THE ROLE OF CONSUMER FACE RESTORATION IN COMMUNICATIVE EFFORTS BY SERVICE FIRMS TO OBTAIN CONSUMER FORGIVENESS, CONSUMER TRUST, AND CONSUMER RECONCILIATION

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ABSTRACT

Service providers covet consumer forgiveness to restore consumer trust and obtain consumer reconciliation post-service failures. While consumer forgiveness is known to depend upon the quality of the forgiveness-seeking communication employed by service providers, there is no quantitative empirical research that investigates the role of consumer face restoration in a service provider's communicative efforts to obtain consumer forgiveness. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by applying the framework of the face negotiation theory to investigate the impact of three types of forgiveness-seeking communicative behaviors of service providers viz., offer of compensation, expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement on consumer face restoration and consumer forgiveness; and thereof the effects of consumer forgiveness on consumer trust and reconciliation. The study uses structural equation modelling on data collected from 400 respondents in North-West India using retrospective experience sampling. The results demonstrate that while expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement are substantial predictors of consumer forgiveness; offer of compensation does not have a significant direct impact on consumer forgiveness. Consumer face restoration is revealed to be a mediator between forgiveness-seeking behaviors and consumer forgiveness and as expected, consumer forgiveness has a significant positive effect on consumer trust and reconciliation.

INTRODUCTION

Consumer forgiveness, consumer trust and consumer reconciliation are important to service firms seeking to build long-term relations with customers, given that service failures are inevitable due to the high involvement of people in providing services (Muhammad and Rana 2019; Riaz and Khan 2016). The damages from these service failures could be huge (Radu et al. 2019) because they tend to elicit negative emotions among consumers and often result in negative attitudes and behavioral intentions (Hur and Jang 2019). Keen to avoid the negative consumer responses to service failures, such as consumer grudge-holding, retaliation, avoidance and vengeance (Aron 2016; Radu et al. 2020; Tsarenko, Strizhakova, and Otnes 2019), service firms desire more positive reactions that, in turn, lead to several beneficial consequences. Consumer forgiveness is one such positive response, which firms yearn for after a transgression (Karani 2021).

Consumer forgiveness is a consumer's relinquishment of anger and vengeful thoughts towards the service provider after the service transgression (Tsarenko et al. 2019). Consumer forgiveness is known to restore the strained relationship between a service provider and a consumer after a service failure (Tsarenko & Tojib 2011) and is acknowledged as an indispensable step towards maintaining and strengthening constructive consumer–firm relationships in the long run (Xie & Peng 2009), and is therefore valued by service firms for its potential positive influence on desirable outcomes such as consumer trust and reconciliation. Consumer trust is a consumer's belief and confidence that the service provider can be relied upon to deliver services as promised in a consistent manner (Sirdeshmukh, Singh, and Sabol

2002) and a willingness to rely upon an exchange partner (Moorman, Zaltman and Deshpande 1992). Trust is a key element in service encounters as it impacts consumers' attitudes and behaviors towards service providers, such as consumer loyalty (Iglesias et al. 2020) and commitment (Vrontis et al. 2020). Consumer reconciliation is a consumer's willingness to accept a service firm after a service failure and to extend necessary acts of goodwill for renewing a relationship with the firm (Radu et al. 2020). Consumer reconciliation too has several desirable outcomes, such as positive word of mouth (WOM), re-patronization, reduced number of complaints as well as reduced negative WOM and vindictiveness toward the firm (Aquino, Tripp, and Bies 2006; Joireman et al. 2013).

While extant interpersonal relations literature acknowledges that the forgiveness process comprises psychological and communicative aspects (Kelley and Waldron 2006; Zhang et al. 2019), the prior literature on consumer forgiveness has paid less attention to the communicative aspects and remained focussed on the psychological aspect of consumer forgiveness by primarily studying social-cognitive, personality and transgressions-related determinants of consumer forgiveness (Babin, Zhuang, and Borges 2021; Hur and Jang 2019; Muhammad and Rana 2020; Riaz and Khan 2016). This neglect of the communicative element of the consumer forgiveness process is hard to explain considering that forgiveness, after all, is an "interactive strategy" of relationship repair (Kelley and Waldron 2005; Zhang et al. 2019), which demands constructive communication between the offender and the offended party to create the possibility of relationship restoration through forgiveness (Waldron and Kelley 2008). Consequently, considering the imperative role of communication in conflict resolution, the understanding and identification of effective communication behaviors is important as these influence consumers' responses after service failures and would have long-lasting consequences for service organizations (Celuch, Bantham, and Kasouf 2012).

The communicative aspect of the forgiveness process focuses on how forgiveness is sought, expressed or enacted (Kelley and Waldron 2005). While there is an account of several direct and indirect strategies of forgiveness-seeking in the literature on interpersonal relations, in the literature on service failure and recovery more attention has been paid to the direct forgiveness-seeking strategies, which are widely employed as service recovery efforts because of their higher relevance in business situations (Hill 2013). Direct forgiveness-seeking strategies are explicit tactics which comprise forgiveness-seeking behaviors such as apologizing, accepting responsibility, compensating and showing empathy; whereas indirect strategies involve non-verbal or implicit tactics such as humour, nonverbal assurance and ingratiation (Kelley 1998; Kelley and Waldron 2005). In addition to employing direct forgiveness-seeking strategies as service recovery strategies, service recovery literature has identified several other non-forgiveness-seeking oriented service recovery strategies also, such as problem-solving, listening, voice, responsiveness, empowerment, referential account, and credibility feedback (Bae, Lee and Kim 2021; Harun et al. 2018; Vaerenbergh et al. 2019).

The present research effort includes in its scope three components of apology, which is the most popular direct forgiveness-seeking strategy, viz., offer of compensation, expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement. Unlike earlier research efforts on communicative aspects of consumer forgiveness, the present research effort examines the underlying psychological mechanism through which forgiveness-oriented recovery efforts of service providers transform into consumer forgiveness. This is important considering the observation by Yim et al. (2003) that understanding consumers' psychological processes during service failure encounters is essential for developing effective service recovery strategies.

The construct related to the underlying psychological mechanism of the consumer, chosen as the focal construct of this research effort, is the consumer's face. Interpersonal face-threatening service failure situations demand sophisticated practice of facework (Lee and Sparks 2007). Facework is the communicative behavior that is used to save or protect self-face

or other-face in social encounters (Ting-Toomey 2005). In service encounters, the interactions are built on the varied aspects of the face and these are especially relevant in service failure and recovery incidents (Du, Fan, and Feng 2010). Surprisingly, despite the indispensable role played by consumers' face concerns in influencing post-service recovery attitudes and behaviors, little attention has been paid to investigate consumer face evaluations in service failure encounters, and previous researchers have called for further research on this (Y. L. Lee, Sparks, and Butcher 2013; J. L. M. Lee et al. 2020).

