |                     | Organization          | Supervisor | Colleague | Customer |               |                     |                      |             |
| A  |                     |                       |            |           |          |               |                     | 1                    |             |
| B  |                     |                       |            |           |          |               |                     |                      |             |
| C  |                     |                       |            |           | 1        |               |                     | 1                    | 1           |
| D  |                     |                       |            |           |          |               |                     | 1                    |             |
| E  |                     |                       |            |           | 2        |               |                     | 6                    | 2           |
| F  |                     |                       |            |           | 1        |               |                     | 1                    |             |
| G  |                     |                       |            |           | 1        |               |                     | 1                    |             |
| H  |                     |                       |            |           |          | 2             |                     | 4                    | 1           |
| I  |                     |                       |            |           |          |               |                     | 2                    | 1           |
| J  |                     |                       |            |           |          |               |                     |                      |             |
| K  |                     |                       |            |           |          |               |                     |                      |             |
| M  |                     |                       |            |           | 1        | 1             |                     | 1                    |             |
| Total number of incidents in each category |                     |                       |            |           | 6        | 3             |                     | 18                   | 5           |

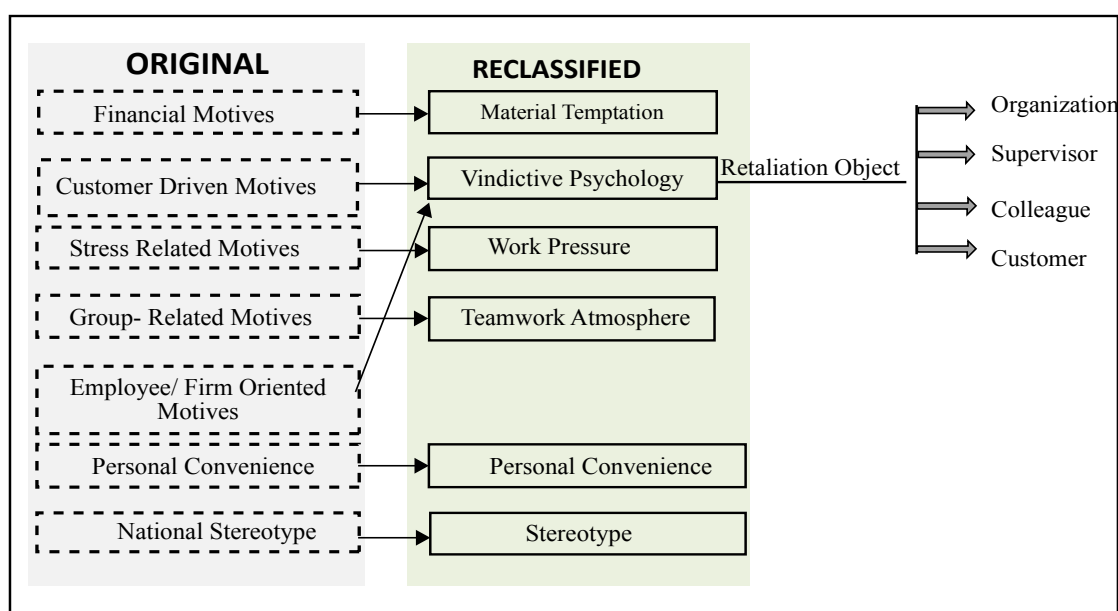


Figure 1: Categories of service sabotage motives.

According to the data analysis results, many deliberate acts that may negatively affect customer service are due to employees attempting to protect the interests of their company. For instance, refusal to accept drunken customers, refusal of a customer's request to change rooms, the use of tough measures to deal with troublesome customers, achieving complete occupancy to meet the company's requirements, and check customers into rooms next to rooms undergoing renovations may all affect customers' satisfaction. These behaviours are not the deliberate intentions of the employees. Therefore, this study excludes such behaviours as service sabotage. The following quotations are examples of such behaviours:

*[You should not] intentionally place customers in rooms next to renovation projects, which may affect the customers' satisfaction because of construction noise. This should be avoided, and the rooms next to rooms being renovated should be left empty. However, in the interests of the company, we still allow customers to check in and only tell them about the renovation after they've paid. (EP9L30-L35)*

