Customer deviance: A framework, prevention strategies, and opportunities for future research

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ABSTRACT

The phrase the "customer is always right" assumes that customers provide universal benefits for firms. However, in recent years, customer deviance is on the rise and the academic literature has provided little insight into the drivers of deviance, the actual behaviors, and strategies for how managers can better manage a customer base that cannot be classified as universally benign. This article addresses customer deviance ranging from classic examples like shoplifting to engaging in hostile anti-brand behaviors on social media or even breaking established norms such as trespassing in stores after closing hours. In an effort to spur new research into customer deviance, we propose a customer deviance framework encompassing the triggers, behaviors, and consequences of customer deviance with attention given to differentiating firms, employees, and other customers as the possible targets of deviant behaviors. We outline prevention strategies that comprise social, design, and technological-oriented factors, which in turn can help firms better manage deviant behavior. In doing so, we identify gaps in the literature and close with an actionable agenda for future research that can help firms curtail these negative customer behaviors.

The phrase the "customer is always right" assumes that customers provide universal benefits for firms. However, in recent years, customer deviance, or misbehavior, is on the rise (PriceWaterhouseCooper, 2018) and it costs firms large sums both in lost revenue and overhead to implement counter measures to battle such behaviors. We define customer deviance as any act by a customer in an online or offline environment that deprives the firm, its employees, or other customers of resources, safety, image, or an otherwise successful experience. In addition to an increase in frequency, the range of customer deviant behaviors is also growing. Specifically, customer deviance spans from classic examples of shoplifting to experiences such as pirating digital media, cheating at self-service kiosks, trespassing via "24-hour" challenges (i.e., where customers hide in stores overnight past closing

hours), and engaging in hostile, anti-brand behaviors on social media.

Customer deviance is not an exceptional phenomenon by a minority of customers. In fact, a recent study demonstrated that 64% of customers reported shoplifting at least once in their life (Farmer & Dawson, 2017), costing US retailers an average loss of $798 per shoplifting incident in 2017 (National Retail Federation, 2018). Even a less forceful wrongdoing like retail return fraud results in over $23 billion dollars in loss per year in the US (Appriss Retail, 2018). Furthermore, with an increase of 27% in 2019, 9782 acts of aggressive and abusive behavior involving customers were recorded in the retail sector, of which, 83% of staff experienced verbal abuse, and 41% of the violent incidents resulted in injury. Furthermore, customer deviance was estimated to cost UK convenience stores £246 million in losses in 2018, clearly

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demonstrating the financial impact of deviance on firm operations (Association of Convenience Stores, 2019). This number is particularly staggering as it only represents a small sub-sector within the broader retailing category. While the challenges posed by deviant customer behavior have grown for firms, the academic literature has provided limited insight into the drivers of deviance and strategies to better manage a customer base that cannot be classified as universally benign.

Recent academic studies have demonstrated that customers are plaguing firms in a variety of ways including shoplifting (Lee et al., 2018), revenge seeking (Haenel, Wetzel, & Hammerschmidt, 2019; Johnson, Matear, & Thomson, 2010), customer rage (Grove, Pickett, Jones, & Dorsch, 2012), insurance fraud (Garnefeld, Eggert, Husemann-Kopetzky, & Böhm, 2019), and vandalism (Bhati & Pearce, 2016). These works provide baseline knowledge into why and how customers engage in a set of longstanding deviant behaviors. However, academic research has studied these deviant actions in isolation of each other and without a full understanding of how they can be interrelated and prevented. As a result, a comprehensive framework for examining a wider range of deviant behaviors and explicit discussion of strategies to curtail these deviant behaviors is missing. This research proposes an expansive customer deviance framework consisting of the following components. First, and based on prior research in the field, we establish that the process of customer deviance consists of triggers, behaviors, and consequences. Second, we expand the targets beyond the firm and include both employees and other customers as possible deviance marks. Third, we provide a comprehensive discussion of social, design, and technological customer deviance prevention strategies along with a battery of future research questions.

In order to fully understand customer deviance, managers and researchers alike must understand that there is a process of customer deviance that starts with a trigger. This trigger leads to deviant behaviors that can impact firms, employees, and customers, and has a variety of consequences for those involved. Further, given this deviance process, a key question is how firms can enact prevention techniques to reduce deviance throughout the process. Fig. 1 provides an overview of this framework and additional details are provided in the following sections.

1. Customer deviance

Deviant customer behavior has generated interest from diverse disciplines such as psychology, sociology, criminology, and management which have all aimed at understanding the antecedent events for deviant customer behavior. Prior studies have sought to provide insights into general personality-based motivations and contextual triggers for customer deviance. However, these studies stop short of explaining differences with regards to the targets of the deviance (firms, its employees, or other customers) or providing much insight into how firms can prevent customer-initiated deviance.

A few earlier studies have examined the flow of customer-firm deviance, consisting of triggers, behaviors, and consequences (Beverland, Kates, Lindgreen, & Chung, 2010; Brady, Voorhees, & Brusco, 2012). However, such studies do not address customer deviance from an overarching perspective. We argue that these process steps cannot comprehensively cover all aspects of customer deviancy on their own. First, the triggers discussed in past models (e.g., Beverland et al., 2010) are mostly construed as preventable actions caused by the firm. However, there is evidence that triggers for deviant customer behaviors do occur even when firms are doing "what they should be doing." For instance, people can abuse customer-centric policies that are designed to cater to their comfort (e.g., generous return policies). A second limitation of past research has been their focus on customers targeting the firm directly, thus failing to incorporate other customers and employees who can also be the target of bad behavior (ACS, 2019). A lack of discussion about the efficacy and ability to use different strategies (e.g., social, design, and technological) to prevent both the act of deviant behavior and the subsequent consequences is a third limitation we address with our proposed framework.

1.1. Deviance triggers

According to past research there are a variety of factors that can trigger, or cause, an individual to behave in a deviant, or socially unacceptable manner (Fullerton & Punj, 1993; Reynolds & Harris, 2009). From the customer's perspective, deviance could be triggered extrinsically via firm influence (firm-initiated), other customers (customer-initiated), or intrinsically through the customer's own psychological state that is under the influence of social stimuli (customer-initiated).

