

# Emotions Behind the Wheel: Customer Incivility, Need Satisfaction, and Service Quality in Online Transportation

*Customer Incivility,  
Need Satisfaction, and  
Service Quality*

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## ABSTRACT

*This study is motivated by the rapid development of digital transportation services, which not only demand system efficiency but also involve emotional dynamics in service interactions. Customer incivility has the potential to influence service quality through users' psychological mechanisms. Therefore, this study aims to examine the effect of customer incivility and service convenience on service quality by incorporating the mediating role of need satisfaction and the moderating role of surface acting. This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal explanatory design, involving 350 active Maxim users in Indonesia selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through an online survey and analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS). The findings indicate that customer incivility negatively affects need satisfaction and service quality, while positively influencing surface acting. In addition, need satisfaction and service convenience significantly enhance service quality. Need satisfaction also serves as a mediator, while surface acting moderates the relationship between customer incivility and both need satisfaction and service quality. In conclusion, service quality in digital contexts is shaped by both psychological and functional factors, highlighting the importance for service providers to simultaneously manage emotional experiences and service convenience*

**Keywords:** *Customer Incivility, Maxim, Need Satisfaction, Online Transportation, Service Convenience, Service Quality, Surface Acting.*

## INTRODUCTION

The development of digital technology over the past decade has transformed various service sectors, including transportation, online commerce, banking, and healthcare. Digital platforms facilitate interaction between customers and service providers through fast, practical, and efficient transaction processes, making society increasingly dependent on application-based services in daily activities. However, the success of technology is not only determined by system efficiency but also by the emotional aspects of service interactions. Harfian et al. (2025) affirm that public preferences in using online transportation applications are influenced by cost, ease of access, waiting time, safety, and comfort. In terms of cost, Maxim is considered superior to its competitors, although this condition is exacerbated by the absence of clear regulations regarding the wage system, which places drivers in an economically vulnerable position (Hakim, 2025). The three main actors in this ecosystem (Gojek, Grab, and Maxim) each offer different business strategies, service models, and user experiences.

In the post-pandemic era, customer expectations for digital services have increased sharply, making service quality a primary determinant of the sustainability and competitiveness of online transportation platforms (Zygiaris et al., 2022). Although online transportation services provide convenience, the reality of on-the-ground interactions is often not as ideal as expected, with some customers experiencing discomfort due to rude behavior from other users or inappropriate driver responses. In the context of digital

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services such as Maxim, the high level of convenience in the ordering, payment, and communication processes is an important factor influencing customer assessments of service quality. Mehmood and Najmi (2017) assert that the easier a service is to access and use, the greater the customer satisfaction and positive perception. According to The State of Mobile 2024 report published through Databoks (2024), online transportation applications in Indonesia showed high download rates throughout 2022–2023, with Maxim ranking among the top five applications with the highest average downloads, indicating a significant user base and high interaction intensity.

Based on sentiment analysis of 5,400 user reviews of Gojek, Grab, and Maxim on the Google Play Store in 2024, there were differences in sentiment proportions across platforms. Maxim had the highest positive sentiment at 42.45%, compared to Grab (32.83%) and Gojek (20.21%), as well as the lowest negative sentiment at 13.55%, lower than Grab (23.34%) and Gojek (16.74%) (Databoks, 2025). These findings indicate that users' emotional experiences with Maxim are relatively more positive compared to its competitors. This variation in sentiment underscores the importance of interaction quality and users' psychological conditions in shaping service perceptions. This phenomenon demonstrates that technological progress not only demands system efficiency but also creates emotional dynamics that can give rise to rude customer behavior (customer incivility) as well as emotional reactions in the form of surface acting.

Consistent with the Self-Determination Theory put forward by Ryan and Deci (2000), explaining how the disruption of fundamental psychological needs like autonomy, competence, and relatedness can lead to a decline in an individual's intrinsic drive to offer or receive high-quality service. On the other hand, the Service Quality Theory developed by Zeithaml and Berry (1988) affirms that customer perceptions of service quality are formed through the comparison between expectations and actual performance they experience. Previous research on customer incivility has generally focused on the context of frontline employees in conventional service sectors such as hospitality, retail, and restaurants (Sliter et al., 2010; Lin & Lai, 2020). Unfortunately, there is a lack of user-centered research on digital incivility, despite the fact that relationships between humans and systems in apps like Maxim can lead to rude comments, technical difficulties, and frustration while using the service.

