


Systematic review on consumer forgiveness: Clarifying the domain and future research agenda

Tüketici affetmesinin sistematik literatür incelemesi: Alanın ve gelecekteki araştırma gündeminin belirlenmesi

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Abstract

Consumer forgiveness has gained prominence in marketing literature, particularly in investigating service failure and recovery. In this vein, this study aims to systematically review the consumer forgiveness literature and provide valuable suggestions for future research endeavours based on the discovered gaps in the existing literature. The present study thoroughly examined 77 peer-reviewed journal articles on consumer forgiveness from the Scopus database. The findings are discussed under the headings of descriptive overview (year and journal) and content analysis that consists of theoretical background, methodological trends (research design, data collection method, sample size, industry, analysis techniques, measurement) and thematic issues (antecedents, consequences, mediators and moderators) subtitles. This study contributes to the body of knowledge by clarifying the literature on consumer forgiveness, identifying gaps, and making suggestions for future research. This study also contributes to the literature by proposing a comprehensive framework that aligns with the variables investigated in previous research on consumer forgiveness.

Keywords: Consumer Forgiveness, Service failure, Service Recovery, Systematic Review

Jel Codes: M30, M31

Öz

Tüketici affetmesi, hizmet hatası ve telafisi araştırmalarındaki rolüyle pazarlama yazınında önemi giderek artan bir kavramdır. Bu doğrultuda, bu araştırma tüketici affetmesi literatürünü sistematik olarak incelemeyi ve mevcut literatürde tespit edilen boşluklar doğrultusunda gelecek çalışmalar için faydalı öneriler sunmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu kapsamda, tüketici affetmesi ile ilgili Scopus veri tabanından ulaşılan 77 hakemli dergi makalesi sistematik olarak incelenmiştir. İnceleme bulguları tanımlayıcı genel bakış (yıl ve dergi) başlığı ile teorik arka plan, metodolojik eğilimler (araştırma tasarımı, veri toplama yöntemi, örneklem hacmi, sektör, analiz teknikleri, ölçüm) ve ilişkili olan değişkenler (öncül, sonuç, aracı ve düzenleyici) alt başlıklarından oluşan içerik analizi başlığı altında tartışılmıştır. Bu araştırma ile tüketici affetmesi literatürüne açıklık getirilerek mevcut durum ortaya konulmuştur. Bu kapsamda, boşluklar belirtilerek ve gelecek çalışmalara yönelik öneriler sunularak literatüre katkıda bulunmaktadır. Ayrıca, tüketici affetmesi çalışmalarında incelenen değişkenler doğrultusunda bütüncül bir yapı sunularak ilgili literatüre katkı sağlanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tüketici Affetmesi, Hizmet Hatası, Hizmet Telafisi, Sistematik İnceleme

JEL Kodları: M30, M31

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Introduction

The concept of forgiveness, which holds substantial importance in interpersonal relationships, was initially examined within theology. Subsequently, it garnered attention from several disciplines, including psychology, philosophy, psychotherapy, developmental psychology, and moral development (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011). Forgiveness, widely employed across various academic disciplines, has also gained considerable attention among marketing scholars and is known as *consumer forgiveness* in the marketing literature (Aggarwal, 2004). The significance of consumer forgiveness in enhancing a company's reputation and promoting the well-being of employees is widely recognized within the field of marketing (Stone, 2002). Specifically, consumer forgiveness is a notable topic explored in-service failure and recovery studies (Xie & Peng, 2009; Yagil & Luria, 2016; Harrison-Walker, 2019). The act of forgiveness has the potential to expedite the process of repairing a strained relationship between a service provider and a customer. This not only results in the restoration of the relationship but also enhances the overall quality of the business relationship and fosters positive word-of-mouth communication (Zourrig, Chebat & Toffoli, 2009). According to Tsarenko and Tojib (2012), the utilization of consumer forgiveness can assist clients in restoring psychological equilibrium and attaining optimal service outcomes by relinquishing negative feelings. Hence, the factors influencing consumer forgiveness, the process, and the resulting consequences have garnered significant interest among service academics and practitioners.

