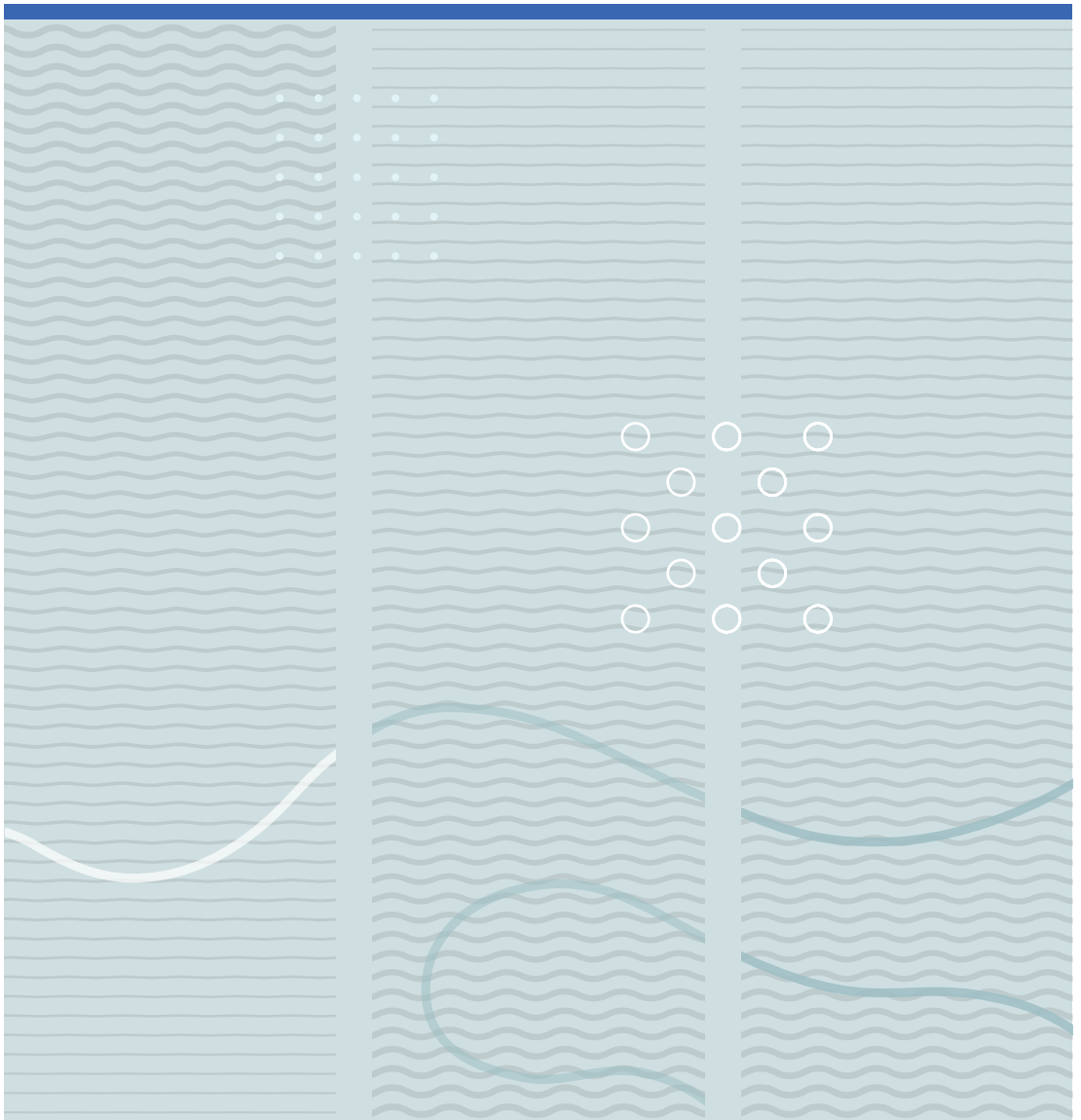Huy Quoc Tran

Customer identity and dysfunctional behaviors: The case of impoliteness

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Customer identity and dysfunctional behaviors: The case of impoliteness

A PhD dissertation in
Marketing Management

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Abstract

A common intuition in marketing is that businesses should 'treat customers as kings or queens.' However, customers do not always reciprocate in kind. In this research, I explore how merely identifying as a customer facilitates dysfunctional behaviors such as impoliteness in service interactions. Across five studies, I demonstrate that making the customer identity salient increases dysfunctional behaviors. In particular, customer identity (1) increases the likelihood of impoliteness via an enhanced sense of entitlement, (2) leads to objectification of employees, (3) reduces other-focus orientation, (4) eliminates the positive effect of subjective social status on forgiveness, and (5) decreases politeness in written language. To our knowledge, this research is the first that attempts to explore the relationship between customer identity and customer impoliteness. This contributes to existing marketing theory by demonstrating that customer identity can induce impoliteness beyond contextual factors and personal characteristics. For managers, this research suggests that businesses should refrain from making customer identification salient and rather promote alternative identities (i.e., guest, partner, student). Finally, the current research encourages future studies to extend our current understanding of the relationship between customer identity and customer dysfunctional behaviors.

Keywords: Customer identity, dysfunctional behaviors, impoliteness, service interaction

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1 Introduction

The recent CNBC (2021) article "It is out of control! Airlines, flight attendants want stiffer penalties for unruly passengers" calls attention to US airlines' need for help from the government to deal with unruly passengers. This story is merely one among many examples of *customer dysfunctional behaviors* that cause service frontline employees to experience stress, exhaustion, and burnout (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). Specifically, customer dysfunctional behaviors (also referred to as customer misbehaviors) are customer actions that violate generally accepted norms (Kang & Gong, 2019) and cause considerable problems for firms, including decreases in productivity, erosion of employees' mental health, and unnecessary business costs (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley, & Nelson, 2017). In addition to these undesirable consequences, regarding the overall impact of customer misbehaviors on the service environment, dysfunctional behavior of even one customer can negatively affect fellow customers in terms of behavior, experience, and satisfaction. Dysfunctional behaviors are also emotionally costly to misbehaving customers, who often experience negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, and dissatisfaction (Harris & Reynolds, 2004). In this dissertation, I aim to address three main questions:

1. Can simply identifying oneself as a customer lead to customer dysfunctional behavior such as impoliteness? What are the mechanisms behind this effect?

2. How does an active customer identity influence psychological states, such as sense of entitlement, objectification, forgiveness and empathy, and self- versus other focus?

3. How do individual differences, such as self-control and social status, moderate these effects?

Addressing these questions is both managerially and theoretically important, considering the essential role of service interaction in the service environment. In particular, this thesis sets out three areas in which additional knowledge on how customer identity leads to dysfunctional behavior is critical: (1) service employees' welfare, (2) other customers' satisfaction, and (3) the well-being of the focal customers themselves.

1.1 Theoretical contributions

From a theoretical perspective, the five studies herein contribute to both dysfunctional behavior research and the identity literature by examining *customer identity* as one potential antecedent of customer dysfunctional behaviors. With regard to identity, while current research has explored to a great extent the effect of personal identity on product preferences and consumption choices (Reed, Forehand, Puntoni, & Warlop, 2012), only a few empirical studies have examined the causal relationship between social identity and interpersonal behaviors (Reynolds & Harris, 2009). As social identities are formed and reinforced while people interact with others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989), studying social identities without considering their interpersonal connotations is insufficient. More specifically, in every social relationship, the way people interact with one another not only manifests that social role but also helps us understand what that identity is and how it is developed (Stets & Burke, 2000; Stryker & Burke, 2000; Tajfel, 2010). Therefore, this thesis aims to address this research gap by investigating the influence of identity on interpersonal behaviors in the service context.

With regard to dysfunctional behaviors, prior research suggests that customer misbehaviors result from different customer motivations (Greer, 2015; Harris et al., 2010), such as financial motivations (e.g., complaints to obtain discounts), psychological motivations (e.g., feelings of venting or anger), or retaliation for bad service (e.g., negative reviews about the service experience). Prior research (i.e., Fullerton & Punj, 1993; Reynolds & Harris, 2009) also attributes customer misbehaviors to individual differences, such as personality (e.g., people with high scores on narcissism or the Machiavellianism scale). However, most previous work fails to account for why people with ordinary personalities and no outright intentions to harm misbehave in the service context (Yagil, 2017). To address this research gap, in this thesis, I propose customer identity as an alternative explanation for customer dysfunctional behaviors.

In this thesis, my overarching goal is not to address all types of customer dysfunctional behaviors but to zoom in on a common subset of these behaviors. Indeed, what I propose is a novel way to deal with less severe but more frequent cases of customer misbehaviors, such as rudeness and impoliteness toward service providers. The underlying assumptions

are that most misbehaviors are not extreme and that milder forms of misbehaviors do not result from customers' pre-intentions but the malleable image of the customer role.

Furthermore, laws should continue to regulate serious cases of customer misbehavior. For example, if customers try to steal from or physically assault service providers, the proper business response is to report the incident to the police. As severe customer misbehaviors often come with pre-intentions, whether or not customer identity or any identity is activated would not have any considerable impact on these deviant behaviors.

In this thesis, I argue that current business practices activate customer identity, which in turn can lead to unintentional customer misbehaviors. I begin with an examination of the marketing notion that *customers are always right* (Fader, 2020). In practice, most firms favor this service philosophy, and both companies and customers have reasons to advocate the "customer is king" concept. Many customers want to be treated like kings and queens when they use services. For firms, by giving customers the feeling of being treated like kings and queens, they hope to attract customers and establish long-term service relationships by increasing customer satisfaction, promoting customer loyalty, and building a reputation of excellent service.

However, treating customers as kings or queens has a dark side. Previous research shows that customers can often be abusive, aberrant, deviant, and aggressive (Yagil, 2017). In their research, Wetzel, Hammerschmidt, and Zablah (2014) report that customers who were granted a high status felt even more ingratitude and a greater sense of entitlement to special treatments than customers granted a lower status. This finding may contradict what social theorists would expect; people usually feel indebted to and behave reciprocally to kind treatments in the social context (Nowak & Roch, 2007). This contradiction may lead to a theoretically and empirically important question: What makes people feel and behave differently when they are in the service context than when they are in another social context such as at home or school?

Drawing on identity-based motivation theory (Oyserman, 2009) and the relational models theory (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997), which are discussed in detail in the "Theoretical background" section, I theorize that the salience of customer identity—that is, self-identifying as a customer—is a driving force behind customer misbehaviors. The basis of

this theorization is that when an activated customer identity becomes the center of the self, it provokes associated schemas and behavioral scripts. In turn, these schemas and scripts direct behaviors to fulfill the *customer role*, which is to extract values from a transaction to achieve self-goals, self-interests, and self-desires. Moreover, an active customer identity is associated not only with customer roles but also with *customer rights*, which encompass powerful autonomy and sovereignty in choices and actions. This freedom in choices and actions produced by business practice inevitably implies consequences for a person's psychological states; these include an inflated sense of entitlement, the objectification's tendency, and the lack of other focus.

1.2 Practical implications

Service interaction is an indispensable part of every modern society, as through service consumers obtain necessities, education, and recreation. A typical service usually involves the participation of at least one customer and one service provider. Therefore, ensuring proper service interactions benefits both customers and service providers in terms of customer experience and employee morale (Porath & Pearson, 2013). From a business perspective, being able to ensure smooth and polite service interactions boosts employees' mental health and subsequently increases their productivity, service quality, and customer satisfaction (Vasconcelos, 2020). For example, Yi, Nataraajan, and Gong (2011) document that customer citizenship behaviors such as courtesy, politeness, and helpfulness increase employees' performance, satisfaction, and commitment. In a similar vein, Kurdi, Alshurideh, and Alnaser (2020) find support for the positive relationship between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction.

From a practical perspective, this thesis suggests an alternative option that business managers can consider when addressing customer misbehaviors. An ongoing debate among policy makers, practitioners, and researchers is whether customer misbehaviors should be controlled by stricter rules and regulations (Grandey, Kern, & Frone, 2007; Mitchell & Ka Lun Chan, 2002; Tschan, Rochat, & Zapf, 2005). However, customer misbehaviors vary depending on the severity of these acts (Greer, 2015; Harris et al., 2010). Although rules are necessary to threaten and punish offenders who either intend to or do commit serious crimes against service providers and other firms (Yagil, 2008;

Yamato, Fukumoto, & Kumazaki, 2017), I do not recommend applying strict controls to govern milder forms of customer misbehaviors, such as customer impoliteness, for several reasons. First, strict rules may reduce positive customer service experiences. Most people do not want to remember and follow a series of rules when they expect to be served. The focus on rules and regulations might reduce the overall customer experience and bring negative consequences to firms (e.g., negative reviews). In this thesis, I posit that customer identity is a major cause of customer dysfunctional behavior. Therefore, I propose that, rather than applying strict rules, firms should change their approach to either deemphasize customer identity or activate other communal identities that can promote politeness and prosocial behaviors.

Second, strict rules may not be useful for firms whose main goal for applying these rules is to improve employees' mental health. I argue that the main purpose of strict controls is to handle severe cases of customer misbehaviors. However, service employees are more likely to suffer from mild, but frequent forms of misbehaviors than from severe misbehaviors (Reynolds & Harris, 2009). Thus, regulations might not work to address the lighter forms of misbehaviors, such as customer rudeness and impoliteness, that, in the long run, are among the main causes of employee burnout (Fullerton & Punj, 2004).

Third, the intentionality of misbehaviors makes a difference. I argue that strict rules are not efficient to govern unintentional behaviors. Regulations can be useful to threaten customers who have bad intentions, but they become meaningless to customers who do not have such intentions. Furthermore, most people likely do not intend to misbehave, as they know that misbehaviors may result in negative consequences to themselves, such as loss of reputation in public (e.g., shouting at an employee), legal charges against convictions (e.g., physically abusing service staff), or a spoiled service experience (e.g., experiencing aversive emotions such as anger or irritability on a holiday). On many occasions, however, people still misbehave even without a pre-intention to do so (Harris & Reynolds, 2004) and also without being aware that they are doing so. I argue that the salience of customer identity may account for why people behave differently in the service context than in other social contexts.

Fourth, business costs are a major concern. Monitoring and reinforcing behaviors through rules and regulations also require a certain investment, including implementation and

operational costs. To maximize profitability, firms often prefer to avoid such costs and expenses. In this thesis, I suggest that firms should consider an alternative option that is less costly and more service-oriented than strict rules and regulations. I argue that while the salience of customer identity is a cause of customer misbehavior, it is quite malleable. For example, firms could design the service environment or deploy different communication tactics to reduce the degree of activated customer identity. At a more specific level, depending on the context and nature of service, firms could address their customers by using different *labels* such as guests, members, or partners.

1.3 Dissertation overview

In this chapter, I contend that both researchers and practitioners should further explore the phenomenon of customer dysfunctional behaviors in terms of their antecedents and consequences. I argue that customer identity is a potential antecedent of customer misbehaviors, and that this identity is malleable. My research offers guidance to practitioners on how to reduce customer misbehaviors and contributes to consumer research on the impact of customer identity on customer dysfunctional behaviors. I also briefly provide the background for my theorization that customer identity leads to customer dysfunctional behaviors.

In the second chapter, I further review the literature and establish my hypotheses. I present key constructs of customer dysfunctional behaviors, customer impoliteness, and customer identity. I elaborate on how the salience of customer identity influences impoliteness. This relationship manifests a *social function* of customer identity through interpersonal interactions between a customer and a service provider. Then, I detail several potential psychological processes that may underlie the effect of customer identity on behaviors. Although many potential intrapersonal processes may activate customer identity, in this thesis, I selectively examine the constructs of sense of entitlement, objectification tendency, forgiveness and empathy, and self- versus other focus. After that, I discuss several examples of boundary conditions that moderate the effect of customer identity on dysfunctional behaviors. In particular, I discuss psychological constructs such as self-control and subjective social status.

In the third chapter, I present five empirical studies. Across the studies, I develop and test different identity priming methods and discuss progressively how and when these priming methods work. Furthermore, I examine the effect of an activated customer identity (vs. other identities, including guest, local community, volunteer, and student identity) on customers' impoliteness and their psychological states. Specifically, Study 1 illustrates the effect of customer identity on participants' likelihood to be impolite through their choices of actions in three hypothesized service scenarios. Study 2 documents the effect of customer identity on objectification through the usage of the implicit association test (IAT). In Study 3, I examine how customer identity influences the way people react to service failure by measuring their tendency to forgive and be empathetic. In Study 4, I investigate the direct effect of customer identity on the self- versus other-focus orientation through the choices of first-person pronouns. In Study 5, I measure impoliteness through text analysis using a machine learning approach.

 In the fourth chapter, I discuss the contributions of the five studies to consumer research and detail how business practice can extract value from the present research. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the studies and suggest future research directions. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework of the research.
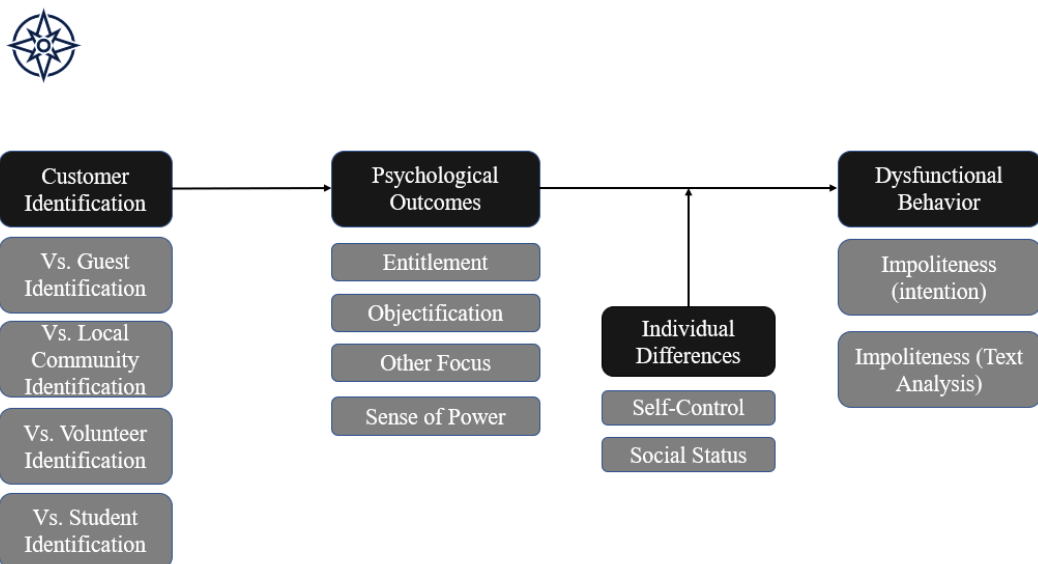
Figure 1 Conceptual framework

2 Theoretical background

2.1 Customer dysfunctional behavior

> *As a server in a previous life, on many occasions, there would*
> *be a jerk who would snap his fingers and call out, "Waitress!"*
> *An experience shared by an anonymous participant*

In contrast with the traditional assumptions that customers behave in a good manner and customer misbehaviors are atypical (Ringberg, Odekerken-Schröder, & Christensen, 2007), contemporary literature argues that these deviant behaviors are endemic and ordinary in the service environment (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). Several studies have investigated the consequences of these dysfunctional behaviors. For example, Dormann and Zapf (2004) discuss the long-term consequences of customer misbehaviors on employees' general well-being, including eroded morale, burnout, stress, fatigue, and physical damages. Surprisingly, research indicates that most cases that cause such employee suffering are not severe incidents but rather mild, pervasive, and usually neglected ones (Yagil, 2017). Indeed, Harris and Reynolds (2004, p. 352) suggest that customers who misbehave should be "recognized and managed as normal consumers and not segregated apart from consumers as a whole."

Contributing to this research stream on the mild forms of customer misbehaviors (Fullerton & Punj, 1993), my thesis focuses on the interpersonal behaviors between customers and service employees. I do not aim to review all types of customer misbehaviors, as to a large extent prior research has summarized and amalgamated previous sporadic works (e.g., Daunt & Harris, 2012; Fisk et al., 2010; Greer, 2015; Harris & Reynolds, 2004; Kang & Gong, 2019). Rather, I discuss the current concepts, the consequences, and the antecedents of interpersonal misbehaviors such as *impoliteness* before I introduce customer identity as a driving force behind these customers' acts.

2.2 Customer impoliteness

Prior research has proposed a variety of terms to categorize customer dysfunctional behaviors (Fisk et al., 2010). While each term might carry a slightly different shade of

meaning, they all indicate that deviant behavior is an act that generally violates social norms (Harris & Reynolds, 2004). One subset of customer dysfunctional behaviors is interpersonal misbehaviors, also referred to as customer impoliteness. Specifically, impoliteness constitutes behaviors such as insensitivity to other feelings, rudeness, lack of empathy, lack of trust, and non-reciprocity (Meier & Semmer, 2013; Vasconcelos, 2020).

Semantically, impoliteness is the opposite of politeness, which is an outcome of civilization (Starobinski, 1993). Politeness, as a set of rules or social norms, helps make society function properly. People often try to avoid being impolite to maintain societal structures and social links (Pinker, 2010). In short, impoliteness is simply a violation of social norms. At the operational level, I refer to the extensive concept of impoliteness, capturing the whole spectrum of verbal (e.g., orders), gestures (e.g., physical approaches), and expressions (e.g., aggressiveness). Depending on cultural differences, verbal, physical, and emotional expressions may imply both politeness and impoliteness (Culpeper, 1996, 2008). Therefore, a behavior is not impolite but only constitutes an impolite act if it goes against expected norms and offends the interaction partners.

I postulate that customer impoliteness is customer interpersonal misbehavior in exchange situations. Fundamentally, impoliteness is a construct that deals with whether a person preserves another person's *face* or not (Mao, 1994). According to Brown and Levinson (1987), the concept of face reflects an individual's psychological wants. This notion assumes that all people have face wants. In short, face is a public self-image that people want to maintain, and it is also an emotionally sensitive concept of the self. Applied to a customer–employee relationship, a customer would be impolite if he or she does not care about the face of the interaction partner, such as a salesperson or service employee. In service interactions, many impolite behaviors manifest themselves in the way customers make inquiries, give orders, and provide feedback to service providers.

I argue that customer impoliteness, as a representative of customer dysfunctional behaviors, has a cumulative detrimental impact on customer-contact employees, even though this behavior is usually considered minor or non-significant. In their study, Sliter, Sliter, and Jex (2012) provide evidence that frequent interactions with impolite customers lead to employees' poor performance and burnout. Indeed, frontline service employees

often experience distress and emotional challenges. First, given the intense and high workload of the service environment (Chiang, Birtch, & Kwan, 2010), customer-contact employees must deal with multiple customers during their shifts (Zohar, 1994). Therefore, service employees are likely to experience more than one incident of customer rudeness during their shifts. Second, when people face unpleasant situations, they can choose to fight or flee (Lang, 1995; Lang & Bradley, 2010). However, service employees often do not have such a choice; rather, as required by employers, frontline service workers must conceal their real emotions through *emotional labor*, which implies responding to customer rudeness with kindness and good manners (Schaubroeck & Jones, 2000). In the long run, such emotional suppression produces negative consequences for service employees' morale, derailing their emotional stability and leading to stress and burnout (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey & Sayre, 2019).

2.3 The causes of customer impoliteness

Previous research identifies other causes of dysfunctional behaviors, including customers' financial motives, lack of constraining legislation, and poor service-scape conditions (Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005; Daunt & Harris, 2012; Huang, Zhao, Miao, & Fu, 2014); by contrast, in this thesis I suggest different causes of dysfunctional behaviors. By synthesizing the current literature, I find that customer impoliteness is due to an *obstructive personality*, *bad service*, and *prioritization*.

Obstructive personality. Harris and Reynolds (2004) elaborate that people who score high on personality obstructionism tend to judge their service experience in a negative light. This elaboration is in line with what other previous works have proposed—namely, that people with different personality traits interpret and respond to the situation differently (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1970; Williams & Dargel, 2004). Overall, personality traits have a powerful impact on behaviors and, apparently, on misbehaviors. For example, people with antisocial personality disorder or narcissistic personality disorder tend to ignore the perspective of others and behave in a self-centric manner in interactions with others (Dolan & Fullam, 2004; Sedikides, Gregg, Cisek, & Hart, 2007). They easily become aggressive or hostile even without significant provoking incidents (Campbell & Miller, 2011).