High levels of surface acting intensify the negative impact of customer incivility on need satisfaction, while also functioning as a moderating variable. However, limited research has examined whether such behavior can mitigate the relationship between customer incivility and unmet needs in digital service contexts. This study addresses this gap by empirically testing the mechanism within online transportation services in Indonesia. It incorporates surface acting as a moderator and need satisfaction as a mediator. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how these variables interact to shape users' perceptions of service quality and to offer empirical insights for improving service quality strategies in the digital economy.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW & HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT**

### **The Effect of Customer Incivility**

Customer incivility refers to behaviors that violate basic norms of politeness in service interactions, such as being disrespectful, demeaning, or displaying misdirected frustration (Sliter et al., 2010; Chaudhuri et al., 2023). In digital service contexts, such behavior becomes more prevalent due to anonymity, which allows customers to express dissatisfaction more freely and excessively (Cheng et al., 2020). The impact of customer incivility extends beyond situational effects to psychological consequences, including increased emotional strain, negative feelings, and reduced quality of service interactions (Chen et al., 2023; Han & Han, 2023). According to Self-Determination Theory, disruptions to basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness can diminish well-being and satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Furthermore, customer incivility encourages individuals to engage in surface acting as a form of emotional regulation, whereby negative emotions are suppressed, and positive

emotions are displayed artificially to maintain smooth interactions (Grandey, 2003; Diefendorff et al., 2005). Lin and Lai (2020) found that stressful interactions resulting from incivility increase the tendency to engage in surface acting. In addition, rude customer behavior negatively affects perceptions of service quality by creating unpleasant and unsatisfactory service experiences (Sliter et al., 2010). Therefore, customer incivility is expected to reduce need satisfaction and service quality while increasing surface acting.

H1: Customer incivility has a negative effect on need satisfaction.

H2: Customer incivility has a positive effect on surface acting.

H3: Customer incivility has a negative effect on service quality.

### **The Effect of Need Satisfaction on Service Quality**

Need satisfaction refers to the fulfillment of individuals' basic psychological needs, namely autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2000). The fulfillment of these needs plays a crucial role in enhancing subjective well-being, positive emotions, and engagement in service-related activities (Kleszewski & Otto, 2023). In digital service contexts, when users feel a sense of control, competence in using the system, and connection with the service, their overall satisfaction increases (Alexe et al., 2022). Longo et al. (2016) further emphasize that perceived autonomy significantly contributes to more positive service experiences.

Consistent with Service Quality Theory, service quality is determined by the comparison between customer expectations and perceived performance (Zeithaml & Berry, 1988). When users' psychological needs, such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness, are fulfilled, they are more likely to evaluate the service positively, as their experiences align with or exceed expectations. This alignment enhances overall satisfaction and strengthens positive perceptions of the service. Empirical studies have confirmed that need satisfaction significantly contributes to improved service evaluations and user satisfaction (Hoo et al., 2024; Sutriani et al., 2024). Therefore, need satisfaction plays a crucial role as a key determinant in shaping perceived service quality outcomes.

H4: Need satisfaction has a positive effect on service quality.

### **The Effect of Service Convenience**

Service convenience is defined as customers' perceptions of the ease and speed in accessing, using, and completing a service (Mehmood & Najmi, 2017). Seiders et al. (2007) conceptualized service convenience into five dimensions: decision convenience, access convenience, transaction convenience, benefit convenience, and post-benefit convenience. In digital service environments, convenience becomes a critical determinant of user preference, as customers increasingly value efficiency and minimal effort in service interactions. Services that are easy to navigate and quick to use reduce cognitive and time costs, thereby enhancing user experience. The service convenience plays a vital role in shaping user satisfaction and overall service evaluation.