According to Fetscherin and Sampedro (2019), research on consumer forgiveness is still in its nascent phase within the marketing discipline. Therefore, a growing demand is growing (Rasoli, Rasoolimanesh, Rahmani, Momayez & Torabi, 2022) for further investigation. In this sense, the main motivation of this study is to determine any existing gaps and evaluate the advancements made in research within this field. This will be achieved by assessing the current literature on consumer forgiveness, which is very important in service marketing. To the extent of our current understanding, there has been a lack of comprehensive literature review studies on consumer forgiveness, except for a solitary study conducted by Kim, Ho, Tan and Casidy (2023). In their study, Kim et al. (2023) thoroughly examine the various elements influencing consumer forgiveness through a systematic literature review. This study differs from the previous review by conducting a systematic literature review of existing studies about consumer forgiveness. It presents a comprehensive framework by identifying the factors that antecedents and consequences of consumer forgiveness. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the extant literature on consumer forgiveness, offering a holistic perspective. In this context, the present study addresses the following inquiries: (1) How is consumer forgiveness conceptualized? (2) Which theoretical frameworks are employed by these studies? (3) What are the most preferred methodological approaches? (4) What countries and industries are currently undergoing the highest levels of research? (5) What are the antecedents and consequences of consumer forgiveness?

This study makes two contributions to the field of consumer forgiveness research. Firstly, this study offers a complete examination of the existing literature by thoroughly exploring the theoretical foundations, descriptive features, methodological considerations, and thematic analysis of the current consumer forgiveness literature. Secondly, this study highlights various areas of research that have not been adequately addressed in the existing body of knowledge. It proposes important avenues for future research about the theoretical framework, research technique, and related variables.

Consumer forgiveness

Forgiveness, considered fundamental in interpersonal interactions (McCullough, Worthington & Rachal, 1997), has also been applied in the marketing literature as consumer forgiveness. The influence of consumers perceiving brands like their social interactions has played a significant role in developing this notion (Aggarwal, 2004). Consumer forgiveness can be described as the consumer's positive and constructive reaction to a service failure. It involves the consumer's desire to refrain from seeking retribution, engaging in retaliatory actions, becoming alienated, or exhibiting any other negative behaviour towards the service provider who has failed to meet their expectations (Xie & Peng, 2009). Consumer forgiveness is a complex process involving cognitive, emotional and motivational responses to a violating event. That is, forgiveness is a process that starts with a cognitive response, leads to the emergence of emotions and results in motivational results (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011).

The concept of forgiveness has been referred to as a coping mechanism that primarily centres on the regulation of individuals' internal emotional responses to a transgression (Strelan & Covic, 2006) and the mitigation of their stress-related behaviours in the face of a transgression (Worthington & Scherer, 2004). In this sense, forgiveness can be considered a coping behaviour and strategy. Forgiveness as a

coping behaviour aims at an effort to adapt to one's environment. In contrast, forgiveness as a coping strategy refers to a specific action or effort undertaken by the person (Zourrig et al., 2009).

Consumer forgiveness is conceptualized in several ways within the service marketing literature. It can be considered a reaction to a service transgression (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011) or as a result of efforts made to recover the service (Harrison-Walker, 2019), or even as a combination of both (Xie & Peng, 2009). On the other hand, consumer forgiveness can be understood and analyzed via the lens of the customer journey. Consumer forgiveness is not considered solely a consequence of service transgressions but encompasses a broader perspective (Kim et al., 2023).

Consumer forgiveness can be explored by examining its emotional and decision-making aspects (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011). Decisional forgiveness is a concept that encompasses the behavioural inclination to refrain from adopting an unforgiving attitude and instead respond distinctly towards an individual who has caused harm. Emotional forgiveness entails substituting unpleasant sentiments of unforgiveness with positive emotions towards others. Both perspectives hold significance within the business setting, as emotional and decisive forgiveness and intrinsic motivation to release unpleasant emotions contribute to the consumer's restoration of psychological equilibrium and attainment of optimal service outcomes (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2012).

Methodology

This study employs a descriptive approach to assess articles on consumer forgiveness, utilizing a systematic literature review to gather data from Scopus databases. A systematic literature review (SLR) is a distinct literature review offering supplementary benefits. Siddaway, Wood and Hedges (2019) assert that systematic reviews are comprehensive, clear, and repeatable.