*We first see if the customer asks to change room. For example, we don't allow the customer to change room if they are only staying one night. But*

*if the customer is staying for a few nights, we make them a priority and change the room for them. We tell the customer that they can change room the next day because it is wasteful [extra expense] to clean the used room when a customer is changing to another room. We tactfully tell the customer that we do not have a room at the moment... (FP2L21-L28)*

*Some troublesome customers refuse to check out because they want to stay for a few more nights, and that may affect subsequent customers. In this case, we have to think of how to get them out the room, and the easiest way is to stop providing facilities and equipment to the room, such as cutting off the water, electricity, and air-conditioning. The customer leaves the room when they are unable to use the facilities. (EP9L13-L16)*

### Single service sabotage behaviours may stem from one of many motives

The analysis results reveal that an incident of service sabotage can have several motives. For example, the deliberate rejection of a troublesome customer requesting a day extension can be motivated by personal convenience and vindictive psychology against customers. Therefore, the total number of service sabotage

motives exceeds the total number of service sabotage behaviours.

*Some customers are strange. Although they were complaining about the hotel, they return to the hotel after check-out. They may ask for an extension even if you tell them there is no room left, or the customer may come and ask about room availability if they are staying nearby. We don't allow these customers to check in because we already know they are troublesome. We are willing to let go of a customer to reduce our trouble. We don't even want to sell him the room with a higher price because he may ask for more amenities and things that cause me trouble. Therefore, we have to reject such customers with any excuses. (EP7L15-L22)*

### Front desk service sabotage behaviour of budget hotels

This study adopts the nine types of service sabotage behaviours proposed by Sun and Wang as the basis for data analysis and summarization of the service sabotage behaviours of budget hotel front desk staff [13]. Simplified process and customer rejection are discovered to be the most common types of service sabotage, followed by customer deception; sometimes, customers may also be ignored or treated badly. However, the behaviours of hinting, disturbing, teasing, and taking advantage of customers are not observed. Detailed descriptions are as follows:

**Rejection of customers:** Rejecting customers as a common service sabotage behavior and indicates that an employee deliberately refuses a customer's request. Employees make subjective judgments about a customer on the basis of their first impression and use a direct or technical manner to reject customers with what is perceived to be a poor attitude.

*We often reject customers directly because they are annoying. For example, for people who walk-in without a reservation, we would tell them that there are no rooms available, even if empty rooms are actually available. (CP3L5-L7)*

*We usually look at a person's face to get a first impression. Some people just make you feel comfortable; but others have a difficult-customer face that puts you off approaching them or their accent makes you want to reject them immediately... (EP7L37-P8L4)*

**Ignoring customers:** Employees can deliberately ignore customers' needs. Employees often feel impatient with customer needs because they are busy or emotional, or they may disregard or perfunctorily address a customer's needs because they have stereotyped the customer. Thus, they act passively and perfunctorily in handling a customer's issues or pretend to be busy with work to validate their ignoring the customer's need.

*When the customers ask about the WiFi password, we usually tell them that it's printed on the cover of the room card and then hang up the phone. However, some colleagues can be more passive because they have other tasks to do such as taking an order or checking in a customer... [omitted]... In fact, some customers still don't understand even if you tell them that the WiFi password is printed on the room card, which causes the service to be incomplete... (HP10L18-L28)*

*Some customers from certain regions are unpleasant... [omitted]... they talk loudly... [omitted]... Basically, we will advise them, but they may not understand when you talk softly... [omitted]... In addition, we don't serve them as enthusiastically as other foreign travelers... [omitted]... we tend to be passive and indifferent... [omitted]... because they won't come back... (IP3L24-P4L3)*

**Treating customers with poor attitude:** Employees may treat poorly any customers with inappropriate facial expression, tone

of voice, or behavior. Customers often experience poor service quality, but they may not identify that it is intentional on the part of the employees, and some severe cases of service sabotage may lead to direct employee-customer conflicts.