However, people who score high on such obstructive personality disorder are rare by definition; most customers have a moderate score on these traits. In addition, traits such as entitlement, narcissism, and Machiavellianism are malleable, and they fluctuate depending on both internal and external factors (Campbell & Miller, 2011; Giacomin & Jordan, 2016). For example, people may feel more entitled in a situation in which they believe they contribute more than they receive (Kabanoff, 1991). This sense of entitlement may derive from situational cues and the *rights* associated with social roles (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997). In the context of the service environment, I propose that customer identity is a social role that, when activated, increases people's sense of entitlement.

Bad service. Customers often react when their service experiences do not meet their expectations. Several studies have shown that customers become aggressive when they feel dissatisfied (Bitner, Booms, & Mohr, 1994; Strizhakova, Tsarenko, & Ruth, 2012). One explanation that could account for customer aggression is emotional venting. According to the consumer-oriented framework of Duhachek (2005), customers cope with service disappointments by expressing their negative emotions (e.g., anger, rage, exasperation) to frontline service employees.

Moreover, unlike other social contexts, the service environment encourages customers to freely express their bad experiences and emotions (Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010). Firms often promote customer sovereignty, treating customer direct feedback as a *gift* so they can redress service failures immediately (Barlow & Møller, 2008). Therefore, customers often do not hesitate to express their frustrations to attract attention and obtain compensation for their bad service experience. Furthermore, customers may perceive service failure as disrespectful if they believe the service provider is not providing a sufficient amount of care (Scalora, Washington, Casady, & Newell, 2003). Consequently, they may retaliate with impolite and disrespectful behaviors.

However, concluding that customer impoliteness is a direct outcome of service failure is too simplistic and mundane. Because revenge or retaliation is often a self-serving mental construction (Kearns & Fincham, 2005; Stillwell, Baumeister, & Del Priore, 2008), the service failures for which customers take revenge are subjective perceptions of reality (Grégoire, Laufer, & Tripp, 2010). Thus, a perception of service failure depends on the

extent to which the customer's expectation differs from the service reality (Baker, Meyer, & Johnson, 2008). This discrepancy between expectation and reality is partly caused by the exaggerated images of service that firms build up time over time (Bolton & Houlihan, 2005), manifesting through the concept of "zero service err." In this thesis, I propose that customer identification facilitates the construction of negative service outcomes as service failures.

Prioritization. To compete with one another, firms frequently employ service tactics that make customers feel like kings or queens (Bishop & Hoel, 2008). These tactics consequently elevate customer status, evoking customers' high sense of entitlement and infinitive privilege (Korczynski & Evans, 2013). When customers' status elevation becomes a symbolic benefit, their sense of entitlement (vs. reciprocity and gratitude) increases (Wetzel et al., 2014). Simultaneously, the service requirement for frontline employees to treat *customers as kings and queens* inevitably brings to the fore their inferior and subservient position (Korczynski, 2009). In support of this, Yagil (2008) shows that customers often take advantage of firms' preferential treatment to abuse service and customer-contact employees.

In this thesis, I argue that firms' customer prioritization fuels the acceptance of violated social norms, as customer impoliteness becomes a service norm that both firms and customers implicitly endorse. In particular, I posit that the service norm that customer impoliteness is acceptable is associated with activated customer identity. That is, I hypothesize that a major antecedent of customer dysfunctional behavior in general and customer impoliteness in particular is identifying as a "customer."

2.4 Identity in consumer research

In the following paragraphs, I briefly review the main findings in identity research and the role of identity in consumer research (see Appendix A for a review). After that, I discuss the customer identity concept and its relationship to customer dysfunctional behaviors.

According to cognitive psychology, the term "identity" refers to the capability of self-reflection and the awareness of the self (Leary & Tangney, 2003, p. 3). A person can hold

multiple identities within a self-concept, and these identities can comprise both personal identity and social identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000). For one specific identity to guide a behavior, a person must first be aware of his or her identity and then, via thinking processes, recall his or her experience with and knowledge about that identity. In case of conflicts among identities, a person decides on which identity's expectations to follow.

Conceptually, identity can be categorized as either personal identity or social identity (Schwarz & Bohner, 2001). Personal identity reflects the traits, characteristics, and goals that are not connected with membership in the social unit group (Oyserman, 2009). According to personal identity theory, identity is a dispositional structure of traits that draws on a sense of "me-ness" values (Stryker, 2007). Equally important, personal identity is relatively stable across situations (Puntoni, Sweldens, & Tavassoli, 2011). Therefore, any trait or gender-related labeling may fit well into the personal identity category. For example, one can self-identify as a persistent or an indecisive person, a type of identity that is not specifically linked to any social group.

By contrast, social identity refers to a part of self that consists of meanings and scripts attached to multiple roles in different social events (Tajfel, 2010). Social identity is an interpersonal structure of social relationships that inherits collective values (Turner & Reynolds, 2010). In addition, many social identities are temporal, and their activation is often context-dependent. For example, Shih, Pittinsky, and Ambady (1999) found that the momentary activation of an Asian identity boosted the math performance of Asian American participants. In their study, Chugani, Irwin, and Redden (2015) discovered that, compared with those who were not primed with university identity, participants with an activated university identity consumed more candies in the bag with their university logo.

Prior research distinguishes between personal identity and social identity because this distinction can be useful to understand the causal relationship between individual identities and their associated schemas (Deaux, 1993; Markus, 1977). Classifying one identity as either personal identity or social identity may nevertheless neglect the multiple aspects of identity, because personal traits and social identities may overlap (Forehand, Reed, & Saint Clair, 2021; Reed et al., 2012). For example, classifying a trait-related identity such as artistic personality can be confusing, because it may also refer to a social

group that comprises all members with artistic skills. Therefore, some scholars suggest that it is not imperative to categorize one identity as either personal identity or social identity (Reed et al., 2012); rather, what matters most is how individuals perceive and process feedback on their identities and how they transform these into behaviors and actions (Laverie, Kleine, & Kleine, 2002).

In essence, the identity of the self is important to people's self-image (Sirgy, 1982); it can both unify them as a group (Brewer, 1991) and distinguish them as individuals (White & Dahl, 2006). In consumer research, identity has recently taken the spotlight, as more researchers are recognizing that consumers make choices not only along the line of rationality and emotionality but also based on their identity (Epp & Price, 2011).

In this thesis, I argue that personal identity refers to a more stable, less context-dependent, and more intentional self while social identity is more situational, dependent on activating cues, and, therefore, less intentional. Within the scope of this thesis, I postulate that customer identity is a two-pronged concept. First, customer identity belongs to the social identity category, as it is momentarily activated when a person is in an exchange situation. Second, customer identity reflects, to some degree, characteristics of personal identity, as it captures the sense of self-centricity.

2.5 Customer identity

While a wealth of studies has examined the effect of different types of identities on customer behaviors (Forehand et al., 2021), to my knowledge, none are devoted to customer identity or the customer role itself. In this thesis, I rely on Reed et al.'s (2012, p. 312) definition of customer identity as "any category label to which a consumer self-associates (either by choice or endowment) that is amenable to a clear picture of what the person in that category looks like, thinks, feels and does." Thus, I define customer identity as a *label* to which people can refer when they think, feel, and act from a buyer perspective in a transactional or service context. Following the identity-based motivation model developed by Oyserman (2009). I propose that the activation of customer identity or the customer role provokes customers to fulfill their customer role by activating behaviors to extract the highest possible personal gain from a transaction.

The identity-based motivation model envisages behaviors and judgment using identity congruency as a focal predictor (Oyserman, 2009). In this model, identity salience is an important factor that guides behaviors. The model also includes the contextual factors that are essential to explaining the variance of one identity in different contexts (Oyserman & Lee, 2008). In principle, the model suggests that people select choices that are congruent with their focal identity. Therefore, I postulate that, when activated, customer identity influences (1) the way customers interpret and judge the outcome of a transaction, (2) their attention to self-goals and self-interests, (3) the way they view and treat service providers as a means to achieve their goals, and (4) their perceived entitlement to a flawless service experience without gratitude and reciprocity.

Drawing on Fiske and Tetlock's (1997) relational model, I postulate that customer identity is a role identity that is activated in transactional and service situations. In general, the relational model suggests that people in transaction situations think and behave differently than when they are in other social situations (e.g., at home, at school). In contrast with exchange relationships, the communal sharing principle asserts that people typically share resources with their fellow in-group members based on the needs of everyone, playing down the distribution principle on the ratio of input to outcome (e.g., parents do not feed their children depending on their contribution to the household income). However, the market pricing model indicates that the transaction or service context influences perceptions, feelings, and behaviors differently than other social contexts. For example, it is acceptable for customers to calculate the outcome in proportion to what they pay. It is also acceptable in exchange relationships for people to refer to the utility ratio of input to output when interacting with business partners (Aggarwal, 2004).

On the one hand, activating customer identity makes exchange norms salient and induces the focal person to rely on such norms when interacting with others, On the other hand, customer identity, when activated, automatically alters perceptions of the service interaction, the interaction partners, and the service environment. In this regard, people with a salient customer identity will perceive the environment and react in ways that are congruent to their customer role. Specifically, the salience of the customer role may activate the associated goals to fulfill customer needs, wants, and desires. When their

customer goals become salient, people search for information, perceive the surrounding environment, and interact with others to achieve these goals, and if there is a presence of goal threat, they react intensively and promptly. For example, when customers visit a service outlet, they will automatically look for the service option that can satisfy their needs and consider multiple relevant factors, including price, benefits, or special treatment. Similarly, Aggarwal (2004) postulates that partners in an exchange relationship often keep track of their inputs and outputs and focus on what benefits they can extract from the other; they also become less responsive to the partner's needs over time.

If a service fails to meet customers' expectations, in response to this goal threat, they may not hesitate to voice their frustrations and demand service employees' immediate attention to their needs. Thus, what might be a violation of social norms and moral grounds in other contexts might become neutralized and acceptable in exchange relationships (Fiske & Tetlock, 1997). Under an activated customer identity, people may find it appropriate to provide their feedback *directly* even if their behaviors will be perceived as impolite toward the service provider. That is, customers might consider it appropriate to focus on their own interests, needs, and desires and to concentrate less on service providers' feelings and interests (Aggarwal, 2004).

2.6 Customer identification

In the following paragraphs, I discuss both the activation and the intensification process of customer identity. First, cues that are strongly associated with enacting customer roles activate customer identity. These cues can be service environments, service employees, and service interactions. Specifically, the customer identity moves to the center of the active self when a person enters a store or service outlet, or it can become salient when the person interacts with a salesperson or service provider. When a customer interacts with other people who hold *other transactional roles* (e.g., salesperson, service employees), the customer role becomes more vivid in his or her mind. For example, when service providers ask how they can help, that request can activate the customer identity, with thought schemas and behavior scripts specific to the transaction context. In such a situation, external factors such as the service environment and service interaction activate

customer identity. Conversely, internal motivations can activate customer identity. For example, customer identity becomes salient when a customer demands a service employee's attention. In this case, after experiencing a service failure, a customer may state "I am your customer" to show frustration and demand immediate compensation or rectification.

Second, I argue that *customer identification* refers to the degree to which a person identifies him- or herself as a customer. The degree of self-identifying as a customer or the level of customer identification can vary depending on different factors such as the *elevated customer status*, the *instigation of service situations*, *customer sovereignty*, and the *actual market power of customers*.

In general, *elevating customer status* (e.g., granting customers special status and preferential treatment) remains at firms' discretion (Lacey, Suh, & Morgan, 2007). By raising customer status, firms hope to attract new customers and retain current ones. For example, a loyalty program that gives customers a unique privileged status may induce feelings of self-importance (Dreze & Nunes, 2009) and exacerbate a customer identity. Concurrently, giving customers privilege status emphasizes how important customers are to service organizations and, as a result, intensifies the positive feelings about being a customer (Giordano, Wood, & Michela, 2000).

Instigation of service situations is an event that provokes customers (Finkel, 2014). It often refers to a service failure in which customers demand that service employees rectify their negative service experience. In case of service failure, customers often blame and attribute such failure to service providers and demand immediate service compensation (Folkes, 1984; Folkes & Kotsos, 1986; Yen, Gwinner, & Su, 2004). In these situations, a common customer argument for blaming failures on service providers is "I am your customer"; therefore, it is the responsibility not of customers but of service providers to ensure a satisfactory service experience. Overall, I argue that customer identification will increase in case of service instigation because customers emphasize their customer role to avoid any responsibility for service failure.

Customer sovereignty is an ideology in which firms espouse a view that customers are "second managers" who control and give feedback on employees' performance (Sliter et

al., 2010). In particular, customers are granted the power to punish and reward frontline service employees, emphasizing the power of the customer role (Hochschild, 2012; Robertson & O'Reilly, 2020). Implicitly, the customer role includes both the dominant power over service providers and the managerial rights to control and evaluate service providers' performance (Korczynski, 2009). Therefore, I argue that highlighting customer sovereignty may activate associations with the customer role and, consequently, intensify customer identity.

The actual market power of customers comes from the fungible resource that customers owe and firms desire. It also comes from the availability of outside options to the customer and thus is limited by this availability. Firms simply need money to survive and operate. Business operations must cover fixed expenses, including stocking and labor, within a certain timeline, and most firms cannot afford the time lost without income (Nunn, 1981; Nwankwo & Osho, 2010). The power dependence theory of social relations elucidates that the more a person prizes the resource held by another, the more dependent that person is and the less power he or she has in the relationship (Emerson, 1962). Applying this theory to the firm–customer relationship, I argue that firms often find themselves in a weaker power position than their customers.

In addition, acquiring new customers usually costs more than retaining current ones (Ehrenberg & Goodhardt, 2000; Griffin & Herres, 2002), and business sustainability often depends on a strong customer base (McMullan & Gilmore, 2008). Thus, it is in firms' best interest to facilitate a long-term relationship with their current customers. By contrast, in most situations, customers have the option to choose among many service providers (Urban, 2005). Therefore, firms often depend more on long-term relationships than customers. In particular, customers have coercive power to withhold transactions or change service providers (Walker, Churchill, & Ford, 1972), while service organizations cannot operate and pay their employees without customers, resulting in a natural service characteristic that service providers and their employees have less power than customers. Because the actual market power is derived from a customer role, I argue that accentuating the actual market power of the customer can strengthen the salience of customer identity. Alternatively, I also expect the actual market power to strengthen the positive effect of customer identity on misbehaviors, as the more powerful customers feel,

the more likely they will believe that they can misbehave without any consequences to themselves. Therefore, on the one hand, power can strengthen customer identity, but on the other hand, it can boost the positive effect of customer identity on misbehaviors.

2.7 Consequences of an activated customer identity

In the following subsections, I present the reasons I expect customer identity to facilitate customer misbehaviors. In particular, I elaborate on how activated customer identity can influence psychological processes and states such as entitlement, objectification, forgiveness and empathy, and self- versus other focus.

2.7.1 Entitlement

In general, entitlement refers to "human events associated with social justice: the issue of equity, deserving, right, fairness, and the justice of procedures, distribution and retributive acts" (Lerner, 1987, p. 108). While this broad definition is generally accepted as a starting point for understanding entitlement, it may not fully capture another important aspect of entitlement—namely, self-regard. Westerlaken, Jordan, and Ramsay (2017) define entitlement as an excessive self-regard associated with a belief in the right to privileged treatment at work. In the domain of consumer research, scholars coin the term "entitlement" to refer to customers who believe that they deserve special treatment from sellers (Boyd & Helms, 2005). Combining these two perspectives, I define customer entitlement as a feeling of self-regard associated with the belief that, as a customer, a person should be entitled to special treatment and attention.

Entitlement can be either a chronic trait or a temporal state (Tomlinson, 2013). Regarding entitlement as a chronic trait, people with an extreme score on the entitlement scale are, by definition, not representative of the population, as scores on a trait scale are typically distributed around the average-point. However, I argue that people experience different levels of entitlement and that entitled feelings are often subject to the situations and conditions in which people find themselves.

Thus, entitlement as a psychological state is latent and malleable (Tomlinson, 2013). In a similar vein, Feather (2003) contends that entitlement is influenced not only by internal factors but also by external elements, such as social norms, political environment, and

situational conditions. In other words, entitlement may not be stable across situations; instead, it is activated by situational aspects and personal experiences (Fisk, 2010; Tett & Guterman, 2000). Accordingly, entitlement is a momentary feeling or a *sense* that can be influenced by contextual cues (Kivetz & Zheng, 2006).

Previous research indicates that an inflated sense of entitlement accounts for variations in dysfunctional behavior (Jordan, Ramsay, & Westerlaken, 2017). For example, Campbell, Bonacci, Shelton, Exline, and Bushman (2004) report that participants who scored high on the entitlement scale were more selfish and greedier than those who scored low on the scale. Similarly, Fisk and Neville (2011) show that entitled customers became self-centric and behaved aggressively toward service frontline employees, who, as a consequence, experienced pernicious mental issues, including stress, burnout, and feeling of depersonalization. In another example, Grandey, Dickter, and Sin (2004) report that contact-center agents experience verbal abuse by customers on a daily basis.

In this thesis, I postulate that there is a link between an inflated sense of customer entitlement and the process of customer identification. As mentioned in the previous section, customer identification is associated with service norms, service prioritization, and the actual market power of customers. These notions often resonate together and escalate the sense of entitlement. On the one hand, the service norm of prioritization usually reflects the mantra that the *customer is king or queen* (Harris & Daunt, 2013), consequently increasing the sense of self-worth (Tauber, 1972). Such inflated self-worth then promotes the feeling of deservingness of an idealized service experience and unrealistically expected treatments from service providers (Bitner et al., 1994). The more customers feel entitled, the less likely they are to reciprocate special treatments and service efforts with gratitude and the more likely they are to neutralize and normalize such treatments and efforts. In the event of service failures, which often happen when real experiences do not meet idealized expectations (Bolton & Houlihan, 2005; Colgate & Norris, 2001), people with a high sense of entitlement will react strongly and vent their negative emotions through aggression, contention, and rudeness (Twenge & Campbell, 2003). This happens because customers believe that they have the right to demand gratification from the transaction, and any deviation from their expectations is not acceptable (Huefner, Parry, Payne, & Otto, 2002).

On the other hand, the activated customer identity or customer identification can trigger associated schemas with customer market power. Being a customer is sufficiently inherent to the actual market power, as customers possess fungible resources that firms depend on to survive (Fisk & Neville, 2011; Sliter et al., 2010). Customers hold more power than firms and frontline service employees. For example, customers' complaints can affect employees' performance evaluations, commission, promotions, and job retention (Fine, Shepherd, & Josephs, 1994). Being aware of their power over service providers, customers often feel entitled (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007). This happens because power induces a feeling of superiority, and this feeling often correlates positively with a sense of entitlement (Baumeister, Bushman, & Campbell, 2000; Ben-Zur & Yagil, 2005). In summary, customer identification prompts the associated schema of the actual market power of the customer, and in turn this power leads to an inflated sense of entitlement. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

> *H1*. Customers' sense of entitlement mediates the negative impact of customer identity on customer impoliteness.

However, I do not assume that customer identification leads to impoliteness in all situations; rather, there are boundary conditions in which the effect of customer identity on impoliteness through an inflated sense of entitlement is reduced. One of these conditions is *self-control*, in which a person monitors and governs self-behaviors. Self-control refers to the ability to regulate cognition, moods, and behaviors to control temptation and pursue long-term goals (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). Customers can rely on their self-control or self-regulation to avoid overconsumption, be mindful of their choices, and interact effectively with service providers.

Human behavior is restrained by both external reinforcements and internal self-regulation (Deci & Ryan, 1987). In the consumer domain, self-control or self-regulation manifests in a person's decisions between rationality and desirability, vice and virtue, luxury and necessity, and short-term satisfaction and long-term benefits (Baumeister, 2002; Baumeister, Sparks, Stillman, & Vohs, 2008). Prior research contends that avoiding feelings of guilt and regret is the main motivation to exercise self-control (Hofmann & Fisher, 2012).

While the effect of self-control is well documented in terms of consumer choices and consumption (Gul & Pesendorfer, 2004), evidence on how self-control affects interpersonal behavior in the consumer context is still sporadic and limited. In this thesis, I argue that self-control as a personal trait negatively moderates the effect of customer identification on impoliteness. That is, while most severe dysfunctional behaviors are restrained by external reinforcements such as rules and regulations, less severe dysfunctional behaviors such as impoliteness are not constrained in the service environment. Therefore, the only force left to regulate behavior is an internal factor, such as self-control. I expect that for people who score low on the self-control scale, the inflated sense of entitlement as a consequence of an activated customer identity will lead to impoliteness, because people simply act on their momentary feeling. For those who score high on self-control, I expect that they will be less likely to let their entitlement feelings rule over how they act and behave. As self-control failure often results in conflict interpersonal relationships that, in turn, pose potential emotional and financial costs, exerting self-regulation can help people avoid such negative outcomes (Vohs & Baumeister, 2004). By contrast, self-control can help strengthen group relations. People with high self-control are more likely to modify their behaviors to gain acceptance in social group relationships. In exchange relationships, self-controlled people can have good relationships with service providers that may help them derive benefits such as special offers and treatments. Thus:

> *H2.* Self-control negatively moderates the effect of customer identity on impoliteness. When customer identity is activated, the effect of entitlement on impoliteness will be stronger (weaker) for people with lower (higher) self-control.

2.7.2 Objectification

Objectification is an instrument of subjugation in which the needs, interests, and experiences of those with less power are subordinate to those with more power, and this situation facilitates using others as a means to an end (Nussbaum, 1995). In short, a person may objectify others to attain his or her goals (Gruenfeld, Inesi, Magee, & Galinsky, 2008). Furthermore, the subjects of objectification are not exclusive, and an objectified subject can be the self, another person, or even an animal. In this thesis, I focus on a

person's tendency to objectify other people (Haslam, 2006), treating them as a *means* to an end.

According to Opotow (1990), objectification comprises several milder processes, including psychological distance (perceiving the self as distant from others), condescension (patronizing others as being inferior, irrational, and childlike), and technical orientation (a focus on means-end efficiency and mechanical routine). Infrahumanization theory also suggests that objectification does not necessarily take extreme forms but can reflect milder everyday interactional behaviors (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014).

In the exchange context, objectification may reflect the process of instrumental segmentation, espousing a view that depersonalizes a service employee as a tool to serve specific goals of buyers (Henkel, Boegershausen, Hoegg, Aquino, & Lemmink, 2018). Specifically, previous research argues that people become objectification subjects when they are treated and valued according to their utility, disregarding human being values such as competence, warmth, feelings, and independence (Rudman & Mescher, 2012). In the service context, departmentalizing service employees by their service functions (Mok, Sparks, & Kadampully, 2013) may contribute to the process by which customers perceive and treat service providers as utilized objects.

In recent years, consumer research has contributed greatly to the understanding of self-objectification, but only a few studies have examined the effect of objectification of others in the service context (e.g., Henkel et al., 2018). Given the relevance of objectification in the exchange relationship, in this thesis I aim to explore customer identity as a potential antecedent of the customer tendency to objectify service employees. In short, I argue that customer identity can cause an objectification tendency toward service providers.

First, I argue that at the moment the desire for goal attainment becomes a core tenet in their minds, customers consider hardly anything else beyond their self-interests. In this circumstance, objectification occurs, causing them to ignore the personhood of others and focus on their instrumental values (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). Second, I contend that the objectification process happens automatically. That is, a person with a salient customer identity may automatically focus on self-goals and self-interest, leaving little

cognitive resource available to recognize others as equal human beings. Third, a customer-centric service environment often prioritizes customers (Homburg, Droll, & Totzek, 2008), which tends to personalize the customer experience and depersonalize service employees, emphasizing their interchangeability (Korczynski, 2009). Thus, customers may deem it acceptable to use others as a means to achieve their gratifications or needs. Thus, I propose the following:

H3. The activation of customer identity increases objectification orientation.

2.7.3 Forgiveness and empathy

The rudimentary concept of forgiveness is the idea that the offended person will not retaliate against the offender (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). The offended person will likely forgive if he or she does not tend to think, feel, or behave negatively against the offender. *Forgiveness* is an important personality disposition of human beings, as it contributes to a harmonious state of society and promotes social solidarity by avoiding a cyclical nature of vengeance and retribution (Hook, Worthington, & Utsey, 2009; Karremans et al., 2011). Human beings often make mistakes and fail each other (Wainryb, Recchia, Faulconbridge, & Pasupathi, 2020). If they never forgive and always seek revenge on each other's mistakes, society will likely fall apart, and there would be no cooperation. The act of forgiving benefits not only the forgiven person but also the one who forgives (Strelan, McKee, Calic, Cook, & Shaw, 2013). Previous research shows that the more people forgive, the less they experience negative emotions such as depression, anxiety, and hostility (Kaplan, 1992; Worthington, Witvliet, Pietrini, & Miller, 2007). In the service context, customer forgiveness and empathy play a vital role in maintaining the firm–customer relationship, which is crucial for firm success (Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009).

