



Do Cultural Differences Matter? Individualism–Collectivism as a Moderator in Hotel Complaint Handling Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how the cultural dimension of individualism–collectivism moderates the relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions in the hotel sector. Drawing on quantitative data collected from 389 guests in five-star hotels in Egypt, structural equation modeling was employed to test the hypothesized relationships. The findings reveal that complaint handling has a significant influence on customer behavior. Furthermore, the cultural orientation of individualism–collectivism significantly moderates this relationship. The analysis of the interaction effect indicates that the positive relationship between complaint handling and favorable behavioral intentions is strengthened for individuals with a more individualistic orientation. These customers, who emphasize fairness and personal benefits, respond more positively to effective complaint handling, whereas collectivist-oriented customers place relatively greater weight on relational harmony and long-term relationships. The results highlight the importance of adapting complaint-handling strategies according to customers' individualism–collectivism, suggesting that hotels should tailor their responses to better meet the expectations of both individualistic and collectivist guests. By integrating Hofstede's cultural framework with service recovery and consumer behavior literature, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how cultural values affect customer evaluations of complaint handling in the context of Egyptian hospitality.

KEYWORDS

Individualism, collectivism, complaint handling, customer behavioral intentions, and five-star hotels.

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هل للاختلافات الثقافية أهمية؟ الفردية والجماعية كمعدل في معالجة شكاوى الفنادق

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الملخص

بحثت هذه الدراسة في كيفية تأثير البعد الثقافي للفردية-الجماعية في تعديل العلاقة بين معالجة الشكاوى ونوايا سلوك العملاء في قطاع الفنادق. وبالاعتماد على بيانات كمية تم جمعها من 389 نزياً في فنادق الخمس نجوم في مصر، تم استخدام نمذجة المعادلات الهيكلية لاختبار العلاقات المفترضة. أظهرت النتائج أن معالجة الشكاوى تحدث تأثيراً معنوياً على نوايا السلوك لدى العملاء. علاوة على ذلك، تبين أن التوجه الثقافي للفردية-الجماعية يُعد متغيراً معديلاً مهماً في هذه العلاقة. وتشير نتائج تحليل أثر التفاعل إلى أن العلاقة الإيجابية بين معالجة الشكاوى والنوايا السلوكية المواتية تزداد قوة لدى الأفراد ذوي التوجه الفردي الأعلى. فهؤلاء العملاء، الذين يركزون على العدالة والمنافع الشخصية، يستجيبون بصورة أكثر إيجابية لمعالجة الشكاوى الفعالة، في حين أن العملاء ذوي التوجه الجماعي يولون اهتماماً أكبر للانسجام في العلاقات والاستمرارية طويلة الأمد. وتبرز هذه النتائج أهمية تكيف استراتيجيات معالجة الشكاوى وفقاً للتوجهات الثقافية للعملاء، مما يشير إلى ضرورة أن تقوم الفنادق بتخصيص استجاباتها بما يتلاءم مع توقعات النزلاء الفرديين والجماعيين على حد سواء. ومن خلال دمج إطار Hofstede الثقافي مع أدبيات استعادة الخدمة وسلوك المستهلك، تُسهم هذه الدراسة في تعميق الفهم لكيفية تأثير القيم الثقافية على تقييمات العملاء لمعالجة الشكاوى في سياق صناعة الضيافة المصرية.

الكلمات الدالة

الفردية، الجماعية، التعامل مع الشكاوى، نوايا سلوك العملاء، فنادق الخمس نجوم.

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Introduction

Tourism and hospitality companies have a particular and significant tendency to experience service failures due to the frequency and intensity of communication between employees and customers in the service, as well as general service characteristics, such as inseparability, heterogeneity, and indestructibility (Koc, 2019; Li *et al.*, 2021). Service failures are important because they can have serious consequences for these companies, causing customer dissatisfaction (Kim and Jang, 2021; Tosun *et al.*, 2022), negative verbal communication (Huang and Philp, 2021), and customer conversion behavior (Zhang *et al.*, 2021), which increases tourism and hospitality customers' perception of service-related risks (Ding *et al.*, 2016). Given the severity of these effects, service recovery (complaint handling) has become one of the most important strategies hotels adopt to transform a negative customer experience into a positive one, and prevent undesirable consequences (Koc, 2019).

Customer behavioral intentions (CBIs) are seen as an indication of whether customers will either continue to receive service from a business or leave it (Eskiler and Altunşık, 2021). No matter how careful the service providers are, service failures are inevitable due to variability, inseparability, heterogeneity and intangibility characteristics of services (Kuo & Wu, 2012). Thus, the way complaints are managed becomes a vital element of customer relationship management (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002). At the same time, customer perceptions of complaint handling are not shaped in isolation but are filtered through cultural values. Culture influences how customers interpret fairness, justice, and satisfaction in service encounters (Mattila and Patterson, 2004). Hofstede's (1980, 2001) cultural framework provides a robust lens for understanding such differences. Among his dimensions, individualism–collectivism has attracted significant attention, as it distinguishes between cultures that prioritize personal goals and independence versus those that emphasize group harmony and interdependence (Triandis, 1995; Taras *et al.*, 2012).

The rationale for focusing on individualism–collectivism rather than other Hofstede dimensions lies in its direct relevance to how customers express dissatisfaction and evaluate complaint-handling outcomes. Unlike power distance or uncertainty avoidance, which primarily influence hierarchical relationships or risk tolerance, individualism–collectivism fundamentally determines interpersonal behavior and communication styles during service recovery. Customers from individualistic cultures tend to assert their needs, demand compensation, and assess fairness from a personal-benefit perspective (Donthu and Yoo, 1998; Hofstede, 2001; Mattila and Patterson, 2004; Jung and Kau, 2021). Conversely, collectivist customers often prioritize relational harmony, avoid confrontation, and judge complaint-handling effectiveness based on their ability to maintain social balance and respect (Mattila and Patterson, 2004).

Despite extensive literature on service recovery and culture, the research gap lies in the limited empirical evidence on how individualism–collectivism moderates the link between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions in emerging markets such as Egypt. While previous studies have explored service recovery strategies in Western and Asian contexts (e.g., Choi and Mattila, 2008; Hsu *et al.*, 2020; Ma *et al.*,

2023), few have examined these relationships in culturally hybrid environments like Egypt, where both collectivist and individualist orientations coexist. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how individualism–collectivism influences the relationship between complaint handling and CBIs in Egyptian hotels.

This study contributes to literature and practice in the following ways:

- It empirically examines the moderating role of individualism–collectivism in the relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions.
- It extends justice theory by integrating cultural values into service recovery research, highlighting how individual-level cultural orientations shape customer responses.
- It offers practical insights for hotel managers by emphasizing the need to tailor complaint-handling strategies to the individualism–collectivism of their guests, thereby enhancing customer loyalty and reducing switching behavior.