The fundamental postulations of face negotiation theory concerning face, face concerns and facework strategies in face-threatening social interactions makes it an effective theoretical framework for studying consumer forgiveness in service failure encounters because forgiveness-seeking behaviors are fundamentally the facework strategies that could be employed by the offender to positively influence the offended party's face evaluations in social encounters and to attain forgiveness (Kelley and Waldron 2005). It is only recently that this theory has been used in the literature on consumer forgiveness. However, as only qualitative research has been published on this (Bath and Bawa 2020) there is a need for rigorous quantitative research that can triangulate the face management perspective in service failure context and further augment the scope and applicability of face-negotiation theory in forgiveness episodes.

Specifically, the objectives of the study are, first, to examine the effects of three types of perceived forgiveness-seeking behaviors of service providers, namely- offer of compensation, expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement on consumer forgiveness; second, to investigate the mediating effect of consumer face restoration in the relationship between forgiveness-seeking behaviors of service providers and consumer forgiveness; and third, to examine the influence of consumer forgiveness on consumer trust and reconciliation, and to investigate the indirect effect of consumer face restoration via consumer forgiveness on consumer trust and reconciliation.

In contrast to the majority of prior studies in the research stream of consumer forgiveness, the current study has employed retrospective experience sampling to collect data, instead of scenario-based experimental approaches. Data has been collected from 400 respondents about service failures experienced by them and their forgiveness encounters. The findings obtained with the help of structural equation modeling reveal that the afore-mentioned three forgiveness-seeking behaviors work as effective facework strategies to redress the perceived face threats of the consumers during service failures. Expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement are revealed as strong predictors of consumer forgiveness. Consumer face restoration facilitates consumer forgiveness and also acts as a mediating link between the three forgiveness-seeking behaviors and consumer forgiveness. Consumer forgiveness promotes the restoration of consumer trust and reconciliation after service failures.

The present research effort is novel in several aspects: in the choice of face negotiation theory as the conceptual lens, in examining the overlooked communicative aspect of consumer forgiveness, and in giving a focal place to consumer face restoration to unveil the underlying psychological mechanism of the consumer forgiveness process. Therefore, this research effort makes a contribution to the research streams of service failures and recovery, face management, consumer forgiveness and interpersonal communications.

This article is organised under the following sections: theoretical framework and hypotheses development, research methodology, analysis and results, discussion and implications, limitations, and future directions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

In this section, hypotheses are developed with the help of a review of existing research on face negotiation theory, consumer forgiveness, forgiveness-seeking behaviors, consumer face restoration, consumer trust and consumer reconciliation.

While extant service recovery research has examined the impact of components of apology on recovery outcomes through the theoretical lens of justice theory, the present research has employed face negotiation theory. Justice theory studies the outcomes of service recovery efforts by evaluating the consumers' perceived fairness of three dimensions of justice, namely-distributive, procedural and interactional (J. L. M. Lee et al. 2020). Justice perceptions are influenced by several situational and cultural factors (Chebat, Roth and Chebat 2020). Concern for face is one such imperative factor which may influence the effectiveness of service recovery actions in restoring commercial relationships as it provides the rationale for the development of justice perceptions (J. L. M. Lee et al. 2020; Sengupta et al. 2018). The strength of the face-negotiation theory is that it provides a comprehensive organizing framework for expounding individual, cultural and situational influences, especially face, face concerns and facework behaviors during face-threatening situations such as service failures (Zhang et al. 2019).

Face negotiation theory

Face negotiation theory proposed by Ting-Toomey (1988) provides an explanatory and organizing framework for conflict management by elucidating individual, situational and cultural influences on the face, face-concerns and facework during conflict situations. Face is a person's claimed sense of favourable image and self-worth, which is enjoyed in social interactions (Ting-Toomey 2005). Face could be gained or lost depending on the respect or disregard by other parties in social encounters (Y. L. Lee et al. 2013); thus, conflicts involving face-threatening social and relational transgressions result in the victim's face-loss (Zhang et al. 2019). Face negotiation theory emphasizes the locus of the face and highlights the role of self-face, other-face, and mutual-face concerns during face-threatening conflicts (Ting-Toomey 2005). Self-face is the protection of one's own image; other-face is the concern for the preservation of another's image; and mutual-face is the concern for both parties' images or the image of the relationship (Ting-Toomey and Kurogi 1998). The theory postulates that face-concerns gain significance in face-threatening conflict situations, and people try to maintain and negotiate face by employing facework behaviors that involve optimal incorporation of knowledge, mindfulness and communication skills (Ting-Toomey 1988). The facework behaviors which alleviate or redress the face threats and losses are effective in attaining positive outcomes from face-threatening conflicts (Kelley and Waldron 2005). Facework behaviours are reflective of a person's face concerns (Oetzel et al. 2000).

Forgiveness is a face-management process which involves cooperative actions by relational partners following face-threatening transgressions (Waldron and Kelley 2008). Forgiveness-seeking, which is fundamentally a facework strategy, includes face-saving/restoring communicative behaviors such as acceptance of responsibility, expressions of remorse or guilt, explicit acknowledgement of harm, and a plea for mercy (Kelley and Waldron, 2005, 2006). The forgiveness-seeking behaviors place the offender in an inferior spot vis-à-vis the offended party and give autonomy to the offended party to take the decision about granting or denying forgiveness (Hareli and Eisikovits 2006). This submissiveness of the offender helps to restore the damaged dignity and self-respect of the offended party (Lazare 2004). Thus, these forgiveness-seeking behaviors manifesting face-management characteristics lead to positive transformation in the victim's emotions and behaviors and attain favourable relationship outcomes (Kelley and Waldron 2006).

As service failures are face-threatening situations and forgiveness-seeking behaviors are face-restoration activities (Bath and Bawa 2020; Du et al. 2010), the face-negotiation theory

(Ting-Toomey 1988) serves as an effective theoretical framework to guide the present research on consumer forgiveness.

Consumer forgiveness

The concept of forgiveness originally emerged in the discipline of theology, and later on, it received profound attention in the fields of psychology, philosophy, psychotherapy, developmental psychology and moral development (Tsarenko and Tojib 2011; Tsarenko et al. 2019). Past studies offer diverse conceptualizations of forgiveness (Worthington 2005); however, it is widely agreed by scholars that forgiveness can be conceptualized as a psychological and communicative process which involves motivational, emotional and behavioral transformations such as a decreased anger and resentment, dampened urge to retaliate and take revenge and elevated desire to reconcile (Kelley and Waldron 2006; Zhang et al. 2019). Even though the process and pragmatic benefits of forgiveness are well-studied in other disciplines, the adoption of forgiveness in consumer research is a recent phenomenon, as pointed out by Lin and Chou (2022) and Karani (2021).