In the literature, to some extent, researchers have found that both personal factors and situational contexts account for the tendency to forgive (Thompson et al., 2005). In terms of personality, forgiveness correlates negatively with neuroticism but positively with agreeableness (Brose, Rye, Lutz-Zois, & Ross, 2005). By contrast, among individual personality traits, *empathy* connects positively with forgiveness (Macaskill, Maltby, & Day, 2002). To be empathetic is to look at the incident from the perspective of others and

to feel concerned about and understand others' situations (Davis, 2006; Jiao & Wang, 2018).

In the consumer context, empathy enables consumers to understand the situation service providers are in and to attribute service failure to situational factors that go beyond what service providers can handle (Wieseke, Geigenmüller, & Kraus, 2012). More empathetic consumers will tend not only to adjust their assessment of the service failure (i.e., attribute the failure more to the situation than to the service provider) but also to project the feelings of the service providers (i.e., imagine themselves in the role of service employees and acknowledge that they may feel stress, burnout, and sad). As people empathize more with others, they will be more forgiving of others' mistakes (McCullough & Witvliet, 2002). Therefore, a higher level of empathy should correlate highly with a forgiveness tendency and vice versa (McCullough, 2000).

In addition to personality dispositions, situations have an impact on forgiveness. For example, couples who are highly committed to their relationship tend to forgive their partners more (Fincham, Paleari, & Regalia, 2002). In another study, Fehr, Gelfand, and Nag (2010) found that people may forgive less if the situation leads them to believe that the offending action is intended, severe, or personal. In the service context, several studies have attempted to decode the causes of customer forgiveness (e.g., Tsarenko, Strizhakova, & Otnes, 2019). Most interventions to customer forgiveness require the active role of frontline employees (Wei, Liu, & Keh, 2020). For example, an apology can boost forgiveness from customers, and firms often encourage service employees to seek customer forgiveness (Joireman, Grégoire, Devezer, & Tripp, 2013). Such an increase in employee empathy could also lead to an increase in customer empathy (Wieseke et al., 2012).

In this thesis, I posit that the salience of customer identity can have a negative impact on forgiveness and empathy. As argued previously, activation of customer identity often comes with an inflated and unrealistic expectation. On the one hand, such high and unrealistic expectations can intensify the severity of the service failure. According to Tsarenko and Tojib (2012), the intention of the offender and the severity of an offending act directly influence forgiveness. In terms of severity, people may forgive less if the incident is more severe (Pronk, Karremans, Overbeek, Vermulst, & Wigboldus, 2010).

In the service context, the severity of a service failure is the psychological outcome of the discrepancy between reality and expectation (Grégoire et al., 2010; Sarkar, Sarkar, & Sreejesh, 2021). Thus, those with an activated customer identity are likely to have higher service expectations than those without an activated customer identity. Conversely, those with an activated customer identity may have a lower perception of service quality than those without an activated customer identity. In both cases, people with a salient customer identity will be less likely to forgive service failure than those whose customer identity is not activated.

On the other hand, the unrealistic expectations caused by customer identification will contribute to the tendency to attribute failures exclusively to service employees (Folkes & Kotsos, 1986) if they fail to deliver what they implicitly promise. In addition, an inflated sense of self-caused by customer identification may intensify customers' negative emotions under service failures, leaving less room for an empathetic view on such failures. Therefore, when customer identity becomes salient, a person may have less of a tendency to empathize and to forgive service failures. Thus:

> *H4.* The activation of customer identity leads to a decrease in forgiveness and empathy.

Furthermore, I postulate that the discrepancy between objective social status and subjective social status moderates the effect of customer identity on forgiveness and empathy. Social status, in general, can be distinguished by a subjective social status or an objective social status (Jackman & Jackman, 1973). Subjective social status refers to what a person perceives about him- or herself compared with others or his or her perception of his or her own position in the status hierarchy. By contrast, objective social status refers to the real state of socioeconomic status, such as income, education, and occupation. In this thesis, I argue that people's social status has several implications for their interactional behaviors toward service employees, as it not only defines (1) how they expect to be treated but also (2) how others may treat them. For customers who experience service failures, I expect those with a high score on subjective social status to forgive and empathize less if their customer identity becomes activated.

First, people with high subjective social status may perceive themselves as having a superior social status when they interact with service providers, creating a psychological distance to service providers who are often considered lower in the social hierarchy (Yagil, 2008; Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2019). Given the gap in psychological distance induced by class differences, customers may feel dissimilar and become less empathetic toward service providers (Liberman, Trope, & Stephan, 2007). In turn, customers with less empathy become less forgiving. Second, people with a higher subjective social status may expect more from others than people with a lower subjective social status, signaling their privilege status and its inherent deservingness (Côté et al., 2021; Piff, 2014). Such high expectations induced by subjective social status resonate with an inflated expectation induced by customer identity, thereby intensifying the reduction of empathy and forgiveness tendency.

By contrast, a low level of subjective social status will reduce the effect of customer identity, as people will expect less in response to their perceived social status. People with low subjective social status are also more likely to take the perspective of service providers and subsequently become more tolerant of service failures (Galinsky, Ku, & Wang, 2005; Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; Israelashvili, Sauter, & Fischer, 2020). However, are the poor always more empathetic and forgiving than the rich? Are there any situations in which the effect would be reversed?

To answer these questions, I include objective social status (income) as another predicting factor and argue that the interaction between subjective and objective social status may help account for the potential countering effect. I postulate that the direct effect of objective social status on forgiveness and empathy will be less than the effect of subjective social status because what they perceive has a greater influence on people's attitudes and behaviors than the objective view of reality itself (Burton, Sheather, & Roberts, 2003; Clarkson, Hirt, Jia, & Alexander, 2010). However, I anticipate the interaction effect of these two types of social status on forgiveness and empathy for two reasons. First, the interaction between subject and objective social status may result in psychological dissonance, which is the cause of negative emotions such as depression, sadness, and sorrow (Cooper, 2007). Then, when people experience negative emotions, they often find ways to reduce their negative emotions (Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008). To

some people, exerting power can help them regain their confidence or their sense of control (Crocker, Thompson, McGraw, & Ingerman, 1987; Harris & Reynolds, 2004). The service environment, as argued, may encourage the exercise of customer power. In general, not all customers wish to punish others or exert power over others to feel good, as most are often concerned about the feelings of their interaction partners (Piliavin & Charng, 1990). However, in the exchange context, I argue that people become less concerned about others and more attentive to self-emotions. Consequently, they may disregard the negative outcomes of their behavior on others and focus instead on the positive outcomes on their emotions.

Second, I posit that, when customer identity is salient, a person becomes more self-centered. As argued previously, customers will become less empathetic and forgiving of employees during service failures. In addition, the psychological dissonance caused by the discrepancy between subjective and objective social status will intensify the experience of negative emotions, which demand more self-attention. Such a dual effect will strengthen the negative impact of customer identity on empathy and forgiveness. As consumers become more self-centered, they may not worry much about the consequences of their actions on others but care more about the benefits of these actions for their own feelings and interests. Thus, I hypothesize the following:

> *H5a.* Customers with higher (lower) subjective social status will be less likely to forgive and empathize with employees during service failures.

> *H5b.* Customers with low (high) objective social status but high (low) subjective social status will be less likely to forgive and empathize with employees when their customer identity is activated.

2.7.4 Self- versus other focus

The focus on the self versus others often hinges on both personality and situations (DeMarree & Loersch, 2009). In terms of personality, individuals who score high on communal orientation are more likely to pay attention to and respond to the psychological states of others (other-focus orientation) than those who have weaker communal orientation. They are also more likely to include others in a representation of the self

(Abele & Wojciszke, 2014). In terms of situations, the contexts in which people perceive variance in their sense of power can influence their self- versus other focus. For example, when power is imbalanced, the party with a higher sense of power often pays less attention to the party with lower power status (Dubois, Rucker, & Galinsky, 2015). As a concrete example, relationship partners with a higher power status are less likely to take the perspective of partners with a lower power status and to put less effort into maintaining relationships (Polman, 2012).

In terms of interpersonal behavior, the shift of focus from the self to the other also has multiple psychological and behavioral implications. In one instance, researchers found that participants in the other-focus condition perceived more responsibility than those in the self-focus condition (Scholl, Sassenberg, Scheepers, Ellemers, & de Wit, 2017). Beyond responsibility, people are more likely to perceive similarities to others if their focus is on others and vice versa (Pahl & Eiser, 2006). One account for this effect is that the self-focus orientation draws people's attention to their unique features while the other-focus orientation draws their attention to commonly shared features (Carver & Scheier, 2012). These findings might well extend to service contexts for three reasons.

First, a person takes a customer role to seek gratification and satisfy self needs (Tauber, 1972). Therefore, customer identity is presumably associated with both self-prioritization and self-goal pursuit, leading to an elevated state of self-attention (Sedikides et al., 2007). Second, according to interdependence theory, the party with the higher power will be less interested in the concerns of the party with lower power (Van Lange & Balliet, 2015). In the customer–service employee relationship, as argued previously, customers often hold more power than service providers. Therefore, they will be less likely to focus on or include others in their self-concept. Third, a widespread norm is that customers should be treated like kings and queens (Gettman & Gelfand, 2007), leading to unrealistic expectations of the service experience that service employees often fail to meet. Consequently, this exaggerates the agency components of customer identity, assuming that satisfying customer needs is the main goal of all involved parties in the transaction.

It is also important to note that while some properties of the self- versus other-focus concept may overlap with the perspective-taking concept, these two concepts can be differentiated by the extent of cognitive effort (Galinsky et al., 2005). In this research, I

argue that perspective-taking requires more cognitive effort than the self- versus other focus. Perspective-taking means that a person not only pays attention to but also reflects on and uses the information perceived. For the process of self- versus other focus, the precondition of attention is sufficient. People do not always need to be aware of their attention direction, and the attention to the self and others can be triggered automatically under the right conditions (Carretié, Hinojosa, Martín‑Loeches, Mercado, & Tapia, 2004). Therefore, I argue that one of the triggering conditions for the self- versus other focus is the activation of customer identity. I hypothesize that a salient status of customer identity prompts a person to be more self-focused and become less other-focused. Thus:

H6. Customer identity decreases (increases) other(self) -focus.

3 Empirical Studies

In this chapter, I attempt to answer the three research questions mentioned previously by testing the proposed hypotheses (see Table 1 for a summary).

Study	Hypotheses testing
1	*H1*. Customers' sense of entitlement mediates the negative impact of customer identity on customer impoliteness. *H2*. Self-control negatively moderates the effect of customer identity on impoliteness via entitlement. When customer identity is activated, the effect of entitlement on impoliteness will be stronger (weaker) for people with lower (higher) self-control.
2	*H3*. The activation of customer identity increases objectification orientation.
3	*H4*. The activation of customer identity leads to a decrease in forgiveness and empathy. *H5a*. Customers with higher (vs. lower) subjective social status will be less likely to forgive and empathize with employees during service failures. *H5b*. Customers with low (high) objective social status but high (low) subjective social status will be less likely to forgive and empathize with employees when their customer identity is activated.
4	*H6*. Customer identity decreases (increases) other (self-) focus.
5	Replicate Study 1 by measuring impoliteness implicitly Replicate Study 4 by measuring other (self-) focus implicitly

Table 1 Summary of hypotheses

In Study 1 and Study 5, I examine the effect of an activated customer identity on impoliteness. The main difference between the two studies is their purposes. In Study 1,

I develop a procedure to prime customer identity. Moreover, I test whether an inflated sense of entitlement can mediate the effect of the activated customer identity on impoliteness. However, I rely on participants' self-reports of their own impolite behaviors. Thus, potential social desirability bias might influence the study's results. To address the potential social desirability concern, in Study 5, I employ an indirect measure to capture impoliteness. Specifically, using a machine learning approach, I analyze participants' responses to compute a politeness score across identity priming conditions.

In Study 2, Study 3, and Study 4, I aim to empirically test the psychological processes behind an activated customer identity. These studies are theoretically related to Study 1. In particular, I propose three main psychological effects of customer identification: objectification, forgiveness and empathy, and self- versus other focus.

In Study 2, I examine the effect of customer identity on the tendency to objectify service providers. I argue that objectification's tendency as an outcome of an activated customer identity can account for the reason customers misbehave. When people with an activated customer identity objectify service providers, they do not consider the consequences of their impoliteness on service providers' feelings. For example, diners often pay little attention (e.g., do not look at the service provider when saying thank you) to service employees. As another example, it is common for riders to use their phone without issuing an apology or excuse to taxi drivers, but the same action would be deemed rude if it happened with friends or colleagues.

In Study 3, I explore another possible reason customers become impolite. Most people do not like to experience service failures, but the degree to which they react to a service failure might vary. In Study 3, I examine whether customer identity has a negative impact on customer forgiveness and empathy when a service failure happens. In this study, I also take into account the influence of a person's social status, as I argue that people with different social statuses (both subjective and objective social status) will perceive service failure differently.

Finally, in Study 4, I test another reason customers misbehave: the lack of other focus. Customers might act impolitely because they are not concerned about service providers and do not include others in the representation of the self. In this study, I investigate the

extent to which people with activated customer identity tend to focus on the self versus others. I use first-person pronoun choices as the implicit measure of self- versus other focus to avoid potential social desirability bias. Table 2 provides a summary of the studies.

Study Type	Priming	DV	N	Purposes and Hypothesis testing
Online Survey	No Priming	Dysfunctional behaviors that participants observe	120	Survey to develop behavioral scenarios
Scenario Validation	No Priming	Politeness Judgement (6 dimensions) on 10 hypothesized scenarios	91	Validate scenarios
Pre-test	Identity priming through Word Picture Matching (WPM) task	Manipulation check via Self Other Overlapping (profiles of Identities)	241	Pre-test with manipulation check
Study 1	WPM task	behavioral scenarios	239	Capture the effect of Customer Identity on impoliteness thru mediation and moderation effects Test H1 and H2
Pre-test	No Priming	Implicit Association Test (IAT) Objectification btw nonservice staff and service staff	90	Validate the measure of objectification via IAT
Study 2	WPM task	IAT	249	Capture the effect of Customer Identity on objectification Test H3
Study 3	Thinking and reflection of target role(s)	Shopping scenario Demand compensation Empathy Forgiveness	177	Control for confounding effect Capture the interaction effect btw identity and social status Test H4 and H5
Study 4	Writing task: reflection of target identity	Self Other focus (choices of pronouns)	250	Indirect measure of self-other focus Test H6
Study 5	Writing task: Supporting Argument for target identity	Politeness via text analysis	126	Indirect measure of politeness Replicate H1, H6

Table 2 Summary of studies

3.1 Study 1: Customer identity and impoliteness: The mediation effect of entitlement

3.1.1 Goals and purposes

In Study 1, I tested the first three hypotheses presented in the theoretical framework. Specifically, I predicted that (1) customer identity, when activated, would increase the likelihood of customer impoliteness; (2) an inflated sense of entitlement would mediate the effect of customer identity on customer impoliteness; and (3) self-control would moderate the effect of entitlement on customer impoliteness. I also conducted two pretests to develop the behavioral scenarios that measure impoliteness (Pretest 1) and the identity priming procedure (Pretest 2).

3.1.2 Pretest 1

Study design. In Pretest 1, I developed and tested whether the consumption scenarios captured impoliteness, as predicted. I conceived 10 consumption scenarios plus 2 baseline scenarios. These consumption scenarios manifested in three consumption stages: pre-consumption (3 scenarios), during consumption (5 scenarios), and post-consumption (2 scenarios). The baseline scenarios include one scenario manifesting an unrealistic scenario (spontaneous donation) and another scenario including no impolite behaviors (normal visit to a coffee shop). I employed a single-factor between-subjects design with two levels (male character name vs. female character name). This design accounted for the potential gender bias that the character's gender influences participants' judgment of the character's behaviors.

Procedures and measurements. I recruited 120 online Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) participants. More than half the participants were men (51.7%), and the majority (73.3%) had at least a college degree. Among all the participants, 63 (52.5%) were between the ages of 30 and 50 years.

I instructed participants to read the scenarios and then rate the behaviors of the character by responding to six items about impoliteness, deceit, aggression, hostility, selfishness, and dishonesty. All scales were 7-point Likert scales (1 = "strongly disagree," 7 =

"strongly agree"). The different dependent variables captured different dimensions of interpersonal misbehaviors (Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001).

Scenario selection. The analysis of variance (ANOVA) revealed that there was no main effect of the characters' gender on participants' judgment ($p > .05$). When both genders in the scenarios and the participants' gender were included in the analysis, gender had a non-significant effect on participants' judgment ($p > .05$). These results suggest that both the gender of participants and the gender of the characters did not influence participants' judgment of the characters' behaviors in the scenarios.

I selected three scenarios with the highest average rating on impoliteness and customer dysfunctional behaviors to use for the first experiment ($M_{customer\ dysfunctional\ behaviors} > 3.4$; $M_{impoliteness} > 4$; see Appendix B for details). For the composite score of customer dysfunctional behaviors and perceived politeness, multiple pairwise t-tests showed that the differences between the baseline scenario and each of the three selected scenarios were statistically significant ($p < .05$). Given these results, I selected the following three scenarios for the main experiment:

Selected scenario 1_restaurant

"Susan/Mark is in a busy restaurant. The service employee seems very occupied. When Susan/Mark is about to make an order, the service employee asks if he can come back later. However, Susan/Mark still insists on ordering now."

Selected scenario 2_airport

"Laura/Jack is waiting to board at the airport. She/he has plenty of time before departure, so she/he goes to buy coffee. She/he has been standing in the line for 10 minutes when another customer walks toward Laura/Jack and asks if he can get ahead in line so he can catch his flight. Laura/Jack does not let this customer go ahead in the queue."

Selected scenario 3_customer service hotline

"Emma/William bought an expensive software package at a store. There is one minor issue with the software program. Emma/William calls the customer service

hotline, and the operator says that the person with the most expertise in this relevant issue is currently very busy and asks for Emma's/William's patience until the next day when the expert would have more time. Emma/William insists on the operator finding the expert to solve the issue."

Baseline scenario_at the café

"It is a sunny day. Mike goes to a café, where he orders his coffee. He stays in the café for one hour, then leaves."

Baseline scenario_donation

"Sophia is a student. She goes to the library to search for a particular book. She is unable to locate the book herself. The librarian helps her find the book. Sophia is so happy with the librarian's help that she donates 100,000 USD to the library."

3.1.3 Pretest 2

Study design. In Pretest 2, I created and validated the identity priming procedure. I employed a single-factor, three-level (customer vs. guest vs. control condition) between-subjects design. In addition, I developed two profiles: customer profile and guest profile (see Appendix B for details). Then, I used these profiles to measure customer identification and guest identification, adopting a measure of social identity from Bagozzi and Lee (2002). These measurements also serve as manipulation checks for the identity priming conditions.

Procedures and measurements. I recruited 241 MTurk participants. More than half the participants were women (61.4%), and the majority (73.9%) had at least a college degree. Among all participants, 133 (55.2%) were between the ages of 30 and 50 years.

In all three conditions, participants saw the same set of pictures (see Figure 2 for an example); the differences in the three conditions were the key (cued) words and the task instructions. In the customer condition ($n = 79$), the keyword was "customer," and participants were asked to select pictures that were most relevant to that word. In the guest condition ($n = 79$), the keyword was "guest," and in the control condition, it was "nature"

(n = 83). After participants completed the task, they saw the correct set of pictures to reinforce the identity with which I aimed to prime participants.
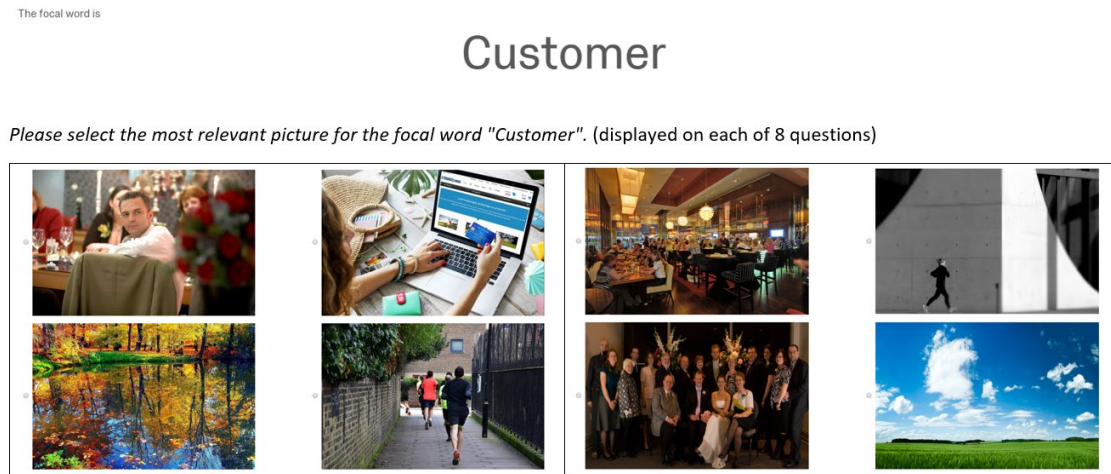
Figure 2 Examples of the images used in the priming task

Next, I asked participants to imagine that they were customers in the customer condition and to imagine that they were guests in the guest condition. In the control condition, I asked participants to imagine that they were in nature (without any specific role). Later, all participants completed a manipulation check in which they rated the extent to which they believed the customer profile and the guest profile matched their identity. Afterward, participants rated the extent to which profile X and profile Y related to the "customer identity" and "guest identity" (see Appendix B for details and Figure 3 for procedure).
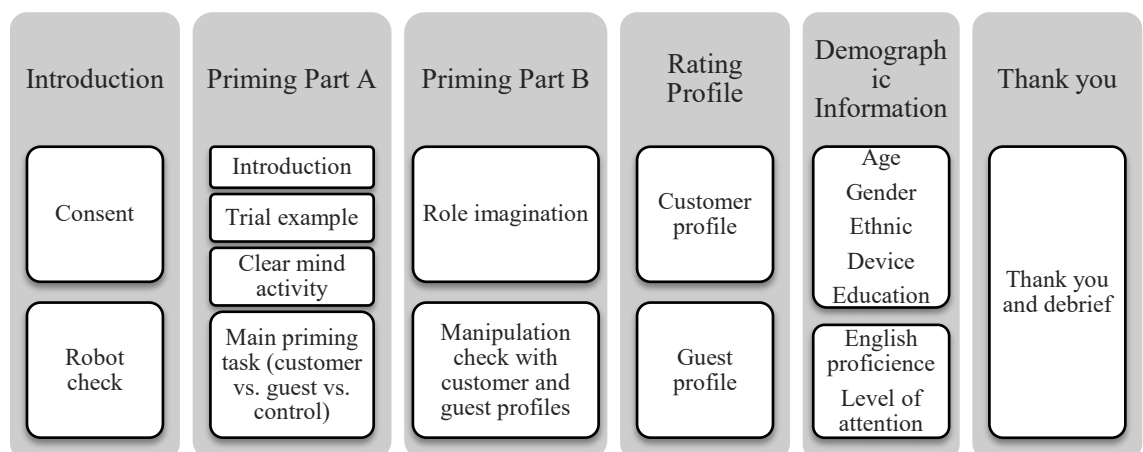
Figure 3 Pretest 2 procedure

Results. The results suggest that participants in the customer identity condition felt that the customer profile matched their current identity better ($M = 5.18$, $SD = 1.36$) than those in the guest condition ($M = 4.24$, $SD = 1.39$) and those in the control condition ($M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.81$). The difference among the three conditions was statistically significant ($F(2, 238) = 12.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .095$). The post hoc Tukey test also confirmed the statistical difference between the customer condition and the other two conditions ($p < .001$). Moreover, the results indicated that participants in the guest condition felt that the guest profile matched their identity better ($M = 4.87$, $SD = 1.57$) than those in the customer condition ($M = 3.89$, $SD = 1.75$) and those in the control condition ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.53$). The difference among the three conditions was statistically significant ($F(2, 238) = 10.79$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .083$). The post hoc Tukey test also confirmed the statistical difference between the guest condition and the other two conditions ($p < .001$).