Through this integration, the study adds new theoretical and contextual understanding to the cross-cultural dynamics of service recovery in the hospitality industry, offering implications for both academia and managerial practice.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Complaint Handling in the Hospitality Industry

Service failures are inevitable in the hospitality sector due to the simultaneity of production and consumption, the human element involved, and the intangible nature of hotel services (Lewis and McCann, 2004). Since service delivery cannot be perfectly standardized, even high-performing hotels sometimes fail to meet customer expectations, leading to dissatisfaction and complaints. How hotels respond to such complaints determines whether service failures become opportunities to reinforce customer trust or reasons for defection (Tax *et al.*, 1998).

Complaint handling refers to the systematic process through which an organization receives, evaluates, and resolves customer complaints to restore satisfaction, improve service quality, and maintain long-term relationships. It reflects how customers perceive the organization's responsiveness, fairness, and commitment to service recovery, which ultimately influences their trust and loyalty (Wirtz and Lovelock, 2022). It extends beyond solving problems to demonstrating fairness, accountability, and a genuine commitment to service recovery (Blodgett *et al.*, 1997). Effective complaint handling is often explained through the justice framework, which comprises three dimensions: distributive justice (fairness of outcomes), procedural justice (fairness of processes), and interactional justice (fairness of interpersonal treatment) (Sparks and McColl-Kennedy, 2001; Kim *et al.*, 2003; Mattila and Patterson, 2004). These perceptions of justice influence post-complaint satisfaction and shape future behavioral intentions (Mattila and Patterson, 2004).

In hospitality, complaint handling is particularly critical because dissatisfied guests can easily share negative experiences via social media and online reviews (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002; Casidy and Shin, 2015; Cheng *et al.*, 2019). Conversely, timely and fair responses can enhance satisfaction and loyalty and even result in the service

recovery paradox, where customers become more satisfied after effective recovery than they were before the failure (Cheng *et al.*, 2019). Hotels that treat complaints as opportunities for learning and continuous improvement can strengthen trust, reinforce loyalty, and build long-term relationships (Gómez *et al.*, 2012; Ma *et al.*, 2023). In competitive destinations such as Egypt, effective complaint handling is thus a critical differentiator for sustaining customer relationships (Ma *et al.*, 2023).

2.2 Customer Behavioral Intentions in the Hospitality Industry

Customer behavioral intentions (CBIs) described as the "stated likelihood to engage in a behavior" (Han *et al.*, 2011). Over time, this concept has evolved to encompass both conscious and subconscious intentions, reflecting customers' plans to perform certain actions such as repurchase, positive word-of-mouth, or willingness to pay a premium, depending on their previous service encounters and overall satisfaction (Ali and Amin, 2020). CBIs are considered strong predictors of actual behavior, particularly in hospitality contexts where repeat patronage and favorable word-of-mouth play a vital role in sustaining business success (Han and Ryu, 2012). Typically, two primary dimensions of CBIs are discussed in the literature: loyalty intentions and switching intentions (Han *et al.*, 2011). Loyalty intentions are fundamental to the long-term profitability and competitiveness of hotels, as they reflect guests' willingness to revisit the property, recommend it to others, and maintain a sustained relationship with the brand (Han and Back, 2008). Within the hospitality literature, loyalty is viewed as a multidimensional construct that includes both behavioral and attitudinal components, such as repeated patronage, trust, emotional attachment, and advocacy (Oliver, 1999).

Empirical research demonstrates that effective complaint handling significantly strengthens loyalty intentions by restoring trust and signaling fairness, empathy, and respect. When hotels handle service failures with care and responsiveness, customers are more likely to forgive the incident, feel valued, and develop a deeper emotional attachment to the brand (McCollough *et al.*, 2000; Casidy and Shin, 2015). Moreover, loyalty intentions can sometimes surpass pre-failure levels when the recovery effort exceeds expectations, a phenomenon referred to as the "service recovery paradox" (Ma *et al.*, 2023). In tourism and hospitality contexts, loyalty intentions are particularly crucial because loyal customers not only generate repeat business but also influence potential guests through positive word-of-mouth, online reviews, and social media recommendations. Thus, fostering loyalty intentions through effective complaint handling constitutes a vital strategic advantage for hotels (Zhang *et al.*, 2018).

Switching intentions refer to the desire of customers to abandon their current service provider in favor of an alternative (Chiang & Chen, 2014). In the hotel industry, such intentions are particularly harmful, as dissatisfied guests not only abandon the service but also spread negative word-of-mouth that discourages potential customers from booking (Ngai *et al.*, 2007). Empirical research shows that ineffective complaint handling is one of the most powerful predictors of switching behavior. When customers perceive that their complaints are ignored, handled unfairly, or addressed without empathy, they tend to disengage emotionally and seek alternative service providers (Han *et al.*, 2011). Moreover, the impact of switching intentions can be

magnified through online reviews and social networks, especially in collectivist cultures where experiences, both positive and negative, spread quickly among peer groups (Cheng *et al.*, 2019). Thus, switching intentions serve as a critical warning indicator for hotel managers. While loyalty intentions represent opportunities for long-term profitability, switching intentions expose vulnerabilities that can erode customer trust, reputation, and overall business sustainability if not properly managed (Cheng *et al.*, 2019).

2.3 Individualism–Collectivism in Hospitality

Culture plays a pivotal role in shaping customer perceptions, behaviors, and expectations within the hospitality industry. Among the various cultural frameworks, the dimension of individualism–collectivism stands out as one of the most influential constructs in cross-cultural psychology and consumer behavior research. It describes the extent to which individuals prioritize personal goals and autonomy versus group harmony and interdependence (Triandis, 1995; Hofstede, 2001). In individualistic cultures, people perceive themselves as independent entities, emphasize self-expression and achievement, and make decisions primarily based on personal benefit. Conversely, in collectivist cultures, individuals define themselves in relation to social groups, value loyalty and conformity, and seek harmony within interpersonal relationships (Taras *et al.*, 2012).

This dimension has gained particular importance in the service and hospitality sectors, where customer interactions and relational quality are central to perceived service value. Cultural orientation shapes not only how customers express dissatisfaction but also how they interpret fairness, justice, and satisfaction during complaint-handling encounters. Customers from individualistic cultures are more likely to express dissatisfaction openly, demand personalized solutions, and judge fairness based on personal gain (Mattila and Patterson, 2004; Lin and Yi, 2019). By contrast, collectivist customers tend to avoid confrontation, emphasizing respect, empathy, and relationship maintenance during recovery processes (Ngai *et al.*, 2007; Yoon *et al.*, 2010; Jung and Kau, 2021).

Collectivist customers evaluate service recovery more positively when interactional justice, manifested through politeness, empathy, and courtesy, is emphasized, while individualists focus more on distributive justice and tangible outcomes (Mattila and Patterson, 2004; Jung and Kau, 2021). Recent studies further suggest that cultural sensitivity in complaint management enhances perceived fairness and strengthens long-term customer relationships in multicultural markets such as Egypt, where both orientations coexist (Ma *et al.*, 2023). Therefore, understanding the individualism–collectivism dimension is essential for hospitality managers seeking to design culturally adaptive complaint-handling strategies that align with customer expectations and reinforce satisfaction, loyalty, and trust (Ma *et al.*, 2023).