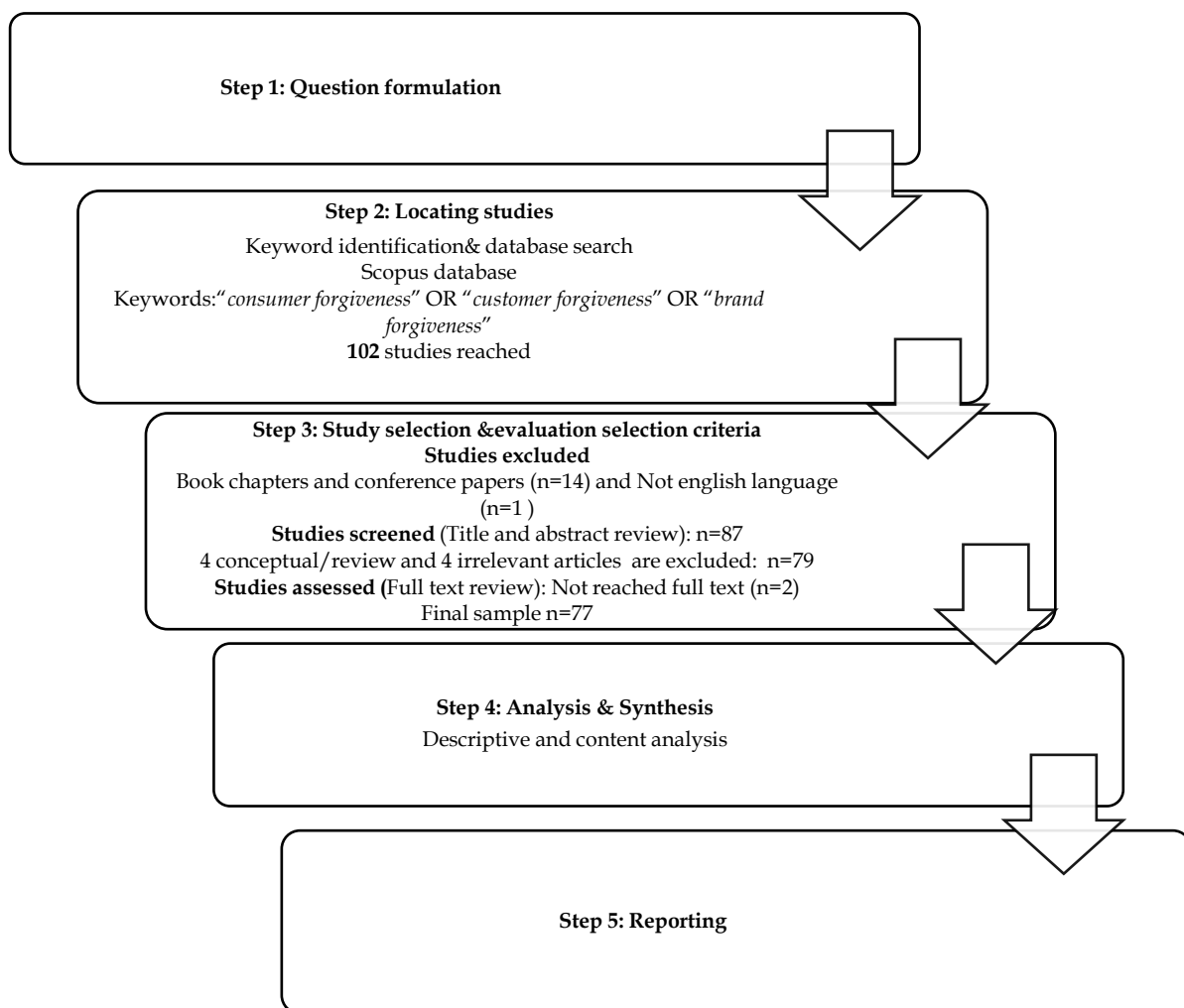


Figure 1: Literature Refinement Process

In this sense, this study endeavours to ascertain and assess the pertinent research by conducting a comprehensive examination. This examination involves formulating a well-defined query and

employing systematic and transparent methodologies to gather and analyze data from the studies in the review.