Empirical studies suggest that service convenience plays a significant role in shaping user experiences. Ease of access and use enhances users' sense of competence and control, thereby increasing need satisfaction (Sun & Pan, 2023). When services are simple, fast, and efficient, users feel more capable and comfortable during interactions. In addition, service convenience directly improves perceived service quality, as customers tend to evaluate convenient services as more reliable and effective (Reynaldo et al., 2020). The higher levels of service convenience are expected to simultaneously strengthen psychological need fulfillment and improve overall perceptions of service quality in digital service contexts.

H5: Service convenience has a positive effect on need satisfaction.

H6: Service convenience has a positive effect on service quality.

### **The Effect of Surface Acting as a Moderator**

Surface acting is an emotional regulation strategy in which individuals display emotions that are not genuinely felt or suppress negative emotions to maintain positive interactions (Diefendorff et al., 2005). Within the framework of emotional labor theory, surface acting is used to reduce the discrepancy between felt and displayed emotions (Grandey, 2003; Hakim et al., 2024). This strategy is particularly relevant in stressful service situations, especially when individuals encounter customer incivility.

Research suggests that surface acting can function as a coping mechanism that moderates the negative effects of customer incivility on psychological outcomes and service quality (Walsh et al., 2016; Lin & Lai, 2020). By regulating emotional expressions, individuals may reduce the adverse emotional impact and maintain more stable service perceptions (Sciotto & Pace, 2022; Güler et al., 2023). However, excessive reliance on surface acting may lead to emotional exhaustion and reduced well-being (Ha, 2018; Zang et al., 2022; Wang et al., 2023). Therefore, surface acting plays a critical moderating role in the relationship between customer incivility, need satisfaction, and service quality.

H7: Surface acting moderates the effect of customer incivility on need satisfaction.

H8: Surface acting moderates the effect of customer incivility on service quality.

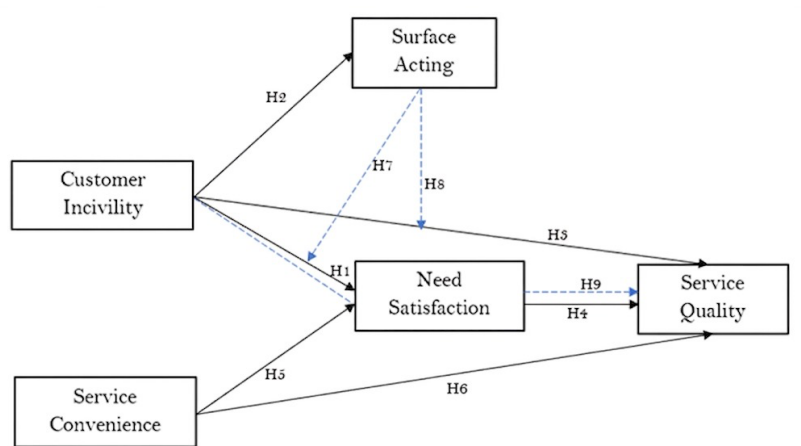
### **The Effect of Need Satisfaction as a Mediator**

Need satisfaction serves as a psychological mechanism that links service experiences to perceived outcomes (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Bartels et al., 2023). When customers experience incivility, their psychological needs are likely to be disrupted, leading to lower satisfaction and diminished service quality perceptions. Disruption in need satisfaction can manifest as feelings of disrespect, helplessness, or exclusion, which directly color the overall evaluation of the service encounter. Conversely, when service interactions are respectful and supportive, customers experience a sense of autonomy, competence, and relatedness, which enhances their positive perception of service quality. Conversely, when these needs are fulfilled, the negative impact of unpleasant interactions can be mitigated (Saleem et al., 2023; Waqas et al., 2024). Thus, need fulfillment acts as a buffer that protects customers' overall service evaluations even when minor issues or tensions arise during the interaction.