*One customer said he was unable to connect to our WiFi, so we helped him and figured out that the problem was with his WeChat... [omitted]... He forgot his login password, so we suggested that he check back over his emails. But he insisted that the problem was with our WiFi and started yelling in the lobby. So we also talked back louder because we were a little irritated... (MP5L5-L22)*

**Deception of customers:** Employees say things to deceive customers and achieve their goals. The intention is to appease the customer or stop them from making difficult requests. Such behavior is another common type of service sabotage.

*If a current customer is scheduled to have two more hours for checking out, but this clashes with the booking of another customer, we slightly adjust the time of the current customer by making him feel that his time's up... Even if he doesn't have to check out for 20 minutes, we tell him that he has only 10 minutes left, so that he'll check out earlier. (EP6L8-L13)*

**Simplifying the process:** Employees deliberately simplify the established service processes or shorten the service time. The data collected in this study show that such behaviours are the most frequent type of service sabotage. Employees often simplify the established service process or shorten the service customer time because they are lazy, think the process is troublesome, want to reduce their workload, or want to complete their work as quickly as possible. Because customers are unaware of the company's rules, they may not be aware that service sabotage has occurred.

*In the long holiday season, we usually ask the customer to pay in advance. But we often don't call and ask the customer to send the money because we assume that the customer may not come or suddenly cancel the booking... Getting the money in advance is more secure, but sometimes we are just too lazy... (AP3L11-14)*

*We call customers to confirm their bookings, but it's difficult to reach foreign tourists because you don't know where they are. They may be on a plane or have arrived in Taiwan but not turned on their phone because they want to avoid roaming charges... [omitted]... we still make a call. However, we never try calling foreign tourists, because it's troublesome. (FP10L7-L14)*

### Service sabotage motives of budget hotel front desk staff

After analysing the categories of service sabotage motive, the seven motive categories are reclassified into six categories for the next data analysis (Figure 1). Personal convenience is the main motive for service sabotage behaviour, and vindictive psychology on customers, stereotypes, and work pressure are three other common types of motive that often cause service sabotage. Detailed descriptions are as follows:

**Personal convenience:** Personal convenience is the main motive for service sabotage among budget hotel front desk service sabotage staff. This indicates that employees pay less attention to customer needs and are too lazy to comply with company regulations and complete routines because they want to avoid troubles. The objective of employees is to reduce their workload or be able to leave work on time.

*We can complete our administrative work perfectly, but we won't spend time and effort on customers... [omitted]... we pay less attention to*

customers in order to finish our administrative work. We want to send the customers to their rooms as quickly as possible so they don't disturb me and stop me finishing our administrative work... [omitted]... For example, we may be doing an order audit at night, responding to emails, or trying to confirm reservations with foreign customers; having to check in a customer interferes with our tasks, so we simplify the service and get them to their rooms quickly. After that, we have time to complete all our work and can then relax in the night... (EP5L21-L32)

**Vindictive psychology on customers:** A troublesome or difficult customer is a common reason for an employee's service sabotage. This type of customer can have direct and immediate effect on an employee's emotions. Employees retaliate against customers and vent their dissatisfaction by providing poor service.

There was one group of customers who were very noisy and annoying. They booked two rooms and insisted that the rooms were next to each other on the same floor... [omitted]... we told them that we didn't currently have two rooms on the same floor. [R: Did you say that because their attitude was bad?] Yes! Poor attitude! The customers said, "I booked so early, why didn't you arrange the rooms on the same floor!?" we told them that they should have informed us in advance to make that arrangement. They again said, "You see that we booked two rooms, don't you know both rooms must be on the same floor?" How would we know that [interviewee rolls their eyes]? we told them that there were only rooms available on the fifth and sixth floors, and if they insisted on staying on the same floor they would have to wait until... Then they said, "Why do we have to wait!?" They weren't convinced... [omitted]... So we deliberately refused to arrange it for them... In the end they accepted it, but they had a poor attitude toward the staff during their stay, and we ignored them. (CP4L19-L28)

**Stereotypes:** Service sabotage may be committed by employees because of their stereotyping of customers, considering for example the customers' appearance, nationality, language, and urban-rural difference.