2.4 Hypotheses Development

Integrating the above concepts, this study proposes a conceptual model linking complaint handling to customer behavioral intentions, with individualism–collectivism as a moderator. The theoretical rationale draws from justice theory, relationship marketing, and cross-cultural consumer behavior.

Complaint Handling and Customer Behavioral Intentions

Effective complaint handling restores trust, rebuilds satisfaction, and strengthens customer relationships after service failures (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002; Davidow, 2003). In the hospitality sector, where customer experience is a key source of competitive differentiation, service recovery plays a pivotal role in shaping future customer behavior. When hotels respond to service failures with fairness, transparency, and empathy, customers are more likely to forgive the failure, remain loyal, and engage in positive word-of-mouth (Casidy and Shin, 2015). Conversely, poor or inadequate complaint handling can increase dissatisfaction, trigger negative emotions, and lead to switching intentions (Cheng *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, effective complaint handling serves as a significant predictor of both loyalty behaviors, such as repeat patronage and advocacy, and switching behaviors, such as discontinuing service use or recommending competitors (Han *et al.*, 2011). Therefore, this study hypothesizes:

H1: Complaint handling has a significant positive effect on customer behavioral intentions (loyalty and switching) in hotels.

Moderating Role of Individualism–Collectivism

While complaint handling directly affects customer behavioral intentions, cultural orientation plays a critical moderating role in shaping how customers perceive and respond to service recovery efforts. The cultural dimension of individualism–collectivism, as conceptualized by Hofstede (2001), has been widely recognized for influencing both complaining behavior and evaluations of service recovery (Taras *et al.*, 2012). Customers with an individualistic orientation tend to emphasize personal outcomes and self-interest. They are more assertive in voicing dissatisfaction, expect customized and efficient solutions, and evaluate recovery efforts primarily based on fairness and tangible compensation (Mattila and Patterson, 2004; Lin and Yi, 2019). When complaint handling is perceived as fair and effective, these customers reward the provider with loyalty and positive word-of-mouth; however, when it is ineffective, they are more likely to switch to competitors, as their evaluations are driven by individual expectations and outcome satisfaction (Ma *et al.*, 2023).

In contrast, collectivist-oriented customers value harmony, relationship maintenance, and mutual respect. They are often less likely to complain directly and instead focus on preserving long-term relationships with service providers (Ngai *et al.*, 2007). For these customers, the interpersonal and relational dimensions of complaint handling, such as empathy, politeness, and respectful communication, carry greater weight than material compensation (Yoon *et al.*, 2010). Consequently, collectivists may display continued loyalty even when tangible recovery outcomes are modest, provided that relational harmony is maintained. Overall, these distinctions suggest that individualism–collectivism moderates the relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions, amplifying or weakening the effects based on cultural orientation. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Individualism–collectivism moderates the relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions in hotels, such that the effect is stronger for customers with a more individualistic orientation.

Based on the literature review and hypothesis development, the proposed conceptual framework of this study is illustrated in Figure 1, which depicts the direct relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions (H1) and the moderating role of individualism–collectivism (H2).

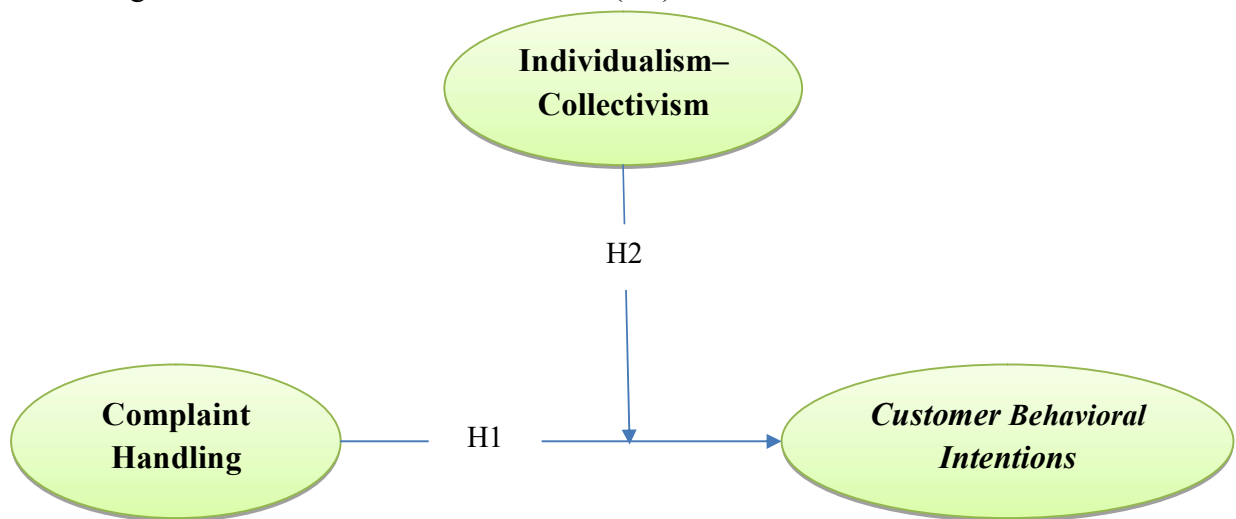


Figure (1): Conceptual Framework of the Study

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional design to examine the moderating role of individualism–collectivism in the relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions in the hotel sector. A structured questionnaire was developed based on validated scales from prior literature, adapted to the hospitality context. The survey method was chosen as it enables the collection of standardized data from many respondents, ensuring reliability and comparability of results.

3.2 Sample and Data Collection

The target population consisted of guests staying in five-star hotels in Greater Cairo, Egypt. These hotels were selected due to their significant role in the Egyptian hospitality industry and their diverse customer base, which includes both domestic and international travelers (Khairy et al., 2023). Convenience sampling was employed, a common approach in hospitality research, given the accessibility of respondents and the practical constraints associated with data collection in hotel environments (Hashad et al., 2023). Before data collection, official approval was obtained from the hotel administrations to conduct the survey and use the data for academic research purposes. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all respondents were informed that their responses would remain anonymous and confidential. The collected data were used exclusively for research purposes, ensuring adherence to ethical standards in data handling and privacy protection.

A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed to hotel guests during the check-out process and in lobby areas. Data collection was conducted over a period of five weeks, from August 2023 to October 2023. Of the distributed questionnaires, 412 were

returned, representing a 91.5% response rate. After screening for completeness and response quality, 23 questionnaires were excluded due to missing data, patterned responses, or inconsistencies, resulting in 389 valid responses. This sample size was deemed sufficient for structural equation modeling (SEM), as recommended by Hair *et al.* (2019).