Alexe et al. (2022) and Kleszewski and Otto (2023) have demonstrated that need satisfaction plays a significant mediating role in explaining the relationship between service experiences and psychological as well as behavioral outcomes. In this context, need satisfaction explains how customer incivility indirectly influences service quality through the fulfillment or frustration of psychological needs. Therefore, need satisfaction is a key mechanism in understanding the relationship between customer behavior and service quality evaluation (Setia et al., 2022; Busque-Carrier et al., 2022).

H9: Need satisfaction mediates the effect of customer incivility on service quality.

Figure 1 shows a conceptual model explaining the relationship between customer incivility, service convenience, surface acting, need satisfaction, and service quality, where customer incivility and service convenience influence how employees perform surface acting and the level of need fulfillment, which ultimately impacts service quality; specifically, H7 and H8 illustrate the moderating role of surface acting, namely that surface acting strengthens or weakens the influence of customer incivility on need satisfaction and on service quality, so that the impact of rude customer behavior is not always the same depending on the employee's ability to manage the emotions displayed, while H9 shows the mediating role of need satisfaction in the relationship towards service quality.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual Framework

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a quantitative approach with a causal explanatory design to examine cause-and-effect relationships among variables. It analyzes the influence of customer incivility on service quality among Maxim users in Indonesia, while incorporating the mediating role of need satisfaction, the moderating effect of surface acting, and the direct effect of service convenience. This approach enables the simultaneous testing of complex models involving both direct and indirect relationships among latent variables. The population consists of active Maxim users in Indonesia, and a purposive sampling technique was applied with criteria including active usage, prior service interaction, at least two uses within the last three months, and willingness to complete the questionnaire. Based on sample size guidelines, a minimum of 300 respondents was required from 60 indicators, and the study successfully collected data from 350 eligible respondents.

The study incorporates five main variables: customer incivility, service convenience, need satisfaction, service quality, and surface acting. Customer incivility is measured through dimensions of relatively low-intensity but disruptive rude behavior, including customer condescension and misdirected frustration (Sliter et al., 2010; Alola et al., 2019). Service convenience reflects customers' perceptions of ease and speed in accessing and completing service processes, measured across five dimensions: decision convenience, access convenience, transaction convenience, benefit convenience, and post-benefit convenience (Seiders et al., 2007). Need satisfaction refers to the fulfillment of users' basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Alexe et al., 2022). Service quality is assessed using the five SERVQUAL dimensions: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy to evaluate the extent to which service performance meets or exceeds customer expectations (Zeithaml & Berry, 1988; Hoo et al., 2024). Surface acting is measured through the dimensions of fake unfelt emotions and suppressed felt emotions, reflecting individuals' efforts to regulate emotional expressions in service interactions (Diefendorff et al., 2005). Gender is included as a control variable (Siddiq & Taylor, 2024; Granié et al., 2025).

Data were collected through an online survey using Google Forms, employing a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire was distributed via online transportation user forums and social media platforms to reach respondents who met the study criteria, and data collection was conducted over a specified period until the targeted number of responses was achieved. Data analysis was performed using Structural Equation Modeling-Partial Least Squares (SEM-PLS) with SmartPLS version 4.1.17, which was selected due to its flexibility in handling non-normally distributed data and its capability to analyze complex models involving mediation and moderation (Hair et al., 2019). The analysis was conducted in

two stages: evaluation of the measurement model (outer model) and the structural model (inner model). The outer model was assessed through convergent validity, discriminant validity, and construct reliability using indicators such as outer loadings  $\geq 0.70$ , Average Variance Extracted (AVE)  $\geq 0.50$ , Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability, cross-loadings, and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. Subsequently, the inner model was evaluated using R-square and adjusted R-square values, while hypothesis testing was conducted using a bootstrapping procedure.