Traditionally, deviant customer behavior has been viewed as a cause or symptom on firm failures (Beverland et al., 2010). Such problems include poor handling of customer complaints (Reynolds &
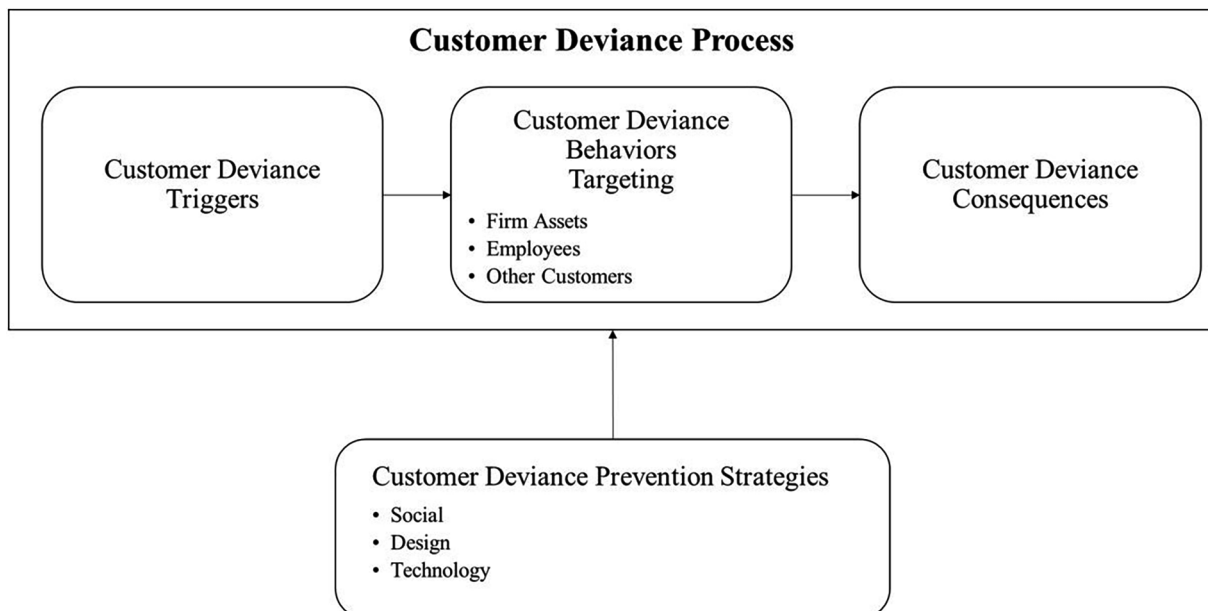

Fig. 1. A framework for customer deviance.

Table 1
Key insights and future research questions for firm-directed deviant behavior.

Type of behavior	Key citations	Motivations	Managerial strategies	Opportunities for future research
Shoplifting	Cox et al. (1990); Vermeir et al. (2017); Romeo (2016); Taylor (2016); Tonglet (2002)	Thrill-seeking, anger, economizing, laziness	Surveillance, evoking social norms	How can firms best cope with professional thieves (e.g., organized crime)? What new risks are poised by the emerging group of "self-service" shoplifters?
Vandalism	Cialdini et al. (2006); Bhati and Pearce (2016)	Thrill-seeking, anger	Surveillance, evoking social norms	Can "self-service" shoplifting serve as a gateway to other deviant behaviors? What impact can vandalism have on other perceptions of the firm?
Wardrobing	Shang et al. (2017)	Ego, financial savings, opportunism	Restocking fees, increase the volume (Shang et al., 2017)	How to identify wardrobers in advance? Can we leverage data mining techniques to highlight likely wardrobers and deter the behaviour in advance? What are the primary motivations for wardrobing (thrill seeking, social approval, economic necessity)? Can offering customers an option that provides similar benefits to wardrobing (e.g., RentTheRunway) be an effective way to reduce the behaviour while generating revenue?
Digital service piracy	Sinha & Mandel (2008)	Cost-savings, ease, digital services otherwise unavailable	Make paying for digital service enticing	What factors in a new service or product attract former delinquent customers?
Anti-firm communities/word of mouth	Hollenbeck and Zinkhan (2006); Popp et al. (2016); Kuo and Hou (2017)	Service failures, firm betrayal, impact on self-relevance, socially irresponsible actions	Proper recovery strategies (before the fact) Likely little to do once it occurs	What are the best responses a firm can take to anti-brand communities? Is ignoring the only strategy? Can firms proactively intervene to reduce the damage from anti-firm communications? Can firms discredit negative online reviews or do these efforts do more damage than benefit?

Harris, 2009), corporations behaving in socially irresponsible ways (Sweetin, Knowles, Summey, & McQueen, 2013), close relationships that turn from love to hate because of service failures (Grégoire, Tripp, & Legoux, 2009), or customers experiencing strong feelings of betrayal (Bonifield & Cole, 2007). In these past studies, customer's deviant behavior seems to be directly triggered by conflict or disapproval of a firm or employee actions. These in turn lead to feelings of anger and outrage (Bougie, Pieters, & Zeelenberg, 2003; McColl-Kennedy, Patterson, Smith, & Brady, 2009), increasing levels of animosity (Cui, Wajda, & Hu, 2012; Harmeling, Magnusson, & Singh, 2015), and profound hate (McGovern & Moon, 2007).

While firm failure has clearly been linked to customer deviant behaviors, it is also crucial to understand triggers from other sources outside the firm. Deviant behavior can occur without provocation simply due to customer characteristics and/or opportunity. For instance, personality related problems have been linked to the propensity to steal, vandalize, and trash property (Johnson et al., 2010; Ishar & Roslin, 2016) and engage in online trolling (Hardaker, 2010; Postmes, Spears, & Lea, 1998). Such personality-driven behavior is largely motivated by self-financial gains (i.e., greed), self-need for recognition, or thrill-seeking behavior (Bechwati & Morrin, 2003; Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008). Customers can also be tempted to act opportunistically based on the perceived ability to remain anonymous or escape without consequences (Ehrhart & Naumann, 2004; Hoigaard, Safvenbom, & Tonnessen, 2006).