3.3 Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire employed in this study was structured into four main sections to capture the core constructs of the research model. All questionnaire items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The first section focused on complaint handling, which was measured using thirteen items adapted from the scales of Tax *et al.* (1998) and Maxham and Netemeyer (2002). These items covered the distributive, procedural, and interactional aspects of complaint handling, ensuring that the construct was comprehensively assessed from multiple dimensions of service recovery.

The second section assessed customer behavioral intentions, which were operationalized into two subdimensions. Loyalty intentions, such as the intention to repurchase and the willingness to recommend the hotel to others, were measured using five items adapted from Zeithaml *et al.* (1996) and Han and Back (2008). Switching intentions, reflecting the likelihood of discontinuing services or trying competitors, were measured using four items derived from Bansal and Taylor (1999) and Han *et al.* (2011). Together, these nine items provided a holistic view of both favorable and unfavorable customer behaviors.

The third section examined the cultural dimension of individualism–collectivism, which was measured using five items. This study operationalized individualism–collectivism as an individual-level value orientation (idiocentric versus allocentric tendencies), rather than a national-level index. This approach allowed for the examination of variations in cultural values within the sample population. The items were adapted from Hofstede’s cultural framework and validated in prior cross-cultural consumer studies (Donthu and Yoo, 1998; Taras *et al.*, 2012). The scale included both individualism-oriented and collectivism-oriented statements, and to ensure scoring consistency, the collectivism-oriented items were reverse-coded so that higher scores reflected a stronger individualistic orientation. Finally, the fourth section collected demographic information from respondents, including age, gender, nationality, education level, and frequency of hotel stay. These variables provided a contextual understanding of the sample and allowed for more nuanced interpretation of the results.

3.4 Data Screening, Preparation, and Analysis

Prior to conducting the analysis, the dataset was carefully screened to ensure accuracy and completeness. Missing values were minimal and addressed through case-wise deletion, which resulted in the exclusion of 23 incomplete responses. Reverse coding was applied to negatively phrased items to align them with the positive direction of the constructs. Outlier analysis was also performed, and no extreme values were detected beyond the initial exclusions. To further ensure the robustness of the

measures, the reliability and validity of the scales were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE).

For hypothesis testing, structural equation modeling (SEM) was conducted using WarpPLS 8.0. A two-step analytical procedure was followed. First, the measurement model was evaluated by examining internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity of the constructs. Second, the structural model was tested to assess both the direct effect of complaint handling on customer behavioral intentions and the moderating role of individualism–collectivism. To establish the significance of the path coefficients, a bootstrapping procedure with 5,000 resamples was employed. SEM was chosen as an analytical approach because it allows for the simultaneous testing of complex relationships among latent variables and is particularly suitable for examining moderation effects in behavioral research (Hair *et al.*, 2017).

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Profile

Table 1 presents the demographic profile of the respondents. The results indicate that the majority of participants were Egyptian (60.9%), while foreign guests represented 39.1% of the total sample. Regarding gender, males accounted for 56.8%, compared to 43.2% females. The dominant age group ranged between 30 and less than 40 years (38.6%), followed by respondents aged 18–30 years (31.8%).

Table (1): Respondents' Demographic Profile (n=389)

Demographic Characteristic		Frequency	Percentage
Nationality	Egyptian	237	60.9
	Foreigner	152	39.1
Gender	Male	221	56.8
	Female	168	43.2
Age	From 18 to less than 30	124	31.8
	From 30 to less than 40	150	38.6
	From 40 to less than 50	96	24.7
	More than 50 years	19	4.9
Educational Level	High-technical school	45	11.6
	Bachelor's degree	279	71.7
	Master-PhD degree	65	16.7
Average Annual Income Level	Less than \$5,000	5	1.2
	From \$5,000 to less than \$10,000	112	28.8
	From \$10,000 to less than \$15,000	136	35.0
	More than \$15,000	136	35.0

In terms of education, a large proportion of respondents held a bachelor's degree (71.7%), while 16.7% had a postgraduate degree (Master's/PhD). Concerning income, most respondents earned between \$10,000 and \$15,000 or above (70%), reflecting a relatively high-income customer base typical of five-star hotel guests.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

4.2.1 Complaining Behavior

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for complaining behavior. Upon analysis, the overall average response was 3.97, with a standard deviation of 0.409. Based on the criteria established in this research and the feedback from participants, it can be inferred that the level of complaining behavior exhibited by the study sample is on the higher end of the spectrum.

Table (2): Mean value and standard deviation (SD) of customers' complaining behavior

No.	Complaining Behavior	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
1	When I am not satisfied with the service provided, I prefer to express this feeling before leaving the place.	4.01	.844	93.682	.000
2	I will let the hotel know about my issue so that they can rectify it in the future.	4.25	.694	120.697	.000
3	To resolve the issue, I will contact the hotel.	4.20	.755	109.772	.000
4	I will recommend this hotel to my family and friends, so much so that they will not think of another hotel.	4.18	.783	105.318	.000
5	I will express my displeasure with the situation on a feedback card or questionnaire for visitors.	4.25	.638	131.453	.000
6	In case of service failure incidents, I will tell the hotel's service provider.	4.05	.826	96.856	.000
7	In case of service failure incidents, I will tell my family and friends.	4.16	.755	108.717	.000
8	In case of service failure incidents, I will tell a third party.	3.14	.790	103.416	.000
9	After a bad experience, I will post a critical review on social media.	3.21	.658	126.283	.000
10	After a bad experience, I may leave the hotel and determine not to use it again.	4.24	.683	122.389	.000
Complaining Behavior		3.97	.409	17.603	.000

The average score for this variable ranged from 3.14 to 4.2. Statement no. 5, which concerns expressing dissatisfaction through feedback cards or questionnaires, had the highest mean of 4.25, surpassing the overall mean of 3.97, with a standard deviation of 0.638. In contrast, Statement no. 8, which relates to informing a third party in case of service failure, had the lowest mean of 3.14, below the overall mean, with a standard deviation of 0.790. These results indicate limited variation in responses, suggesting a consensus among participants regarding the importance of complaining behavior. The consistency in mean values further supports this observation.

The statistical significance values, as indicated by the calculated p-values, suggest a strong agreement among respondents on statements related to complaining behavior, with all significance levels below 0.05. The findings in Table 2 demonstrate that most respondents are inclined to act following service failures, as evidenced by the average mean of 3.97. Complaining behavior was categorized based on potential customer actions following a service failure, as outlined in the literature review.