3.1.4 Main experiment

Procedures and measures. For Study 1, I recruited 240 MTurk participants but excluded 1 participant who failed the attention check. More than half the participants were women (53.6%), and the majority (71.6%) had at least a college degree. Among all participants, 188 (78.7%) were Caucasian. Most of the participants (N = 231) used English as a communication language at home, and 99% were English native speakers. In addition, more than 98% of participants reported that they were either "very attentive" or "attentive" during the experiment. Finally, 139 participants (58.2%) were between the ages of 30 and 50 years.

In the first part of the study, participants engaged in the priming task, as mentioned in Pretest 2. First, participants went through the word matching task, in which all participants saw the same set of pictures. Participants in the customer condition were asked to select pictures that were most relevant to the word "customer." In the guest condition, the keyword was "guest," and it was "nature" in the control condition. Second, participants in the customer condition were asked to imagine that they were customers, and those in the guest condition were asked to imagine that they were guests. In the control condition, participants were asked to imagine that they were in nature (without any specific role).

In the second part, participants responded to the three scenarios of Pretest 1 and reported how likely they were to take the hypothesized actions. I used the same measure as in Pretest 2 for the manipulation check. Afterward, participants reported their psychological states, including the sense of entitlement and self-control (see Appendix B for details).

Entitlement. The extent to which people believe that they deserve special treatment was measured with a nine-item 7-point scale (1 = "not at all," 7 = "very much"; α = .87). Sample items were "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others." "I demand the best because I'm worth it," and "I feel more entitled to more of everything." This measurement was an adopted measure of entitlement from Campbell et al. (2004).

Self-control. The extent to which a person regulates behaviors was measured with a 13-item 7-point scale (1 = "not at all," 7 = "very much"; α = .90). Sample items were "I am good at resisting temptation," "I say inappropriate things," and "Sometimes I cannot stop myself from doing something even if I know it is wrong." I adopted the measure of self-control from Tangney, Baumeister, and Boone (2004).

Customer impoliteness. The likelihood that participants behave impolitely was initially measured by three hypothesized consumption scenarios. Factor analysis with principal component analysis suggested one subscale component for customer impoliteness measured by one item in the customer care service scenario ("How likely is it that you would insist on finding the in-charge person to solve your issue now?) and one item in the restaurant scenario ("How likely is it that you would insist that the service employee take your order now?") (0 to 100%; α = .66). The composite likelihood of impoliteness was an average between the likelihood of these two scenarios (%). Finally, participants provided some demographic information before they were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

3.1.5 Results

Manipulation check. The manipulation check was the extent to which participants believe their self matches the customer or guest profile. The results show that participants in the customer identity condition felt more connected with the customer profile (*M* = 5.38, *SD* = 1.18, *n* = 79) than those in the guest condition (*M* = 4.37, *SD* = 1.26, *n* = 82) and those in the control condition (*M* = 3.67, *SD* = 1.54, *n* = 78). The difference among the three

groups was statistically significant ($F(2, 236) = 32.69$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .217$). The post hoc Tukey test also showed the statistical difference between the customer condition and the other two conditions ($p < .001$). In addition, participants in the guest condition felt more connected with the guest profile ($M = 5.12$, $SD = 1.62$) than those in the customer condition ($M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.81$) and those in the control condition ($M = 3.82$, $SD = 1.72$). The difference among the three groups was statistically significant ($F(2, 236) = 12.63$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .097$). The post hoc Tukey test also indicated a statistical difference between the guest condition and the other two conditions ($p < .01$).

Effect of customer identity on entitlement. The ANOVA results indicated that customer identity (vs. control) led to an increase in the feeling of entitlement. Participants in the customer identity condition reported higher scores on entitlement ($M = 3.73$, $SD = 1.47$) than those in the guest condition ($M = 3.48$, $SD = 1.42$) and those in the control condition ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.39$; see Figure 4). The difference among conditions was statistically significant ($F(2, 236) = 4.28$, $p = .015$, $\eta^2 = .035$). The post hoc test showed that while the difference between the customer condition and control condition was statistically significant ($p = .004$), the difference between the guest condition and the control condition was not statistically significant ($p = .06$). These results suggest that customer identity (vs. the control condition) increases entitlement.
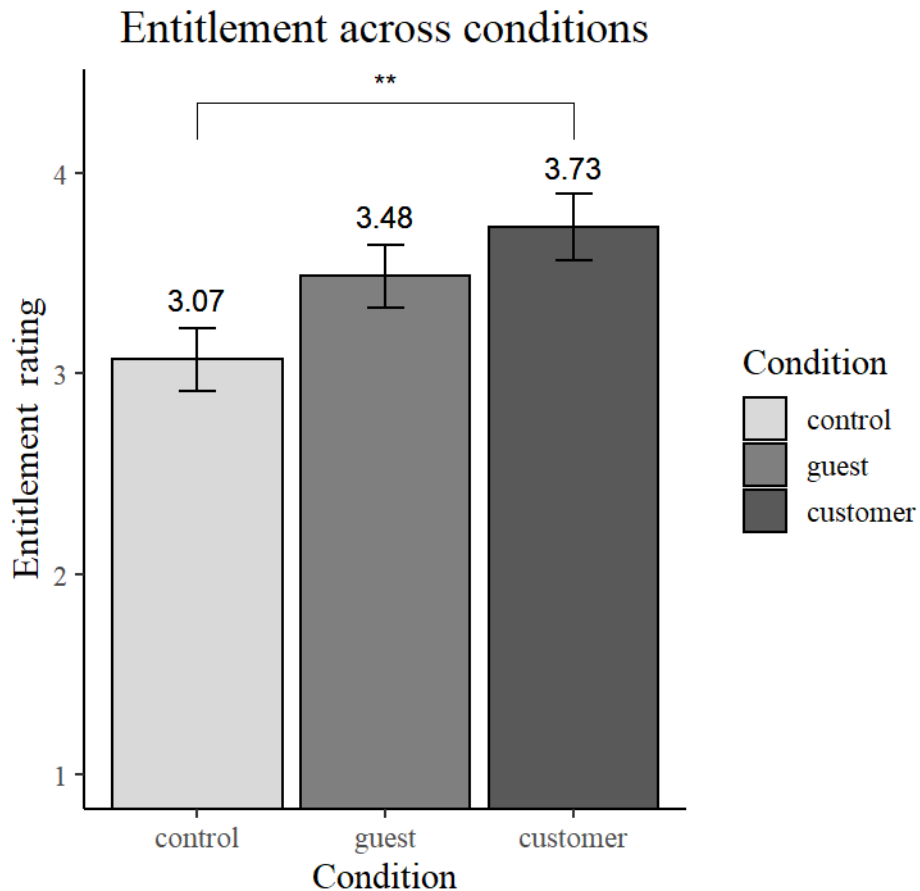
Figure 4 Reported average rating on entitlement. *Note.* Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*p < .05, **p < .01)

Mediation analysis. To test the effect of customer identification on impoliteness through entitlement, I used PROCESS 3.5.3 with the input model 4 developed by Hayes (2021) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval (CI). I recorded identity conditions into a set of dummy variables. In the analysis model, I controlled for factors such as self-control, age, gender, and education.

The indirect effect of customer identification through mediation was significant when I compared the customer identity condition with the control condition (95% CI [1.7153, 10.3294]). However, there was no indirect effect of entitlement when I compared the guest condition with the control condition (95% CI [−.6204, 7.4415]). These results are in line with the expectations.

As Figure 5 shows, the results indicate a main effect of customer identity on entitlement (β = 0.61, t = 2.81, p = .005) and a main effect of entitlement on the likelihood of being

impolite (β = 9.59, t = 8.92, p < .001). The indirect effect (customer identification $\rightarrow$ entitlement $\rightarrow$ impoliteness) was statistically significant (β = 5.89, 95% CI [1.7153, 10.3294]). However, the direct effect (customer identification $\rightarrow$ impoliteness) was not significant (β = −3.03, 95% CI [−10.2079, 4.1505]). Even so, the hypothesis of a mediation effect of entitlement (H1) still gained statistical support as an indirect-only mediation (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010).
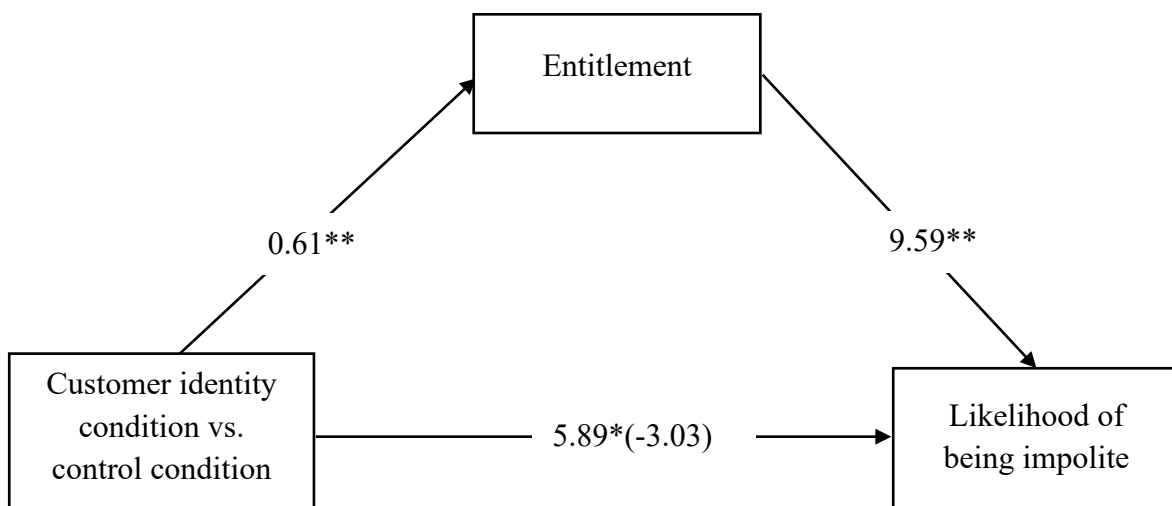
Figure 5 Mediation effect of entitlement. *Note.* I controlled for variables such as self-control, gender, age, and education. Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*p < .05, **p < .01)

Moderation effect of self-control. To test whether self-control negatively moderates the effect of entitlement on impoliteness, I used PROCESS 3.5.3 with the input model 14 developed by Hayes (2021) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% CI. The results show a conditional indirect effect of customer identity (0 = control, 1 = customer identity) on the likelihood of being impolite through entitlement but not an effect of guest identity (0 = control, 1 = guest identity). The indirect effect of customer identity through entitlement was significant (β = 5.57, *SE* = 2.18, 95% CI = [1.59, 10.02]). In addition, there was a significant, negative interaction effect of self-control and sense of entitlement on the likelihood of being impolite (β = −1.11, *SE* = 0.64, 95% CI = [−2.69, −0.08]), indicating that self-control negatively moderated the effect of entitlement on impoliteness. This finding provides support for H2 that self-control negatively moderates the effect of entitlement on customer impoliteness. Self-control also had a negative direct

effect on entitlement ($\beta = -.27$, *SE* $= 0.12$, 95% CI $= [-.51, -0.03]$). This suggests that people with a high level of self-control felt less entitled than those with a low level of self-control. However, the direct effect of customer identity on impoliteness was not significant ($\beta = -3.83$, $p > .05$; see Figure 6).
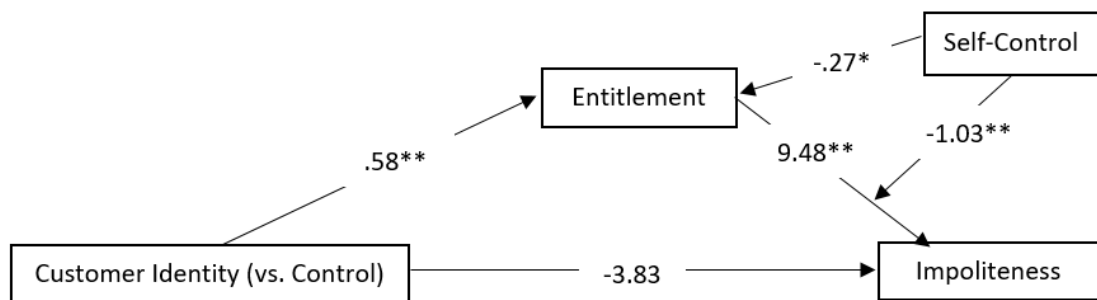
Figure 6 The effect of customer identity on impoliteness through entitlement, moderated by self-control. *Note.* I controlled for variables such as gender, age, and education. Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$)

3.1.6 Discussion

Study 1 aimed to determine whether the activation of customer identity increases the likelihood of being impolite and whether this effect is mediated by the inflated sense of entitlement caused by the salience of customer identity. The results show that customer identity increases customer impoliteness through entitlement. In addition, I performed an auxiliary analysis that included customer identification (the manipulation check of customer identity) as a proxy of customer identity. The results from this auxiliary analysis showed a negative direct effect of customer identification on impoliteness, meaning that the more participants identified themselves as a customer, the more likely they were to behave impolitely toward service employees (see Appendix B for details).

Furthermore, self-control both interacted with and reduced the sense of entitlement, producing a negative impact on impoliteness. This finding suggests that the negative effect of customer identification is limited to people with low self-control. This result may also extend to circumstances in which a person's self-control becomes low because of a high mental load or an increase in arousal. However, as self-control was measured but not manipulated, this may raise concerns that (1) self-control and sense of entitlement may have a correlational relationship but not a causal relationship, and (2) if they have a

causal relationship, the direction would not be obvious. To address that issue, I reviewed the effect of the priming conditions on both entitlement and self-control. While the priming conditions had a direct impact on entitlement, these conditions did not influence self-control. This finding shows that Study 1 indeed measured self-control as a trait and a sense of entitlement as a state. Therefore, it could be that self-control as a trait reduces the sense of entitlement but not the other way around. Nevertheless, this merits further research that manipulates self-control and examines its moderation effect on the relationship between entitlement and impoliteness.

In summary, Study 1 shows that customer identity increases impoliteness toward service providers. One explanation of the findings is that the activation of customer identity results in a heightened sense of entitlement, which in turn increases the likelihood of being impolite. However, entitlement may not be the only outcome of an activated customer identity; there could be other reasons customers are rude to service providers. For example, people may be impolite if they tend to objectify service providers, treating them as a means to an end. In addition, people can be rude if they are frustrated with the service providers and thus become less tolerant of others' mistakes. Finally, if people do not have an other-focus orientation during the interpersonal contact with service providers, they may not pay equal respect to service providers as to their fellow friends or colleagues. In Studies 2, 3, and 4, I aimed to test the effect of customer identity on psychological states such as objectification, forgiveness and empathy, and self- versus other focus.

3.2 Study 2: All are not equal in the eyes of customers

3.2.1 Goals and purposes

People can be impolite if they do not believe others deserve polite treatment or they fail to recognize others' values beyond instrumental values to their goals and interests. In Study 2, I examined whether the activation of customer identity can influence the objectification tendency toward service employees. I proposed that people with an active customer identity would be more likely to view others as instruments to achieve their goals than those whose customer identity is not activated. In particular, I hypothesized that the activation of customer identity would increase objectification orientation (H3).

In Study 2, to avoid possible demand effects, I used the IAT to measure objectification. In short, the IAT is a computerized task in which participants classify stimuli words into four different categories. IAT is known to measure indirect biases toward different groups, characters, or objects (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995; Oswald, Mitchell, Blanton, Jaccard, & Tetlock, 2013) and is a recommended method to examine socially sensitive topics when the self-report measure is not likely to be highly reliable. "IAT measures had greater predictive validity than did self-report measures for criterion measures involving interracial behavior and other intergroup behavior" (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, & Banaji, 2009, p. 28). Before conducting the main study, I ran a pretest to select the traits and identity categories for use in the main test. In the main study, I primed identities using the same method as in Study 1.

3.2.2 Pretest 3

In Pretest 3, I explored people's objectification tendency toward different types of service staff: direct service staff who often deliver service through interactions with customers and non-direct service staff who deliver service without much interaction with customers. For example, direct service staff who have frequent interaction with customers are barbers, waitstaff, bank tellers, receptionists, and shop attendants, while non-direct service staff who do not necessarily interact with customers to deliver services include plumbers, farmers, painters, carpenters, and janitors. Pretest 3 served as a baseline to examine whether, in general, people have any tendency to objectify service providers.

This test also helped estimate the reaction times, select traits, and identity categories I used in the main test.

Study design. In the pretest, using the IATgen app (Carpenter et al., 2019), I developed an IAT that features (1) the two categories of direct service staff (labeled service staff) and non-direct service staff (labeled non-service staff) and (2) human traits (i.e., creative, sensible, and knowledgeable) versus object traits (i.e., instrumental, fungible, and violable). I adopted these traits from Henkel et al. (2018). All details are available in Appendix C.

Procedures and measurements. I recruited 89 MTurk participants. I presented this study as "a keyboard game" to examine how fast participants could correctly match the displayed words on the screen with the general categories of these words. All participants went through seven stages of the experiments, as described in Table 3 (see Appendix C for detailed descriptions of the stages). To control for ordering effect, I counter-balanced the setup of IAT in stage 1 and stage 2. Participants were randomly assigned to the IAT tasks following the matrix: two concept categories of the service staff categories (non-service staff vs. service staff) × types of traits (human traits vs. object traits).

Stage	Left Assignment	Right Assignment	No. of trials	Note
1	Non-service Staff	Service Staff	30	Target
2	Human Trait	Object Trait	32	Attribute
3	Non-service Staff Human Trait	Service Staff Object Trait	32	Combination Practice
4	Non-service Staff Human Trait	Service Staff Object Trait	48	Combination Critical
5	Service Staff	Non-service Staff	30	Target swap
6	Service Staff Human Trait	Non-Service Staff Object Trait	32	Combination Practice
7	Service Staff Human Trait	Non-Service Staff Object Trait	48	Combination Critical

Table 3 Seven stages of the IAT test. *Note.* Target is the identity that belongs to either the non-service staff category or the service staff category. The attribute is the trait that belongs to either the list of human traits or the list of object traits.

After giving their consent, all participants saw a brief description of the two concept categories of the service staff and traits with some examples. In the first stage, participants saw the non-service staff category at the top-left corner of the screen and the service staff

category at the top-right corner. Participants were asked to place their left- and right-index fingers on the "E" and "I" keys, respectively. In the task, the focal words appeared in the middle of the screen. When the participants saw the displayed word, they needed to press the "E" key if the word belonged to the category on the left (i.e., non-service staff) or the "I" key if the word belonged to the category on the right (i.e., service staff). Participants were instructed to perform the task as fast and accurately as possible. Before performing the task, participants went through a trial step to ensure they understood the instructions.

In the second stage, participants saw some human traits at the top-left corner of the screen and object traits at the top-right corner. The human traits included *creative, knowledgeable, passionate, independent, self-righteous, sensible, uncompromising, and influential*. The object traits included *convertible, dependent, defenseless, senseless, impotent, violable, instrumental*, and *fungible*. Participants also went through a trial step to ensure that they were familiar with the task. The task procedure was similar to the one in the first stage.

In the third stage, participants saw both the service staff categories and the traits on the screen at the same time. At the top-left corner, participants saw the non-service staff and human trait category while they saw the service staff and object trait category at the top-right corner. When the participants saw the displayed word, they needed to press the "E" key if the word belonged to either the non-service staff category or the human traits; otherwise, they needed to press the "I" key if the word belonged to the service staff category or the object traits. The third stage served as a practice stage.

In the fourth stage, I repeated the procedure of the third stage and recorded individual participants' responding time and the accurate ratio. In the fifth stage, I repeated the procedure of the first stage, but I swapped the position of the two service staff categories. For example, participants saw the service staff category at the top-left corner of the screen and the non-service staff category at the top-right corner.

In the sixth stage and the seventh stage, I repeated the procedure in the third stage and the fourth stage, respectively. The only difference was that I swapped the positions of the two concept categories and the two types of traits. For example, at the top-left corner of the

screen, participants saw the service staff and the object trait category, while they saw the non-service staff and human trait category at the top-right corner. After finishing the IAT, all participants answered the demographic information questions and tried to guess the purpose of the study.

D-score measurement. To measure participants' reaction times, I computed the difference score in reaction times called the D-score (Greenwald, Nosek, & Banaji, 2003). A positive D-score indicates that people associate the first target category with positive traits and the second target category with negative traits for the setting of targets (the first category vs. the second category) with traits (positive vs. negative). A negative D-score indicates the reverse. This means that participants favor the second target category over the first target category. In Pretest 3, a positive D-score indicates that participants associate service staff more with human traits while a negative D-score indicates that participants associate non-service staff more with human traits.

First, I calculated the difference in average speed in individual responses between the fourth and seventh stages and between the third and sixth stages. Second, I calculated the D-score for the critical (fourth and seventh) and practice (third and sixth) stages. I divided the difference score by the pooled standard deviation (pooled SD) for each pair of stages. The final D-score was an average between two D-scores. I used the online tool of analysis IATgen to calculate the difference score and the statistical indicators by reaction times and correct ratio (Carpenter et al., 2019).

I excluded any trial responses that were more than 10,000 milliseconds (too-slow responses). I also excluded participants if more than 10% of their response trials were faster than 300 milliseconds (too-fast responses). After filtering, I included all responses to calculate the standard deviation and mean value of latency responses.

Results. Among participants who completed the IAT, I eliminated 19 because of either excessive speed or very slow speed, as mentioned previously. This resulted in 70 participants being included in the final analysis. The error rate for the whole IAT test was relatively high at 0.148, which is greater than the average of .087 (Greenwald et al., 2003). The internal consistency reliability was high (α = .93). Thus, there was a higher correlation in response time when the IAT paired the target categories with the traits than

when the IAT presented either the categories or the traits alone. Moreover, there was an object bias against non-direct service staff than against service staff ($M_{\text{D-Score}} = .293$, *SD* = .496; $t(69) = 4.94$, *p* = .001). This means that participants responded faster when the service staff categories were paired with human traits than when the non-service staff categories were paired with human traits, as well as when the non-service staff categories were paired with the object traits than when the service staff categories were paired with the object traits. Thus, there was an object bias against non-direct service staff compared with service staff.

Discussion. The results of Pretest 3 suggest that people perceive non-direct service employees as possessing more object traits than human traits than service employees. One possible reason is that people tend to objectify more non-service staff than service staff. Another potential account for this effect is that participants may perceive non-service staff as often working with tools and service staff as working with people. Therefore, the effect may be driven merely by the labeling of the two types of traits (human vs. object traits), making people associate the object traits more easily with the non-service staff categories. If this is the case, the effect will not hold if I change the trait labeling to superior traits (human traits) versus inferior traits (object traits).

3.2.3 Main experiment

In Study 2, I examine the effect of an activated customer identity on the objectification tendency toward service staff. To measure objectification tendency, I used the IAT developed in Pretest 3. However, I changed the labels of the traits. In particular, I replaced the human trait labeling with the label "superior traits" and the object trait labeling with "inferior traits." The change helps rule out the alternative explanation that the effect of objectification was driven by the perceived associations between the types of service and the objects used by service providers.

Procedure and measurements. I recruited 249 MTurk participants and randomly assigned them to three priming conditions: the control condition, the customer condition, and the local community condition. Similar to Study 1, in all three conditions, participants were asked to take part in a language game. All participants saw the same set of pictures; the

differences pertained to the key (cued) words and the task instructions in each priming condition.

After that, all participants took part in the IAT test, which was similar to Pretest 3. In short, this is a computerized task in which participants classify stimuli words into four different categories: two target concept categories relating to the types of staff (service staff and non-service staff) and two contrasting attribute categories (superior traits and inferior traits). The superior traits included *creative, knowledgeable, passionate, independent*, and *sensible*. The inferior traits included *dependent, defenseless, senseless, instrumental*, and *fungible*.

In the combination round, the top corners (left and right) of the screen displayed the labels of one of the target concepts and one of the attribute categories (e.g., "service staff" and "superior traits" on the left and "non-service staff" and "inferior traits" on the right). Participants were asked to respond by pressing a key on the same side on which the category appeared. The word stimuli appeared in the middle of the screen, one at a time. These words were exemplars of the four categories (i.e., waiting staff, farmer, creative, and instrumental). Participants were to press the "E" key on the left or the "I" key on the right, which corresponded to the category labels (e.g., "service staff," "non-service staff," "superior traits," "inferior traits"). For example, if the two categories on the left were service staff and superior traits and the two on the right were non-service staff and inferior traits, participants should have sorted "receptionist" or "creative" by pressing "E." Participants also took practice trials with only one category per key (e.g., "non-service staff" to the left and "service staff" to the right). The IAT comprised seven stages as described in the pretest.