1.2. Deviance behaviors & their targets

In the same way that the triggers of customer deviance should be considered beyond just firm triggers, the targets of bad customer behavior are just as wide ranging. Once negative states are triggered, customers begin looking for ways to take direct actions (Bechwati & Morrin, 2003; Bonifield & Cole, 2007). Examples include seeking fairness and justice from the firm (Maxham & Netemeyer, 2002), engaging in direct conflict (Beverland et al., 2010), and punishment (Wooten, 2009). Such deviant intentions can manifest through examples such as negative word-of-mouth (Wetzer, Zeelenberg, & Pieters, 2007), withholding consumption (i.e., boycotts; Klein, Smith, & John, 2004), brand avoidance (Lee, Motion, & Conroy, 2009), verbal abuse, opportunistic and aggressive complaints (Baker, Magnini, & Perdue, 2012), fraud (Tian & Keep, 2002), trashing, vandalism and violence (Bhati & Pearce, 2016; Kristofferson, McFerran, Morales, & Dahl, 2016), and shoplifting (Cox, Anthony, & Moschis, 1990).

A comprehensive picture of deviance behavior, however, must differentiate these actions according to their targets. While researchers have traditionally focused on the effects of deviant customer behavior directed at the firm, this is not reflective of all deviant behavior as misbehaving customers often target the firm's employees and other customers when behaving badly. For example, customers verbally harass (Hershcovis & Bhatnagar, 2017) and even stalk frontline employees (Romans, Hays, & White, 1996). These acts hurt more than just the employee morale and feelings; they threaten employees safety and their sense of security. Additionally, bystander customers witnessing these hostile transgressions against the employee may become embarrassed or uncomfortable, which can have negative downstream consequences on word-of-mouth and patronage intentions (Kilian, Steinmann, & Hammes, 2018). Further, other customers can also be the direct or indirect target of deviant behavior. Customers can engage in minor deviant behaviors towards other customers, such as cutting in line, or more aggravated deviant behaviors, such as verbal or physical abuse. In extreme situations, such as Black Friday deal rushes, the physical abuse of other customers has led to serious physical harm and even death (Kristofferson et al., 2016). Customer can also be affected indirectly by deviance towards the service facilities, (e.g. trashing or damaging the servicescape that other customers will need to use; Schaefers, Wittkowski, Benoit, & Ferraro, 2016). We discuss each of these targets of customer deviance next in order to expand the scope of customer deviance research.

1.2.1. Firm-directed deviance

Arguably, the most prevalent focus of deviant customer behavior research focuses on firm-directed deviance. Firm-directed deviance involves acts or transgressions against a firm that hurt the firm through financial or other resource-related losses, such as damage to the servicescape, or damage to their brand or image. Under this broad umbrella, there are a number of ways for customers to behave poorly towards the firm. In Table 1, we provide an overview of prior research and introduce opportunities for future research on customer deviance towards firms.

Classic examples of firm-directed deviance include shoplifting (Tonglet, 2002) or vandalism (Cialdini et al., 2006). Yet recent changes in the retail environment and technology have spawned a new evolution of firm directed deviance. For instance, with the proliferation of self-service checkouts, customers can now intentionally avoid scanning all their items or ring up expensive products as much cheaper items (e.g., treating avocados as carrots; Taylor, 2016). In these settings, the barrier for customers to experiment with deviance becomes much lower and can potentially result in a larger pool of customer deviants plaguing firms. In addition to deviance that originates within the walls of the retailer, many customer deviants are now taking advantage of customer-centric policies to liberally return clothes after wearing them. This process is called wardrobing, where people buy clothing with the intent of wearing them briefly and then returning them (Shang, Ghosh, & Galbreth, 2017).

Finally, there are two other areas where customers are actively working to harm firms outside of traditional retail channels. First, the digitization of media has turned piracy into a considerable problem for many providers of digital information-based services (Sinha & Mandel, 2008). Second, many customers have learned that they can take advantage of firms by holding their reputations hostage online through writing nasty online reviews or engaging in online communities. Social media has empowered customers to band together, exchange information, coordinate their actions, and inflict harm on firms (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). This has also led to the formation of online anti-firm/ brand communities (e.g. Hollenbeck & Zinkhan, 2006; Kuo & Hou, 2017; Popp, Germelmann, & Jung, 2016). For instance, customer frustration with the US customer electronics retailer Best Buy resulted in the creation of websites such as Black-ogre.com/bestbuysucks, Screw-blue.com, or several BestBuySucks Facebook groups. The effectiveness of these customer driven initiatives is exemplified by "United Breaks Guitars," a song available on YouTube that has over 19 million views. These are simply a selected number of examples and, at this point, it is rare to find an entity that has not been attacked online. Online anti-brand communities are characterized by brand hate and passionate negative emotion (Fetscherin & Heinrich, 2014; Zarantonello, Grappi, & Bagozzi, 2016). Anti-brand communities show an increased refusal of brand hegemony (Cromie & Ewing, 2009) and market domination (Holt, 2002). Customers' anger and hatred towards the brand are the motives that cause the most damage to relationships between customers and firms (Kähr, Nyffenegger, Krohmer, & Hoyer, 2016), which in turn weakens brand strength (Cova & D'Antone, 2016) and impacts profits (Koku, Akhigbeb, & Springer, 1997; Pruitt & Friedman, 1986).

Taken together, customers are behaving badly across all channels and touchpoints with firms. While initial research has provided some insight into basic motivations and consequences of these actions, more research is needed to help explain the nature and magnitude of these behaviors. For example, will "self-service" facilities (e.g., checkout kiosks that require customers to scan and "ring in" their own items) encourage subsequent customer deviant behaviors? Are there means to identify wardrobing customers in advance? Finally, are there strategies for how to best react to anti-brand communication online? We provide

Table 2
Key insights and future research questions for employee-directed deviant behavior.

Type of behavior	Key citations	Motivations	Managerial strategies	Opportunities for future research
Customer incivility and verbal harassment	DeCelles et al. (2019); Hershcovis and Bhatnagar (2017)	Frustration, time pressures, service failures	Streamlining service delivery process, develop effective recovery strategies, prevent over-intoxication	Are certain customers more prone to engaging in customer incivility?
				How can firms limit the bystander effect when other customers lash out at a firm?
				What impact do various stages of the customer journey have on the likelihood for customers to engage in deviance targeting employees?
				Are certain employees more likely to be victims of customer deviance?
				Are certain employees better served to manage customer incivility?
				Can witnessing customer incivility towards an employee alter a customer's evaluation of a service experience?
Physical/sexual assault	Mohr, Warren, Hodgson, and Drummond (2011); Yagil (2008)	Heightened emotions, crowd effects, medical issues, stress, emergency conditions, low level of perceived risk, service delivery structures, perception that the customer is beyond reproach	Legislation, workplace training	What triggers can elevate customer incivility to extreme forms of deviance like assault?
				In healthcare or social service sectors, how can employees manage the friction of continuing to support their clients while maintaining their safety?
Stalking	Romans et al. (1996)	Anger, desire for control, mental disorders	Restrict access to employee personal information, avoid being left alone with a client/customer	To what extent does the service environment contribute to customers engaging in extreme behaviors like stalking?

more ideas on logical starting points for research addressing these questions in Table 1.