Customers have the option to either remain with the provider or choose to check out if dissatisfied, which may result in the hotel being unaware of any service failures (mean = 4.24). This finding aligns with Li's (2010) research, which suggests that dissatisfied guests are more likely to share their negative experiences with others. Similarly, Refaat (2015) found that customers express dissatisfaction in various ways, such as word-of-mouth (WOM), lodging complaints with agencies, remaining silent, or switching to a competitor. WOM is particularly common in Arab societies, where it serves as a cultural norm for venting frustration. Furthermore, Elsaed and Hassan (2020) found that most respondents act in response to service failures, with a mean of 3.65. Yuliat and Simanjuntak (2024) also supported the notion that WOM significantly impacts complaint behavior. Statement no. 10 introduces interesting observations. While earlier responses indicate a strong desire among clients to express dissatisfaction and provide feedback, this statement ranks third in terms of the highest approval ratios among respondents. This suggests that a substantial number of customers tend to make a decisive decision following a negative experience, choosing to boycott the hotel and avoid future dealings.

It is also important to note that the results regarding the cultural dimension of power distance in Egyptian society indicate that it has a low power distance, which suggests that consumers in Egypt are less accepting of inequity in how their issues are addressed. Additionally, the individualism dimension, as revealed in the post-study data, further reflects this characteristic in the behavior of Egyptian consumers, emphasizing the complexity of their satisfaction. This highlights the importance of understanding the psychological factors influencing Egyptian consumers, especially when dealing with the emotional impact of frustrating experiences or the loss of face associated with high individualism.

4.2.2 The Customer Behavioral Intentions

The analysis of the study sample's responses regarding customer behavioral intentions, as shown in Table 3, reveals an overall average of 4.13 with a standard deviation of 0.612. This indicates that the respondents' assessments of customer behavioral intentions were predominantly positive.

Table (3): Mean value and standard deviation (SD) of the Customer Behavioral Intentions

No.	The Customer Behavioral Intentions	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
1	I will consider this hotel as my first choice in the future.	4.16	.698	117.540	.000
2	I consider this hotel as my first choice to meet my wants and needs.	4.13	.743	109.787	.000
3	I will encourage my friends and relatives to do business with this hotel.	4.21	.751	110.538	.000
4	I will recommend this hotel to anyone who seeks my advice.	4.16	.733	112.105	.000
5	I will say positive things about this hotel to other people.	4.14	.788	103.592	.000
6	I will switch to another competitor's hotel if I experience a problem with this hotel's service.	4.13	.780	104.403	.000

7	I will do less business with this hotel in the next few years.	3.98	.855	91.872	.000
8	I will probably be happy with the products and services of competing hotels.	4.13	.793	102.831	.000
9	If a competing hotel offers a better discount on its services, I will switch.	4.15	.749	109.414	.000
The Customer Behavioral Intentions		4.13	.612	133.140	.000

The analysis of the study sample's responses regarding customer behavioral intentions, as shown in Table 3, reveals an overall mean of 4.13 with a standard deviation of 0.612. This indicates that respondents generally hold a positive assessment of their behavioral intentions. The mean values for this construct ranged from 3.98 to 4.21. Statement no. 3, "I will encourage my friends and relatives to do business with this hotel", recorded the highest mean of 4.21, surpassing the overall average, with a standard deviation of 0.751. In contrast, Statement no. 7, "I will do less business with this hotel in the next few years", obtained the lowest mean of 3.98, below the overall average, with a standard deviation of 0.855. This limited range of dispersion suggests a consensus among respondents on the importance of these intentions. The significance levels of all T-values were below 0.05, confirming strong agreement across the sample.

The mean score of 4.16 for statement no. 1 ("I will consider this hotel as my first choice in the future") reflects high satisfaction with guest experiences in five-star hotels in Egypt. Similarly, Statement no. 2 ("I consider this hotel as my first choice to meet my wants and needs") yielded a mean of 4.13, suggesting that guests generally perceive these hotels as capable of fulfilling their expectations.

Positive word-of-mouth intentions were also strongly evident. Statement no. 4 ("I will recommend this hotel to anyone who seeks my advice") achieved a mean of 4.16, while statement no. 5 ("I will say positive things about this hotel to other people") scored 4.14. Together with Statement no. 3, these results emphasize the important role of guest advocacy in enhancing hotel reputation.

On the other hand, switching-related intentions showed moderate agreement. Statement no. 6 ("I will switch to another competitor's hotel if I experience a problem with this hotel's service") had a mean of 4.13, while Statement no. 9 ("If a competing hotel offers a better discount on its services, I will switch") recorded 4.15, highlighting the influence of price sensitivity. Finally, Statement no. 8 ("I will probably be happy with the products and services of competing hotels") also had a mean of 4.13, suggesting that respondents recognize the availability of alternative service providers.

In sum, these findings reveal a dual pattern: strong loyalty and advocacy intentions alongside a noticeable willingness to switch when competitors provide better value. This complexity highlights the need for Egyptian five-star hotels to balance service quality, fair complaint handling, and competitive pricing to sustain customer loyalty. These results are in line with the findings of Kandampully and Suhartanto (2020), who confirmed that service quality and customer satisfaction are the main drivers of loyalty in the hospitality industry. Similarly, Han *et al.*, (2021) found that while high service

quality enhances loyalty, guests may still exhibit switching behavior when competitors offer greater value or more favorable pricing. This indicates that, in the Egyptian hotel context, customer loyalty is not purely emotional but rather conditional upon consistent service performance and perceived value.

4.2.3 Individualism

The descriptive statistics for individualism are presented in Table 4. The mean score was 3.08 (SD = 0.377), indicating a moderate level of individualistic orientation among respondents. Given the criteria outlined in this research and the participants' feedback, it can be inferred that the perception of individualism falls within the moderate range.

Table (4): Mean value and standard deviation (SD) of Individualism

No.	Individualism	Mean	SD	T	Sig.
1	Whenever I need a hotel, I will go to the one that is highly recommended by my social circle, regardless of its quality.	1.83	.447	99.644	.000
2	I prefer it when the hotel, in its commercials, uses language directed toward me over language directed toward the whole community.	4.14	.721	113.29	.000
3	I expect to be addressed in a manner that differentiates me from the other.	4.19	.698	118.51	.000
4	Individuals should sacrifice self-interest for the group.	1.93	.438	98.949	.000
5	Group success is more important than individual success.	3.32	0.831	129.69	.000
Individualism		3.08	.377	146.3	.000

The range of means for this variable varied between 1.83 and 4.19. Item no. (3), "I expect to be addressed in a manner that differentiates me from the other," received the highest mean of 4.19, exceeding the overall mean of 3.08 with a standard deviation of 0.698. In contrast, Statement no. 1, "Whenever I need a hotel, I will go to the one that is highly recommended by my social circle, regardless of its quality," ranked the lowest with a mean of 1.83, falling below the general mean of 3.08, with a standard deviation of 0.447. The respondents' views on individualism exhibited low dispersion, suggesting strong agreement among the study sample. This is further supported by the statistical significance values for the calculated t-values, all of which were lower than the significance level of 0.05, indicating a widespread consensus on the variable statements.