D-score measurement and interpretation. D-score was measured as in Pretest 3. A positive D-score indicates that participants associate service staff more with superior traits, while a negative D-score indicates that participants associate non-service staff more with superior traits.

3.2.4 Results

Manipulation check. The results showed that participants in the customer identity condition felt more connected with the customer profile ($M = 5.11$, $SD = 1.56$) than those in the local community condition ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.72$) and those in the control condition ($M = 3.72$, $SD = 1.83$). The difference among the three conditions was statistically significant ($F(2, 209) = 18.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .153$). The post hoc Tukey test also confirmed the statistical difference between the customer condition and the other two conditions ($p < .001$). The results also indicated that participants in the local community condition felt more connected with the local community member profile ($M = 5.03$, $SD = 1.82$) than those in the customer condition ($M = 3.49$, $SD = 1.80$) and those in the control condition ($M = 4.22$, $SD = 1.68$). The difference among the three conditions was statistically significant ($F(2, 209) = 12.94$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .11$). The post hoc Tukey test also confirmed the statistical difference between the guest condition and the other two conditions ($p < .001$). These results indicate that the manipulation worked as intended.

Customer identity increases objectification (H3). Participants in the customer condition responded faster when the service staff category was paired with superior traits and the non-service staff category was paired with inferior traits than when the service staff category was paired with inferior traits and the non-service staff category was paired with superior traits (MD-score $= .15$, SD $= .49$; t(73) $= 2.62$, p $= .01$; see Table 4). These results suggest that participants in the customer condition tended to objectify the non-service staff roles more than the service staff roles. Therefore, the results provide support for H3 that customer identity increases objectification.

In the control condition, I found no significant difference in time responses when pairing traits with types of staff ($M_{\text{D-score}} = .07$, $SD = .52$; $t(75) = 1.57$, $p > .05$). This result differs from that in Pretest 3, which showed that people tended to objectify non-direct service staff. This further supports my argument that the object and human traits labeling influenced the results of Pretest 3 and that the change in trait label can account for such difference. In the local communal condition, there was also no significant difference in reaction times ($M_{\text{D-score}} = .10$, $SD = .49$; $t(61) = 1.73$, $p > .05$).

Condition	n	Rel	Drops	Error %	Timeout %	M (SD)	t (df)	p	Cohen's-d
Customer Identity	85	89	11	11.22	0.06	0.15(0.49)	2.619(73)	0.011	0.304
Nature	83	90	7	11.64	0.13	0.07(0.52)	1.157(75)	0.251	0.133
Local Community Identity	81	91	19	8.29	0.05	0.10(0.49)	1.733(61)	0.089	0.22

Table 4 D-scores across identity conditions. *Note.* Rel = split-half reliability. Err = error proportion. Drop = proportion of participants dropped for >10% of responses with <300ms (Greenwald et al., 2003)

3.2.5 Discussion

The purpose of Study 2 was to assess whether a person with an activated customer identity objectifies service providers. The results show that participants in the customer identity condition scored higher on an implicit measure of objectification of the non-direct service employees (i.e., plumbers, carpenters) than participants in the other two conditions. These findings suggest that participants in the customer identity condition perceived direct service employees as possessing more human traits than non-direct service employees.

One possible explanation is that customer identity may inflate a person's sense of self. If people believe that they are superior to others, they may tend to condescend to others. In addition, people with a perceived superior status might feel entitled to only the best and demand the best to serve them directly (service staff), viewing those who do not serve them directly (non-service staff) as inferior. In addition, the results indicate that priming people with another identity (e.g., local community members) may help debias or reduce the objectification orientation.

3.3 Study 3: Influence of customer identification on forgiveness, empathy, and demand compensation

3.3.1 Goals and purposes

In Study 2, I examined whether objectification tendency is the outcome of activated customer identity. In Study 3, I examined the negative effect of customer identity on customer forgiveness and empathy. In particular, I articulated that customer identity could exacerbate the negative effect of service failure on customer forgiveness and customer empathy. In addition, I included demand compensation as a behavioral measure of both forgiveness and empathy. If customers report that they forgive service providers, to be consistent with what they claim, their forgivingness should manifest through low demand compensation.

In this study, I also tested the moderating role of social status (subjective and objective). On the one hand, I expected that a high level of subjective social status would intensify the positive effect of customer identity on customers' demand compensation. For example, people with high subjective social status may demand more for their service failure experience than those with low subjective social status (Yagil & Medler-Liraz, 2019). Such an increase in demand compensation manifests as a lower degree of forgiveness tendency. By contrast, people with a low level of subjective social status may demand less and tolerate more service failure if they consider themselves more in the shoes of service providers (Galinsky et al., 2005).

On the other hand, I expected that people's objective social status would not have as much effect on forgiveness and empathy as their subjective social status. However, I anticipated the interaction between these two types of social status on forgiveness. In the case of a mismatch between subjective and objective social status (low in subjective social status but high in objective social status), I articulated that people would be more likely to punish and less likely to forgive others' mistakes. This may happen because the outcome of such a mismatch is often psychological dissonance, which causes negative emotions (Cooper, 2007), and when people experience negative emotions, they may vent it by showing their power and being aggressive toward those who disappoint them (Harris & Reynolds, 2004; Nezlek & Kuppens, 2008).

3.3.2 Main experiment

Procedure and measurements. I recruited 177 MTurk participants and randomly assigned them to one of three conditions: customer identity ($n = 58$), volunteer identity ($n = 63$), and control identity ($n = 56$). In the customer identity condition, participants first completed the priming task, which asked them to imagine that they were a customer in the grocery store considering their needs and what they wanted to buy. To enhance the effect of priming, I showed participants the image of the store (inside and outside) and asked what actions they might take when they first arrive and when they select items in the fruits and vegetables area. In the volunteer condition, participants also completed a similar task, but they were asked to imagine themselves as a volunteer who helps others buy groceries. This condition activated both customer identity and volunteer identity. Activating the two identities simultaneously helped examine the interplay effect of multiple identities on customer perceptions and behaviors. (Forehand et al., 2021). Finally, the control condition had no identity priming. To keep the time participants spent across conditions equal, I asked participants in the control condition to discuss their hobbies, describe activities they engage in when they have free time, and mention special things about themselves. Appendix D provides the details.

After the priming task, all participants in the three conditions saw the same hypothetical situation in which the cashier makes a mistake on the bill and overcharges the customer. In particular, the cashier scanned one item twice. The participants were told to imagine that they notified the cashier about a $5 overcharge. They were also told to imagine that they had to wait for 10 minutes until they received a refund. After that, participants completed the set of questions on the measures described next.

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is the extent to which customers forgive service providers for their mistakes. The construct was measured with a three-item 7-point scale (1 = "not at all," 7 = "very much"; $\alpha = .72$): "I will forgive this service failure," "I will give the cashier an opportunity to make it up to me," and "I will not avoid the cashier when I do checkout in the future." This measure was adopted from Suri, Huang, and Sénécal (2019).

Empathy. Empathy is the extent to which customers empathize with the service providers. The construct was measured with a three-item 7-point scale (1 = "not at all," 7 = "very

much"; α = .78): "Despite what happened, I understand the cashier"; "Despite of what happened, I put myself in the shoes of the cashier"; and "Despite of what happened, I feel empathetic toward the cashier." This measure was also adopted from Suri et al. (2019).

Power. Power is the extent to which customers feel powerful. The construct was measured with a four-item 7-point scale (1 = "not at all," 7 = "very much"; α = .90): "My wishes do not carry much weight"; "Even if I voice them, my views have little sways"; "My ideas and opinions are often ignored"; and "Even when I try, I am not able to get my way." Power served as a proxy variable. I expected that participants with an activated customer identity would feel more powerful than participants with an activated volunteer identity and participants with no identity priming. This measure was adopted from Anderson and Galinsky (2006).

Objective social status. This type of social status reflects customers' social status regardless of their idiosyncratic perceptions. It was measured by participants' annual income item with a 7-point scale (1 = "$15,000 or less," 7 = "over $100,000"). This objective social status was measured using the adapted scale of family income developed by Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, and Ickovics (2000).

Subjective social status. Subjective social status was measured with the 10-point ladder scale in which participants reported their self-awareness of social status (1 = "the worst off – those who have the least money, the least education, and the least respected jobs or no job," 10 = "the best off – those who have the most money, most education, and the most respected jobs"). This measure was adopted from Adler et al. (2000).

Demand compensation. Demand compensation was measured with the question that asked participants how much they wanted the store to compensate them for their service failure experience (0–$100).

3.3.3 Results

Manipulation check. For the manipulation check, after participants responded to the dependable variable items, I ask them the extent to which they perceived their self-image as being close to the customer image as in Study 1. There was no statistically significant difference in customer identity among the three priming conditions ($p > .05$). The results

indicated that participants in the customer condition did not feel more connected with the customer image ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.48$, $n = 58$) than those in the volunteer condition ($M = 5.06$, $SD = 1.39$, $n = 63$) or those in the control condition ($M = 4.88$, $SD = 1.50$, $n = 56$).

A potential explanation is that I performed manipulation checks after the hypothetical shopping event, failing to capture the immediate effect of the priming conditions. However, the results indicated that participants in the customer condition ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.61$, $n = 58$) felt more powerful than participants in the volunteer condition ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.64$, $n = 63$), and the difference between these two conditions was statistically significant ($M_{diff} = .76$, $p = .03$). Furthermore, while participants in the customer condition ($M = 4.12$, $SD = 1.61$, $n = 58$) reported that they felt more powerful than participants in the control condition ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 1.74$, $n = 56$), the difference between these two conditions was not statistically significant ($M_{diff} = .55$, $p = .19$). There was no *main effect* of identity priming on either forgiveness or empathy ($p > .05$). Therefore, H4 was not supported.

Interaction effect of social status and customer identity on forgiveness. I performed a multivariate linear regression analysis to investigate the effects of interest. The main model included forgiveness as a dependent variable, the social subjective status (three levels: high, medium, and low) as a moderator, and the identity conditions as a predictor. I also controlled for other factors such as education level, gender, age, and level of self-control. There was a significant, positive main effect of social subjective status on forgiveness ($F(2, 174) = 4.48$, $p = .013$, $\eta^2 = .052$). The pairwise comparison analysis showed that participants with high social subjective status were more likely to forgive the mistake of the cashier than those with a medium level of social subjective status ($M_{diff} = .65$, $p = .004$). However, there was a non-statistically significant parameter for the interaction effect of the social subjective status and identity priming conditions on forgiveness ($p > .05$). There was also no main effect of objective social status (i.e., income) on forgiveness ($p > .05$).

Interaction effect of two types of social status on forgiveness. I examined the effect of the mismatches between subjective social status (two levels: high vs. low) and objective social status (two levels: high vs. low). To simplify the presentation of the results, I

dichotomize both subjective social status and objective social status variables using the median split method (MacCallum, Zhang, Preacher, & Rucker, 2002).

To do so, I ran generalized linear models to examine the interaction effect when comparing three identity salience conditions. There was a significant three-way interaction among the identity salience condition, subjective social status, and objective social status ($Wald\ \chi^2 = 14.154, p = .028$). In the control condition, the interaction between subjective social status and objective social status had a marginal impact on forgiveness ($p = .089$). In particular, participants who reported being high in subjective social status but low in objective social status forgave the service failure more than those who reported being low in subjective social status and low in objective social status ($M_{diff} = 2.12, p = .089$; 95% CI [–.572, 4.809]). However, there was no interaction effect of subjective social status and objective social status on forgiveness in the customer and volunteer conditions ($p > .1$). Figure 7 depicts the results.
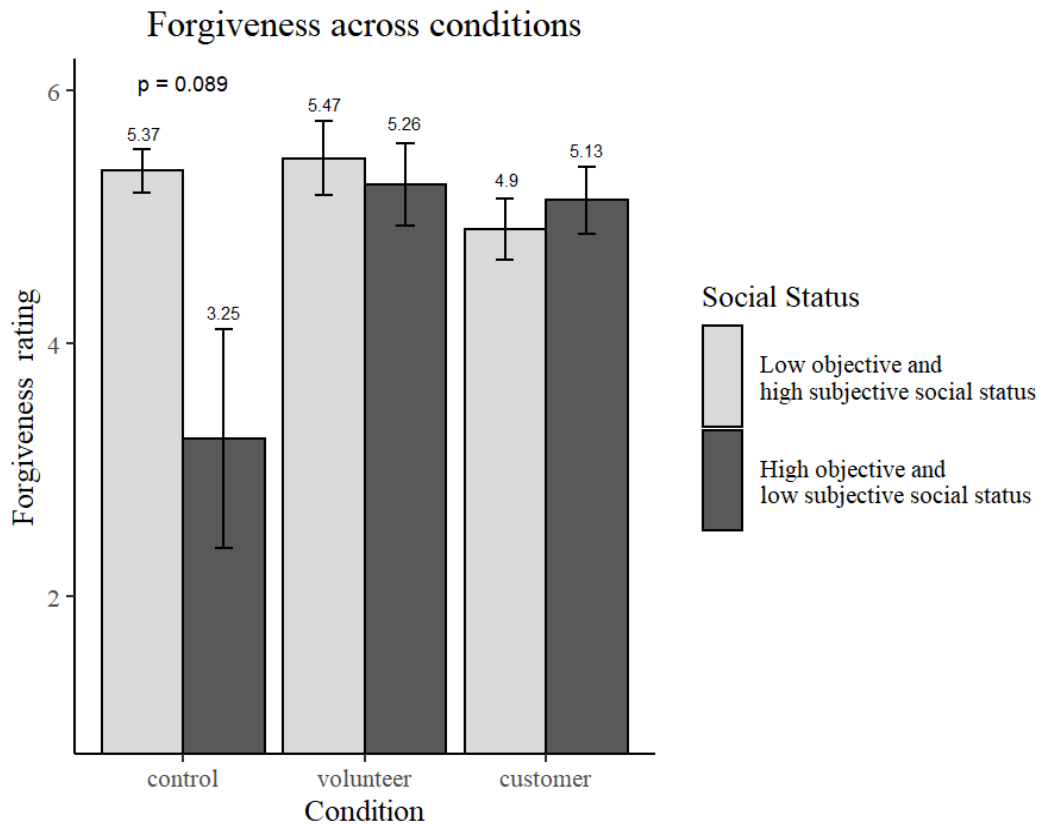

Figure 7 The interaction effect of social status and identity conditions on forgiveness

Interaction effect of social status and identity salience on empathy. I ran a linear regression analysis. The main model included empathy as a dependent variable, social subjective status (three levels: high, medium, and low) as a moderator, and identity salience as a predictor. I also controlled for factors such as education level, gender, age, and level of self-control. There was a significant, positive main effect of social subjective status on empathy ($F(1, 175) = 4.63$, $p = .011$, $\eta^2 = .053$). The pairwise comparison analysis showed that participants with high social subjective status empathized more with the cashier's mistake than participants with a medium level of social subjective status ($M_{\text{diff}} = .721$, $p = .003$). However, there was no interaction effect of subjective social status and identity salience on empathy ($p > .05$). There was also no main effect of objective social status on empathy ($p > .05$).

I ran a regression of empathy tendency on subjective social status, comparing the three identity salience conditions. In the control condition, there was no main effect of subjective social status on empathy ($p > .05$). In the volunteer condition, there was a main effect of subjective social status on empathy ($F(1, 61) = 5.39$, $p = .007$, $\eta^2 = .161$). Specifically, participants with high subjective social status were more empathetic than those with a medium level of subjective social status ($M_{\text{diff}} = 1.08$, $p = .002$). In the customer condition, there was no main effect of subjective social status on empathy ($p > .05$). These results suggest that the observed effect is driven by the priming of volunteer identity.

Interaction effect of two types of social status and identity conditions on empathy. I examined the interaction effect among subjective social status (two levels: high vs. low), objective social status (two levels: high vs. low), and the identity conditions. I ran a generalized linear model to test the interaction among objective social status, subjective social status, and the identity conditions. There was a significant three-way interaction among identity salience condition, subjective social status, and income (*Wald* $\chi^2 = 14.689$, $p = .023$). In the control condition, the interaction between subjective social status and income had a significant impact on empathy ($p = .032$). In particular, participants who reported being high in subjective social status but low in objective social status empathized more with the service providers than those who reported being low in

subjective social status and high in objective social status ($M_{diff} = 2.53$, $p = .032$, 95% CI [.370, 4.683]).

In the volunteer condition, the interaction between subjective social status and objective social status did not have a significant impact on empathy ($p > .05$). In addition, there was no interaction effect of subjective social status and objective social status on empathy in the customer condition ($p > .05$). Figure 8 illustrates the results.
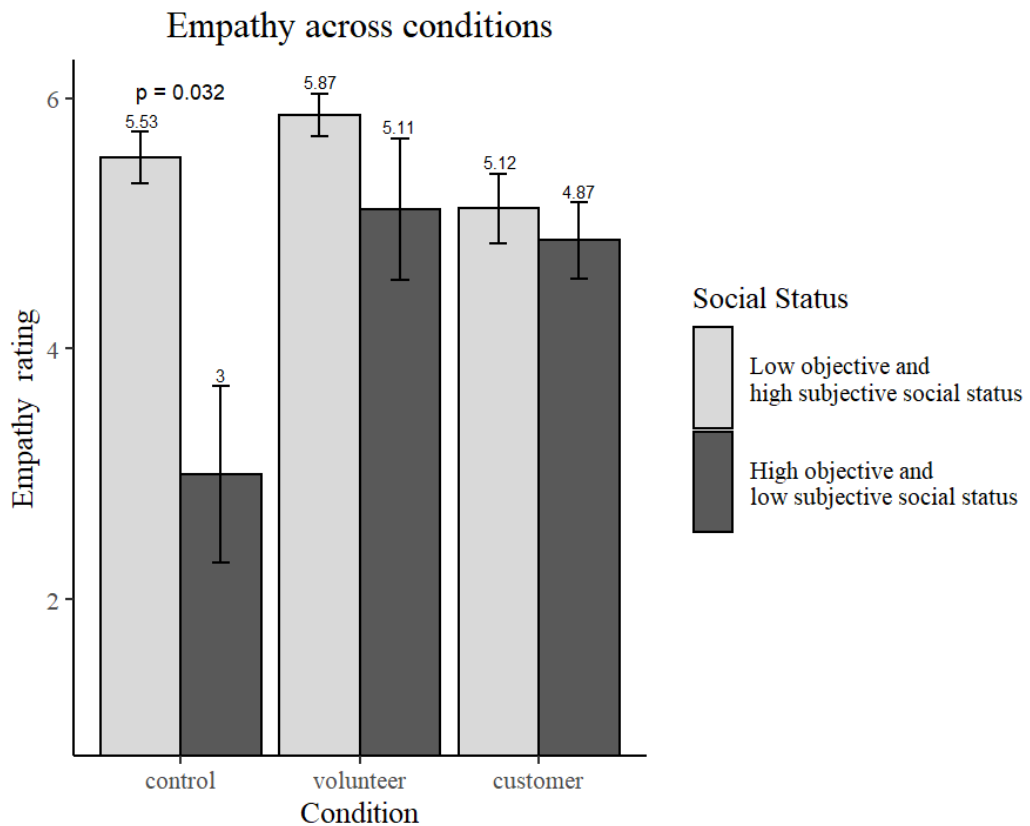

Figure 8 The interaction effect of social status and identity conditions on empathy

Compensation analysis. I examined the interaction effect of subjective social status, objective social status, and the identity conditions on the demand compensation. The results indicated that within groups of participants who reported low objective social status and high subjective social status (see Figure 9 for details), participants in the customer condition demanded a higher compensation than participants in the control condition ($M_{diff} = 21.87$, $p = .035$, 95% CI [1.734, 41.995]). However, when participants reported low subjective social status but high income, there was no difference among the three conditions ($p > .05$). This result indicates that the interaction effect was present only

for those who reported being high in subjective social status but low in objective social status.
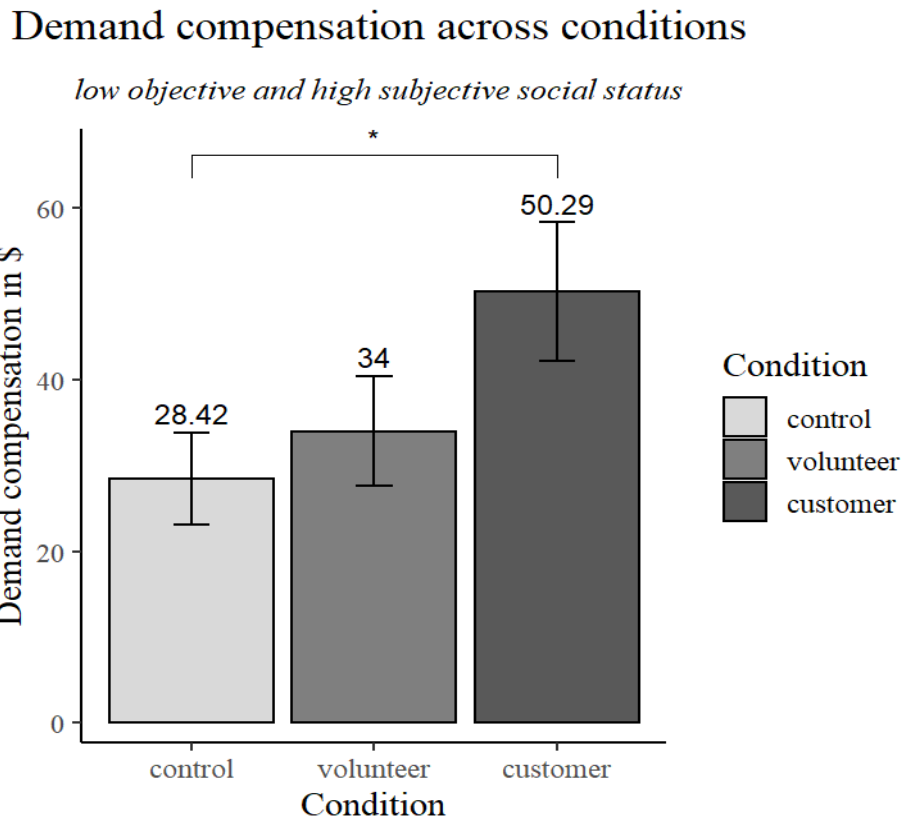
Demand compensation across conditions
low objective and high subjective social status

Figure 9 The effect of identity conditions on the demand compensation for those with a low objective social status but a high subjective social status. *Note.* Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*p < .05, **p < .01)

3.3.4 Discussion

In Study 3, I aimed to show the effect of customer identity on forgiveness and empathy. I explored the interplay among multiple identities, as in the volunteer condition, the priming tasks activated both customer and volunteer identity. While the manipulation check was unsuccessful, the findings still provide insights that are worthy of discussion and further development.

The identity priming conditions influenced the reported forgiveness and empathy differently than the demand compensation. In particular, there was an interaction effect of both objective and subjective social status on forgiveness, empathy, and demand compensation. For example, participants with high objective social status but low

subjective social status, in both the volunteer condition and the customer condition, reported a higher level of forgiveness and empathy toward service employees than those in the control condition. However, the results revealed that for demand compensation, participants in the customer condition demanded a larger compensation for their waiting time than participants in both the control and volunteer conditions.

In short, while participants in the customer condition reported a high level of forgiveness and empathy, they nevertheless demanded a larger amount of compensation than participants in the other two conditions. This finding suggests that participants with a salient customer identity perceive themselves as more tolerant and empathetic of others, but their demand compensation may reflect the opposite (i.e., a lesser regard for others). In Study 4, I examine whether customer identity leads to less regard for others.

3.4 Study 4: Customer identity and self- versus other focus

3.4.1 Goals and purposes

Study 4 complemented the overall theme of the dissertation, which was to discover multiple paths in which customer identity leads to impoliteness. One reason customers might be rude is that they do not allocate sufficient attention to service providers' feelings. They may say and do things without considering the outcomes of their actions on others because of a low level of other-focused attention.

In Study 4, I examined whether customer identity (1) increases self-focus and (2) decreases other focus. In particular, I aimed to document the effect of customer identification on communal orientation (other focus) and agency orientation (self-focus) through the implicit measure of pronoun choice. The choice of the first-person pronouns helps unpack the extent to which people include others in their self-representation (Zimmermann, Wolf, Bock, Peham, & Benecke, 2013). This is an implicit measure of people's tendency to consider others in their thought and decision-making processes (Rucker, Galinsky, & Dubois, 2012).