Consumer forgiveness is a consumers' internal act of renouncing anger, alienation, and other destructive behaviors towards the firm for maintaining relationship (Xie and Peng 2009). With the acknowledgement of consumer forgiveness as a possible transgression outcome, research in the field of consumer forgiveness has made remarkable advances with the development of two comprehensive models of consumer forgiveness, namely- the role of consumer forgiveness in service transactional model (Tsarenko and Tojib 2011) and customer forgiveness model (Joireman, Grégoire, and Tripp 2016); the qualitative exploration of consumers' perspective (Karani 2021) and frontline employees' perspective of consumer forgiveness (Bath and Bawa 2020); the identification of socio-cognitive, personality and failure-related determinants of consumer forgiveness (Babin, Zhuang, and Borges 2021; Hur and Jang 2019; Riaz and Khan 2016; Tsarenko and Tojib 2012; Wei, Liu, and Keh 2020); the investigation of several outcomes of consumer forgiveness (Ma, Zhong, and Hou 2020; Muhammad and Rana 2019; Muhammad and Rana 2020); the revelation of mediating role of consumer forgiveness in the service recovery process (Harrison-Walker 2019; Muhammad and Rana 2020); the examination of organizational and consumer moderators on the relationship between service recovery and consumer forgiveness (Harrison-Walker 2022).

Notably, the majority of research on consumer forgiveness emphasizes the motivations and cognitions linked with forgiveness, rather than communicative behaviors used to seek, express or manage forgiveness.

Forgiveness-seeking behavior

The communication component of the forgiveness process focuses on communicative behaviors used to seek, provoke, express or manage forgiveness (Kelley and Waldron 2005). The communication between the offender and the offended party following a transgression is an integral element of the forgiveness process (Waldron and Kelley 2008) because the offended party's decision to forgive is associated with the offender's constructive communicative behavior after the transgression that may eventually lead to relationship repair (Kelley and Waldron 2006). Thus, the forgiveness-seeking behavior can generate positive or negative post-transgression relationship outcomes depending on the quality and components of forgiveness-seeking communication employed by the offender (Kelley and Waldron 2005).

The present research examines various components of apology as forgiveness-seeking behaviors employed by service providers to elicit consumer forgiveness. Apology, a direct forgiveness-seeking strategy, involves an acknowledgement of responsibility, an expression of remorse or empathy, an offer to recompense, and a request to forgive (Han and Cai 2010; Zhang et al. 2019). Apologies are regarded as the offender's socially responsible post-transgression

behavior and are, therefore, considered by consumers as a satisfactory response by an organization following a service failure (Bolkan and Daly 2008). In service failure and recovery literature, extant literature has studied the apology as a binary variable (apology vs no apology), but has overlooked the examination of specific components of apology (McClure, Killian, and Pearson 2019), which is necessary as the effectiveness of each component varies (Fehr and Gelfand 2010; Hill 2013). Therefore, based on Fehr and Gelfand (2010) and Kelley and Waldron's (2005) work on the categorisation of apology and forgiveness-seeking communications, the current research examines three components of apology, viz., offer of compensation, expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement as forgiveness-seeking behaviors of service providers in the consumer forgiveness process.

Offer of Compensation

Offers of compensation are aimed at restoring balance and equity in relationships through some type of actions and investment of resources (Fehr and Gelfand 2010). Compensation involves the offender's tangible attempts to cover the losses caused to the offended party by making an investment of time and effort to gain forgiveness (Kelley and Waldron 2006; Waldron and Kelley 2008). Specifically, offers of compensation involve attempts to amend the balance of gains and losses and to restore the offended party's situation to its pre-harm level (Komiya et al. 2018). The offer of compensation signifies that the offender is sorrowful for committing the wrongdoing and is making efforts to repair the relationship with the offended party (Lewis, Parra, and Cohen 2015). Offers of compensation are perceived positively by the offended party as these signal the wrongdoer's efforts to redress the victim's face threats (Kelley and Waldron 2005) and commitment to restore equity and, thus, enhance the offended party's readiness to forgiveness (Waldron and Kelley 2008). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> **H1a:** *An offer of compensation has a significant positive relationship with consumer forgiveness.*

Expression of Empathy

Expressions of empathy exhibit the wrongdoer's acknowledgement of and concern for the victim's sufferings (Fehr and Gelfand 2010; Nadler and Liviatan 2006). From the affective perspective, it involves the offender's expression of warmth towards the offended party and compassion for the sufferings. From a cognitive perspective, the offender demonstrates comprehension of the offended party's point of view and the consequences of the wrongdoing on the aggrieved party's well-being (Fehr and Gelfand 2010). Expressions of empathy by the transgressor help to regulate wronged individual's negative emotions, boost positive affect, repair trust and restore interpersonal relationships (Bagdasarov, Connelly, and Johnson 2019). Furthermore, Nadler and Liviatan (2006) pointed out that offenders' acknowledgement of the victim's sufferings helps restore the victim's self-worth, and it is found to influence the revenge-seeking behaviors of offended parties negatively. Similarly, in services literature, expressions of empathy by service employees reduce negative consumer evaluations and retaliation (Radu et al. 2019). Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> **H1b:** *Expression of empathy has a significant positive relationship with consumer forgiveness.*

Explicit Acknowledgement

Explicit acknowledgement includes behaviors such as acceptance of responsibility for harm done and rules violation, and direct requests for forgiveness (Fehr and Gelfand 2010;

Kelley and Waldron 2005). In literature from the field of psychology, the offender's acceptance of responsibility and direct request for forgiveness are found to deliver a sense of control to the offended party and reduce the offended party's perceived responsibility for the unfavourable conditions and thence encourage chances of forgiveness by legitimizing the offended party's emotional responses to the transgression (Hareli and Eisikovits 2006; Kelley and Waldron 2005; Lewis et al. 2015; Nadler and Liviatan 2006). Likewise, Kelley and Waldron (2005) pointed out that explicit acknowledgement threatens the positive face of the wrongdoer while vesting the offended party with the power to grant or deny forgiveness and that it increases the chances of post-transgression satisfaction and stability. Furthermore, explicit acknowledgement by the transgressor enhances the chances of relationship repair after wrongdoing by redressing the rules violations (Kelley and Waldron 2005) and reinforcing the moral code that upholds a relationship (Waldron and Kelley 2008). In services research, a qualitative study by Bath and Bawa (2020) suggested that explicit acknowledgement is a pre-requisite for facilitating consumer forgiveness. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> **H1c:** *Explicit acknowledgement has a significant positive relationship with consumer forgiveness.*