The main thing we look at is the customer's face and expression... [omitted]...; we might not want to serve customers who have a difficult customer face, or we directly reject customers with certain accents... [omitted]... because we think they will cause an image problem. Customers with a certain characteristic may ask for this and that or their daily routines may affect other customers, so we would rather reject them in the first place... (EP7L37-P8L6)

Some colleagues are afraid to serve customers from certain areas because they worry they won't be able to understand what the

customers say. [R: They avoid having contact with customers...] Or they just simply, err..., perfunctorily help the customers. (HP10L28-L32)

**Work pressure:** Too much or too little work pressure can be a motive of service sabotage. An overly dull job may make employees seek excitement to relieve the boredom. By contrast, heavy work or personal pressure can affect an employee's ability to control their emotions, and employees can behave improperly due to excessive pressure.

Some customers really don't know how to use certain facilities, and we ask our staff to help the customers personally... [omitted]... But sometimes the staff are too busy or want to avoid trouble; they just explain something orally without going to the room to help the customer... [omitted]... Most customers don't continue to call the front desk, but some do keep calling. So our staff have to go to the room and help them out. This situation causes customers who restate their needs be served, but customers who are less persistent will not be served... (MP3L17-35)

### Reclassification of service sabotage motives

Overlapping and ambiguous categories are identified during data analysis and category summarization. Therefore, the categories of service sabotage motives are reclassified into six categories to provide a clearer explanation. First, this study renames financial factors, group factors, stress factors, and nationality stereotypes. In addition, customer factors and employee and company factors are incorporated into vindictive psychology. Finally, the descriptions of the various service sabotage motives are provided in Table 3.

### Relationship between the antecedents and motives of service sabotage

As mentioned in the literature review, the motives and antecedents of service sabotage are similar because they both refer to why employees sabotage services, but they are actually different. Therefore, according to the aforementioned definitions of antecedents and motives, the author integrates the content of relevant studies into Figure 2, which illustrates the relationship between antecedents and motives of service sabotage.

This study selects four factors proposed by Harris and Ogbonna as a framework of service sabotage, namely individuals, organizations, groups and roles, and environmental factors. Relevant research results are integrated to further categorize related factors.

Table 3: Description of service sabotage motive categories.

| Motive category       | Description  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Material temptation   | Desire to obtain additional benefits for individuals or a team of work group by the way of usurp.  |
| Vindictive psychology | These motives come from four aspects: organization, supervisor, colleagues, and customers. Intention to negatively affect the management, company, a particular colleague or customer. Due to the Dissatisfaction with the organization, a supervisor, a colleague or unfair treatment of difficult customers. |
| Teamwork atmosphere   | Service sabotage may be jointly performed by colleagues, resulting in a spirit of cooperation, or the person performing service sabotage thinks they will be regarded a hero by their colleagues. Service sabotage is thus performed to enhance status in the group.   |
| Work pressure         | Too much or too little work pressure. An overly dull job may make employees seek excitement to relieve their boredom, whereas heavy work or personal pressure can affect an employee's ability to control their emotions, and some employees tend to behave improperly when under excessive pressure.          |
| Personal convenience  | Employees ignore a customer's needs to avoid trouble or are too lazy to comply with company regulations. The goal is to reduce workload as much as possible or be able to leave work on time.  |
| Stereotype            | Stereotyping of customers, considering for example their appearance, nationality, language, culture, and urban-rural difference.   |

Moreover, the antecedents of service sabotage to be considered as implicit factors that existed before a service sabotage incident; by contrast, the motives of service sabotage are the dominant factors that directly trigger service sabotage behaviours [1,2,8,9,28].

If an employee works in a stressful environment for a long time, they are subject to high emotional load that can cause lower job satisfaction and increase the possibility of service sabotage. When an employee in this state of mind sabotages a service because a customer is troublesome, work pressure is the influential factor that existed before the incident occurred and can thus be labelled an antecedent; conversely, the troublesome customer is the trigger of service sabotage, and this “troublesome customer” is thus the motive. By contrast, if an employee deliberately rejects and ignores a customer’s request because they are under high work pressure, the work pressure in the situation is the motive—the direct cause of service sabotage.