The basic hypothesis is that when customer identity becomes salient, people are less likely to think of others and behave in an agentic way. They become more focused on themselves and less focused on others. Given the major role of the customer in fulfilling personal needs, the associated schemas that come with an activated customer identity should be formed to achieve personal goals than to care for others (Dubois et al., 2015).

3.4.2 Main experiment

Procedure and measurements. The study used a single-factor, three-level (identity: customer vs. student vs. control) between-subjects design. I recruited 250 MTurk participants. The majority (89%) had at least a college degree, and 62% were between the ages of 30 and 50 years.

Each participant was randomly assigned to one of three priming conditions. In the customer condition, participants were instructed to read a short paragraph about customer experiences in the United States and then to describe their experience as a customer. In

the student condition, participants read about an example of student experiences in the United States and then wrote about their own student experience. In the control condition, participants read an example about a US nature experience and then were asked to share their experience with US nature.

After the priming task, all participants were instructed to take part in one foreign-language task. I used a disguise story that the foreign language was uncommon and that only a few people on remote islands in the Pacific could understand it. The language was, in fact, a fairly elaborated imaginary language only used in the Star Trek franchise (Wikipedia, 2021). The purpose of using this imaginary language was to prevent participants from finding translations via programs such as Google Translate. Then, participants were told that the task was to understand how accurately people can guess the content of this foreign language.

The task included 13 multiple answer questions. Each question presented a sentence with a missing pronoun. The individual orientation was measured by the sum of the first-person singular pronoun choice (e.g., I, me, my, mine), while the communal orientation was measured by the sum of the first-person plural pronoun choice (e.g., we, our, us). Participants also had the option to select the second-person plural pronoun (e.g., they, them, theirs) and the second-person singular pronoun (e.g., he, she, his, her). This indirect measurement of self- versus other focus came from Wood, Saltzberg, and Goldsamt (1990). Appendix E provides the details.

Participants were encouraged to try their best to guess what the missing pronoun could be. To control for the order effect, the order of both questions and choices was randomized. In addition, to increase participants' effort, I told them that those who got the highest scores would receive a bonus.

After that, all participants spent some time on a filler task before they answered a set of psychological control measures. In the filler task, participants answered two math riddles that required some cognitive effort. In this way, I limited the potential immediate effect of the priming task on the subsequent tasks. Finally, participants provided demographic information and were debriefed about the study.

3.4.3 Results

Manipulation check. Participants responded to the following question: "To what extent were you thinking of yourself as a customer when you responded to the task?" The results showed that participants in the customer condition reported higher scores of customer identity ($M = 6.16$, $SD = 1.22$) than those in the student condition ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.81$) and those in the control condition ($M = 2.88$, $SD = 1.87$). The difference among the three conditions was statistically significant ($F(2, 247) = 103.09$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .455$). The post hoc Tukey test also confirmed the statistical difference between the customer condition and the other two conditions ($p < .001$).

The negative effect of customer identity on other focus (H6). As mentioned, I measured other-focus orientation with choices of first-person plural pronouns (e.g., we, our, us). The ANOVA showed that participants in the customer condition ($M = 2.64$, $SD = 1.31$) selected fewer first-person plural pronouns than those in the control condition ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 2.25$) and those in the student condition ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.82$). The difference among the three conditions was statistically significant ($F(2, 247) = 5.56$, $p = .004$, $\eta^2 = .043$; see Figure 10). The mean difference in choices of the first-person plural pronouns between the customer condition and the control condition was statistically significant ($M_{\text{diff}} = -.98$, $t(147.04) = 3.47$, $p < .001$). The mean difference in choices of the first-person plural pronouns between the customer condition and the student condition was also significant ($M_{\text{diff}} = .54$, $t(154.43) = 2.18$, $p = .03$). There was no significant difference in other focus between the student condition and the control condition ($M_{\text{diff}} = .44$, $t(169.87) = 1.43$, $p = .155$). These results provide support for H6 that customer identity decreases other-focus tendency.
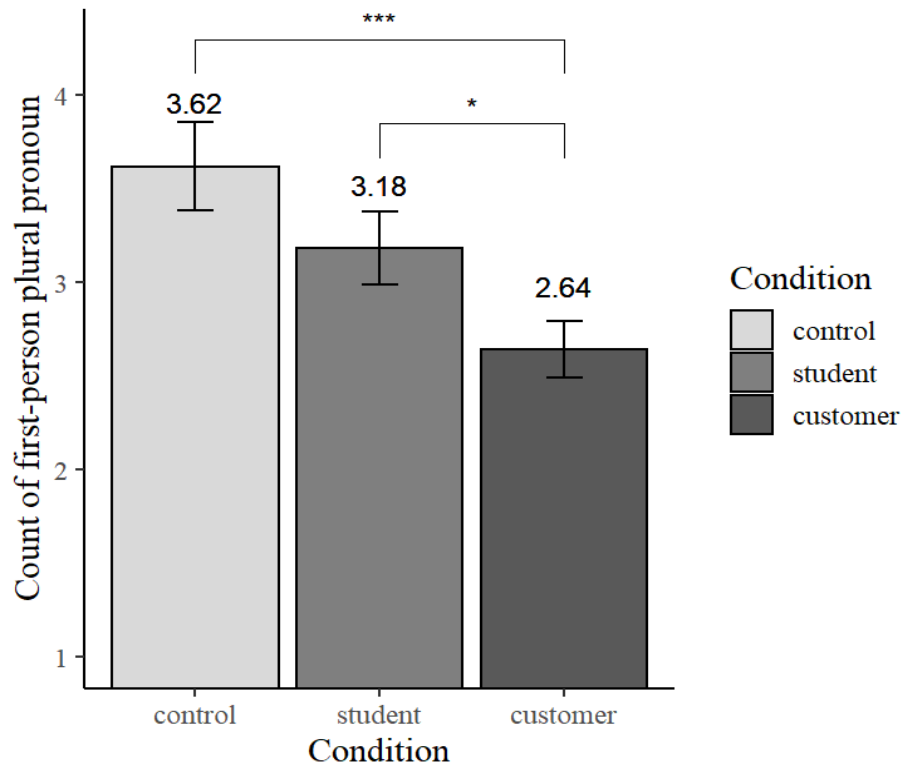
Figure 10 Count of selected choices of first-person plural pronouns. *Note.* Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001)

The effect of customer identity on self-focus. I measured self-focus with the choices of first-person singular pronouns (e.g., I, me, and mine). The ANOVA showed that participants in the control condition ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.54$) selected fewer first-person singular pronouns than those in the customer condition ($M = 3.01$, $SD = 1.51$) and those in the student condition ($M = 3.10$, $SD = 2.51$). However, the difference among the three conditions was not significant ($F(2, 247) = 1.78$, $p > .05$).

3.4.4 Discussion

The aim of Study 4 was to document the effect of customer identity on self-focus and other focus. I expected that when a customer identity was activated, people would be more likely to focus on themselves and less likely to focus on others. The tendency of self- versus other focus was measured by the choice of first-person pronouns.

Specifically, I found that the salience of customer identity decreases choices of first-person plural pronouns. As the choice of first-person plural pronouns manifests the

tendency to include others in the representative self, a decrease in such choices should reflect a decrease in communal orientation (Rohrbaugh, Mehl, Shoham, Reilly, & Ewy, 2008; Zimmermann et al., 2013). By contrast, I found no supporting evidence of the effect of customer identity on the choices of first-person singular pronouns. A potential reason is that the priming might have induced a self-focus orientation among all participants, as the task required a certain degree of self-reflection. Thus, I ran a follow-up text analysis on the scripts that participants provided in the priming texts to explore the potential explanation. In the analysis, I counted the total pronouns participants used—both first-person singular and first-person plural pronouns. I found that while the mean difference for the selected choices of the first-person plural pronouns was significant among the three conditions ($p < .01$), the mean difference for the selected choices of first-person singular pronouns was non-significant ($p > .05$). This suggests that the priming task induced self-attention equally in all participants in the three conditions. Therefore, there was no significant difference in the self-focus among the three conditions. In Study 5, I aimed to replicate the finding of Study 4 and document the direct effect of customer identity on impoliteness through text analysis.

3.5 Study 5: The influence of customer identity on impoliteness: the implicit measure of impoliteness through text analysis

3.5.1 Goals and purposes

The purpose of Study 5 was to complement both Study 1 and Study 4. In Study 1, as impoliteness was measured by participants' direct self-report, I could not rule out the potential biasing effect of social desirability. To tackle this, in Study 5, I examined impoliteness by using an implicit measure approach. In particular, I measured politeness by analyzing the texts participants wrote in the priming task and three hypothetical library scenarios. Here, I employed a machine learning approach that can provide insight into the language participants use.

Furthermore, Study 5 aimed to replicate the finding in Study 4 regarding an other-focus orientation. I analyzed the text participants wrote in the priming task and the scenario-based tasks to examine the extent to which they employed first-person pronouns (plural vs. singular) in their writing.

3.5.2 Main experiment

Procedure and measurements. To test the effect of customer identity on impoliteness, I conducted a one-factor, three-level (customer identity vs. control vs. student identity) between-subject experiment. One hundred twenty-six MTurk participants took part in this study (56% male). The majority (82%) had at least a college degree, and 83% were between the ages of 30 and 50 years.

Priming conditions. Each participant was randomly assigned to one of the three conditions. In the customer condition, participants wrote down their supporting arguments for the notion that "students should be treated as customers." In the control condition, participants wrote down their arguments for the notion that "online courses should be free." In the student condition, participants wrote down their arguments for the notion that "students should not be treated as customers." Appendix F provides the details.

Three hypothetical library scenarios. I used hypothetical scenarios to measure politeness when participants encountered interactions within a library context. All participants were guided through three potential scenarios at one imagined library. In the first scenario, the participants' task was to email the librarian to reserve a book. This scenario served to capture participants' politeness through written communication with the librarian. In the second scenario, participants' task was to imagine how they would react (e.g., what they would say to the librarian) if the librarian put them on hold waiting for their new library card. In the third scenario, participants' task was to ask the librarian for help searching for a book; participants were requested to write down what they would say to the librarian to seek help. These three scenarios helped document the effect of the priming conditions on participants' politeness—that is, how polite they were in their reservation email, verbal request, and reaction to the service interruption.

3.5.3 Data analysis

From the participants' written responses, I obtained unstructured text data used to extract a set of "polite" features. Using the established "politeness" package in R (Yeomans, Kantor, & Tingley, 2018), I extracted up to 36 unique politeness markers as described in Appendix F. These markers can be interpreted separately by plotting differences across conditions. For example, hedging is a politeness marker. To be polite, speakers often use hedging words (e.g., "I guess," "I wonder," "I think") to moderate their tone.

I also used the extracted politeness markers to compute average politeness scores for each experimental group. The average politeness score captures the politeness of the produced text based on the extracted politeness features. The machine learning model is trained to guess correctly whether the text is 0 (i.e., not polite) or 1 (i.e., polite). It is basically similar to logistic regression, in which the dependent variable is politeness (binary) and the independent variables are 36 politeness features. The package requires a set of labeled politeness texts to calculate the politeness score. The package's algorithm uses that set of trained data to create a predicting model. With the input of the labeled politeness texts, the model can extract politeness features and then use these features to predict politeness scores for unlabeled texts.

For this purpose, I chose the Stanford Politeness Corpus, a widely used politeness database that is based on users' communications on Wikipedia and Stack Exchange (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, Sudhof, Jurafsky, Leskovec, & Potts, 2013). This database has high politeness prediction performance (Li, Hickman, Tay, Ungar, & Guntuku, 2020). The politeness corpus encompasses more than 10,000 online requests annotated for politeness, meaning that all requests are rated by human annotators in terms of politeness score and are classified as either polite or impolite. From this corpus of annotated online requests, a machine learning model (to predict politeness) was built using extracted politeness features as predictors or classifiers.

Then, I applied the default supervised machine learning algorithm "glmnet" (Taddy, 2013) to teach the model to predict politeness (politeness score) based on extracted features. In the training phase, each of the request texts has an independent score (rated by annotators), and then the algorithm learns to predict these scores by word frequencies of the referent politeness lexicons, pronominal forms, and syntactic structure (Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil et al., 2013).

After successfully training the model on 10,956-labeled examples of the Stanford Politeness Corpus, the obtained parameters were used to predict politeness on the data of interest (i.e., participants in the three conditions). Using the differences among the control condition, the student condition, and the customer condition in the average politeness score, I validated the main effect. Moreover, I tested the differences across specific politeness markers to show the robustness and face validity of the results.

3.5.4 Results

Manipulation check. The results showed that participants in the customer condition reported higher scores of customer identity ($M = 5.48$, $SD = 1.38$) than those in the control condition ($M = 4.08$, $SD = 2.00$) and those in the student condition ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 2.03$). The difference between the customer condition and the control ($p < .01$) and student ($p < .01$) conditions was statistically significant.

Politeness scores on the priming text responses. The results indicated that participants in the control condition ($M = .65$, $SD = .20$) scored higher on the politeness parameter than those in the customer condition ($M = .54$, $SD = .22$; see Figure 11). The difference

between the two conditions was statistically significant (M_{diff} = .11, SE = .038; $t(122.96)$ = 2.91, p = .004). The results showed that participants in the customer condition used fewer hedges (i.e., the politeness strategies speakers use to soften their tone) (M_{diff} = −.61, SE = .18; $t(115.05)$ = 3.36, p = .001), fewer positive emotion words (M_{diff} = −2.54, SE = .41; $t(122.27)$ = 6.20, p <.001), and fewer first-person plural pronouns (M_{diff} = −.41, SE = .23; $t(91.81)$ = 1.80, p = .075) in their responses than those in the control condition. The direction of the effect across "polite" features was in line with that on the overall politeness score.
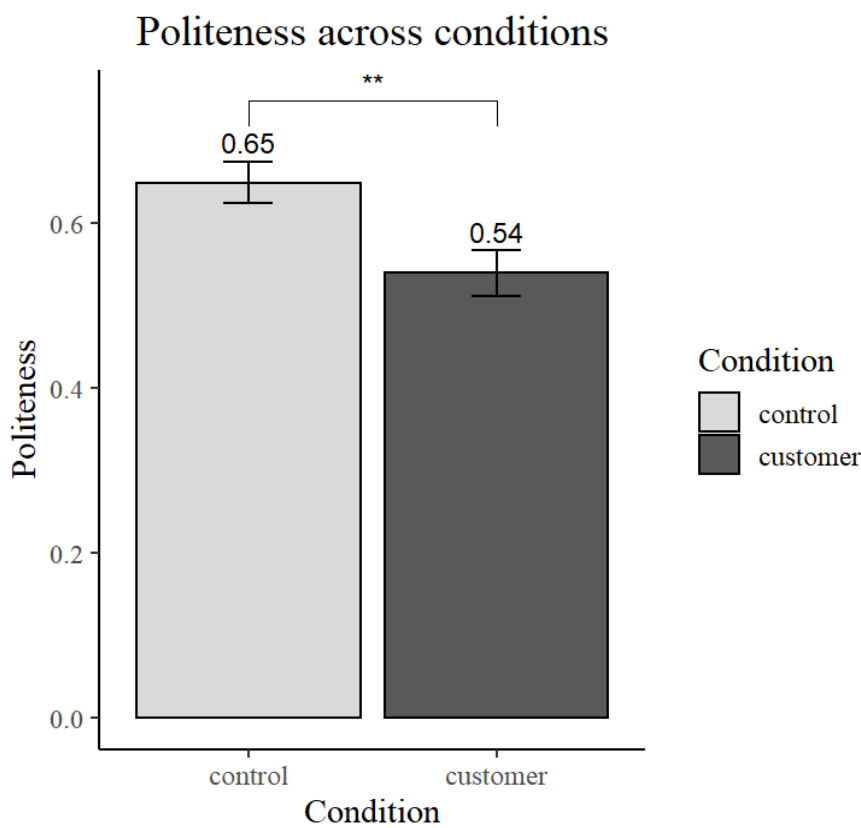
Figure 11 Means of politeness scores of the priming text between the control condition and customer condition. *Note.* Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*p < .05, **p < .01)

I also included the student condition in the analysis. The results indicated that participants in the student condition (M = .37, SD = .20) scored lower on the politeness parameter than those in the control condition (M = .65, SD = .20) and the customer condition (M = .54, SD = .22). Moreover, the difference in politeness between the student and control conditions (M_{diff} = .28, SE = .036; $t(124.98)$ = 7.81, p = .000) and the difference between

the student and customer conditions ($M_{\text{diff}} = .17$, $SE = .038$; $t(123.68) = 4.53$, $p = .000$) were statistically significant (see Figure 12). This result indicated that participants in the student condition scored lowest on the politeness scales. One way to interpret this result is that students' identity may be associated with the debating skill in which the logic of the argument is more important than how polite the argument is framed.
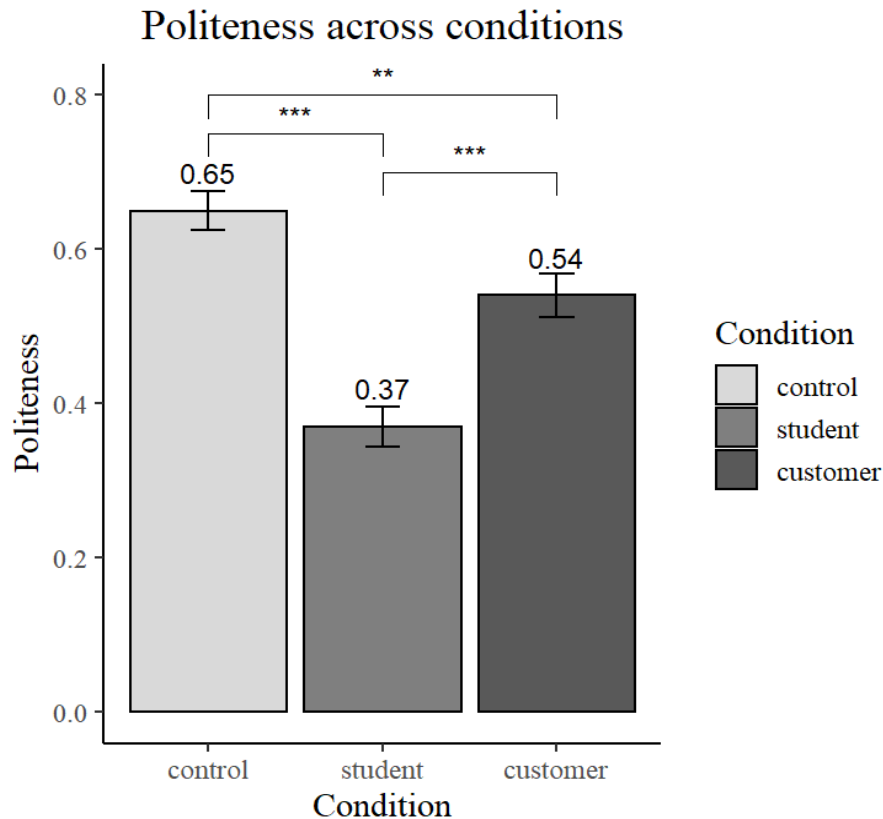

Figure 12 Means of politeness scores of the priming text across the three conditions. *Note*. Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$, ***$p < .001$)

Politeness scores measured by the three library scenarios. I next analyzed participants' responses in the three library situations. However, there was no significant difference among the priming conditions when analyzing participants' responses ($p > .05$).

To understand this result, I examined the average number of words in each of the three scenarios. I found that the average words ranged from 16.83 to 28.55 words in each response. The number of words was below 50, the recommendation of Tausczik and Pennebaker (2010) for the program to accurately extract the politeness features and

project the politeness score. Therefore, it could be that the text responses collected from the three scenarios were not sufficient for scoring politeness.

3.5.5 Discussion

I obtained mixed results when analyzing the responses from the priming tasks. First, analyzing the politeness features, I found that participants in the customer condition used fewer first-person plural pronoun words than those in the control condition. Second, when analyzing the politeness scores, I found that participants in the control condition were more polite than participants in the customer condition (for robustness tests, see Appendix F). This provides partial support for the hypothesis that customer identity decreases politeness. However, when I added another control condition (i.e., the student condition), I found that participants in this condition scored lowest on the politeness scale. While this finding was unexpected, it shows the dynamic effect of multiple identities on behaviors. This finding represents a fruitful future research avenue.

When I analyzed participants' responses to the three library scenarios, I found no significant difference in politeness scores among the three conditions. A potential explanation is that the responses were too short for the model to detect politeness. Another way to interpret this result is that student identity, when activated, may induce participants with a debating skill in which ensuring the logic of the argument is more important than how polite the argument is framed. However, this interpretation needs further empirical testing.

4   General discussion

Customer dysfunctional behaviors such as impoliteness represent a considerable proportion of customer–employee encounters. These customer misbehaviors inflict undesirable consequences not only on service employees and their firms but also on fellow customers and the misbehaving customers themselves. In recent years, an emergent body of work has descriptively explored customer misbehaviors, outlining a research gap with regard to empirical studies. Taking into account the vital role of service interactions, gaining insight into customer misbehaviors has both theoretical and managerial importance.

The present research proposes customer identity as a driving factor of customer misbehaviors. This research is distinct from previous work in two respects. First, extant research has not empirically explored how the salience of customer identity can lead to customer dysfunctional behaviors. Across all studies, I examine the multiple downstream consequences of activated identities on customers' behaviors, their perceptions, and the changes in their psychological states, such as sense of entitlement, objectification tendency, and forgiveness. While the central tenet of this thesis is to document the effect of customer identity, it also includes other identities as control conditions. Second, what I propose is a novel way to deal with less severe but more frequent cases of customer misbehaviors, such as rudeness and impoliteness toward service providers. The underlying assumptions are that most misbehaviors are not extreme and that the milder forms of misbehaviors are not due to customers' intentions per se but from the malleable image of the customer role. The studies provide hypothetical scenarios that are as close to reality as possible. These scenarios are also purposed to manifest different daily consumption events to increase the generalizability of the findings.

4.1   Summary of findings

As mentioned, the goal of the studies and pretests was to answer the following research questions:

1. Can simply identifying oneself as a customer lead to customer dysfunctional behavior such as impoliteness? What are the mechanisms behind this effect?

2. How does an active customer identity influence psychological states, such as sense of entitlement, objectification, forgiveness and empathy, and self-versus other focus?

3. How do individual differences, such as self-control and social status, moderate these effects?

In response to the first question, I conducted Study 1 to document the negative effect of customer identity on impoliteness, proposing that a sense of entitlement mediates this effect. I operationalized customer identity with hypothetical consumption scenarios in which participants decide how likely they are to engage in impolite behaviors. The impolite scenarios were pretested to ensure both validity and reality. The scenarios represented common service encounters that may happen in real service contexts. I also developed a new identity priming method by using matching pictures with focal (cued) words. This method was first pretested and then successfully validated in the main studies.

To my knowledge, this research is the first empirical attempt to examine the effect of customer identity on impoliteness. The set of studies is distinct from previous identity research in consumer research in two respects. First, I treat the customer role itself as a distinctive identity that has a direct impact on behaviors. While prior research has focused on a variety of consumer identities (e.g., student identity, global citizenship identity, driver identity), surprisingly it has ignored the essential role of customer identity in customer behaviors. Second, whereas scant research attempts have tried to decode the link between the customer role and customer misbehaviors through a descriptive method, my work contributes to current literature by providing empirical evidence on that link.

4.2 Theoretical implications

I also contribute theoretically by shedding light on how customer identity increases the chance of customer impoliteness. I proposed and tested the mediation effect of the sense of entitlement. Specifically, I found that customer identity increases entitlement and

entitlement subsequently increases the chance of impolite behavior. These findings are in line with current theorization that entitlement causes dysfunctional behaviors and add to the literature that the salience of customer identity can inflate the sense of entitlement.

Because impoliteness was measured by participants' direct self-report in Study 1, I could not rule out the potential biasing effect of social desirability. To tackle this issue, in Study 5, I employed a machine learning method to measure politeness through text analysis. The findings provided several notable implications for theory. Consistent with what I found in Study 1, participants in the customer identity condition were less polite in their writing than those in the control condition. I also found that when customer identity was activated, people were more likely to use negative emotion words (i.e., "hate," "bad," "worthless") and were less likely to use first-person plural pronouns (i.e., we, our, us) in their writing. This suggests that the salience of customer identity implicitly influences people's word choices, the way they express their opinions, and overall, the way they communicate. Surprisingly, among participants in the three conditions (customer identity vs. control vs. student identity), those in the student identity condition scored lowest in terms of politeness. As noted previously, one way to interpret this result is that student identity may be associated with the debating skill in which the logic of the argument is more important than how polite the argument is framed. However, this interpretation needs further empirical testing. Ultimately, this finding reveals the dynamic effect of multiple identities on behaviors.