The mean score of 1.83 for statement no. 1, "Whenever I need a hotel, I will go to the one that is highly recommended by my social circle, regardless of its quality," suggests that customers have a strong preference for making independent decisions rather than relying on social recommendations. On the other hand, the mean scores for statements no. (2) and (3), "I prefer it when the hotel, in its commercials, uses language directed toward me over language directed toward the whole community" (4.14) and "I expect to be addressed in a manner that differentiates me from the other" (4.19), reflect that Egyptian customers appreciate personalized and

individualized approaches. This indicates a shift towards individualistic tendencies, where customers feel valued when their individuality is recognized, especially in advertising.

Further analysis reveals a mean value of 1.93 for the statement, suggesting that individuals should prioritize the group over self-interest. This suggests a strong preference for personal recognition and benefits, rather than adhering strictly to collective expectations. Conversely, the mean value of 3.32 for the statement on whether group success is more important than individual success reflects a neutral stance. This indicates that while there is an acknowledgment of the importance of group achievements, individual success is still valued.

It is noteworthy that previous studies have characterized Egyptian society as collectivist, but the findings of this study point towards a shift towards individualism, with studies by Agag *et al.* (2024) and Hassan *et al.* (2024) also supporting this trend. This cultural shift toward individuality could have significant implications for how complaints are handled in the hospitality industry and may influence customers' behavioral intentions. As Egyptian society becomes more independent and liberalized, the need for personalized customer service and tailored experiences in the hotel industry is likely to grow.

This transition from a collective to an individual society in Egypt is driven by interconnected factors such as globalization, technological advancements, and economic and social changes. While this shift brings many benefits, it also poses challenges for sectors like hospitality. For the hotel industry, understanding and adapting to these changing cultural dynamics is crucial. As Egyptian society becomes more individualistic, hotels must rethink their approaches to service delivery, marketing, and customer relationship management to remain competitive and meet the evolving expectations of their customers.

4.3 Measurement Model

4.3.1 Model Fit and Quality Indices

The model's fit and quality indices were assessed following Kock's (2022) recommendations as shown in Table 5, all indices met the recommended thresholds, confirming the robustness and reliability of the structural model.

Table (5): Model's Fit and Quality Indices

Indices	Assessment	Criterion	Decision
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.163, $p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	Supported
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.864, $p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	Supported
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.862, $p < 0.001$	$p < 0.05$	Supported
Average block VIF (AVIF)	4.306	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Supported
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	3.454	Acceptable if ≤ 5 , ideally ≤ 3.3	Supported
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.829	Small ≥ 0.1 , Medium ≥ 0.25 , Large ≥ 0.36	Supported
Simpson's paradox ratio	0.771	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7 , ideally = 1	Supported

(SPR)			
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	0.993	Acceptable if ≥ 0.9 , ideally = 1	Supported
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Supported
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	Acceptable if ≥ 0.7	Supported

4.3.2 Validity and Reliability

The measurement model was examined to assess the relationships between the latent constructs (complaint handling, customer behavioral intentions, and individualism–collectivism) and their respective indicators, with a focus on reliability and validity. Factor loadings for all indicators ranged between 0.732 and 0.891, exceeding the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). This confirms that each item strongly contributes to its corresponding construct.

Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR). As shown in Table 6, Cronbach's alpha values ranged from 0.741 to 0.952, exceeding the recommended cut-off value of 0.70 (Nunnally and Bernstein, 1994). Similarly, CR values ranged from 0.793 to 0.959, surpassing the 0.70 threshold suggested by Manley *et al.*, (2021), confirming high internal consistency. Convergent validity was established by examining the average variance extracted (AVE), which ranged from 0.531 to 0.721, all above the benchmark of 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). This indicates that the constructs capture more than half of the variance in their indicators. Additionally, collinearity statistics (VIF values) ranged between 1.17 and 1.78, far below the threshold of 5.0 (Kock, 2022), confirming the absence of multicollinearity.

Table (6): Reliability and Validity of Constructs

Items	Loading	CA	CR	(AVE)	VIF
Complaint Handling (CH)		0.885	0.922	0.571	1.362
CH.1	0.732**				
CH.2	0.744**				
CH.3	0.733**				
CH.4	0.769**				
CH.5	0.824**				
CH.6	0.744**				
CH.7	0.746**				
CH.8	0.842**				
CH.9	0.817**				
CH.10	0.774**				
CH.11	0.887**				
CH.12	0.868**				
CH.13	0.863**				
Customer Behavioral Intention (CBI)					
CBI.1	0.847**				
CBI.2	0.811**				
CBI.3	0.873**				

CBI.4	0.855**	0.952	0.959	0.721	1.668
CBI.5	0.829**				
CBI.6	0.882**				
CBI.7	0.891**				
CBI.8	0.827**				
CBI.9	0.828**				
Individualism (Ind)		0.741	0.706	0.531	1.78
Ind.1	0.744**				
Ind.2	0.823**				
Ind.3	0.843**				
Ind.4	0.744**				
Ind.5	0.776**				

4.3.3 Discriminant Validity

Discriminant validity was confirmed using both the Fornell–Larcker criterion and the HTMT ratio. The square root of the AVE for each construct was greater than its correlations with other constructs, indicating strong discriminant validity (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Additionally, all HTMT values were below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015), supporting the distinctiveness of the constructs. Table 7 demonstrates the Fornell–Larcker criterion results, confirming discriminant validity among the constructs. The square roots of the AVE values (diagonal elements) are higher than the inter-construct correlations, indicating that each construct, complaint handling, customer behavioral intentions, and individualism–collectivism, shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs. This supports the adequacy of the measurement model in distinguishing between the study variables.

Table (7): Fornell–Larcker Test Results

Construct	CH	CBI	Ind
Complaint Handling (CH)	0.755		
Customer Behavioral Intentions (CBI)	0.726	0.849	
Individualism–Collectivism (Ind)	0.352	0.383	0.576

Table 8 presents the heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) ratios, which provide further evidence of discriminant validity. All HTMT values are below the conservative threshold of 0.85 (Henseler *et al.*, 2015), with the highest being 0.835 between complaint handling and individualism–collectivism. These results confirm that the constructs are empirically distinct and that multicollinearity is not a concern in the measurement model.

Table (8): Heterotrait–Monotrait (HTMT) Ratios

Construct	CH	CBI	Ind
Complaint Handling (CH)	—		
Customer Behavioral Intentions (CBI)	0.770	—	
Individualism–Collectivism (Ind)	0.835	0.825	—

4.4 Structural Model

The structural model was assessed to examine the hypothesized relationships. The results indicate a strong, significant effect of complaint handling on customer behavioral intentions ($\beta = 0.79$, 95% CI [0.55, 1.03], $p = 0.028$), confirming

hypothesis 1 (H1). These findings align with justice theory: customers who perceive distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness in complaint handling are more likely to feel satisfied, valued, and respected, fostering trust, loyalty, and enhancing the hotel's reputation.

The moderating effect of individualism–collectivism was also supported. The interaction effect was significant ($\beta = 0.10$, 95% CI [0.03, 0.17], $p = 0.003$). Since higher scores on the Ind scale indicate greater individualism, this positive interaction suggests that the relationship between complaint handling and behavioral intentions is stronger for more individualistic customers. Collectivist-oriented guests also respond positively to effective complaint handling, but the strengthening of the relationship is less pronounced. These results support the directional form of hypothesis 2 (H2).