## RESULTS

Before presenting the empirical analysis, it is important to describe the demographic profile of the respondents to provide an overview of the sample characteristics. This information helps to understand the composition of participants and ensures that the data used in this study adequately represent the target population of Maxim users in Indonesia. The respondent profile includes age, gender, occupation, domicile, user status, usage frequency, and experience of discomfort or rude interactions while using the service. These characteristics are relevant in interpreting user behavior and perceptions of service quality. The detailed distribution of respondents based on these criteria is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Character of Respondents

Characteristics	Category	Total	Percentage (%)
Age	< 17 years	9	2.9
	17–25 years	191	54.6
	26–35 years	75	21.4
	36–45 years	48	13.7
	> 45 years	27	7.7
Gender	Female	231	60.9
	Male	124	39.1
Occupation	Student	177	50.6
	Private Employee	63	18.0
	Civil Servant (ASN)	61	17.4
	Homemaker	28	8.0
	Entrepreneur	17	4.9
	State-Owned Enterprise Employee	1	0.3
	Laborer	1	0.3
	Unemployed	1	0.3
	Other	1	0.3
	Domicile	Bengkulu	109
South Sumatra		62	17.7
Java		79	22.6
Bali & Nusa Tenggara		29	8.3
Papua		16	4.6
Sulawesi		15	4.3
Kalimantan		14	4.0
Maluku		4	1.1
Active Maxim User Status	Yes	292	83.4
	No	58	16.6
Usage Frequency (Last 3 Months)	Rare (1–2 times)	140	40.0
	Quite Often (3–5 times)	179	51.1
	Often (> 5 times)	31	8.9
Experience of Discomfort/Rude Interaction	Yes	60	17.1
	No	290	82.9
Total		350	100

Table 1 shows that the majority of respondents are aged 17–25 years (54.6%) and predominantly female (60.9%). Most respondents are students (50.6%), followed by private employees and civil servants. In terms of domicile, respondents are mainly from Bengkulu (31.1%) and Java (22.6%). The majority are active Maxim users (83.4%) and

use the service quite often (3–5 times) within the last three months (51.1%). Additionally, most respondents reported no experience of discomfort or rude interactions (82.9%), indicating generally positive user experiences.

**Table 2.** Summary of Descriptive Results

Variable	Mean	Category
Customer Incivility	2.81	Moderate
Service Convenience	3.90	High
Need Satisfaction	4.14	High
Service Quality	4.06	High

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the main variables in this study. The results indicate that customer incivility is at a moderate level (mean = 2.81), suggesting that respondents occasionally experience rude interactions. In contrast, service convenience (mean = 3.90), need satisfaction (mean = 4.14), and service quality (mean = 4.06) are all categorized as high. These findings imply that, despite moderate levels of incivility, respondents generally perceive the service as convenient, fulfilling their psychological needs, and delivering a high level of quality.

**Table 3.** Validity and Reliability

Variable	AVE	Cronbach's Alpha	rho_a	rho_c	Information
Customer Incivility	0.779	0.929	0.931	0.946	Valid and Reliable
Need Satisfaction	0.680	0.921	0.922	0.937	Valid and Reliable
Surface Acting	0.862	0.968	0.969	0.974	Valid and Reliable
Service Convenience	0.615	0.948	0.952	0.954	Valid and Reliable
Service Quality	0.650	0.981	0.981	0.982	Valid and Reliable

Table 3 presents the results of the validity and reliability tests for all research variables. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values for each construct exceed the threshold of 0.50, indicating adequate convergent validity. Furthermore, the reliability measures, including Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability rho\_a, and Composite Reliability (rho\_c), all show values above 0.70, confirming strong internal consistency. Among the variables, surface acting and service quality demonstrate particularly high reliability values. These results indicate that all measurement instruments used in this study are both valid and reliable, and therefore suitable for further analysis.

**Table 4.** Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Variable	Customer Incivility	Need Satisfaction	Surface Acting	Service Convenience	Service Quality
Customer Incivility	0.882				
Need Satisfaction	-0.068	0.825			
Surface Acting	0.638	-0.134	0.928		
Service Convenience	-0.333	0.621	0.399	0.784	
Service Quality	-0.089	0.812	-0.184	0.655	0.806

Table 4 presents the results of the Fornell-Larcker criterion to assess discriminant validity among the constructs. The diagonal values represent the square root of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) for each variable, and all of these values are higher than their corresponding inter-construct correlations. This indicates that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs in the model. Therefore, the results confirm that all variables, customer incivility, need satisfaction, surface acting, service convenience, and service quality, demonstrate adequate discriminant validity and are empirically distinct from one another.