1.2.2. Employee-directed deviance

Employee-directed deviance, highlighted in Table 2, includes actions that specifically target a focal employee ranging from the modest (customer incivility) to the extreme (physical/sexual assault or stalking). These can be acts against an employee in a face-to-face setting or they can target employees who are accessible through electronic communication (e.g., chat windows, frontline employees in call centers). Most of the extant research addressing customer incivility and deviance towards employees has taken the perspective of the employee. Customer incivility has been shown to negatively affect employee physical health (Sliter, Pui, Sliter, & Jex, 2011) and customer service performance (Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010), as well as employee incivility (Van Jaarsveld, Walker, & Skarlicki, 2010). Customer deviance behavior directed towards employees affects more than employee well-being and job performance. Other customers are often witnesses to spectacles of customers behaving badly and it has negative downstream impacts on the observing customers (Hershcovis & Bhatnagar, 2017).

In comparison to the consequences, little research has addressed the antecedents of deviant customer behavior that aggressively and violently target employees. Grove et al. (2012) studied customer rage in sporting events where drunken and unruly patrons target a variety of employees involved in a service role. Extending this work, DeCelles, DeVoe, Rafaeli, and Agasi (2019) focused on environmental precursors. In these extreme instances, customers' deviant behavior towards employees can become dangerous and introduce a host of severe implications for the targeted employee, firm, and other customers in the service environment (Romans et al., 1996). An obvious starting point for more research in this area would be to develop a better understanding of the complete customer journey (Voorhees et al., 2017). This journey takes a customer from a goal-oriented shopping trip (pre-core experience) to a failed encounter (core experience) and, ultimately, lashing out at employees in response to their experience (post-core experience). Most research to date examines a subset of these factors, but more research is needed to better understand the implications of such failed journeys. In addition to understanding the journey, more research is needed to identify strategies that firms can employ to limit the bystander effects of customer incivility to see if the damage can be limited to the focal customer and not spread through the customer base. We further provide avenues for future research in Table 2.

1.2.3. Customer-directed deviance

In some situations, a customer can become the target of deviant behaviors either directly through behaviors like verbal abuse or indirectly by deviance towards the subsequent assets customers use (Schaefers et al., 2016). This topic has received the least attention in the deviancy literature, but is critical. Customer-to-customer interactions are an unavoidable aspect of the vast majority of service experiences and it must be taken into account that customer deviance is also contagious (Schaefers et al., 2016). Customer-directed deviance is any act by a customer that deprives the firm's other customers of a successful experience. Traditionally, research in this area has been focused on minor deviance issues, such as cutting in lines (Mitchell & Chan, 2002). More recently it was expanded to include instances such as verbal or physical harassment of others (Grove et al., 2012), malicious behavior online (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017), territorial behaviors in public spaces (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012) as well as misbehavior towards assets used by other customers subsequently such as cars in a car sharing context (Schaefers et al., 2016). We highlight such behaviors in Table 3.

At the basic level, customers are commonly "in the factory" together during service experiences (Moeller, 2008; Voorhees et al., 2017). This creates an environment where interactions are inevitable and decisions cannot be made autonomously by either party, but they affect others

(Moeller, 2008). As Grove et al. (2012) and DeCelles et al. (2019) describe, situations where customers' emotions run high and inhibitions are decreased can result in aggression against other customers. While certain contexts (sporting events, Black Friday, etc.) will always carry high emotions, the ups and downs of general service interactions can also create isolated environments when customers' emotions can ramp up and spillover to impact others in the environment. Advances in technology and culture have provided deviant customers additional venues to target others. Online trolling behavior is a growing epidemic whereby users intentionally aggravate other users and customers by starting arguments, engaging in name calling, or otherwise harming the online experience of their victim (Bruckman, Danis, Lampe, Sternberg, & Waldron, 2006).

Research on customer-to-customer interactions is still emerging under routine conditions and there are even fewer studies that focus on deviant customer interactions. As a result, there are a range of opportunities for future research in this area. At the broadest level, there is a great opportunity for more research on how customers react to incivility targeted at them from other customers and whether the contagiousness of misbehavior found in the context of the sharing economy expands to other contexts. Building on this issue, do customers expect a firm to recover following an uncivil customer interaction and what are the best strategies in this situation? Finally, can simply witnessing a negative customer-to-customer interaction affect the evaluation of the firm? See Table 3 for a more comprehensive list of research questions.

1.3. Deviance consequences

The last step in our model focuses on the consequences of customer deviant behaviors. The consequences can vary greatly depending on a variety of factors such as whether the behavior involves an individual customer or group of customers (Fullerton & Punj, 1993), if the behavior is directly 'face-to-face' or indirectly 'behind a firm's back' (Grégoire, Laufer, & Tripp, 2010), and who is the target of the deviant behavior (see Fig. 1). The main consequences of deviance towards the firm is a depletion of resources, whether these are physical resources that are vandalized or intangible resources such as brand value that will be costly to rebuild (e.g. Fisk et al., 2010; Schaefers et al., 2016). The scope of the damage can also vary. When many customers act in unison, such as in anti-brand communities, the harm will likely be more severe. Past research has argued that the main consequences of deviance towards employees are burnout from emotionally exhaustive or abusive customer interactions (Van Jaarsveld et al., 2010). An individual deviant customer acting towards an employee might not have drastic consequences. However a work environment with constant face-to-face exposure to customer deviance or a lot of public anti-brand movement might lead to employee mental health issues as well as employee churn (Sliter et al., 2011). The consequences of deviance relating to other customers can be direct, such as a firm having to recover an incident where a customer is injured during unruly sporting events (Grove et al., 2012) or more indirect, such as experiencing unwanted negative emotional or affective states from witnessing bad behavior (Kilian et al., 2018). Customers who are the target of customer deviance will likely have a lower evaluation of the firm leading to lower patronage.