In this study, SLR was performed utilizing the five-stage approach proposed by Denyer and Tranfield (2009) (see Figure 1). The initial phase in this approach involves formulating the research question. This study was designed to investigate the existing state of the literature on consumer forgiveness, including its theoretical framework, methodological trends, and thematic issues. The main purpose was to identify gaps in the literature and provide guidance for future research endeavours. The criteria for inclusion and exclusion in the second phase of the study search, specifically pertaining to retrieving relevant research, have been established. The Scopus database was selected. Scopus is an extensive repository of scholarly articles that undergo a rigorous peer-review process. It possesses advanced functionalities that enable the monitoring, analysis, and visualization of research activities (Bhimani, Mention & Barlatier, 2019). In the present context, the terms "consumer forgiveness", "customer forgiveness", or "brand forgiveness" were searched in the Scopus database using the search parameters "title, abstract, keywords." This search yielded a total of 102 relevant articles. During the third stage, 15 studies were excluded based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. These excluded studies consisted of 9 book chapters, five conference papers, and 1 study written in a language other than English. As a result, 87 studies remained for further analysis. Four articles were removed from the analysis due to their conceptual nature. A total of 83 research underwent pre-review, during which two studies with inaccessible complete texts and four studies deemed irrelevant were excluded, resulting in a final selection of 77 articles.

In the fourth phase of this procedure, 77 pertinent articles were extracted from the Scopus database and employed for the analysis of this study. The Excel software generated graphs, tables, and figures illustrating publishing trends, such as journals and publication years. At this level, descriptive and content analyses were performed, and the findings were then presented in the fifth and concluding phase.

Analysis and findings

This part presents the conclusions derived from the content analysis, following a descriptive overview.

Descriptive overview

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of articles that have undergone review, categorized by their respective publication years. The initial paper examined in this study was published in 2009. The emergence of consumer forgiveness as a prominent notion has been observed, particularly from 2018, with a subsequent gradual rise in attention up to the present.

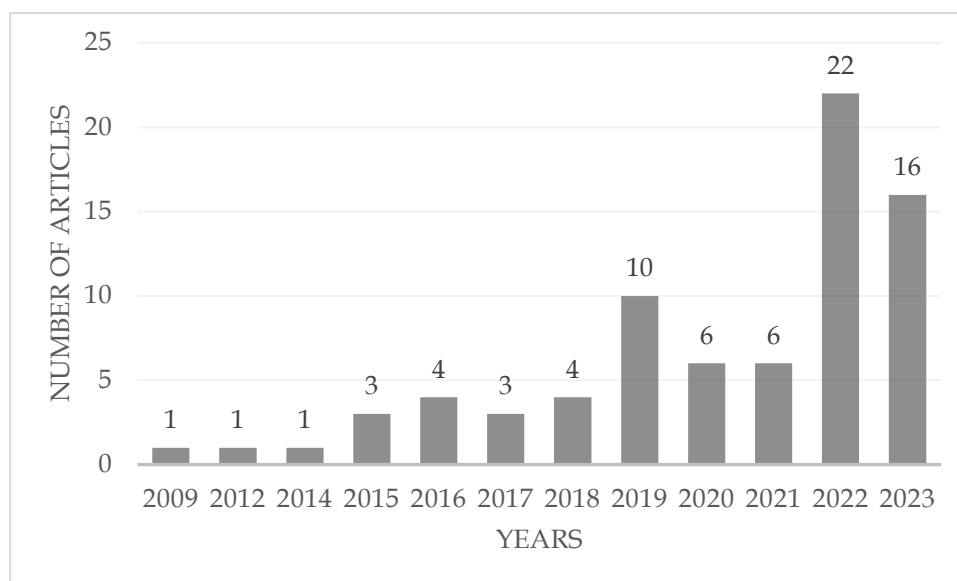


Figure 2: Distribution of Articles by Years

Results showed an increasing interest in consumer forgiveness in the last two years, 2022-2023. According to an analysis of the distribution of articles in various journals, it was found that the Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, Journal of Business Research, and Psychology and Marketing have a higher percentage of articles (9.1%, 7.8% and 5.2% respectively) compared to other journals (Table 1).