**Types of service sabotage are less diverse in budget hotels than international hotels**

This study compares the number of occurrences of front desk service sabotage behaviors between budget hotels and international hotels. Unlike for international hotels, the service sabotage behaviors of hinting, disturbing, teasing, and taking advantage of customers did not occur at the budget hotel front desks (Table 4). Front desk staff at budget hotels usually have multiple roles, unlike those in international hotels, who tend to complete service tasks that are

more complex. For example, service tasks cover the scope of the service center and room department (i.e., assisting customers to check in and check out; providing travel advisory services; assisting in arranging travel plans, transportation rentals, pick-ups, and the ordering of souvenirs; supporting housekeeping; providing spare items to customers; and room keeping).

Because budget chain hotels are smaller in scale and hence have fewer rooms and customers than international hotels, they may only provide the basic services and facilities; front desk staff wish to solve customer problems as quickly as possible when the customers are checking in or asking for travel advice to avoid trouble. Therefore, behaviors such as hinting, disturbing, teasing, and taking advantage of customers are less likely to occur. In addition, the results also reveal that the interviewees could differentiate between private and work matters and attempted to not let their feelings affect their customer service. If service sabotage occurs because an employee is in a bad mood, it is usually because of customer factors (i.e., poor treatment by the customer).

**Management implications**

The managers of budget hotels should adapt their ways of management on the basis of the front desk service sabotage motives identified in this study, namely personal convenience, vindictive psychology on customers, stereotyping, work pressure.

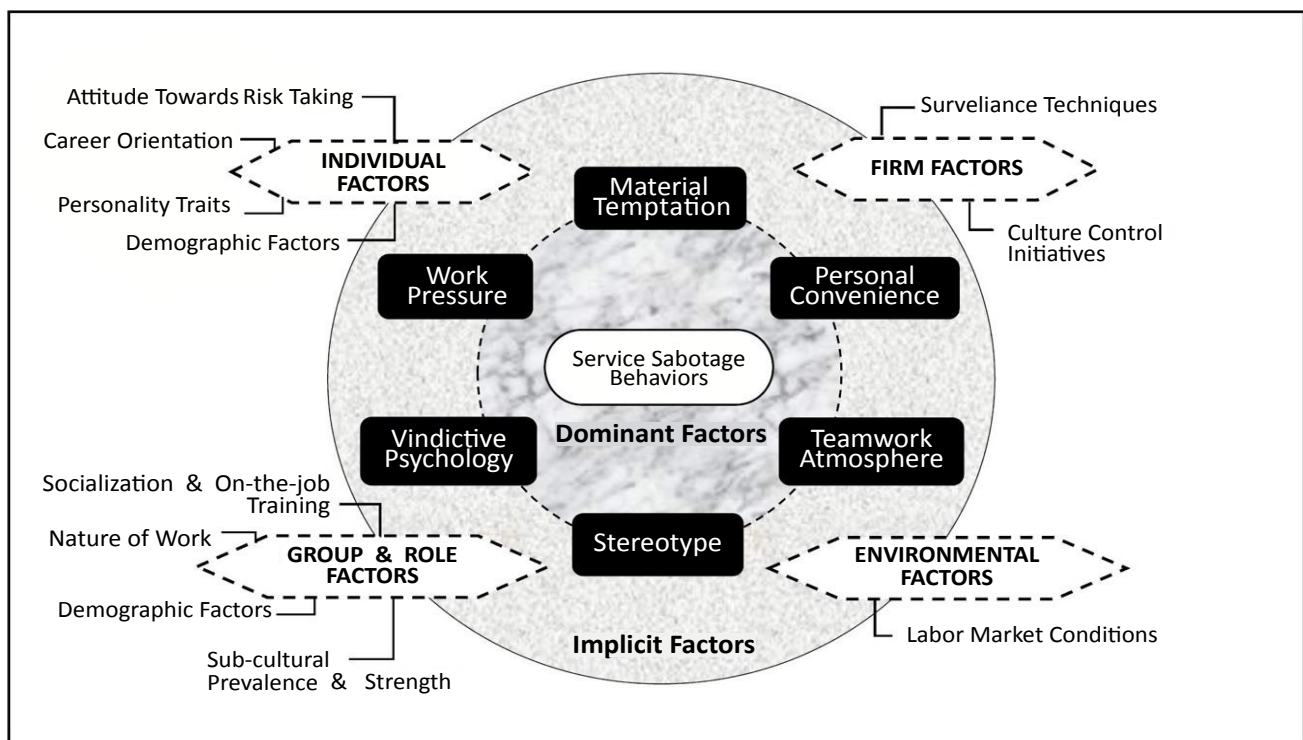


Figure 2: The antecedents and motives of service sabotage behaviours.