2. Preventing customer deviance

Prevention strategies constitute a key component in our proposal for an overarching customer deviance framework. In the following section, we focus on social (e.g. Cialdini et al., 2006), design (e.g. Bitner, 1992), and technological (e.g. IBM, 2008) prevention strategies. As we will illustrate, these three strategies can effectively prevent or reduce deviancy. For example, firms can carefully evoke social norms (a social strategy) to curb shoplifting behavior (i.e., firm-directed deviance) and or to promote kinder behavior towards other customers (i.e., curbing forms of customer-directed deviance). We believe our three strategies

Table 3
Key insights and future research questions for customer-directed deviant behavior.

Type of behavior	Key citations	Motivations	Managerial strategies	Opportunities for future research
Customer-to-customer incivility	Mitchell and Chan (2002); Grove et al. (2012)	Anger, lack of self control, opportunism	Improved monitoring, limiting alcohol use, banning violent offenders	Do customers blame the firm for uncivil behaviors by other customers?
				Do customers expect firms to recover from failed experiences due to the behaviour of other customers?
				Can uncivil behavior serve as a gateway to more aggressive customer-to-customer deviance?
				Are there unique drivers for customer rage directed at other customers versus the firm or its employees?
				Can witnessing customer incivility to other customers affect how customers process a service experience?
Territorial behaviors	Griffiths and Gilly (2012)	Remote working, desire for control, limited resources (e.g., seating, wifi), service loyalty	Servicescape design (more individual tables; signs to accommodate); technological innovations (limited time frame to access wifi)	How can employees moderate territorial interactions to enhance satisfaction for all customers?
				What is the relative impact of territorial behavior versus more traditional service failures or customer incivility episodes?
Misbehavior towards assets other customer will use	Schaefers et al. (2016)	Other customers prior misbehavior	Community involvement, brand value of product	Does misbehavior contagion appear in other contexts?
				Which customers are most prone to be affected by prior misbehavior of other customers?
Trolling/bad online behavior	Baird (2015); Bruckman et al. (2006); Golf-Papez and Veer (2017)	Need for attention	Blocking, moderation, confrontation, largely unknown	Under which conditions do customers' negative online interactions impact evaluation of the firm?
				What is the right balance between moderation and organic debate to foster both activity and positive customer-to-customer interactions?

Table 4
Research questions for future study by prevention strategies and topic.

Topics	Related behaviors	Research questions
Social strategies		
Social norms	Territorial behaviour, online trolling, piracy, harassment, and incivility.	How prevalent can deviant behaviour be in a population before it cannot be reined in?
		How can ethical customer behaviour be taught to children?
		Should online trolls be ignored or dealt with?
Signage	Shoplifting, vandalism, wardrobing, harassment, and piracy	How do managers best optimize signs to deter shoplifting without communicating its prevalence or commonality?
		Where is the threshold for customers to "tune out" and ignore too many signs? What's the right balance?
Fear appeals/shaming	Shoplifting, vandalism, assault, wardrobing, and incivility	What is the efficacy of shaming through posting offender photograms?
		Are there differences in the long term and short term for shaming customers?
		When do customers start to "tune out" constant fear and scare messages by firms?
		How targeted to deviant customers' motivations do these messages have to be effective?
		How can positive, rather than negative, messages be used to prevent bad behaviour?
Design strategies		
Atmosphere	Vandalism, and wardrobing	How can the atmosphere and environment of a store be conducive to good customer behaviour?
		What happens when firms' unique features become a source of bad behaviour (e.g., people playing hide and seek in the maze-like design of Ikea's stores)?
New service designs	Piracy	What strategies explain why some service and business models can pull once deviant people into model customers (e.g., not pirating digital media and subscribing to Spotify, Netflix, etc)?
		How can the desire to pirate or bootleg media be reduced for products like plays and musicals that are inseparable from their delivery and production?
Technological strategies		
Servicescape surveillance	Shoplifting, vandalism, and incivility	What's the optimal balance between using RFID, cameras, etc. and their cost outweighing the losses from shoplifting?
Algorithm and machine learning	Trolling, piracy, fraud, and identity theft	What types of deviant behaviour can artificial intelligence and machine learning predict and what forms can it not?
		How do you protect customer privacy and data while successfully protecting the firm?
		How will an increase in customers being more protective of their personal data impact these efforts?
Forming relationships and customer privacy	Identity theft and fraud	Is there a balance between forming a relationship to prevent deviancy and intruding on personal information?
		Are there low cost, or automated ways to reduce customer anonymity?

comprise many of the current means to curb and better regulate customer (mis)behavior and outline many areas still in need of more research. Table 4 contains a list of key questions that future research can be aimed at investigating, structured by prevention strategy and topic. We expand on current knowledge and these research questions in the sections that follow.

2.1. Deviance prevention through social strategies

2.1.1. Current knowledge

Strategies that focus on social interventions to prevent or disincentivize customers from engaging in deviant behaviors in retailing can be a powerful prevention tool. Managing social norms is important, because most individuals perceive themselves to be trustworthy and cooperative (Kahan, 2003) and reciprocate with other individuals not only by mimicking compliance, but also misbehavior (Schaefers et al., 2016). Consequently, changing this perception can have serious negative consequences such as lower compliance for rules and laws (Netter, 2005). Social norms can be reinforced by providing evidence for broad compliance and strengthening community involvement (Schaefers et al., 2016).

Cialdini et al. (2006) distinguishes between two types of social norms that lead to different behavioral responses: descriptive norms, which refer to what individuals normally do, and injunctive norms, which refer to what individuals ought to do to gain social rewards and avoid punishments. Injunctive normative messages (e.g., "the theft of wood is strongly disapproved") are more effective at preventing theft than descriptive normative messages (i.e., "that such theft occurs frequently"). Descriptive normative messages are appropriate for reminding individuals that an activity is widely approved and accepted, while injunctive normative messages should be used to stress that an activity is deviant and disapproved by society (Cialdini et al., 2006). Thus, it is not just signage or messaging alone that is effective in curbing deviant behavior, but rather how it evokes and instills social norms in others.

Customer deviance can be curbed by attempting to reduce the deviant customer's perception of anonymity, thus increasing punishment certainty and better activating social norms. By humanizing the interaction, the customer can no longer hide in the shadows. Employees should make eye contact with customers and greet them when they enter the store (Ursin, 2014; Walker, 2018). By doing so, potential thieves then know that employees recognize them, which should reduce

their incentives to steal. A well-known example is the Walmart greeter who was reintroduced in 2015 to help reduce theft levels (Nassauer, 2015). Some retail practitioners recommend taking this approach a step further by engaging customers through conversation. They should ask customers if they need help and perhaps even ask them for their names. As one loss prevention expert states: "Most people will automatically answer that question truthfully […] and now, that shoplifter is not going to steal because you know his name" (Ursin, 2014, p. 43). Other firms, like Ikea, have activated social monitoring supplementing a focal employee who manages self-service checkouts with cameras and monitors that make it clear to customers that they are being observed during the checkout process.