Beyond statistical significance, practical significance was evaluated. The coefficient of determination (R^2) for behavioral intentions was 0.61, indicating that the model explained 61% of the variance. Cohen's f^2 values were calculated to determine the contribution of each predictor. The interaction term between complaint handling and individualism–collectivism yielded an f^2 value of 0.04, indicating a small to moderate effect size according to Cohen's (1988) guidelines. This confirms that the moderating role of individualism–collectivism is both statistically and practically meaningful.

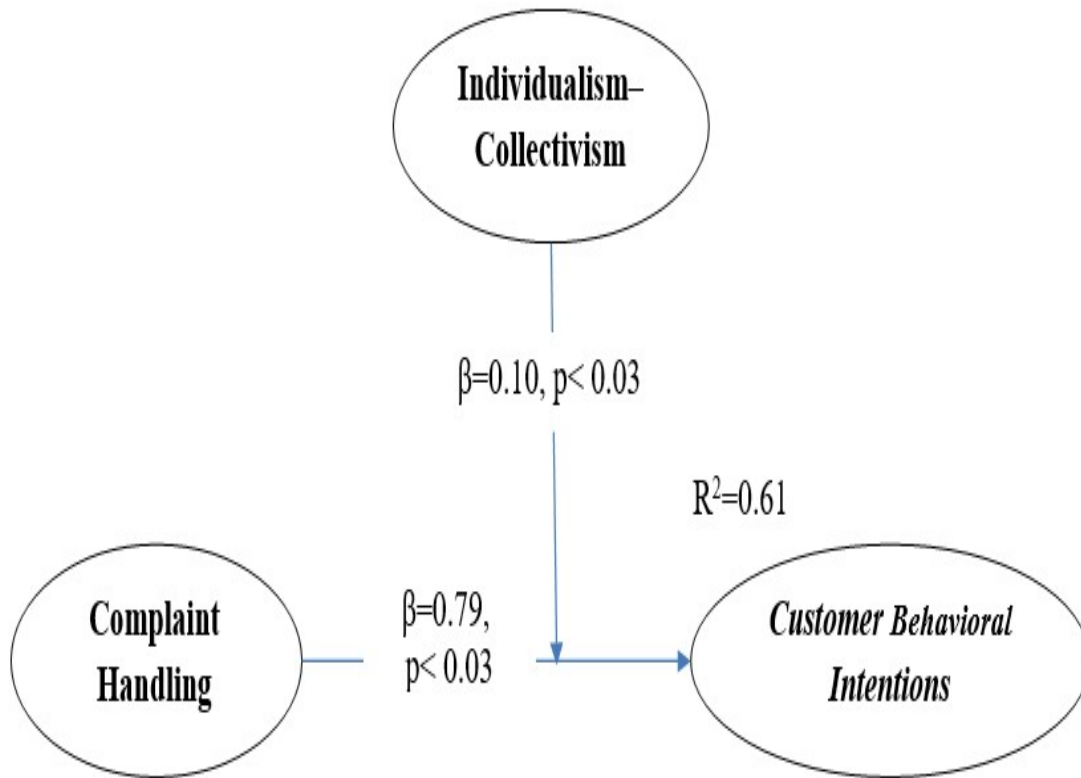


Figure (2): The Structural Model for Testing Study Hypotheses

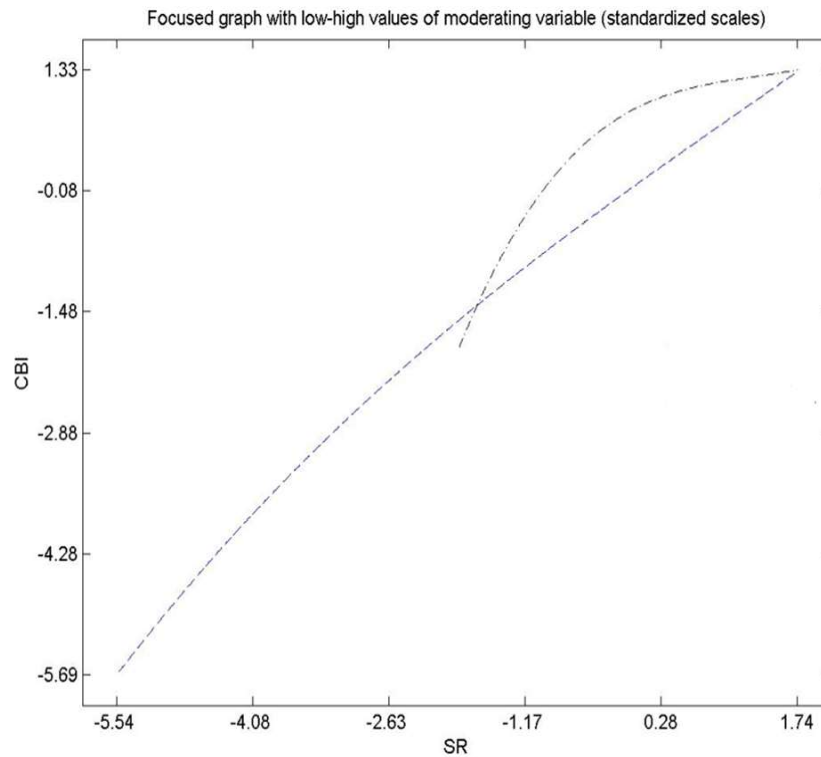


Figure (3): Low-high values of Individualism (Ind) as a moderator

5. Discussion

The findings of this study confirm that complaint handling has a strong and significant positive effect on customer behavioral intentions in the Egyptian hotel sector (H1). Guests who perceive distributive, procedural, and interactional fairness in complaint handling are more likely to demonstrate favorable behaviors such as loyalty, repurchase, and positive word-of-mouth. This underscores the critical role of effective service recovery in enhancing customer satisfaction and sustaining long-term relationships in hospitality contexts (Davidow, 2003; Casidy and Shin, 2015).

Furthermore, the study demonstrates that individualism–collectivism moderates the relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions (H2). The positive interaction coefficient indicates that the effect of complaint handling is stronger for more individualistic guests, who prioritize fairness, efficiency, and tangible outcomes. Collectivist guests, while still responding positively to effective complaint handling, exhibit a comparatively less pronounced increase in favorable behavioral intentions. These results are broadly consistent with justice theory and prior empirical findings. Fair complaint handling has been shown to foster trust, satisfaction, and loyalty, as evidenced in studies by Tax *et al.*, (1998) and Maxham and Netemeyer (2002). The current findings extend this evidence to the Egyptian hospitality context, demonstrating that service recovery principles operate similarly in emerging markets.