Table 1: Distribution of Articles by Journals

Journal	n	%	Articles
Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services	7	9.1	Casidy & Shin (2015); Muhammad & Gul-E-Rana (2020); Yang & Hu (2021); Honora, Chih & Wang (2022); Li, Liu & Qing (2022); Roy, Vijay & Srivastava (2022); Arkan, Altinigne, Kuzgun & Okan (2023)
Journal of Business Research	6	7.8	Wolter, Bacile, Smith & Giebelhausen (2019); Wei, Liu & Keh (2020); Yuan et al. (2020); Papadopoulou, Vardarsuyu & Oghazi (2023); Ali, El-Manstrly & Abbasi (2023)
Psychology and Marketing	4	5.2	Xie & Peng (2009); Schnebelen & Bruhn (2018); Kim, Park & Stacey Lee (2019); Christodoulides, Gerrath & Siamagka (2021)
Journal of Marketing Management	4	5.2	Tsarenko & Tojib (2012); Tsarenko & Tojib (2015); Finsterwalder, Yee & Tombs (2017); Kuchmaner, Wiggins & Grimm (2023)
Frontiers in Psychology	3	3.9	Ran, Wei & Li (2016); Chen, Guo, Xiong & Hao (2022); Wei, Liu, Li, Hou & Li (2022)
Journal Of Product And Brand Management	3	3.9	Fetscherin & Sampedro (2019); Hassey (2019); Hegner, Fenko & Teravest (2017)
Journal of Service Theory and Practice	2	2.6	Chong & Ahmed (2018); Sajtos & Chong (2018)
Asia Pacific Journal of Marketing and Logistics	2	2.6	Riaz & Khan (2016); Muhammad & Gul-E-Rana (2019)
International Journal of Emerging Markets	2	2.6	Salagrama, Prashar & Tata (2021); Zhang, Cui & Zhong (2023)
International Journal of Hospitality Management	2	2.6	Shuqair, Pinto, So, Rita & Mattila (2021); Gannon, Taheri, Thompson, Rahimi & Okumus (2022)
International Journal of Information Management	2	2.6	Wang, Chih & Honora (2023); Agnihotri & Bhattacharya (2023)
Annals of Tourism Research	2	2.6	Liu & Li (2022); Xu, Liu & Gursoy (2022)
Journal of Internet Commerce	2	2.6	Ghosh (2017); Tathagata & Amar (2018)
Marketing Intelligence and Planning	2	2.6	Chaudhary, Lopez & Rodriguez (2020); Siamagka (2023)
Journals in which only 1 article was published	34	44.2	

Content analysis

This section presents an overview of the methodological trends commonly employed in the consumer forgiveness literature. These trends encompass various aspects such as research design, data collection method, population, country where data were collected, sample size, applied analysis and measurement of consumer forgiveness. Additionally, the section highlights the frequently utilized theories. Furthermore, it explores the variables that are associated with consumer forgiveness, including antecedents, consequences, mediators, and moderators, by using thematic analysis.

Methodological trends

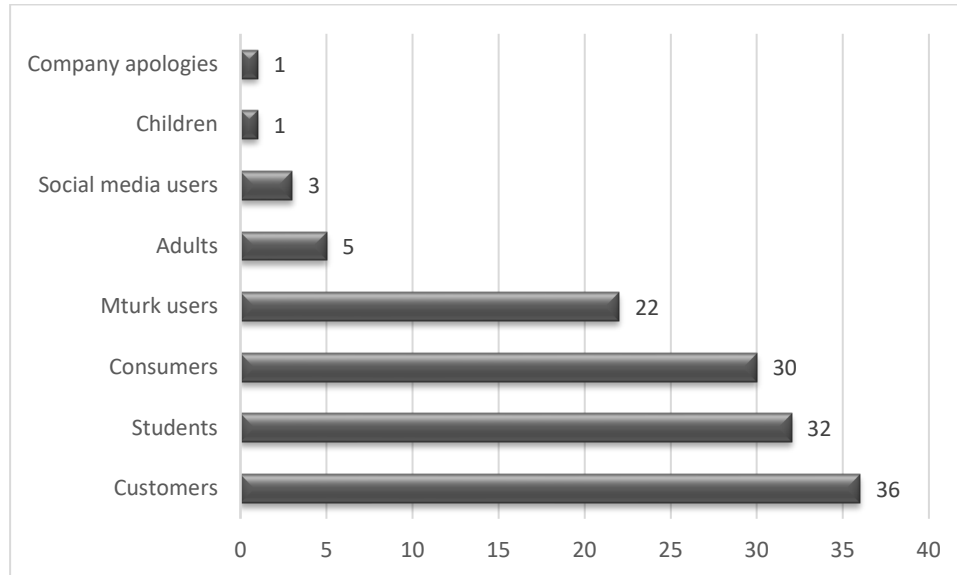
The articles were thoroughly analyzed concerning multiple criteria pertaining to the methodology (Table 2). The results of the systematic review of 77 articles indicated that certain research pertaining to consumer forgiveness encompassed multiple studies. A total of 130 studies were examined over 77 articles. 61.1% of the total articles performed a single study, while the remaining 38.9% had two or more studies. As a result, some of the methodological analysis (population, sample size, data collection methods and analysis methods) within the literature on consumer forgiveness was conducted, utilizing a dataset comprising 130 studies (Table 2).