Firms who create a bond with their customers, show that they care about them, and treat them fairly can also make customers feel less motivated to behave in a deviant way (Mitchell & Chan, 2002). By creating and acting upon the image of "the retailer as a fair player" (Mitchell & Chan, 2002, p. 22), employees could establish rapport (Baker et al., 2012) and customers could be inclined to behave ethically in return. Research in evolution and human behavior shows that people trust people who trust them (Barclay, 2004). Therefore, Macintosh and Stevens (2013) suggest that companies should signal their trustworthiness to customers and explicitly state in their communication materials "we trust you." Individuals would then reciprocate the trust gesture (Kahan, 2003).

Another social prevention strategy might be to employ the use of signage. Some research has argued that a low-cost prevention strategy is for firms to label products with signs stating that items marked with certain stickers are frequently shoplifted (McNees, Egli, Marhsall, Schnelle, & Risley, 1976). Rafacz, Boyce, and Williams (2011), however, report mixed results regarding the effectiveness of this strategy. In fact, Cialdini (2009) argues that the social proof aspect of this strategy would lead to copycat theft. The effect of customer misbehavior contagion found by Schaefers et al. (2016) would suggest a similar negative effect of implementing this strategy. Mitchell and Chan (2002) suggest that firms should use signs that tell their customers that stealing is wrong. The idea is to stimulate feelings of guilt in them. Guilt can be defined as a socially-relevant affective state resulting from violating how one should or is expected to operate within society (Dahl, Honea, & Manchanda, 2005; Tangney, Miller, Flicker, & Barlow, 1996). For example, firms could use in-store displays with statements such as "we are all hurt by shoplifting" or "shoplifting is everyone's responsibility" (Mitchell, Balabanis, Schlegelmilch, & Cornwell, 2009, p. 408).

Extending the activation of guilt, another cost-effective way to prevent deviant behavior could be the use of fear to persuade individuals to change their behaviors (Vermeir, De Bock, & van Kenhove, 2017). Fear appeals can be defined as "communications presenting the threat of impending danger to motivate compliance with a proposed recommendation" (Orazi & Pizzetti, 2015, p. 223). Fear appeals have been popular in many domains such as in anti-smoking and charity campaigns (Hastings, Stead, & Webb, 2004). Extending these appeals to customer deviance, the simple threat of random checks to self-service checkout experiences could be enough to deter customers from engaging in theft.

Another appeal evoking negative affect in interpersonal and social relationships is called shaming. Shaming penalties are alternative sanctions "that shine a spotlight on offenders in order to warn others of antisocial activity and of the miscreants perpetrating the deeds" (Netter, 2005, p. 188). The stigmatizing effect of making the crime public should discourage offenders from doing it again. There are some examples for the use of shaming in retailing (Cooke, 2018; O'Reilly, 2015); however, empirical research is scarce. One of the few exceptions is Vermeir et al.'s (2017) study that found that social disapproval messages were indeed more effective than traditional messages featuring fines. The authors' research design did not consider the long-term impact shaming penalties could have on social norms, which will be discussed in the next section. By shaming offenders, the public may get

the impression that the norm is not as universally accepted or widely accepted by one's society or culture as originally believed. This could then lead to increased cynicism and lower compliance through misbehavior contagion. Instead, messages should stress that offenders are rare exemptions, social deviants, and that the norm is accepted by the vast majority (Netter, 2005). This acceptance of social norms is crucial, as norms help create and shape social order. For example, dishonest customer behavior warrants punishment as a means to restore social order (Lin, Dahl, & Argo, 2013).

2.1.2. Research questions

Due to the scarce amount of empirical research on social prevention strategies, more research studies are necessary to test the effectiveness of the presented behavioral and social prevention strategies on curbing or changing deviant behavior. More research is especially needed to test the applicability of these strategies in an online context. The best method for transferring social prevention strategies to online retailing or social media is currently unknown. Further, there is only anecdotal evidence for the effectiveness of social prevention strategies, such as having a greeter or trying to engage with customers when they enter the store. Therefore, empirical research is needed to test whether these strategies have a measurable effect on theft levels. It is unknown whether social strategies signaling trust in customers increase a firm's trustworthiness and facilitate customers reciprocating this trust (i.e., lowering their propensity to engage in deviant behavior). In order to measure this effect with regard to in-store signs, fellow researchers could examine how signs could be designed in order to significantly reduce theft. More research would need to be conducted on whether generic signs have enough of an impact or signs with more tailored messages are necessary. Having signs that emphasize theft may also influence employee attitude and behavior on this topic. Yet, there is a danger that if a firm focuses too much on customer deviant behavior it will have a spill-over effect on the employees that may in turn start to act as security guards rather than serving customer needs.

More research, especially of a longitudinal nature, is also needed to explore the effect of fear appeals (Hastings et al., 2004; Vermeir et al., 2017). After exposure to repeated fear messages, targeted audiences may recognize that the fear appeals are trying to scare them into changing their behaviors or preventing them from engaging in deviant behaviors. Audiences could then become annoyed and "tune out" the message (Hastings et al., 2004, p. 966), which would negatively impact the effectiveness of the fear appeals. Further, honest customers may feel harassed by the exposure to prevention strategies (Fullerton & Punj, 2004). In addition, Vermeir et al. (2017) posited that in order for fear appeals to be effective, they need to be tailored to specific audiences and the audiences' specific underlying motivations. As mentioned, there are concerns that fear appeals, can change social norms. In order to address these concerns, studies could be conducted to determine if there is significant empirical evidence to validate these ideas. Additionally, fellow researchers could examine whether shaming has long-term consequences.

Cialdini et al. (2006) recommend that persuasive interventions can be used to marginalize undesired behaviors (i.e., in our customer deviance context, stress the fact that only a *few* people are stealing) and instead highlight the widespread social approval of desired behaviors (i.e., communicate that most people are honest and trustworthy). Similarly, Hastings et al. (2004) suggest that appeals based on positive emotions could be as effective as fear messages. Further research could examine the power of positive versus negative appeals. Recent research in advertising already indicates that positive appeals can lead to desired behavioral changes (Randle, Miller, Stirling, & Dolnicar, 2016).