Table 5 presents the R-square and adjusted R-square values for the endogenous variables. The results show that need satisfaction has an R-square of 0.461, indicating that 46.1% of its variance is explained by the predictor variables in the model. Surface acting has an R-square of 0.413, meaning that 41.3% of its variance is accounted for by the

model. Meanwhile, service quality has the highest explanatory power with an R-square of 0.715, suggesting that 71.5% of its variance is explained by the independent variables. These findings indicate that the model has moderate to strong explanatory power, particularly in explaining service quality.

**Table 5.** R-Square Value

Variable	R-Square	R-Square Adjusted
Need Satisfaction	0.461	0.453
Surface Acting	0.413	0.409
Service Quality	0.715	0.710

Table 6 presents the results of the direct effect hypothesis testing. The findings indicate that customer incivility has a significant negative effect on need satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.269$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and service quality ( $\beta = -0.140$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ), while it exerts a significant positive effect on surface acting ( $\beta = 0.624$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, need satisfaction demonstrates a strong and significant positive influence on service quality ( $\beta = 0.606$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). In addition, service convenience significantly and positively affects both need satisfaction ( $\beta = 0.633$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ) and service quality ( $\beta = 0.269$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ). All hypothesized direct relationships are statistically significant and supported, highlighting the critical role of both adverse and facilitating factors in shaping users' perceptions of service quality.

**Table 6.** Hypothesis Testing

Path Coefficient	Original Sample	t-statistics	p-values	Hypothesis
Customer Incivility -> Need Satisfaction	-0.269	3.842	0.000	Accepted
Customer Incivility-> Surface Acting	0.624	15.530	0.000	Accepted
Customer Incivility -> Service Quality	-0.140	2.580	0.005	Accepted
Need Satisfaction -> Service Quality	0.606	11.654	0.000	Accepted
Service Convenience -> Need Satisfaction	0.633	13.255	0.000	Accepted
Service Convenience -> Service Quality	0.269	6.691	0.000	Accepted
Surface Acting x Customer Incivility -> Need Satisfaction	0.245	3.691	0.000	Accepted
Surface Acting x Customer Incivility -> Service Quality	0.131	2.900	0.002	Accepted
Customer Incivility -> Need Satisfaction -> Service Quality	-0.163	4.127	0.000	Accepted

The findings indicate that customer incivility has a significant indirect effect on service quality through need satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.163$ ;  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming the mediating role of need satisfaction. This suggests that higher levels of customer incivility reduce need satisfaction, which in turn lowers perceived service quality. In addition, the interaction effects involving surface acting remain significant, indicating that it also plays a role in influencing the indirect relationships within the model. All indirect effect hypotheses are supported, highlighting the importance of both mediation and moderated mechanisms in explaining service quality perceptions.

**Table 7.** Control Variable Test

Path Coefficient	Original Sample	t-statistics	p-values
Gender -> Need Satisfaction	-0.018	0.202	0.420
Gender -> Surface Acting	0.155	1.711	0.044
Gender -> Service Quality	-0.145	2.575	0.005

Table 7 presents the results of the control variable analysis using gender. The findings indicate that gender does not have a significant effect on need satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.018$ ;  $p = 0.420$ ), as the p-value exceeds the significance threshold. However, gender shows a significant positive effect on surface acting ( $\beta = 0.155$ ;  $p = 0.044$ ), suggesting differences in emotional regulation behavior between male and female respondents. Additionally,