Table 2: Methodological Trends

Number of studies		n	%	Sample size		n	%
1		47	61.03	99 or less		15	11.5
2		13	16.9	100-249		53	40.7
3		12	15.6	250-499		42	32.3
4		4	5.2	500 or more		20	15.3
5		1	1.3				
Research Design				Data Collection Methods			
Quantitative		67	87.01	Survey		33	25.4
Qualitative		5	6.5	Experiment		87	66.9
Mixed		5	6.5	Interview		9	6.9
				Case		1	0.8
Analysis Methods*				Countries involved			
Regression		5	2.6	One country		59	76.6
SEM		18	9.3	Two or multiple countries		6	7.8
PLS-SEM		9	4.7	Country not reported		12	15.6
Anova		70	36.2				
Process macro		81	41.9				
Content analysis		8	4.1				
Other		2	1.03				

* There are multiple counts due to multiple uses

To begin with, the majority of the studies examined in this review were conducted using a quantitative research approach (87.01%). The utilization of experiments as a method for data gathering was observed in 66.9% of the studies, while surveys were employed as a means of data collection in 25.4% of the studies. Regarding the analysis methods, the most commonly used technique was Process macro (41.9%), followed by analysis of variance (36.2%). Process Macro software is particularly beneficial when evaluating research models incorporating mediators and moderators.

**Figure 3: Population Distribution of Studies**

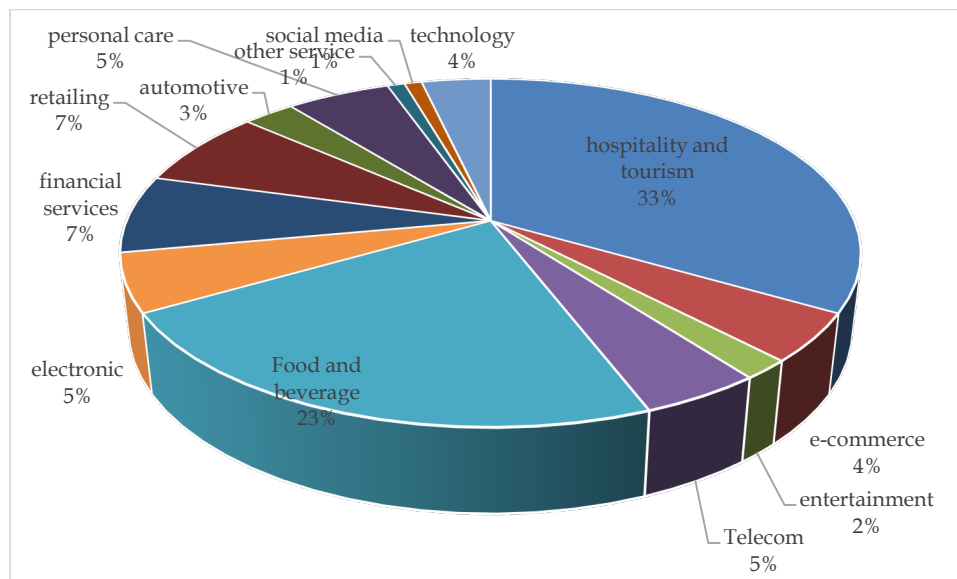
In research, it is crucial to possess knowledge regarding the primary population and the sample size. This information plays a significant role in distinguishing between various studies, determining the extent to which the results may be applied to a certain group, and assessing the generalizability of the findings (Çelik, Tektaş & Kavak, 2022). Figure 3 presents the population distribution of reviewed studies. Customers (27.6%) represent the population group that is most commonly utilized. Hotel, restaurant and airline customers are frequently used as the population of the studies. Students (24.6%), consumers (23.1%) and Mturk users (16.9%) are also utilized. In a significant proportion of the studies (40.7%), the sample size fell between the range of 100 to 499. Results indicate that 32.3% of these studies had a sample size between 250 and 499.