The effectiveness of customer deviant behavior prevention strategies will also likely depend on customers' underlying motivations to engage in these behaviors in the first place. For example, Fullerton and Punj (2004) show that there are numerous reasons why customers misbehave and that educational messages will not be effective in

preventing misconduct if the misbehavior is rooted in psychological problems, unfulfilled aspirations, or provocative situational factors. Further research could build on this to examine if customers' motivations can be identified, and based on these motivations, how these prevention strategies can be customized.

Firms also have to cope with online deviant behavior. For example, trolling can harm online firms and damage the trustworthiness of online reviews (Baird, 2015). In order for firms to combat trolling, future research could investigate strategies to change online trolls' behavior. Studies could test the effectiveness of targeted messages designed to stop trolls from engaging in trolling activities. On the other hand, it would be useful to determine if simply ignoring them, and leaving their desire to be engaged with unfulfilled, is effective as well. Which triggers the question of whether online forums should be moderated or not?

Finally, the social prevention strategies discussed above will likely not be effective for organized crime and professional thieves who steal to resell on the black market, rather than for personal use (Romeo, 2016). In order to successfully combat this type of crime, future research could examine how (online) retailers might best cope with professional thieves.

2.2. Deviance prevention through design strategies

2.2.1. Current knowledge

While changing social norms can help curb deviant behaviors, firms can also build deliberate design features into their servicescape. A specific situation or design feature can trigger customers with various personality traits such as sensation seeking, impulsiveness, and aggression to engage in deviance (Reynolds & Harris, 2009). Consequently, servicescape design can either discourage or encourage deviant behavior. Most offenders evaluate factors such as effort, risk of detection, and potential benefits of a pre-planned event when considering whether to engage in deviant behavior or not (Cornish & Clarke, 2003). When a group of young people consider playing hide and seek at Ikea, factors such as the maze-like structure and the store's massive size contribute to their decision to play the game. In response to this behavior, a firm can design features of their servicescape that may help prevent the behavior. For instance, increase visibility throughout the servicescape by lowering shelf-height or have highly visible employee stations at strategic places throughout the store.

In accordance with the servicescape model (Bitner, 1992), ambient conditions, space and function, signs, symbols, and artifacts all impact how customers behave. We briefly discussed these in the prior section as these elements can signal social norms and warnings to customers, but we expand the discussion in this section. Specifically, servicescapes are designed to influence and guide customer behavior, or in this case, prevent opportunities for customer deviant behavior. These effects have been shown both inside and outside commercial environments. For example, urban environments that are viewed as being too artificial can lead to mental fatigue and increase the propensity of the outburst of anger and violence. (Kuo & Sullivan, 2001). Fortunately, inside retail spaces, firms have more complete control over the environment and can design ambient conditions that deter these negative effects. Specifically, music has been shown to influence buyer seller interactions (Dubé, Chebat, & Morin, 1995). Generally, soothing music promotes more effective interactions and may be detrimental in a customer complaint setting. Scents such as citrus aroma increase physical activity and decrease negative emotions, vanilla aromas increase projected introvert emotions (de Wijk & Zijlstra, 2012), and lavender is seen as a relaxing scent with soothing properties (Mattila & Wirtz, 2001). The colors of a room have also been shown to influence customers' sensory perception (Spence, Velasco, & Knoeferle, 2014), but certain color schemes have also been found to have calming effects on humans (Schauss, 1979).

In addition to physical design, firms have been successful in having effective new service design reduce deviant behavior. For instance, innovations in services such as Netflix or Spotify are alternatives to

struggling traditional businesses, like Best Buy, in that their subscription service is meant to reduce the need to buy individual DVDs or albums and instead enjoy the large variety of media options available on those services. Research has shown that such services that offer major increases in convenience and value can curb media piracy and turn thieves into paying customers (Aguiar & Waldfogel, 2015). Innovations in service design can also let firms ideally profit from negative behaviors like wardrobing. The startup Rent the Runway offers designer women's clothing on a subscription plan that allows them to maintain a "revolving closet door" of the latest fashions.

2.2.2. Research questions

Unique servicescape designs that are central to a brand's retail strategy, like the darkness and noise level in Abercrombie & Fitch stores, might have unintended consequences of creating a fertile environment for deviance. Stores must think more critically about their servicescape. Bitner (1992) contends that servicescapes have been under-researched and based on our literature review, this is still the case. Many studies focus on how various dimensions of the servicescape affect sales or time spent in a store, rather than how businesses can promote non-deviant behavior in customers (e.g., theft prevention, fewer damaged packages or goods, or less aggressive responses following service failures). While past research has shown that lighting, mood, and aroma can elicit positivity in customers, not every store or business can be a spa. Knowing what small changes and minimal modifications to a servicescape will have maximal returns is an area of needed research.

Changing the delivery of a service by innovations in design holds promise for converting customers behaving badly into less disruptive and even profitable ones. For example, Amazon Go stores require customers to identify themselves prior to entering stores by scanning a QR code linked to their accounts. As a result, consumers know they are no longer anonymous as they shop and the ever-presence of surveillance in the design provides signals of effective monitoring. Future research could better inform how more complete self-service options like this can balance surveillance with servicescape design so that the typical customer feels comfortable and embraced while shopping and the deviant customers feels compelled to behave.

2.3. Deviance prevention through technological strategies

2.3.1. Current knowledge

While social and design prevention strategies hold promising solutions, many firms (in particular those with a lot of resources) seem to be defaulting to the use of new and sophisticated technology to combat deviant behavior. The use of technology in service and retail settings has affected customer deviance in both an enabling and a preventive manner.

Customer deviance acts in physical environments are confined to certain arenas such as theft, violence, and social misbehavior towards firm assets, employees, and even other customers (ACS, 2019; Fisk et al., 2010). The tangible instruments used in both combating and observing customer deviance within a service area are referred to as "servicescape surveillance" devices (Bonfanti, Vigolo, & Negri, 2016, p. 887). Such devices play prominent roles depending on the stage of the delinquency. For instance, the use of RFID, article surveillance alarms, and closed-circuit television (CCTV) would give store staff a warning of a potential robbery or even deter thieves by "overloading" them with information about the level of security as a treatment mechanism of action (Hayes & Downs, 2011, p. 239; Medwecki, 2009). At the mid and post theft stages, the inclusion of electronic article surveillance (EAS) to supplement both RFID and CCTV technologies aid in identifying and further attesting the robbery (Gill, 2007; Koh, Schuster, Lam, & Dinning, 2003). Access-control and locking systems, scanners, and motion detectors (among other examples) become more or less efficient depending on the business context in which they are used in (Bonfanti

et al., 2016, p. 891).