Forgiveness-Seeking and Consumer Face Restoration

The impossibility of standardization of services due to their dependence on human beings renders service failures unavoidable and inevitable (Riaz and Khan 2016). These service failures lead to consumer's face loss (Du et al. 2010) which, as explained earlier, is the consumers' perceived loss of social reputation or image in a service interaction (Y. L. Lee et al. 2013). Consumers' perceived face loss elicits negative emotions such as anger and embarrassment; and often results in negative behavioral intentions such as negative word of mouth, consumer switchover intentions and revenge (Du et al. 2010; Tsarenko et al. 2019). In interpersonal conflicts, face loss is one reason for the offended party's reluctance to forgive the offender, as negative emotions experienced by the offended party (Kam and Bond 2008) increase the desire to retaliate against the offender and diminish the willingness to forgive to restore a strained relationship (Hui and Bond 2009).

Therefore, face restoration, which is an individual's attainment of respect and recognition in social encounters (Du et al. 2010), is the utmost concern of consumers during post-service failure and recovery conditions (Du et al. 2010; Y. L. Lee et al. 2013). Face restoration has a prominent influence in the forgiveness process, and people across cultures are known to negotiate face while communicating for conflict resolution (Ting-Toomey 2005; Zhang et al. 2015). Direct forgiveness-seeking behaviors are found to be the most effective tools of conflict resolution as they address the face needs of offended parties and, therefore, increase the possibility of forgiveness (Zhang et al. 2019). Moreover, apologies operate as "face-giving restorative acts" (Han and Cai 2010; Zhang et al. 2019); and therefore, they play an inevitable role in face-negotiation processes during relational transgressions (Ting-Toomey 2005). As service failures, which are known to arise conflict between service providers and consumers (Tsarenko and Gabbott 2004), are regarded as consumer's face-threatening social interactions (Du et al. 2010), these forgiveness-seeking behaviors could be employed by service firms and their employees to alleviate consumer face threats, elicit consumer forgiveness and attain positive outcomes post-service failures. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

> **H2a:** *Offer of compensation has a significant positive relationship with consumer face restoration.*

H2b: *Expression of empathy has a significant positive relationship with consumer face restoration.*

H2c: *Explicit acknowledgement has a significant positive relationship with consumer face restoration.*

H3: *Consumer face restoration has a significant positive relationship with consumer forgiveness.*

H4a: *Consumer face restoration mediates the relationship between offer of compensation and consumer forgiveness.*

H4b: *Consumer face restoration mediates the relationship between expression of empathy and consumer forgiveness.*

H4c: *Consumer face restoration mediates the relationship between explicit acknowledgement and consumer forgiveness.*

Relationship Outcomes: Consumer Trust and Reconciliation

In interpersonal relations, forgiveness is considered a relationship-repairing mechanism which is helpful in diminishing the desire to retaliate, renewing trust and elevating the will to reconcile following a transgression (Zhang et al. 2015). Accordingly, this study examines two potential relationship outcomes of consumer forgiveness, namely- consumer trust and reconciliation as these two have a long-term function of repairing damaged relations and building sustainable relationships (Jiang, Henneberg, and Naudé 2011; Koyama 2001); and sustaining long-term relationships with consumers is of utmost importance to service firms (Wei et al. 2020).

Consumer Trust

The present research has chosen to follow Xie and Peng (2009), who define consumer trust as a construct comprising both consumers' overall evaluation of service providers' trustworthiness and their trust intent. Consumers' trust intent comprises consumers' re-patronage and positive word-of-mouth intentions. In interpersonal relationships, forgiveness-seeking behavior could redress some of the victim's face-threats, and thus by saving/restoring the victim's face, it could attain positive relationship outcomes such as renewal of trust and survival of damaged relationship (Kelley and Waldron 2005; Zhang et al. 2019). Likewise, Rusbult et al. (2005) suggested that the post-transgression behaviors of the offender are found to play a vital role in dampening the desire for revenge and, therefore, promoting trust. Similarly, Xie and Peng (2009) found forgiveness to have a positive influence on consumer trust after negative publicity, and suggest forgiveness to be an initial step towards rebuilding trust. When trust is breached following a service failure (Basso and Pizzutti 2016), service firms could restore it by enabling consumer face restoration and forgiveness, which are found to have a positive influence on consumers' attitudes and behavioral intentions (Du et al. 2010; Tsarenko et al. 2019). Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H5: *Consumer forgiveness has a significant positive relationship with consumer trust.*

H6: *Consumer forgiveness mediates the relationship between consumer face restoration and consumer trust.*

Consumer Reconciliation

Reconciliation is suggested to occur at later stages of relationship repair and is often led by forgiveness (Zhang et al. 2015). Hence, forgiveness is a strong predictor of reconciliation (Harrison-Walker, 2019; Zhang et al. 2019). Literature from the field of psychology holds that the offender's forgiveness-seeking behaviors, which result in the victim's face restoration, are found to mitigate the victim's revenge behavior and promote reconciliation (Nadler and Liviatan 2006). Likewise, service providers' face redistributing efforts give the consumer a chance to assess the intentions of a service provider and therefore give them the opportunity to forgive and further reconcile (Mattila 2006). Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H7: *Consumer forgiveness has a significant positive relationship with consumer reconciliation.*

H8: *Consumer forgiveness mediates the relationship between consumer face restoration and consumer reconciliation.*

Figure 1 demonstrates the research model for the present study. As can be seen Figure 1, the present study proposes that three types of forgiveness-seeking behaviors of service providers affect consumer face restoration, which, in turn, influences consumer forgiveness and relationship consequences- consumer trust and reconciliation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section contains information on the sampling method, measures employed, the sample of respondents and data collection.

This research effort collected data with the help of the retrospective experience sampling method, which is considered an effective method in services marketing research (Huang 2008). Respondents were first asked to recall at length the recent service failure incident in which they had forgiven the provider for inadequate services; later, they were asked to complete a structured questionnaire about the experience. Recalling an experience in detail helps the respondents to relive the thoughts, feelings and emotions associated with the incident and to respond to various items based on their experience (Huang 2008). The retrospective experience method overcomes certain weaknesses of experimental studies in which respondents are required to imagine certain experiences and which therefore are highly dependent on the role-playing abilities of respondents (Huang 2008). As the respondents of this research effort reported service failure and consumer forgiveness incidents from across various industries like restaurants, banks, hotels, beauty salons, airlines, entertainment, car rentals, gyms and travel agencies, it has helped enhance the external validity of the results.