Table 3: Countries of Data Collection

Countries	n	%	Countries	n	%
<i>Eastern</i>	38	49.3	<i>Western</i>	21	27.2
China	17	44.7	USA	9	42.8
India	6	15.7	UK	3	14.3
Pakistan	4	10.5	Korea	2	9.5
Malaysia	3	7.9	The Netherlands	2	9.5
Iran	2	5.3	Germany	2	9.5
Turkey	2	5.3	Australia	1	4.8
Indonesia	1	2.6	Portugal	1	4.8
Israel	1	2.6	New Zealand	1	4.8
Taiwan	1	2.6	<i>Country not reported</i>	12	15.6
Thailand	1	2.6	<i>Two or more country</i>	6	7.8
			Total	77	100%

Concerning the national context, the review results indicate that a significant proportion of studies (15.6%) lack explicit details regarding the number of countries or geographical regions in which their research was conducted. Among the remaining research, a significant majority (76.6%) were conducted within the setting of a single country. A smaller proportion of studies (7.8%) were found to have focused on two or more countries. Table 3 presents an extensive list of countries where consumer forgiveness studies were conducted. Regarding the geographical focus, the systematic review revealed that 20 countries were studied across 77 articles. Concerning the region, the analysis demonstrates that eastern countries contributed 49.3% of the literature (Table 3). China (44.7%) and India (15.7%) were the most commonly examined eastern countries as a research setting. Regarding Western countries, the USA (42.8%) and the UK (14.3%) were the preferred regions.

In addition to the nation, the industry used as an empirical setting in the previous consumer forgiveness literature was examined. Upon analyzing the sectoral distribution of the studies, it becomes evident that most research focuses on the hospitality and tourism industry (33%).

**Figure 4:** Sectoral Distribution of Studies

This is closely followed by the food and beverage industry, which comprises 23% of the studies. Subsequently, the sectors of retailing (7%), financial services (7%), electronic (5%), telecom (5%), personal care (5%), technology (4%), e-commerce (4%), automotive (3%), entertainment (2%), social media (1%) and other services (1%) are ranked in descending order of their respective shares (Figure 4). This demonstrates that researchers in customer forgiveness have studied both the settings of products and services.

Table 4: Scales Used in the Measurement of Consumer Forgiveness

Research	n	%	Research	n	%
Xie & Peng (2009)	10	11.7	Aquino, Tripp & Bies (2001)	3	3.5
Finkel, Rusbult, Kumashiro & Hannon (2002)	6	7.1	Fedorikhin, Park & Thomson (2008)	3	3.5
Tsarenko & Tojib (2012)	6	7.1	Christodoulides et al. (2021)	2	2.4
Harrison-Walker (2019)	5	5.9	Rye et al. (2001)	2	2.4
Casidy & Shin (2015)	4	4.7	Lee & Cun (2018)	2	2.4
McCullough et al. (1998)	4	4.7	Hegner et al. (2017)	2	2.4
McCullough et al. (1997)	3	3.5	Chen, Wei, Ran & Meng (2020)	2	2.4
Schnebelen & Bruhn (2018)	3	3.5	Other (one time used)	29	34.1
*There are multiple counts due to multiple uses			Total	85	100

Table 4 illustrates the scales utilized at least once or more throughout the 77 articles analyzed to measure consumer forgiveness. The Xie and Peng (2009) scale has been identified as the predominant instrument for assessing consumer forgiveness. Xie and Peng (2009) adopted the scale consisting of three items and one dimension from Finkel et al. (2002). In their recent study, Christodoulides et al. (2021) express their critique on the utilization of scales derived from the field of psychology inside the domain of consumer-brand/firm interactions. Furthermore, the authors argue that the measurement of forgiveness is limited in scope, as it primarily relies on one-dimensional and even one-item scales. For instance, Sinha and Lu (2016) emphasize the exclusive emphasis on the behavioural aspect when assessing consumer forgiveness, neglecting the multidimensional nature of interpersonal forgiveness, which encompasses cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. The authors critique this approach and highlight its shortcomings. As per their recommendations, the concept of consumer forgiveness has cognitive, emotional, and behavioural dimensions. In this vein, Christodoulides et al. (2021) developed a nine-item scale combining the three aspects of cognitive, emotive, and behavioural elements to measure consumer forgiveness.