In the physical environment, technology sometimes creates new challenges while solving other problems. For example, the introduction of self-scan checkout counters is meant to provide accessibility to the customer and a healthy ROI to the service provider (Beck, 2011). Yet it created a new breed of customer-turned-thief called "SWIPERS: 'Seemingly Well-Intentioned Patrons Engaging in Routine Shoplifting'" (Taylor, 2016, p. 555). To mitigate deviance risks, an incorporation of more resources, design iterations, and technology refinements would be necessary to circumvent emerging complications (Association of Convenience Stores, 2019; IBM, 2008). Furthermore, ticket-switching, a form of customer tampering on item-embedded contrivances such as RFID tags, barcodes, and product identifiers, creates further challenges for service providers in their quest towards reducing customer-induced inventory shrinkage (Faria, 1977; Want, 2006; Zhou & Piramuthu, 2013, 2015). In contrast, many of the aforementioned grievances are not possible in an online environment.

However, in a digital environment, there are a whole new set of problems to defend against. Online customer deviance has increased with the growth of online technologies, presenting a challenge for organizations. Some examples of the most relevant online customer deviance behaviors include the illegal downloading of copyrighted material or "softlifting" (Hornik, 1993), abusive online returns (Berry & Seiders, 2008; Griffis, Rao, Goldsby, & Niranjan, 2012), online trolling (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017), negative electronic word-of-mouth (EWOM) (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler, 2004; Sundaram, Mitra, & Webster, 1998), misrepresenting personal information and impersonation (Punj, 2017), and fake reservations (Ang & Koslow, 2012). To tackle softlifting, digital rights management (DRM) systems have been implemented by companies dealing with software, media, and other virtual intellectual property offerings (Sudler, 2013). Customers may abuse services, such as return policies, provided by online retailers. For example, Amazon uses software algorithms to predict and ban certain users when their return patterns become suspicious (Safdar & Stevens, 2018).

Destructive online behaviors, like trolling, can be addressed with technological means in addition to the societal ones. Technology intended to combat trolling behavior must be equipped to determine whether the behavior is deviant or is merely unintentional actions by well-intentioned shoppers. For example, a customer might not be able to cancel a reservation made online due to a sudden emergency, while a trolling customer might intentionally fake a reservation. In the case of user data misrepresentation, a user might simply make an honest spelling mistake or even provide false information in an attempt to protect their own privacy.

As the virtual environment is in itself a form of technology, installing online customer-deviance-prevention countermeasures is carried out within technological capacities. Namely, companies have begun focusing on how artificial intelligence can be used to combat fraud (PwC, 2018). Machine learning can be used to analyze text, images, audio, and video to flag irregular user behavior on social media (Viswanath et al., 2014), interact with trolls using chat bots (Golf-Papez & Veer, 2017), flag spam and online aggression (Guzella & Caminhas, 2009; Reynolds, Kontostathis, & Edwards, 2011), and identify online review manipulations (Hu, Bose, Koh, & Liu, 2012).

There is no doubt that technology plays a large role in both combating and enabling customer deviance. Firms need to consider trade-offs when protecting themselves against their own customers. They must balance protecting customer privacy and considering their customers' experiences (Jones, Clarke-Hill, Shears, Comfort, & Hillier, 2004; Juels, Rivest, & Szydlo, 2003). Another tradeoff involves managing the costs and benefits of adopting various technological preventive measures in relation to overall ROI. For example, applying RFID-tags on low-cost products would not be justified in terms of bottom-line profitability per item. However, only tagging expensive items and disregarding cheap items can negatively affect a store's efficiency (Piramuthu, Wochner, & Grunow, 2014).

2.3.2. Research questions

It is clear that technology can be simultaneously a source of innovation in the marketplace and also a tool to be exploited by customers behaving badly. Future research should understand how inventors and manufacturers of novel technology in the servicescape can create a pre-mortem and identify ways that customers could abuse these new services before they are put into practice. Although existing technology like surveillance cameras and RFID tags can work to build a setting where no transgressor may go uncaptured, such large security infrastructures are largely outside the price range of many stores. For those businesses who are interested in investing in technological safeguards, researchers can help to identify what combinations of features maximize the firm's investments.

Artificial intelligence and machine learning will continue to play a role in preventing deviant behavior. This practice comes with many questions for future scholars to explore. For instance, how do you protect customer privacy and data while also acquiring as much data as needed to successfully predict actions against the firm and other customers? While information like IP addresses and past behavior on a website may be an indicator of whether a customer is a friend or foe, public sentiment against the acquisition and use of such personal information is becoming more negative as major security breaches increase. Given the need for customers to be more protective of their personal information, how will a likely increase in customers' data privacy restrict and prevent firms from identifying threats?

3. Call to action

This article both provides a comprehensive summary of the varied work already done in the realm of customer deviance and provides a framework summarizing the process, targets, as well as prevention strategies of customer deviance (Fig. 1). In doing so, we highlight the gaps in the literature and the need to test some of these ideas. The current compilation of works provides future researchers with a baseline knowledge into why and how customers engage in a set of long-standing deviant behaviors. We also offered a series of research questions to help unify the field and push deviant research towards a broader perspective highlighting the efficacy of social, design and technological strategies in preventing customer deviance.

Our customer deviance framework is aimed at addressing not only specific future research questions, but also broader and more general questions such as prevention strategy effectiveness and optimization. Due to the nature of the framework, researchers need to identify the different triggers of deviant behavior, what/who they are targeting, and then what is the best strategy to combat such a behavior. This framework enables researchers and managers to approach customer deviance from a less siloed perspective and with enough flexibility to build on extant literature, and allow iterative experimentation to maintain a dynamic optimized solution. Thus, new or modified solutions and preventions strategies can be generated in response to external changes to deviance triggers. We close the current work with a call to action for future research that can help firms curb these negative touchpoints with troublesome customers, reduce costs, and enhance relationships with their most valued customers.

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