Measures

An extensive research review was undertaken to find measures which had good psychometric properties such as appropriate reliability and validity. Consumer forgiveness was measured using a four-item scale by Xie and Peng (2009). The eight-item scale by Du et al., (2010) was employed to measure consumer face restoration. The four-item offer of compensation scale and the five-item expression of empathy scale were adapted from Fehr and Gelfand (2010). Explicit acknowledgement was assessed using the five-item scale by Kelley and Waldron (2005). Reconciliation was measured by the four-item scale adapted from Harrison-Walker (2019). The six-item scale by Xie and Peng (2009) was used to measure consumer trust. All items were measured using a seven-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree).

Figure 1: Research Model
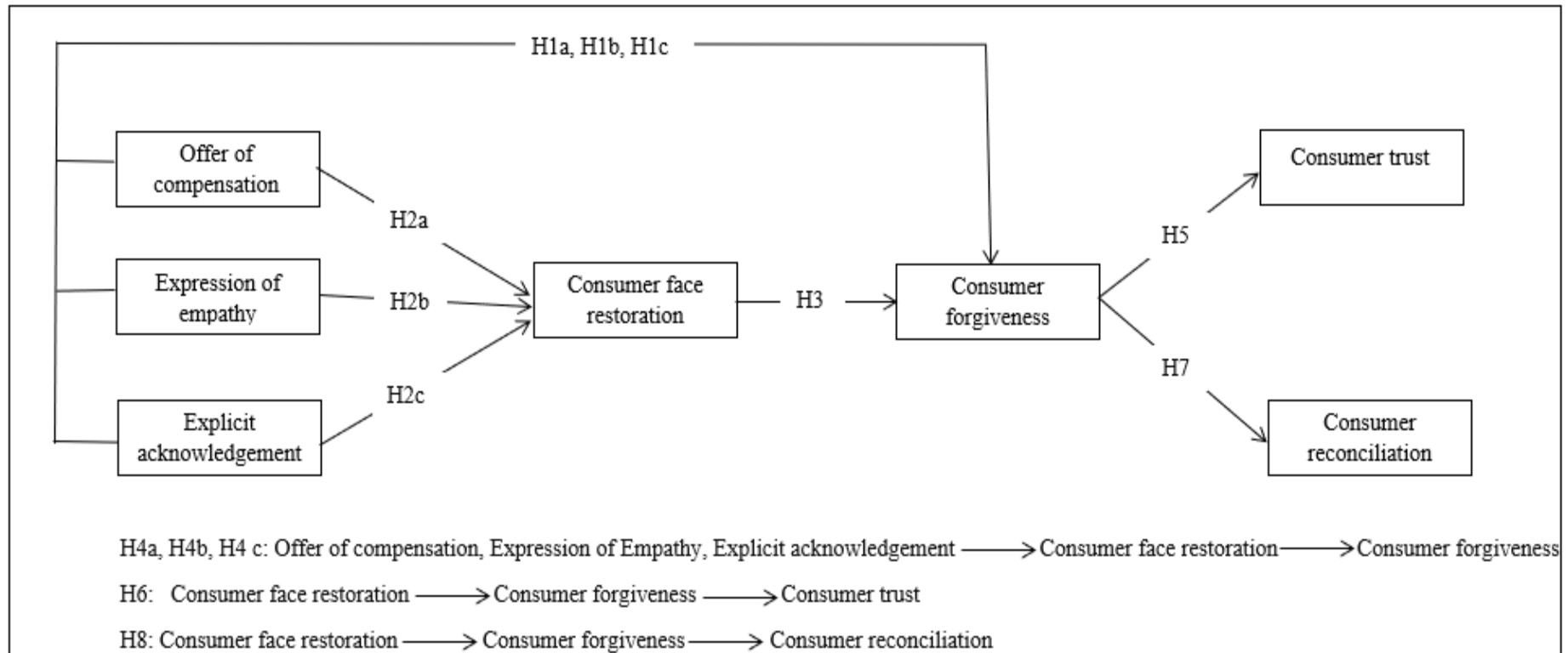
Data were collected from 80 respondents for the pilot test, that was conducted to check the reliability of the scales. The results demonstrated that Cronbach's alpha values were greater than the 0.80 for each scale (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2013). After obtaining satisfactory pilot study results, final data collection was undertaken.

Sample and Data Collection

Following the lead of several researchers working with internet samples (Im and Chee 2011), this research effort also used quota sampling as it is considered an effective method for internet-based research. A web-based survey was employed, and a total of 400 respondents were surveyed using four quota controls, namely- age, gender, type of city and socio-economic classification. Online data were collected from ten cities spread across two states and two union territories of North-West India. While determining the quota, an attempt was made to ensure that proportion of a category in the sample matched the proportion of that category in the population. The age and gender quota controls were based on the 2011 Census of India. To ensure the inclusion of respondents from various financial backgrounds, the research effort made quotas using the socio-economic classification system developed by the Market Research Society of India (2011), which classifies Indian households on the basis of two parameters, namely- education of the chief earner and the number of consumer durables owned. SEC A is the highest SEC and the lowest is SEC E, with there being sub-classifications within each classification. The city classification system of the Government of India, which classifies Indian cities into various tiers based on the population density of the city, was also employed as a quota control. Table 1 contains the profile of the respondents.

As can be seen in Table 1, the sample is heterogeneous on each of the four control measures used to determine quotas.

The respondents reported consumer forgiveness incidents from across various industries. The frequency of consumer forgiveness incidents, as given in brackets, is as follows:- retail stores (such as departmental stores, furniture stores, jewellery stores, and fabric stores) (194), restaurants (38), banks (30), e-commerce sites (29), hotels (23), entertainment (12), beauty salons (21), airlines (13), passenger transportation (such as Ola and Uber) (6), tele-communication (6), automobiles (4), healthcare (2), travel agents and trip organisers (9) and fitness centres (13). The reported consumer forgiveness incidents belonged to a wide variety of service providers, which has led to the enhanced external validity of the findings.

The public nature of the exchange is a necessary condition for the face to be activated, lost or restored (Sengupta et al. 2018). Out of the total 400 incidents, 371 were publicly experienced by the consumers in physical settings wherein face-to-face interaction took place among consumers and service providers in the presence of other consumers. The remaining 29 incidents were related to e-commerce sites in which consumers had publicly raised the service failure issues on the social media site Twitter; and involved public online interaction between consumers and service providers in the presence of other social media users.

ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The present study employed the two-stage method suggested by Anderson and Gerbing (1988). First, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with a maximum likelihood method was conducted on the measurement model to assess the psychometric properties of the scales and to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the measures. Then, the structural model was assessed to estimate the hypothesized causal relationships.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Criteria	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	207	51.75
	Female	191	47.75
	Transgender	2	0.5
Total		**400**	**100**
Age	15-19 years	60	15
	20-24 years	56	14
	25-29 years	52	13
	30-34 years	44	11
	35-39 years	40	10
	40-49 years	60	15
	50-59 years	40	10
	60 years or above	48	12
Total		**400**	**100**
Socio-economic classification	SEC A	188	47
	SEC B	120	30
	SEC C	92	23
Total		**400**	**100**
Type of city	Tier I city	76	19
	Tier II city	212	53
	Tier III city	112	28
Total		**400**	**100**

Measurement Model

The acceptability of the measurement model was appraised based on the overall fit with the data, reliability and validities (convergent and discriminant validity). The properties of all items were assessed via comprehensive CFA utilizing IBM SPSS AMOS 23. The measurement model shows an adequate fit ($\chi 2$= 1277.187, df= 565, $\chi 2$ / df = 2.261, normed fit index (NFI)= 0.949, comparative fit index (CFI)= 0.971, standardized root mean residual (SRMR)= 0.0275, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)= 0.056). Table 2 contains the reliability and validity results of the measurement scales.

Table 2: Reliability and Validity Assessment of Measurement Scales

Measurement items, reliability and validity statistics	Factor loadings (sig)
Offer of compensation *CR = 0.955; AVE =0.841; α= 0.955*	
The service provider made an offer to compensate me for what happened.	0.922***
The service provider made an offer to help me recover my damages.	0.942***
The service provider made an offer to do something specific to make up for what happened.	0.911***
The service provider made a suggestion that it would reimburse me in some way.	0.893***
Expression of empathy *CR = 0.962; AVE =0.902; α= 0.961*	
The service provider showed an expression of great concern for my suffering.	0.939***

The service provider showed empathy towards me.	0.949***
The service provider indicated that it truly cares about how I feel.	0.976***
The service provider showed an expression of tenderness toward me.	0.961***
The service provider expressed true sympathy for me.	0.950***
Explicit acknowledgement *CR = 0.959; AVE =0.862; α= 0.957*	
The service provider apologised.	0.836***
The service provider told me that he/she was sorry.	0.947***
The service provider told me that it felt bad.	0.963***
The service provider took responsibility for what it had done.	0.958***
The service provider asked directly for forgiveness.	0.932***
Consumer face restoration *CR = 0.976; AVE =0.840; α= 0.975*	
The action by the service provider maintained my positive image in front of the general public.	0.971***
The action of the service provider allowed me to gain the admiration of the general public.	0.941***
The action of the service provider allowed me to maintain my face in front of the general public.	0.882***
The action of the service provider made me gain the recognition of the public.	0.923***
The action of the service provider allowed me to gain prestige in front of the general public.	0.876***
The action of the service provider made me feel glory in face of the public.	0.905***
I feel that the service provider gave me due importance.	0.877***
The action of the service provider did not take into account my position.*	0.947***
Consumer forgiveness *CR = 0.977; AVE =0.915; α= 0.977*	
I did think favourably of this service provider.	0.961***
I didn't condemn this service provider.	0.967***
I did forgive this service provider.	0.958***
I did disapprove of this service provider.*	0.941***
Consumer trust *CR = 0.964; AVE =0.862; α= 0.965*	
Generally speaking, I trust this service provider.	0.909***
Generally speaking, this service provider is dependable.	0.915***
Generally speaking, this service provider is reliable.	0.955***
I would buy this service provider's products whenever I need even after service failure.	0.934***
I would willingly recommend this service provider to my relatives and friends even after service failure.	0.940***
I would willingly try other services by this service provider even after service failure.	0.897***
Reconciliation *CR = 0.970; AVE =0.889; α= 0.969*	
I have released my anger so I can work on restoring my relationship with this service provider.	0.957***
Although the service provider hurt me, I did put the hurts aside so we could resume our relationship.	0.977***
Despite what the service provider did, I want us to have a positive relationship again in future.	0.945***
I want the service provider and I to 'bury the hatchet' and move forward with our relationship.	0.891***

Notes: *= item is reverse-coded; *** p<.001, CR= Composite reliability, AVE= Average variance extracted, α= Cronbach's aplha

As can be seen in Table 2, internal consistency reliability was measured using Cronbach Alpha test wherein alpha coefficient greater than 0.70 is considered acceptable (Hair et al. 2013). The analysis indicated that the measurement scales are highly reliable as Cronbach alpha is above 0.90 for all the scales. To assess the convergent validity, the size of the factor loading, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE) were estimated. The standardized factor loadings for all items exceed 0.80 indicating the significant and substantial loading of each indicator on a common factor (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011). The values of composite reliabilities for all seven constructs are above 0.90 which exceeds the minimum threshold value of 0.70 (Hair et al. 2013). The results suggest that the measurement items are reliable in capturing the latent variables. AVEs from all constructs are between 0.840 and 0.915, greater than a minimum threshold of 0.5 (Hair et al. 2011), suggesting that the constructs capture a majority of the variance. Thus, the convergent validity of each construct is confirmed.

Discriminant validity was investigated following Fornell-Larcker criterion by comparing the square root of AVE of the construct with the latent variable correlations. Table 3 contains the discriminant analysis of constructs.

Table 3. Discriminant validity assessment of measurement scales

	OOC	EOE	EA	CFR	CF	CT	RE
Offer of Compensation (OOC)	**0.917**						
Expression of empathy (EOE)	0.802	**0.955**					
Explicit acknowledgement (EA)	0.765	0.812	**0.928**				
Consumer face restoration (CFR)	0.770	0.825	0.824	**0.917**			
Consumer forgiveness (CF)	0.739	0.811	0.801	0.821	**0.957**		
Consumer trust (CT)	0.654	0.795	0.774	0.812	0.770	**0.929**	
Reconciliation (RE)	0.570	0.712	0.681	0.682	0.666	0.762	**0.943**

Notes: The square root of each construct's AVE is on the diagonal. The nondiagonal elements indicate the correlations between the constructs.

As shown in Table 3, the square root of AVE of every construct is greater than the correlation coefficient between the constructs, thus supporting the discriminant validity of the constructs.

Structural Model

A structural model was assessed to test the hypothesized causal relationships. The model fit of the proposed model is adequate ($\chi2$= 1479.344, df= 565, $\chi2$ / df = 2.618, normed fit index (NFI)= 0.941, comparative fit index (CFI)= 0.963, standardized root mean residual (SRMR)= 0.0459, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA)= 0.064).