gender has a significant negative effect on service quality ( $\beta = -0.145$ ;  $p = 0.005$ ), indicating that perceptions of service quality vary by gender. These results suggest that while gender does not influence need satisfaction, it plays a role in shaping surface acting and perceived service quality.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study provide important insights into the dynamics of customer behavior and service evaluation within digital transportation platforms. First, the results confirm that customer incivility negatively influences both need satisfaction and service quality. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that rude or disrespectful customer behavior can disrupt individuals' psychological well-being and reduce the perceived quality of service interactions (Sliter et al., 2010; Lin & Lai, 2020). Within the context of digital services, such negative interactions may not only stem from direct human contact but also from frustrations related to system inefficiencies, thereby amplifying adverse emotional responses. This aligns with the Self-Determination Theory, which posits that unmet psychological needs can diminish overall satisfaction and engagement (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Furthermore, this study finds that customer incivility positively influences surface acting, indicating that individuals tend to regulate or mask their emotional responses when faced with unpleasant interactions. This result supports the findings of Diefendorff et al. (2005), who argue that surface acting is a common emotional labor strategy used to maintain socially acceptable behavior in service contexts. In line with previous studies by Grandey (2003) and Lin and Lai (2020), individuals experiencing incivility may suppress genuine emotions and display artificial responses to avoid conflict or maintain harmony, particularly in digitally mediated interactions where direct confrontation is less visible.

The results also demonstrate that need satisfaction plays a significant role in enhancing service quality. This supports prior studies emphasizing that the fulfillment of basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness contributes to more positive service evaluations (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Alexe et al., 2022). When users feel that their needs are adequately met during service interactions, they are more likely to perceive the service as reliable, responsive, and empathetic. Additionally, service convenience is found to positively influence both need satisfaction and service quality, reinforcing the argument by Seiders et al. (2007) that ease of access and efficiency are key determinants of customer satisfaction in modern service environments.

The mediation analysis further reveals that need satisfaction serves as an important mechanism through which customer incivility affects service quality. This finding suggests that the negative impact of incivility is not only direct but also operates indirectly by undermining users' psychological fulfillment. Similar findings have been reported in previous research, where emotional and cognitive evaluations mediate the relationship between service experiences and perceived quality (Hoo et al., 2024). Thus, improving users' sense of satisfaction may help mitigate the adverse effects of negative interactions.

In addition, the moderation analysis highlights the buffering role of surface acting. The results indicate that surface acting can weaken the negative effects of customer incivility on both need satisfaction and service quality. This finding is in line with Lin and Lai (2020), who suggest that emotional regulation strategies can serve as coping mechanisms in stressful service encounters. By managing emotional expressions, individuals may maintain a more stable perception of service quality despite experiencing incivility. However, it is important to note that excessive reliance on surface acting may also lead to emotional exhaustion over time by Grandey (2003), suggesting a potential trade-off that warrants further investigation.

The control variable analysis indicates that gender does not significantly influence need satisfaction, but it does affect surface acting and service quality. This finding is partially consistent with prior studies that highlight gender differences in emotional regulation and service perception (Siddiq & Taylor, 2024; Granié et al., 2025). These results underscore the complex interplay between emotional, psychological, and

contextual factors in shaping service quality perceptions. This study contributes to the existing literature by extending the examination of customer incivility into the digital service context and highlighting the roles of mediation and moderation mechanisms in understanding user experiences.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that customer incivility has a negative effect on need satisfaction and service quality, while simultaneously increasing surface acting among users. In contrast, service convenience and need satisfaction positively contribute to improving perceived service quality. The findings also confirm the mediating role of need satisfaction in the relationship between customer incivility and service quality, as well as the moderating role of surface acting, which weakens the negative impact of customer incivility. These results highlight the importance of both psychological and functional factors in shaping user perceptions within digital service contexts. From a practical perspective, service providers, particularly online transportation platforms, should focus not only on enhancing system efficiency but also on managing user interactions and emotional experiences to maintain service quality.

However, this study has several limitations. First, the use of cross-sectional data restricts the ability to capture changes in user behavior over time. Second, the sample is limited to Maxim users in Indonesia, which may constrain the generalizability of the findings to other platforms or contexts. Third, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response bias. Therefore, future research is recommended to adopt longitudinal designs to better understand behavioral dynamics, conduct comparative studies across different digital platforms, and incorporate additional variables such as emotional exhaustion or user trust. Expanding the research to diverse cultural settings may also provide a more comprehensive understanding of customer incivility in digital service environments.

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