Table 4: Number of occurrences of front desk service sabotage behaviors in budget and international hotels.

| Service sabotage behavior category occurrences | Rejection of customer | Hinting at customer | Disturbing customer | Teasing customer | Ignoring customer | Treating customer poorly | Deception of customer | Simplifying the process | Taking advantage of the customer |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Sun and Wang (2013)                            | 6                     | 5                   | 10                  | 2                | 2                 | 7                        | 18                    | 45                      | 5                                |
| This study                                     | 6                     |                     |                     |                  | 4                 | 2                        | 5                     | 8                       |                                  |

## Establish a good corporate culture and strengthen operation monitoring

To prevent service sabotage caused by personal convenience and stereotyping, companies can take a two-pronged approach, starting with a good internal culture and organizational climate and enhanced external monitoring. A working environment that has a positive and dynamic atmosphere can produce cultural norms and peer pressure that exerts a highly mutually binding effect [1,2].

Therefore, high-level management should lead by example, communicating the company's vision to low- and medium-level supervisors; such changes can instill a sense of "getting the job done" and "treating all customers equally" in the employees, creating beneficial work habits and pride in employees. In addition, to ensure that service personnel do not misbehave, managers can use surveillance and performance evaluation systems to track the service of employees or manage by walking around the lobby, which encourage front-line personnel to be vigilant and make them less likely to simplify service processes [8].

## Prevent service sabotage with troublesome or difficult customers

In addition to recognizing the seriousness of the emotional and psychological pressure caused by troublesome customers to front desk staff, supervisors should curb the vicious circle of negative interaction between some employees and troublesome customers. Companies can provide education and training for employees regarding how to handle different types of troublesome customers and the company's policy when faced with troublesome customers, as well as providing the skills needed to deal with those customers. In addition to problem solving ability, personal emotion adjustment is also crucial. Employees can use their experience to judge the situation and predict the requirements or behaviours of troublesome customers. The likelihood of service sabotage is lower when employees can manage troublesome customers with ease [29].

Another problem solving method is assigning employees who have a calm personality to serve troublesome and difficult customers. Studies have demonstrated that neurotic staff members are more likely to judge the negative behaviors of customers with a negative perspective, more easily feel unfairly treated, and are thus more likely to sabotage service; by contrast, calm employees are more capable of handling the feelings caused by negative events. Therefore, assigning calm employees to serve difficult customers can prevent service sabotage [30].

Moreover, companies should manage the behaviour of troublesome customers and establish a zero tolerance policy for such customers. In the event of a customer's poor treatment of an employee, the company should stand by their employee. This establishes an image that the company does not tolerate such customers, which may help to limit the occurrence of troublesome customer's behaviours and symbolizes the company's determination to be kind to and respect its employees [31]. When employees feel that they are valued and the company will stand up for them when they are unfairly treated, their dissatisfaction toward customers is eased and the intention to sabotage service is decreased.

## CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The service sabotage incidents collected in this study are limited

and may not represent the overall picture of service sabotage in budget hotels. The interviewees did not necessarily have any experience of service sabotage, or they may have concealed some incidents. Therefore, in-depth interviews are not a completely effective research tool in this scenario.

Convenience sampling and snowball sampling are used to select interviewees with the intention of expanding the interview samples through interpersonal relationships. However, the interviewees of two hotel brands politely declined the interview after reporting this study to their supervisors. Moreover, two hotels within the study scope also declined the interviews for the reasons of inconvenient timings and personnel arrangement. Given the unwelcoming attitudes of some hotels, it can be inferred that hotels are worried that exploring the phenomenon of service sabotage may negatively affect them. Therefore, considering the sensitivity of this issue, future studies can employ the focus group method to collect service sabotage incidents from ex-employees of budget hotel front desks.

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