H1 to H3, H5 and H7 were tested by examining the direction and significance of the regression coefficient in each hypothesized relationship of the structural model. The estimated standardized structural coefficients and their associated level of significance for the hypothesized relationships among constructs are shown in Table 4.

As shown in Table 4, offer of compensation (β = 0.001, p> 0.05) does not have a significant effect on consumer forgiveness. Hence, H1a is not supported. Consistent with H1b and H1c, the results show that expression of empathy (β = 0.316, p ≤ 000) and explicit acknowledgement (β = 0.252, p ≤ 000) have a significantly positive effect on consumer forgiveness indicating that they are strong predictors of consumer forgiveness. The effects of offer of compensation (β = 0.111, p < 0.05), expression of empathy (β = 0.438, p ≤ 000) and explicit acknowledgement (β = 0.413, p ≤ 000) on consumer face restoration are positive and significant, thus these three forgiveness-seeking behaviors of service providers lead to consumer face restoration. Thus, results support H2a, H2b and H2c. The results indicate that

consumer face restoration has a significantly positive effect on consumer forgiveness (β = 0.374, p ≤ 000). Therefore, H3 is supported. Consumer forgiveness has a significantly positive effect on consumer trust (β = 0.198, p <0.05) and reconciliation (β = 0.216, p <0.05). Thus, H5 and H7 are supported.

Table 4. Results of structural model analysis

Hypothesized paths	Hypotheses	Standardized coefficients	Results
Offer of compensation ➝ Consumer forgiveness	H1a	0.001(n.s.)	Not supported
Expression of empathy ➝ Consumer forgiveness	H1b	0.316***	Supported
Explicit acknowledgement ➝ Consumer forgiveness	H1c	0.252***	Supported
Offer of compensation ➝ Consumer face restoration	H2a	0.111**	Supported
Expression of empathy ➝ Consumer face restoration	H2b	0.438***	Supported
Explicit acknowledgement ➝ Consumer face restoration	H2c	0.413***	Supported
Consumer face restoration ➝ Consumer forgiveness	H3	0.374***	Supported
Consumer forgiveness ➝ Consumer trust	H5	0.198**	Supported
Consumer forgiveness ➝ Reconciliation	H7	0.216**	Supported

Notes: ***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; n.s.= nonsignificant

Mediating Effects

This study employed the bootstrapping mediation analysis by SEM at a 95% confidence interval (CI) with 2,000 bootstrapped samples to test H4a, H4b, H4c, H6 and H8. Bootstrapping procedures were applied to find estimates of the indirect effects and to test their significance by using confidence intervals. The indirect effect is considered statistically significant if a zero is not included in the 95 percent confidence interval of the estimate (Hayes, 2009). Table 5 contains the mediation analysis.

Table 5. Results of mediating effects of consumer face restoration and consumer forgiveness

Hypothesized paths	Hypotheses	Indirect effects	Results
Offer of compensation ➝ Consumer face restoration ➝ Consumer forgiveness	H4a	0.042**	Full mediation
Expression of empathy ➝ Consumer face restoration ➝ Consumer forgiveness	H4b	0.164**	Partial mediation
Explicit acknowledgement ➝ Consumer face restoration ➝ Consumer forgiveness	H4c	0.154**	Partial mediation
Consumer face restoration ➝ Consumer forgiveness ➝ Consumer trust	H6	0.074*	Partial mediation
Consumer face restoration ➝ Consumer forgiveness ➝ Reconciliation	H8	0.081*	Partial mediation

Notes: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01

As can be seen in Table 5, in regard to the mediation effect of consumer face restoration on offer of compensation and consumer forgiveness, the results indicate a nonsignificant direct path between offer of compensation and consumer forgiveness (0.001, p >0.05). However, it

may be pointed out that according to Hayes (2009), this direct path between offer of compensation and consumer forgiveness need not be significant to test the hypothesis about indirect effects. The indirect effect between offer of compensation and consumer forgiveness is significant (0.042, p <0.01). The 95% CI of bias-corrected (LL CI = 0.017, UL CI = 0.079) did not include zero, which indicates the full mediation effect of consumer face restoration on the relationship between offer of compensation and consumer forgiveness. Therefore, H4a is supported.

In regard to the mediation effect of consumer face restoration on expression of empathy and consumer forgiveness, the indirect effect (0.164; p <0.01; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.115, UL CI 0.237) is significant. The direct effect is also significant (0.316; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.213, UL CI0.421). Therefore, consumer face restoration has a partial mediation effect on the relationship between expression of empathy and consumer forgiveness. Therefore, H4b is supported. The indirect effect (0.154; p <0.01; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.106, UL CI 0.225) of consumer face restoration on explicit acknowledgement and consumer forgiveness is found to be significant. The direct effect is also significant (0.252; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.135, UL CI 0.357). Therefore, consumer face restoration has a partial mediation effect on the relationship between explicit acknowledgement and consumer forgiveness. Hence, H4c is supported.

As regards the mediation effect of consumer forgiveness on consumer face restoration and consumer forgiveness, both indirect effect (0.074; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.022, UL CI 0.136) and direct effect (0.652; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.508, UL CI 0.795) are significant. Hence, consumer forgiveness has a partial mediation effect on the relationship between consumer face restoration and consumer trust and H6 is supported. In regards to the mediation effect of consumer forgiveness on consumer face restoration and reconciliation, the indirect effect (0.081; p <0.05; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.027, UL CI 0.145) of consumer forgiveness on consumer face restoration and reconciliation is found to be significant. The direct effect is also significant (0.517; bias-corrected: LL CI 0.356, UL CI 0.674). Therefore, consumer forgiveness has a partial mediation effect on the relationship between consumer face restoration and reconciliation and H8 is supported.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study has filled the gap in the services marketing literature by examining the communicative determinants and relational consequences of consumer forgiveness through the lens of face negotiation theory. The study also makes a pioneering effort to demonstrate through quantitative research the vital role consumer face plays in the process of consumer forgiveness. The results illustrate that in interactions after service failures, three types of apology-related forgiveness-seeking behaviors of service providers, namely- offer of compensation, expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement, work as effective facework strategies and lead to redressal of consumers' lost face, and thence consumer face restoration sets the tone for consumer forgiveness which is then positively associated with relational outcomes of consumer trust and reconciliation.