Regarding cultural orientation, the results partially align with Mattila and Patterson (2004), who found that collectivist customers respond more positively when interactional justice, emphasizing politeness, empathy, and respect, is present. However, this study further shows that individualist-oriented customers exhibit stronger behavioral responses to effective complaint handling, consistent with Lin and Yi (2019), who reported that outcome-driven individuals are highly sensitive to the success or failure of recovery efforts. This suggests that while collectivists value relational harmony and long-term relationships, individualists focus on personal benefits and tangible outcomes, responding more sharply when their expectations are met or unmet.

The findings also resonate with more recent studies emphasizing the importance of integrating cultural values into service recovery strategies. For example, Hsu *et al.*, (2020) found that individualism–collectivism significantly influences complaint behavior and the evaluation of recovery efforts in hospitality settings. Similarly, Ma *et al.*, (2023) reported that service recovery effectiveness is moderated by individual-level individualism–collectivism, reinforcing the practical importance of tailoring complaint-handling strategies to the cultural characteristics of guests.

Overall, this discussion highlights that the study not only confirms the positive effects of complaint handling on behavioral intentions but also provides nuanced insights into how individualism–collectivism shapes these effects, thereby contributing to both theory and practice in cross-cultural hospitality management. Managers in hotels can leverage these findings by customizing complaint-handling approaches—focusing on efficiency and tangible compensation for individualistic customers, while emphasizing relational respect and harmony for collectivist customers, to maximize customer satisfaction, loyalty, and retention.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study advance the theoretical understanding of complaint handling in hospitality by integrating Hofstede's individualism–collectivism dimension into the service recovery framework. While prior research has largely treated complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions as universally applicable processes (Maxham and Netemeyer, 2002; Davidow, 2003), this study demonstrates that the strength and nature of these relationships vary according to customers' individualism–collectivism at the individual level. Specifically, the results highlight that individualist customers respond more strongly to effective complaint handling, prioritizing fairness, efficiency, and tangible outcomes, whereas collectivist customers emphasize relational harmony and long-term ties. This provides a nuanced extension of justice theory, showing that the impact of distributive, procedural, and interactional justice is not uniform across cultural contexts but is moderated by individual-level cultural values. By moving beyond national-level generalizations, the study emphasizes the importance of examining within-country cultural variation, particularly in emerging markets like Egypt, which is experiencing socio-economic transformations that foster a mix of collectivist and individualist tendencies (Taras *et al.*, 2012).

Moreover, this research offers new conceptual insights by explicitly linking individualism–collectivism with customer behavioral intentions in service recovery. It extends existing frameworks by demonstrating that the moderating effect of individualism–collectivism can either amplify or attenuate the effects of complaint handling on loyalty and switching intentions, thereby refining theoretical models in cross-cultural hospitality management. The study also challenges the assumption that traditional cultural classifications fully explain consumer behavior, suggesting that transitional or mixed cultural contexts require more dynamic and granular theoretical models. Overall, the study contributes to the cross-cultural hospitality literature by providing a theoretically grounded explanation of how individual-level cultural values shape service recovery outcomes, offering a more precise and actionable framework for both scholars and practitioners.

5.2 Managerial Implications

The findings of this study provide actionable guidance for hotel managers seeking to enhance customer satisfaction, loyalty, and competitive advantage through effective complaint handling. Specifically, the results highlight the importance of culturally adaptive service recovery strategies that consider individual-level differences in individualism–collectivism. For collectivist-oriented guests, managers should emphasize empathy, respectful communication, and relationship maintenance, ensuring that complaint handling preserves relational harmony and long-term ties. In contrast, individualist-oriented guests prioritize fairness, efficiency, quick resolution, and tangible compensation, so recovery strategies for these customers should focus on outcome-driven solutions that directly address their concerns. To operationalize these insights, hotel managers can implement several practical measures. Staff training programs should educate frontline employees on recognizing cultural cues and adapting their complaint-handling approaches accordingly.

Culturally informed customer segmentation can allow managers to tailor service recovery interventions based on the dominant individualism–collectivism of guests. Additionally, monitoring and adapting to cultural shifts within the market, especially in transitional contexts such as Egypt, where globalization and socio-economic change foster a mix of collectivist and individualist tendencies, can help ensure that complaint-handling strategies remain relevant and effective. Furthermore, integrating feedback systems and customer relationship management tools that track complaints, recovery outcomes, and customer satisfaction can provide managers with valuable data to refine culturally sensitive complaint-handling practices over time. By adopting these measures, hotel managers can not only mitigate the negative effects of service failures but also leverage complaint handling as a strategic tool for building customer loyalty, enhancing word-of-mouth advocacy, and sustaining long-term business success.

6. Conclusion

This study examined the effect of complaint handling on customer behavioral intentions in the Egyptian hotel sector, while specifically investigating the moderating role of Hofstede’s individualism–collectivism dimension on the relationship between customers’ perceptions of complaint handling practices and customer behavioral

intentions. The results provide strong evidence that effective complaint handling significantly enhances favorable customer intentions, including loyalty, repeat patronage, and positive word-of-mouth, while reducing unfavorable behaviors such as switching and spreading negative feedback.

The findings further demonstrate that individualism–collectivism moderates the relationship between complaint handling and customer behavioral intentions. Collectivist-oriented customers respond more positively to empathetic and relational recovery efforts that preserve harmony and long-term ties. In contrast, individualist-oriented customers prioritize fairness, efficiency, and tangible outcomes, exhibiting stronger behavioral responses when complaint handling meets or fails to meet their personal expectations. Overall, the study contributes to both theory and practice by confirming justice theory as a robust framework for understanding complaint handling in hospitality, while also highlighting that individual-level individualism–collectivism provides an important contextual layer influencing customer responses. In the Egyptian context, where cultural values are evolving due to globalization and socio-economic transformation, hotels must adopt flexible, culturally sensitive complaint-handling strategies to enhance customer satisfaction, foster loyalty, and ensure long-term competitiveness.

7. Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

This study has several limitations that provide directions for future research. First, the use of convenience sampling in hotel settings, while practical, may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could employ random or stratified sampling techniques to enhance external validity. Second, this study measured individualism–collectivism at the individual level, which may not fully capture broader cultural influences. Future research could integrate national-level cultural indices in cross-national comparative designs to disentangle the effects of individual versus national cultural values. Third, the cross-sectional design of this study does not allow for examination of changes over time. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to track how evolving cultural values in transitional societies like Egypt influence customer responses to complaint handling. In addition, future studies may examine other potential moderators to extend the conceptual framework. Variables such as customer emotions, the severity of service failures, or brand image could be incorporated to provide a more comprehensive understanding of service recovery dynamics. Finally, adopting mixed-method approaches could enhance the robustness of research findings. Combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews would allow researchers to capture deeper customer perspectives, particularly regarding the cultural factors that shape reactions to complaint handling. By addressing these limitations and pursuing these avenues, future research can continue to advance knowledge in the areas of service recovery, individual-level individualism–collectivism, and customer behavior within the hospitality sector.

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