To answer the second research question, I conducted Studies 2, 3, and 4, which examined the effect of customer identity on consumer psychological states such as objectification, forgiveness and empathy, and self- versus other focus. In particular, Study 2 examined the effect of customer identity on objectification tendency by means of the IAT. I found that participants with a salient customer identity objectified non-direct service employees to a higher extent than direct service employees, while those in the control condition perceived no difference between these two types of service providers. This result indicates that merely identifying oneself as a customer may provoke the tendency to objectify others.

In Study 3, I developed a service failure scenario that extends the understanding of how customers react to service failures when their customer identity is activated versus when

it is not. I also contribute to the current stream of research examining the interaction effect of multiple identities. For example, the priming conditions include the customer identity condition in which customer identity (shopping for oneself) was activated and the volunteer condition in which both volunteer identity and customer identity were activated.

In Study 4, I developed a disguised scenario about a language task that measured the choice of first-person singular pronouns (i.e., I, me, mine) and the choice of first-person plural pronouns (i.e., we, our, us). The number of pronoun choices served as an implicit measure of the self- versus other-focused tendency. I found that participants in the customer condition employed more choices of the first-person plural pronoun than those in the other two conditions. One explanation that may account for this effect is that when customer identity becomes activated, customers are less likely to include others in their representative self, and this may manifest in reduced choices of first-person plural pronouns. However, I found no evidence of the effect of identity on the choices of first-person singular pronouns, which illustrates the tendency to focus on the self. Future research could explore whether culture plays a moderating role in this setting. For example, for cultures that value individualism, the ceiling effect may limit the activation of customer identity, whereas for cultures that value collectivism, the activation of customer identity may boost self-focused tendency. As of now, this remains an empirical question.

Both Study 1 and Study 3 helped answer the third research question about how individual differences such as self-control and social status can moderate the effect of customer identity on customer impoliteness and customer responses to service failure. In Study 1, I tested the moderation effect of the trait self-control. In particular, I found that the positive effect of entitlement on impoliteness was reduced for participants with high trait self-control, while the main effect was enhanced for those with low trait self-control. This finding may encourage further research to manipulate self-control to mitigate the detrimental effect of customer identity on impoliteness.

In Study 3, I found that the interplay between subjective and objective social status moderated the effect of the identity priming conditions on forgiveness, empathy, and

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demand compensation. For example, for participants with high objective social status but low subjective social status, those in the customer condition had higher ratings on forgiveness and empathy than those in the control condition. Nonetheless, when asked how much compensation they would demand their service failure experience, participants in the customer condition claimed a larger compensation for their waiting time than participants in the control condition. In summary, these results indicate that participants with an activated customer identity perceived themselves in a more positive light (more forgiving and empathetic), which led them to demand more compensation than those in the control condition. This shows that customer identity may help customers maintain their positive self-image while enabling them to pursue their self-interest.

4.3 Managerial implications

From a business perspective, smooth and polite service interactions boost employees' mental health and subsequently increase employees' productivity, service quality, and customer satisfaction (Vasconcelos, 2020). In their study, Yi et al. (2011) document that customer citizenship behaviors such as courtesy, politeness, and helpfulness increase employees' performance, satisfaction, and commitment. Moreover, Kurdi et al. (2020) find support for the positive relationship between employees' satisfaction and customers' satisfaction. Therefore, understanding how customer impoliteness arises and how to address this matter in an optimal manner is important.

By examining the effect of customer identity on impoliteness, this research provides several managerial implications. First, the findings suggest that merely self-identifying as a customer can increase the chance of misbehaviors and that promoting customer identity triggers a backlash effect. As such, I suggest that firms implement subtle changes in the way they address their customers (e.g., greeting them as guests) to limit potential customer impoliteness. Second, in Study 3, I found that customer identity increased demand compensation for service failure. Therefore, when dealing with customer complaints, firms should employ tactics to avoid addressing the complainer directly with their customer title. For example, if a customer is a member of a loyalty program, the service provider should address that person as "a loyalty program member" or "retail club member." Third, in Study 5, I found that participants in the customer identity condition scored lower on politeness than those in the control condition (online user identity).

Extending this finding to the context of online reviews, a firm might encourage customers themselves to share their experiences as service users. This might help improve the politeness appeal of online reviews, which may signal harmony and good service.

Furthermore, a key takeaway of this research for practitioners is that potential dysfunctional behaviors may arise when customer identity is made salient. Therefore, service providers should think twice before deciding to elevate customer status and attract customers with customer prioritization strategies.

4.4 Limitations and future research

This research has numerous limitations, which might lead to further research. First, Study 1 measured customer impoliteness as the likelihood of engaging in impoliteness behaviors. This measure, however, may not reflect the circumstances in which customer behaviors are closer to binary choices, such as when customers either misbehave or behave properly. Field experiments that observe real-time customer reactions could address this issue.

Second, the salience of customer identity can be intensified through different methods, such as customer status elevation, enhanced customer power, and customer prioritization. By employing these customer identification methods, future research might provide additional insights into the extent to which the behavioral outcomes of mere customer identification differ from the behavioral outcomes of intensified customer identity.

Third, while Study 2 documented the effect of customer identity on the objectification of non-direct service employees (e.g., plumbers, farmers, painters), it did not show the objectification of service employees. Future research might replicate this finding by comparing the objectification of service providers and other similar groups. For example, future research could examine the objectification tendency of those primed with a customer identity (vs. a control condition) toward service employees versus fellow residents (Newyorkers, Bostonians, Dakotans, Floridans, Texans).

Fourth, in Study 3, I attempted to capture the effect of customer identity on perspective-taking through empathy. However, the self-reports may be limited by the effect of social desirability. Future field studies should employ a less direct but more unobtrusive

observational method to generate more objective findings related to the effect of customer identity.

Fifth, in Study 4, I successfully documented the effect of customer identity on other-focused tendencies by summing up the first-person plural pronoun choices. While this result indicated that people with salient customer identity are less likely to include others in the representative self, this finding should be regarded cautiously as evidence of a lower level of communal orientation. To address this uncertainty, future research could employ a more direct way to measure the self- versus other-focused tendency. For example, studies could explore whether activated customer identity includes price fairness perception, sustainability consumption, or concern for employees' well-being.

Sixth, I took customer impoliteness as an indication of customer dysfunctional behavior. On the one hand, customer impoliteness is dysfunctional because it harms service employees; on the other hand, customer impoliteness may be functional for customers and, to a certain degree, may become functional for firms. For example, customers who are too polite may not provide their honest input, thus preventing service organizations from improving their service and meeting customer expectations. In some other service encounters, to be polite customers may delve into personal conversations with service providers, thereby distracting the employees and affecting the flow of service. For example, customers with prolonged and friendly conversations with Uber drivers may distract their driving attention. Furthermore, impoliteness may serve as self-expression and prevent ruminative thoughts.

Seventh, I did not examine the potential interaction between emotions and customer identity, as this was beyond the scope of my research. Although Study 5 measured the extent to which participants used positive emotion words on average, it showed emotions only as outcomes of activated customer identity. Previous research suggests that the interaction between emotions with different primed identities can shape behavior (Anton & Miller, 2005; Reed & Forehand, 2016). It would be insightful to explore how customers' negative and positive emotions can moderate the effect of customer identity on impoliteness in service contexts.

Eighth, in Study 5, I applied a machine learning approach to measure politeness implicitly through text analysis. However, I could not document the effect of the primed identities on the hypothesized library scenarios. A potential explanation is that the scenarios could not yield sufficient responses in terms of word length for a program to provide highly accurate politeness scores. Future research might develop scenarios in which customers can respond extensively so as to produce a sufficient number of words for a more in-depth analysis. Research on customer voice response to service could also produce important theoretical and managerial implications.

Ninth, within the scope and limits of this thesis, I could not explore other boundary conditions that might moderate the effect of customer identity on impoliteness. For example, the potential monopoly status of some service organizations may limit the power of the customer role. That is, customers who depend more on one service organization to fulfill their needs will likely experience lower power in the exchange relationship. As a consequence, they may risk the chance of being banned from using the service if they misbehave. Indeed, service organizations can also create a psychological monopoly through their exclusive service offerings. For example, luxury brands have been successful in creating rareness of their branded products, thereby spurring consumers' cravings for these products.

4.5 Conclusion

This research has noteworthy implications for consumer psychologists, customers, marketing practitioners, and firms alike. This dissertation proposed a novel way to conceive customer identity as a major cause of customer impoliteness and examined this effect under different mechanisms. In particular, it showed that customer identity could increase impoliteness through an inflated sense of entitlement. It also documented that customer identity (1) heightened objectification tendency, (2) increased compensation demand for service failure, and (3) decreased other-focused orientation. Although it is impossible to fully eradicate customer impoliteness, this research suggests that firms can proactively reduce it. For example, firms can make subtle changes in the way they address and communicate with their customers.

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Appendices

Appendix A. A Review of Identity Research in Marketing

Study	IV	DV	Moderators	Mediators	Findings
Bhattacharjee, Berger, and Menon (2014)	Explicit identity (Identity referencing messages vs. Identity defining messages)	Identity expressive Values of purchase	Target or neutral identity Feeling of certainty or uncertainty	Perceived Agency in identity expression	Explicit identity reduces values of purchase under the effect of target identity. Main effect disappears when consumer feels uncertain. Perceive agency mediates the effect of explicit identity on identity expression.
Chan, Berger, and Van Boven (2012)	Affiliation motives vs. uniqueness motives	Choices (Desirable social identity vs. uniqueness)	Group reference brands	Desires to be associated with the reference group Desires for differentiation within the reference group	Affiliation motives increase in-group reference brands. Uniqueness motives increase choice of unique options within the in-group preferable brand.
Dahl, Argo, and Morales (2011)	Body esteem	Product evaluation	Consumption alignment Identity alignment Product ad trial, ad only, trial only	Social comparison	Low body esteem results in negative product evaluation when consumption is aligned, and identity is aligned. The effect happens through social comparison.
White and Dahl (2007)	Brand association with dissociated group, outgroup and neutral group	Self-brand connections Brand evaluations	Situation constraints by information regarding experimenter Identity salience (in group identity)	Private self dis-identification	Consumers avoid brand associated with dissociated group compared to out-group. The effect is strengthened when the private self is primed, however, the effect is canceled by situational constraints.

Study	IV	DV	Moderators	Mediators	Findings
Rustagi and Shrum (2018)	Sociability threaten (implicit or explicit)	Opportunity to compensate using choice task	Connected product (status) Unconnected product (non-status)	Compensatory consumption Self-repaired	When self-threat and symbolic product are not made explicitly, symbolic consumption can facilitate self-repair.
				Threat rumination	Explicit connection (via brand name, slogan, tagline) can have detrimental impact on compensation because of rumination.
Trudel, Argo, and Meng (2016)	Identity linked product via signature	Recycle intention	Strength of connection Self-brand connection Social identity Negative emotions	Collective self-esteem	Consumers are more likely to recycle products linked to the self. Negative emotions reduce the effect of Identity linked product on recycle intention.
Chugani, Irwin, and Redden (2015)	Identity consistent product Sense of self and focal identity	Consumer satiation Product enjoyment	Product misattribution	Dissonance	Satiation from repeatedly consuming a product will slow when that product is made consistent with a salient self-identity.
Kaikati, Torelli, Winterich, and Rodas (2017)	Accountability Political Ideology	Donation allocation	Identity salience polarized vs. Non polarized causes	Desire to seek approval from the audience Conform to the audience of fellow group members	Conservatives can be motivated to align their donation decisions with the perceived generosity of liberals. However, it is only relevant when the donation cause is neutral.

Study	IV	DV	Moderators	Mediators	Findings
Von Schuckmann, Barros, Dias, and Andrade (2018)	Social identity strength	Choice of moral consumption (likelihood of taking picture)	Moral connotation (ambiguous vs. neutral) Moral cues salient	Moral consideration	Consumers who identify only weakly with the people most closely related to the consumption environment are more likely to choose a morally ambiguous consumption experience. Further, the impact of social identity strength decreases when moral considerations are made salient (Experiments 3 and 4).
Jiao, Wang (2018)	Empathy	Moral identity Consumer self-report (cheating behaviors)	Loneliness		Among lonely people, a higher level of empathy (either because of participants' own chronic personality, as in Study 1, or as a result of a temporary manipulation, as in Studies 2–4) leads to increased moral identity and subsequent moral behaviors.
Dimofte, Goodstein, and Brumbaugh (2015)	Aspirational advertising	Product attitude Implicit measure of self esteem		Negative social comparison Collective self-esteem Self-affirmation	When the advertising elicits knowledge about an out-group social identity that is superior to the viewer on some relevant dimension, the viewer experiences a loss of collective self-esteem, leading to diminished product attitudes. Strong identification with one's devalued in-group can attenuate the effect.

Study	IV	DV	Moderators	Mediators	Findings
Gomez and Torelli (2015)	Presence of nutrition information	Health risk perceptions Product evaluation Product enjoyment	Identity salience Cultural mindset cued by nationality Disfluency	Anticipated product enjoyment	French consumers reminded of their cultural identity are more sensitive to the presence (vs. not) of nutrition information in foods, as evidenced by their higher perceptions of health risk associated with consuming a hedonic food item.
Paolacci, Straeter, and de Hooge (2015)	Identity match (between gift and the giver)	Recipient's gift appreciation Choice	Match concerning core vs. peripheral characteristics of the giver	Perceived identity congruency	Gift recipients like a gift more when the gift contains references to the giver's characteristics. This tendency is not conditional on whether or not the giver intentionally selected a giver-matched gift for the recipient (Study 2) or on whether or not the giver is a liked person (Study 3), but it depends on the gift matching core characteristics as opposed to incidental descriptors of the give (Study 4).
Burson & Gershoff (2015)	Absolute stand for personal identity Categorization mindset	Relative difference between estimate others and estimate self		Systematic biased	Two incidental but commonplace marketing decisions can influence consumers' estimates of their relative standing and thus their social identities by influencing estimates of how other consumers are distributed.

Study	IV	DV	Moderators	Mediators	Findings
Weaver, Daniloski, Schwarz, and Cottone (2015)	Maximizers vs. Satisficers	Choices paradox between inferior object good and high relative standing. Choice of fake vs. non fake product	Public vs. Private consumption	Social comparison	Maximizers were actually more willing than satisficers to give up objective quality in order to get higher social standing. It is moderated by whether the outcome of their choice would be known to others or not. Non-visible choice cancels the effect.
Leung, Paolacci, and Puntoni (2018)	Identity motives	Automatic product preferences Willing to borrow the advance product	Skill required for the internal attribute to outcomes Identity salience	Desired for internal attribution	Automated products can be unattractive when identity motives are an important driver of consumption. Consumers who strongly identify with a social category tend to resist automation in identity-relevant products.
Gao, Zhang, and Mittal (2017)	Global mindset vs. local mindset	Price sensitivity Purchase intention	At monetary and non-monetary levels Sacrifice reason	Sacrifice mindset	Consumer with the local mindset has a lower price sensitivity and more tolerant of price increases. Local identity activates a sacrifice mindset, which mediates the effect of local identity on lower price sensitivity.

Study	IV	DV	Moderators	Mediators	Findings
Chung and Johar (2018)	Feeling of ownership artwork vs. calculator (identity related math)	Task performance Mathematic and Calculation	Self-concept clarity	Activation of product related identity Deactivation of product unrelated identity	The salience of actual or psychological ownership over a product results in performance impairment on product-unrelated tasks. In high self-concept clarity conditions, the self-concept is not malleable, and salience of product ownership does not result in (de)activation of specific aspects of the self.
Winterich, Mittal, and Aquino (2013)	Internalization and symbolization	Monetary charity Volunteer behavior	Recognition (public vs. private)	Social reinforcement Self-consistency motives Self-verification motives	Recognition enhances charitable behavior but only among those having low internalization and high symbolization. For both charitable behavior as donations of money (Studies 1 and 3) and volunteering one's time for research (Study 2).
Choi and Winterich (2013)	Outgroup vs. in-group brand	Brand attitude Categorization	Moral Identity Brand Morality	Psychological distance	Moral identity can increase out-group brand attitude. This occurs also for dissociative out-group brands, which have strong negative associations (Study 2). While consumers' moral identity does not influence out-group brand attitude for moral or immoral brands, moral identity is beneficial to out-group brands with more neutral brand morality perceptions (Study 4).

Study	IV	DV	Moderators	Mediators	Findings
Winterich and Barone (2011)	Social identification	Discount based promotions Coupon choice Promotion preference	Self-construal, Identity congruent Salience of the cause of identity Product type Charity efficiency		Interdependent consumers evaluated a donation featuring a congruent (local) charity more favorably than independent. When the promotion pertained to a healthy product, interdependent respondents were more likely to choose the donation than were independent respondents.
Lam, Ahearne, Hu, and Schillewaert (2010)	Market disruption	Brand loyalty and brand switching behavior (functional utility Maximization, and social mobility)		Perceived value and customer brand relationship	Loyalty intentions are a function of perceived value (largely cognitive in nature) early in the product life cycle and that affective attitudes toward the brand become a more important driver later in the cycle.
Bolton and Reed (2004)	Identity based priming, analytical mindset priming	Judgement on issues, product	Featured based judgment Counterargument Counter-identification Social influence		Identity based priming effect on judgment Initial based judgment reserves even after counterfactual reasoning. Initial identity thinking preserves despite counter-identification. Study 4 demonstrates some resistance of identity driven judgment to social influence.

Appendix B. Scenarios and measures in Study 1

Pretest 1

Scenarios

1_Preconsumption. "Ben plans to buy a TV. After searching online, Ben now considers choosing one of two TV brands. A physical store nearby has both brands available for sale, but at higher prices than the online store. Ben goes there and asks a salesperson for technique advice, but then he buys it online."

2_Preconsumption. "Mark wants to buy a pair of sport shoes. After searching online, he decides on a shoe brand he likes, but he is not sure about the size. A shoe store nearby (a physical one) has his favorite brand and model available in stock, but it is $10 more expensive than the online store. Mark comes to the physical store to try the shoes on, but he buys them online."

3_Preconsumption. "Jimmy is interested in knowing some technical features of a sound amplifier. An in-store staff person approaches Jimmy to assist, but he talks very fast and has a strange accent that prevents Jimmy from understanding him clearly. Jimmy asks that person to talk more slowly."

4_Consumption. "Jack is travelling on a warm summer day. Jack has just arrived at the hotel and entered the lobby. In the receptionist area, there is one glass of complimentary water left. Jack takes the glass of water even he knows there are other customers behind him."

5_Consumption. "William is in a restaurant. William is undecided between two dishes listed in the menu. A waitress recommends William one of the options, and explains why she thinks it is better. However, William does not choose the recommended dish."

6_Consumption. "Susan is in a busy restaurant. The service staff seems very busy. When Susan is about to make her order, a member of the service staff asks if he can come back later."

7_Consumption. "Jennifer goes to a local restaurant, and a staff member comes to take her order. That person looks like an apprentice, and he asks Jennifer to repeat her order.

After that, the staff runs to other tables to take further orders. Later, that staff brings Jennifer a slightly wrong side dish (potato fries with some pepper on top instead of no pepper). Even Jennifer does not care much about the side dish, she still asks the waiter to bring her a new side dish."

8_Consumption. "Laura is waiting to board. She has plenty of time before departure, so she goes to buy coffee. She has been standing in the line for 10 minutes. Another customer walks towards Laura and asks to get ahead in line, so he can catch a flight."

9_Postconsumption. "That day was Black Friday. Cathy was going to buy a branded TV at 50% off. Just prior to the "Black Friday" campaign, Cathy had noticed that the store offered a 50% discount on complementary products (HDMI cables etc.). Cathy asked a salesperson about that promotion, and the salesperson responded that he was quite sure the offer for complementary products was not valid during the Black Friday sale. Cathy suggested that salesperson to check with his colleagues."

10_Postconsumption. "Emma bought an expensive software package at a store. There is one minor issue with the software program. Emma calls the customer service hotline, and the operator says that the person with the most expertise in this relevant issue is currently very busy and asks for Emma's patience until the next day when the expert would have more time. Emma insists on finding the expert to solve her issue now."

11_Baseline. "It is a sunny day. Mike goes to a café, where he orders his coffee. He stays in the café for one hour then leaves."

12_Baseline. "Sophia is a student. She goes to library, searching for a particular book. She is unable to locate the book herself. The librarian helps her find the book. Sophia is so happy with the help she got, that she donates 100,000 USD to the library."
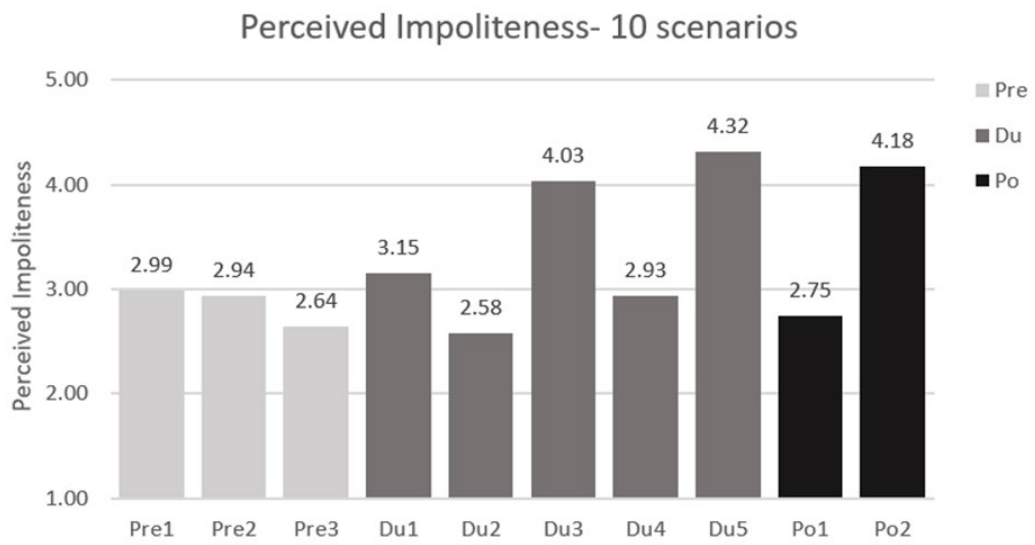
Figure 13 The average rating of perceived impoliteness across ten scenarios
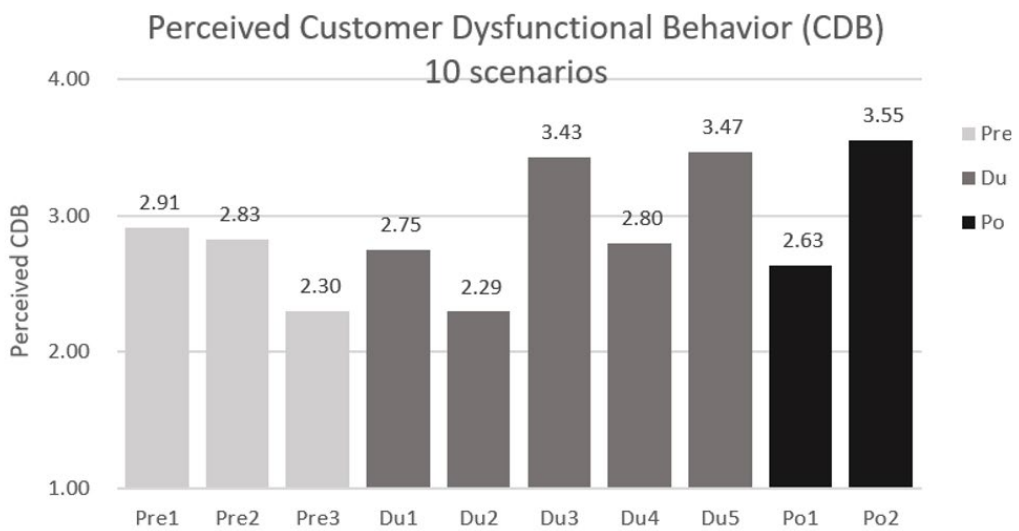
Figure 14 The average rating of perceived customer dysfunctional behavior across ten scenarios