This research effort has contributed to a less researched area of communicative aspects of consumer forgiveness by providing answers to some key questions regarding the effectiveness of different forgiveness-seeking initiatives, particularly concerning consumer face restoration and forgiveness. The findings demonstrate that both expressions of empathy and explicit acknowledgement have a substantial influence on consumer face restoration and consumer forgiveness that is larger than that of offer of compensation; the impact of expression of empathy being stronger than even that of explicit acknowledgement. This is supporting and extending the results of previous research obtained in the domain of psychology that found expression of empathy generates more pronounced and positive effects on the offended party's evaluations of the offender and behavioral intentions in comparison to explicit

acknowledgement (Nadler and Liviatan 2006). Furthermore, the huge influence of expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement on consumer face restoration as compared to offer of compensation exemplifies that when consumers' face concerns are strong, they are focused more on interactional justice rather than distributive justice (J. L. M. Lee et al. 2020).

Offer of compensation is found to have a moderately weak effect on consumer face restoration and no effect on consumer forgiveness. This finding is inconsistent with extant interpersonal relations, which suggests that offer of compensation leads to forgiveness (Kelley and Waldron 2005). However, this finding extends support to Harrison-Walker (2019), who claims that in commercial relationships, compensation characterizes as an economic resource that is appreciated by customers but is not exchanged with the social resource of consumer forgiveness. Therefore, in accordance with the resource exchange theory, which postulates that individuals choose to exchange resources that are similar in nature, this finding implies that offer of compensation which is an economic resource, is not exchanged by the consumers with the social resource of consumer forgiveness. Further, inconsistent results in services and interpersonal relations literature could be attributed to the fact that in commercial relationships offer of compensation is conceptualized purely as an economic resource (Du et al. 2010), whereas in interpersonal relationships, it is conceptualized as comprising both economic and emotional resources (Fehr and Gelfand 2010). Consistent with the face-management perspective, expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement are revealed as more efficacious in dealing with the offended party's face-threats and eliciting forgiveness as such forgiveness-seeking behaviors take personal responsibility for emotional harm caused by the transgression and communicate face restoration for the offended party (Han and Cai 2010), and consequently, secure forgiveness and positive outcomes after the transgression (Kelley and Waldron 2005). These findings also extend support to work on facework behaviors by Oetzel et al. (2000), which proposes that integrating facework behaviors, such as apology and consideration for the other's feelings are most competent communications during conflicts as these demonstrate concern for the other party's face, which further helps support the relationship (mutual-face concerns) through securing the positive relational outcomes.

This research effort has extended the nascent post-experience face evaluation research in the context of service failures and specifically, extended the existing conceptual and qualitative research on the role of the face in consumer forgiveness by offering rigorous evidence of the vitality of the face in consumer forgiveness process, especially the effectiveness of consumer face restoration in obtaining consumer forgiveness. The importance of consumer face restoration to consumer forgiveness is supported by the results that show the mediation of consumer face restoration between all three forgiveness-seeking behaviors and consumer forgiveness is significant. Even though the direct effect of offer of compensation on consumer forgiveness is not significant, the indirect effect through consumer face restoration is found to be significant. In accordance with the assumptions of face-negotiation theory, the current findings reveal the inevitable role of the face in conflict resolution as service providers' efforts to negotiate and restore consumers' face in post-service failure communications are found to positively influence consumer forgiveness and relationship outcomes (Ting-Toomey 2005; Zhang et al. 2015). These findings support the well-established mediating role of the face in conflict resolution in the face-negotiation theory (Zhang et al. 2015). Therefore, extending the previous research that says consumers' face plays a significant role in consumers' psychology and behavior during service failure (Du et al. 2010), the results of this study highlight the significance of understanding the psychological and communicative aspects of consumers' face for facilitating consumer forgiveness in particular.

This research has done pioneering work in establishing consumer forgiveness as the mediating link between consumer face restoration and consumer trust, and consumer face restoration and reconciliation. This is in alignment with previous interpersonal relations

research, which suggests that redressal of the offended party's face threats has an "emotionally transformative effect" on the restoration of affective feelings (Kelley and Waldron 2005) and development of positive attitudes and behavioral intentions (Du et al. 2010). This finding implies that if consumers' face needs are met after the service failures, then it helps consumers transition from negative cognitive ruminations to consumer forgiveness, which leads to positive relational outcomes of consumer trust and reconciliation. Consumer trust and reconciliation are expected to generate re-patronage, commitment, positive WOM and loyalty among consumers post-service failures (Iglesias et al. 2020; Radu et al. 2020). Therefore, this research effort extends the consumer forgiveness literature by examining the mediating role of consumer forgiveness.

Thus, this study contributes to the research areas of service failure, consumer forgiveness, face management and communication studies.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this research effort have managerial implications, especially for the conduct of frontline employees. The findings suggest that consumers' psychological needs, particularly face concerns, are important during service recovery efforts. As this study has shown convincingly that consumer face restoration has a critical role in facilitating consumer forgiveness following a service failure, service providers should adopt suitable forgiveness-seeking behaviors which could lead to consumer face restoration during service failure encounters. The results have unambiguously shown the higher efficacy of expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement compared to offers of compensation, service providers should emphasize more on incorporating and combining expression of empathy and explicit acknowledgement in their forgiveness-seeking communications than offer compensation to consumers. This study helps reiterate that forgiveness-seeking is an interactive strategy of relationship repair, and interpersonal communications play an important role in the forgiveness process. Consequently, service employees should not only possess the technical know-how to resolve service failures but must also be well equipped with interpersonal/social skills, such as courtesy, sincerity, sensibility, and benevolence to effectively repair relations with consumers and attain consumer forgiveness after a service failure. Firms should provide forgiveness-oriented training regarding communicative aspects of forgiveness-seeking to their frontline employees to ensure long-lasting relations with consumers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There is a need for research to check the validity of possible reason, the incongruity of exchange resources, advanced for explaining the rejection of the hypotheses pertaining to the relationship of offer of compensation and consumer forgiveness. Future research efforts may like to compare findings across different service sectors, an aspect the present study has omitted. While, this research effort has examined only three direct strategies of forgiveness-seeking, future research could examine the mediating role of consumer face restoration with respect to other direct or indirect strategies of forgiveness-seeking. Future researchers may like to consider the different methodologies and research designs for testing the very hypotheses tested in this research and thus help in triangulation. Consumers' service recovery expectations are expected to be influenced by factors related to the consumer–organization relationships (Wan, Hui, and Wyer 2011), but this was beyond the scope of the present work. It may have some influence on consumers' face concerns and forgiveness intentions. Therefore, further exploration of the examined conceptual model could be undertaken by investigating the moderating role of consumer-organization relationships through variables such as relationship strength (strong v/s weak), relationship length and service communality.

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