Measures

Measures	Type	Scale	Adapted from
Customer dysfunctional behavior	Likert 1-7; "Strongly Disagree"- "Strongly Agree"	1. Impolite 2. Deceitful 3. Aggressive 4. Hostile 5. Selfish 6. Dishonest	Ybarra, Chan, & Park, 2001
Impoliteness (pretest 1)	Likert 1-7; "Strongly Disagree"- "Strongly Agree"	1. Impolite	
Realistic scenario	Likelihood 0-100%; "Very Unlikely"- "Very Likely"	How likely is it that you believe this scenario can happen in reality?	
Customer Identification	Likert 1-7; "Far Apart"- "Very Large Overlap"	Inclusion of customer identity to the self	Bagozzi & Lee, 2002
Guest Identification	Likert 1-7; "Far Apart"- "Very Large Overlap"	Inclusion of the guest identity to the self	Bagozzi & Lee, 2002
Impoliteness (Study 1)	Likelihood 0-100%; "Very Unlikely"- "Very Likely"	Impolite behaviors in 1) restaurant scenario & 2) customer service scenario	
Power	Likert 1-7; "Not At All"- "Very Much"	1. I can get people to listen to what I say 2. My wishes do not carry much weight 3. I can get people to do what I want 4. Even if I voice them, my views have little sways	Anderson & Galinsky, 2006

		5. I think I have a great deal of power	
		6. My ideas and opinions are often ignored.	
		7. Even when I try, I am not able to get my way	
		8. If I want to, get to make the decisions	
Entitlement	Likert 1-7; "Not At All"- "Very Much"	1. I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others	Campbell et al., 2004
		2. Great things should come to me	
		3. If I was on the Titanic, I would deserve to be on the first life boat	
		4. I demand the best because I am worth it	
		5. I do not necessarily deserve best treatment	
		6. I deserve more things in my life	
		7. People like me deserve an extra break now and then	
		8. Things should go my way	
		9. I feel entitled to more of everything	
Self-control	Likert 1-7; "Not At All"- "Very Much"	1. I am good at resisting temptation.	Tangney, Baumeister, & Boone 2004
		2. I have a hard time breaking bad habits	
		3. I am lazy	
		4. I say inappropriate things	
		5. I do certain things that are bad for me, if they are fun	
		6. I refuse things that are bad for me	
		7. I wish I had more self-discipline	

		8. People would say that I have an iron self-discipline	
		9. Pleasure and fun sometimes keep me from getting work done	
		10. I have trouble concentrating	
		11. I am able to work effectively towards long-term goals	
		12. Sometimes I can't stop myself from doing something even if I know it is wrong	
		13. I often act without thinking through all the alternatives	

Pretest 2

Person X's profile
- X is able to pay for the service and product
- X has need(s) and X's need(s) can be satisfied by service and products
- X can freely choose service and products
- X proactively searches for information about products and service
- X displays X's interest and needs

Person Y's profile
- Y is invited to the event
- The host will pay for the event
- The host treats Y with hospitability
- The host arranges the events by self (etc. menu, decorations)
- Y interacts with the host

Figure 15 Customer Profile (person X) and Guest Profile (person Y)

"Clear mind" Exercise

Please look at the image for 5 seconds and then close your eyes for 10 seconds. You can proceed to the next page in 15 seconds.
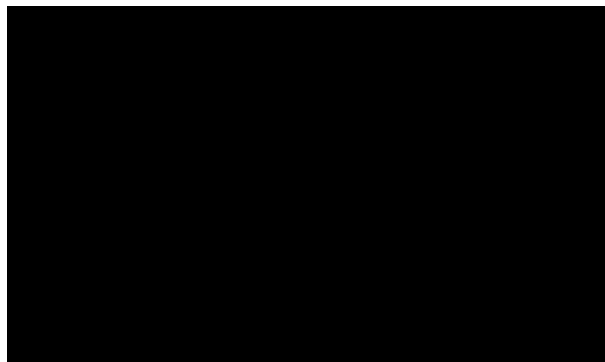
Profile X vs. Profile Y. The validation test confirmed that the profile X is different to profile Y in terms of customer and guest roles. For instance, participants rated that the profile of a typical customer matched the profile of the profile X ($M = 6.02$, $SD = 1.21$) than the profile Y ($M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.85$). The mean difference was statistically significant ($t(240) = 16.87$, $p < .001$). Similarly, participants rated the profile of a typical guest matching the profile Y ($M = 5.99$, $SD = 1.39$) than the profile X ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 1.8$). The mean difference was statistically significant ($t(240) = 13.86$, $p < .001$).

Study 1

Auxiliary analysis_Customer identification→Entitlement. When I used the rating of customer identification as a proxy of predicting variable, the regression model supported the linear relationship between customer identification and entitlement ($\beta = .30$, $t(238) = 4.85$, $p < .001$). The results also indicated that entitlement feeling increased the likelihood of pursuing impolite actions ($\beta = .53$, $t(238) = 9.59$, $p < .001$). These results supported hypothesis 2.

Ancillary analysis_Customer identification→Entitlement→Impoliteness. I used customer identification (the manipulation check) as a proxy of predicting variable and ran PROCESS 3.5 with the input model 4 developed by Hayes (2021) with 10,000 bootstrapped samples and a 95% confidence interval. As shown in Figure 16, the effect of customer identification on entitlement was statistically significant ($\beta = 0.27$, $t = 7.43$, $p < .001$), as was the effect of entitlement on the likelihood of customer impoliteness ($\beta = 8.84$, $t = 8.03$, $p < .001$). The indirect effect of customer identification on impoliteness was statistically significant ($\beta = 2.41$, 95% CI [1.3025 3.6296]), as was the total effect ($\beta = 4.17$, 95% CI [2.0114 6.3336]).

```
                        ┌──────────────────┐
                        │   Entitlement    │
                        └──────────────────┘
         0.27**                                   8.84**

┌──────────────────┐                         ┌──────────────────┐
│    Customer      │      2.41*(1.76)        │  Likelihood of   │
│  Identification  │─────────────────────────│   Impoliteness   │
└──────────────────┘                         └──────────────────┘
```
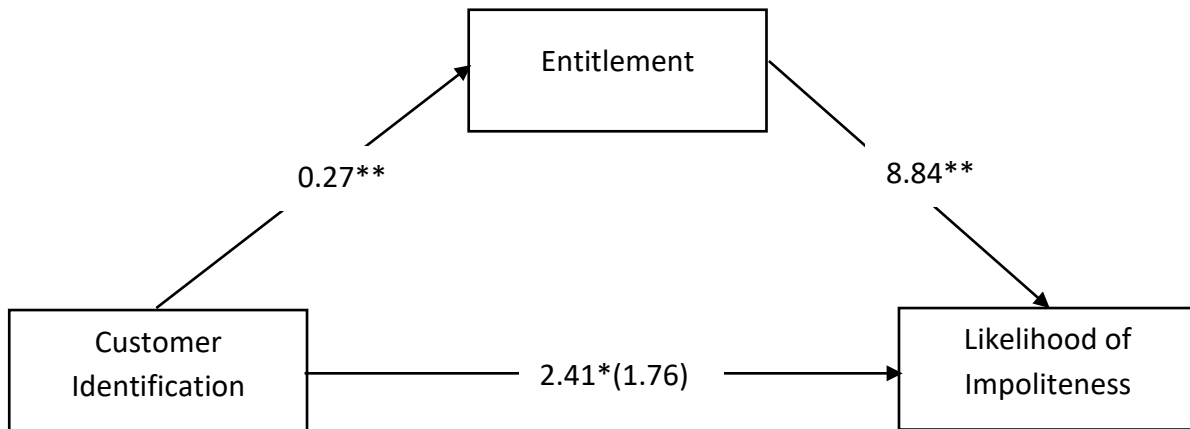
Figure 16 The mediation effect of entitlement when customer identification was used as a proxy. *Note.* We controlled variables such as self-control, gender, age, and education. Asterisks indicate significant path coefficients (*$p < .05$, **$p < .01$)

     The pathway analysis revealed that identity conditions increased entitlement through customer identification, but not through an alternative route such as guest identification. In particular, the indirect effect following the path through identity condition→ customer identification measure→ entitlement→ impoliteness was significant ($p < .05$), as was the indirect path through customer identification measure→ impoliteness ($p < .05$). These findings indicated that entitlement was not the only underlying process explaining the negative relationship between customer identification and the customer's impoliteness.

Appendix C. Tasks and Measures in Study 2

Pretest 3

Keyboard game. When doing this game, you are asked to sort words into categories that are on the left- and right-hand side of the computer screen by pressing the "e" key if the word belongs to the category on the left and the "i" key if the word belongs to the category on the right.

Please pay attention to the following categories.

Service staff: Waiting Staff, Barber, Teller, Receptionist, Shop Attendant

Non-service staff: Plumber, Farmer, Painter, Carpenter, Janitor

Human traits: Creative, Knowledgeable, Passionate, Independent, Self-righteous, Sensible, Uncompromising, Influential

Object traits: Convertible, Dependent, Defenseless, Senseless, Impotent, Violable, Instrumental, Fungible
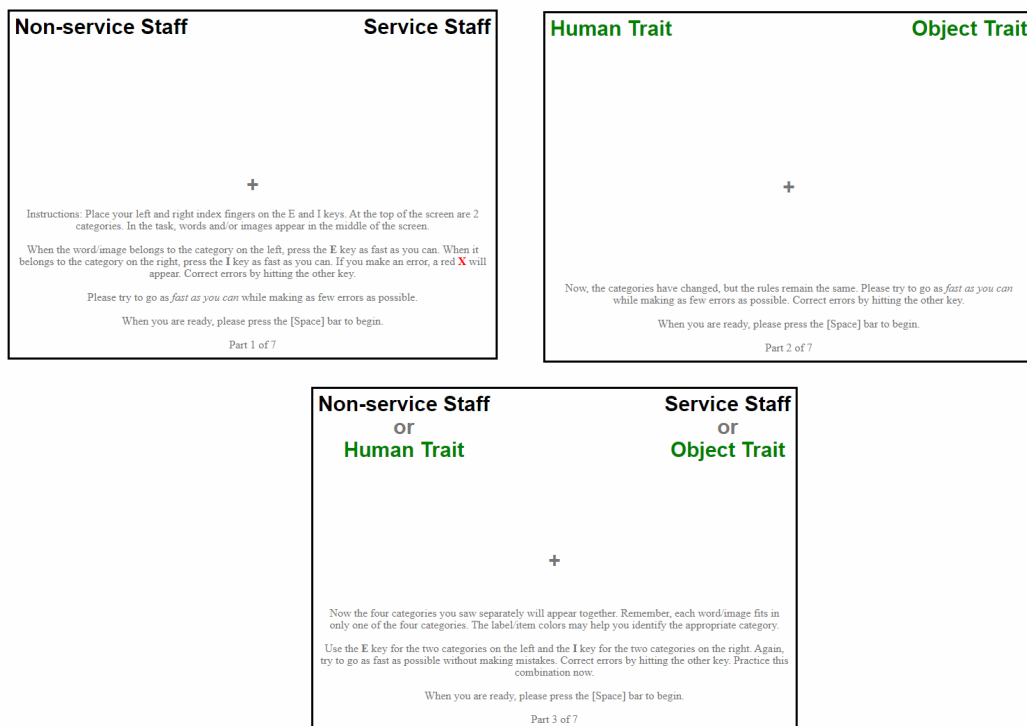

Figure 17 Examples of stages in IAT

Study 2

Priming tasks. Priming of customer identity and control condition were similar to study 1. For local community member condition, we use the local community member images. For example:

Keyboard game. In this game, you are asked to sort words into categories that are on the left-hand side and the right-hand side of the computer screen by pressing the "e" key if the word belongs to the category on the left and the "i" key if the word belongs to the category on the right. Please note that too many errors might disqualify your participation in this study.

Please pay attention to the following categories.

Service Staff: Waiting Staff, Bank Teller, Receptionist, Shop Attendant

Non-service Staff: Carpenter, Plumber, Farmer, Painter

**Superior traits:** Creative, Knowledgeable, Passionate, Independent, Sensible

Inferior traits: Dependent, Defenseless, Senseless, Instrumental, Fungible

Appendix D. Tasks and Measures in Study 3

Customer/Volunteer identity condition

In this participation group, the focus event is **grocery trip/ grocery trip for another**. First, you will be shown some images and be asked to imagine yourself as **a customer/volunteer** visiting a store to **buy groceries for yourself/ buy groceries for a person you know.** Please spend a few seconds think about **your needs/that person**, and **what groceries/ what groceries he or she may need** you might buy.

Please look at the center of the screen and allow yourself at least a few seconds to imagine yourself as a **customer/volunteer**. Please try to imagine as vividly as possible
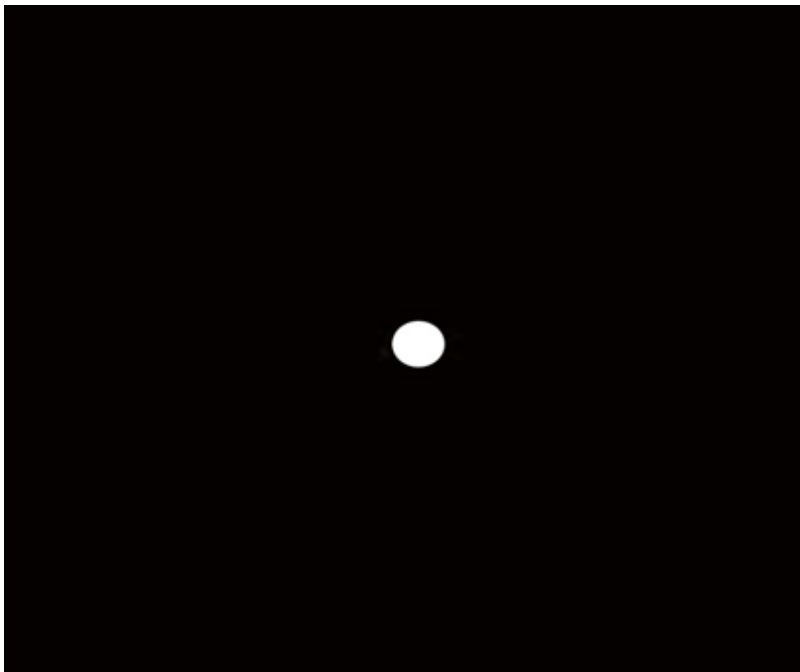
Imagine that you stop by this grocery store for your shopping/volunteer. What would you do first when you arrive?

Imagine that you are browsing through the store. If you/a person you help need some fresh items in the fruits and vegetables aisle, how would you check their quality?

At the end of the grocery trip, you got all groceries you need for **yourself/the person you volunteer to help**. Now, you encounter the cashier for checkout

Control condition

In this participation group, we randomly present you one specific event. However, before you read the scenario and answer the questions, we would like to know a little bit about yourself. For example, what is **your hobby**? What would you do when you have **a free time**? What is **special** about yourself?

Scenario

As the queue is long, the cashier seems to be in a rush. When you receive the receipt, you suspect that something is wrong. Therefore, you check the receipt and find out that there is *a mistake* on the bill: The cashier **scanned** one of the items **twice** and you ended up paying **$5** too much. You try to tell, but the cashier is currently busy. The cashier asks you to wait. It ends up that you have to wait approximately **10 minutes** until the cashier is available for you to report the overcharge. After giving you a refund, the cashier immediately continues to do checkout for another person.

Measures	Type	Scale	Adapted from
Empathy	Likert 1-7; "Strongly Disagree"- "Strongly Agree"	1. Despite of what happened, I understand the cashier 2. Despite of what happened, I put myself in the shoes of cashier 3. Despite of what happened, I put myself in the shoes of cashier	Suri, Huang, & Sénécal, 2019
Forgiveness	Likert 1-7; "Strongly Disagree"- "Strongly Agree"	1. I will forgive the service failure 2. I will give the cashier opportunity to make it up for me 3. I will not avoid the cashier when I do checkout in the future	Suri, Huang, & Sénécal, 2019

Demand Compensation	US dollars (0-100)	If the store want to give you a compensation coupon, how much do you think the fair value of the coupon should be	
Subjective social status	Scale measure 1-10; 1: The worst off 10: The best off	Think of the ladder with 10 steps representing where people stand in the US (education, income, job)	Adler, Epel, Castellazzo, Ickovics, 2000
Objective social status	Income range; 1: US$ 15000 or less 7: over US$ 100000	Annual Income	

Appendix E. Tasks and Measures in Study 4

Identity priming tasks

Control condition

Of all countries, the USA has **the largest diversity in ecosystems** in the world. US natural habitats range from the arctic to the subtropical and are accompanied by **an extensive variety in plants and wildlife**. The **US offers inhabitants and visitors an extensive set of nature exploration opportunities, and beautiful seasonal scenes**. You have probably experienced this as well.

Please take 2-3 minutes to reflect on what **US nature experience means to you** and describe your reflections in writing (5-7 sentences).

Customer condition

Of all countries, the USA is **the largest market for products and services** in the world. US consumers enjoy a **huge variety of product choices** accompanied by extensive service levels. US companies typically **commit to give their customers excellent product and service experiences**.

Please take 2-3 minutes to reflect on what **the American customer experience means to you** and describe your reflections in writing (5-7 sentences).

Student Identity

Of all countries, the USA has **the most elaborate education system** in the world. US students enjoy **outstanding academic programs** accompanied by an extensive social life. US schools typically enable students to enjoy **excellent campus life experience including cultural and athletic activities**. You have probably experienced this as well.

Please take 2-3 minutes to reflect on what **the American student experience means to you** and describe your reflections in writing (5-7 sentences).

Self-other measurement

Word choice task. Linguistic research has shown that **humans are capable of implicit interpretation of the structure and the content of languages, even languages that people have never seen before**. To test that ability, we would like to show you a series of sentences written in one specific foreign language. This language is used by only a few people who lives in a small and isolated island in the middle of Pacific Ocean.

Try your best guess to identify **the correct pronoun missing** in each sentence with the provided list of choices.

Important! We will randomly select two participants who score highest in this task for **a bonus of 5 dollars each**.

Examples of the questions

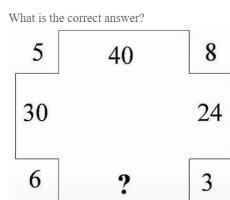Fi leralmin-tor ik sahr-tor-tor nam-tor wuh ftar t' ra pavesh (...) svi' wak ha'kiv.

my
our
his
their
her

Orenau ma shon ik sahr, (...) k'ashiv haul-tor gad-tor-gad toran heh mokuhlek.

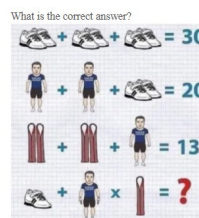| |
|---|
| they |
| we |
| she |
| he |
| I |

Filter task

The following task is to examine how many logical quiz questions an adult can solve.

What is the correct answer?

5	40	8
30		24
6	?	3

14
16
18
20
Other

What is the correct answer?

47
45
43
41
Other

Measures	Type	Scale	Adapted from
Customer Identification	Likert 1-7; "Strongly Disagree"- "Strongly Agree"	I was thinking of myself as a **customer** when I responded to the previous task	
Student Identification	Likert 1-7; "Strongly Disagree"- "Strongly Agree"	I was thinking of myself as a **student** when I responded to the previous task	
Self-focus	The sum-up of the choices of first-person singular pronoun (0-13)	I, me, my, mine	Saltzberg, & Goldsamt (1990)
Other-focus	The sum-up of the choices of first-person plural pronoun (0-13)	We, our, us, ours	Saltzberg, & Goldsamt (1990)

Appendix F. Tasks and Measures in Study 5

Identity priming tasks

Control condition

Recently, the idea that **online courses should be free for everyone** has received increased attention in the media.

While some people support the idea that online course should be free, others are against it.

Please use your arguments to **support** the idea that online courses should be free for all.

You can also provide your own examples by reflecting on **your experience as a user** at any e-learning platform.

Customer condition

Recently, the idea that **students are customers** has received increased attention in the media.

While some people support the idea that students are customers of educational services, others are against it.

Please use your arguments to **support** the idea that students should be treated as customers.

You can also provide your own examples by reflecting on **your experience as a customer** of your school or institution.

Student condition

Recently, the idea that **students are customers** has received increased attention in the media.

While some people support the idea that students are customers of educational services, others are against it.

Please use your arguments to **oppose** the idea that students should be treated as customers.

You can also provide your own examples by reflecting on **your experience as a student** at your school or institution.

Scenarios

Reservation Email. Please imagine that you read a review about a novel book with title "The Old Man and the Sea" written by Ernest Hemingway published in 1952. You find it interesting and want to read it.

Please **write an email** to the librarian to reserve that book.

Library Card Renewal. Please imagine that you are at the library, and you need to renew your library card. The librarian asks you to wait while he/she is answering an email. After waiting for several minutes, you do not want to wait any longer.

Please write down **exactly what you would say** to the librarian.

Book Searching Request. Please imagine that you are at the library. You are trying to locate a book; therefore, you approach the library for help.

Please write down **exactly what you would say** to the librarian.

Robustness analysis

Yeomans et al. (2018) advise researchers to use context-specific corpora for training their politeness models. While Stanford API politeness data set is quite comprehensive and leads to accurate models (Li et al., 2020), it might be too distant from the marketing context we study. Thus, we also employ a public "phone offers" data set Yeomans et al. (2018). In the data set, participants wrote either polite or impolite offers to buy a phone. The replication showed analogous results to the model based on Stanford API (M_{diff} = .075, *SE* = .032; *t*-test(123.29) = 2.491, *p* < .05). The results indicated that the finding in study 5 is robust as it replicated the findings using another politeness corpus.

Feature.Name	POS.Tags	Description	Example
Hello	No	"hi", "hello", "hey"	"Hi, how are you today?"
Goodbye	No	"goodbye", "bye", "see you later"	"That's my best offer. Bye!"
Please	Both	Please mid-sentence	"Let me know if that works, please"
Gratitude	Both	"thank you", "i appreciate", etc.	"Thanks for your interest"
Apologies	Both	"sorry", "oops", "excuse me", etc.	"I'm sorry for being so blunt"
Formal Title	No	"sir", "madam", "mister", etc.	"Sir, that is quite an offer."
Informal Title	No	"buddy", "chief", "boss", etc.	"Dude, that is quite an offer."
Swearing	No	Vulgarity of all sorts	"The dang price is too high"
Could You	No	Indirect request	"Could you lower the price?"
Can You	No	Direct request	"Can you lower the price?"
Bare Command	Yes	Unconjugated verb to start sentence	"Lower the price for me"
Let Me Know	No	"let me know"	"Let me know if that works"
Affirmation	Yes	Short appreciation to start sentence	"Cool, that will work out then"
Agreement	Yes	Explicit statement of agreement	"I mostly agree with that"
Acknowledgement	Yes	Explicit statement of understanding	"I understand your point"
Conjunction Start	Yes	Begin sentence with conjunction	"And if that works for you"
Reasoning	No	Explicit reference to reasons	"I want to explain my offer price"
Resassurance	No	Minimizing other's problems	"Don't worry, we're still on track"
Ask Agency	No	Request an action for self	"Let me step back for a minute"
Give Agency	No	Suggest an action for other	"I want to let you come out ahead"
Hedges	No	Indicators of uncertainty	"I might take the deal"
Truth Intensifier	Both	Indicators of certainty	"This is definitely a good idea."
Positive	No	Positive emotion words	"that is a great deal"
Negative	No	Negative emotion words	"that is a bad deal"
Negation	No	Contradiction words	"This cannot be your best offer"
Questions	No	Question mark count	"Is this for real?"
WH Questions	Yes	Questions w/ WH words (how, why)	"Why did you settle on that value?"
YesNo Questions	Yes	Questions w/o WH words	"Is this for real?"
By The Way	No	"by the way"	"By the way, my old offer stands"
Adverbial Just	Yes	modifying a quantity with "just"	"It is just enough to be worth it"
Filler Pause	No	Filler words and verbal pauses	"That would be, um, fine"
For Me	No	"for me"	"It would be great for me"
For You	No	"for you"	"It would be great for you"
First Person Plural	No	First-person plural pronouns	"it's a good deal for both of us"
First Person Single	Both	First-person singular mid-sentence	"It would benefit me, as well"
Second Person Single	Both	Second person mid-sentence	"It would benefit you, as well"
Impersonal Pronoun	No	Non-person referents	"That is a deal"
Subjectivity	Yes	"I think","I believe","my view"	"I think that is fair"

Table 5 36 politeness features (Yeomans, Kantor, & Tingley, 2018)

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