Theoretical background

In order to effectively portray the conceptual framework of the models examined in the studies, it is important to provide a comprehensive overview of the underlying theoretical foundation. The present study involved an analysis of the theories upon which the conceptual framework and hypotheses of the articles were founded. Regarding the theories used in the studies, the theory of study was not indicated in 24.7% of the articles analyzed. Conversely, the remaining 75.3% of articles were found to incorporate one or more theories into their respective frameworks. Table 5 shows the theories utilized in a total of 58 articles. A comprehensive analysis of 58 articles revealed 76 theories, encompassing 40 distinct theories.

Table 5: Use of Theories

Theoretical Background	n	%	Theoretical Background	n	%
<i>Theory specified</i>	58	75.3	Fairness or justice theory	2	2.6
Attribution theory	10	13.2	Social identity theory	2	2.6
Stress and coping theory	7	9.2	Sensemaking	2	2.6
Cognitive appraisal theory	6	7.9	Social influence theory	2	2.6
Social exchange theory	5	6.6	Service recovery	2	2.6
Forgiveness theory	4	5.3	Other theories used one-time	28	36.8
Equity theory	3	3.9	<i>Theory not specified</i>	19	24.7
Cost signaling theory	3	3.9			
* There are multiple counts due to multiple uses					

Upon closer examination of the 76 theories under consideration, it becomes evident that the attribution theory emerges as the most commonly employed theory, accounting for a significant proportion of 13.2%. Attribution theory is commonly employed in research on service recovery (Choi & Mattila, 2008). It is frequently utilized in the examination of customer responses to service failures. When a service breakdown occurs, consumers tend to reflexively contemplate the company or component to blame for the occurrence. How consumers attribute certain factors to service providers impacts their subsequent attitudes and responses (Cheng, 2023). The theory of stress and coping ranks second with a percentage of 9.2%, whilst the cognitive appraisal theory follows (7.9%). According to stress and coping theory, stress occurs when an individual experiences a transgression. In response to the transgression, the affected individual adopts several coping mechanisms to alleviate stress's impact. The procedure consists of two parts, namely cognitive appraisal and coping. Cognitive appraisal refers to evaluating a change and its associated implications, whereas coping involves deliberate efforts to alleviate the negative consequences of the change created by transgression (Riaz & Khan, 2016). Consumer

forgiveness is rooted in the theoretical framework of stress and coping, specifically in service failure and recovery (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2011).

Thematic analysis

This section provides a comprehensive synthesis of the antecedents and consequences of consumer forgiveness and examines the mediators and moderators that influence these interactions. This comprehensive analysis would offer valuable insights for future researchers in the field of consumer forgiveness studies. An integrated framework for consumer forgiveness is presented in Figure 5.

Antecedents of consumer forgiveness

The review of consumer forgiveness literature identified a total of 60 determinants. These determinants have been categorized into three groups: (1) consumer-related factors, (2) firm-related factors and (3) relationship-based factors. The review indicates that most previous research has focused on factors related to firms/brands (64.6%). In comparison, comparatively less attention has been given to consumer-related factors (20.7%) and relationship-based factors (14.6%). Factors such as religiosity (Tsarenko & Tojib, 2012) and self-construal styles (Sinha & Lu, 2016) are among the factors related to consumers that affect forgiveness. In their research on technology companies in China, Wei and Ran (2019) provide evidence that male apologizers elicit a greater degree of consumer forgiveness than female apologisers in performance-related wrongdoings. Conversely, female apologizers are more likely to receive forgiveness from consumers than their male counterparts for values-related wrongdoings. Tsarenko and Tojib (2012) found that consumer religiosity positively affects both forms of forgiveness. However, consumer spirituality exhibits a negative relationship with decisional forgiveness and lacks any significant association with emotional forgiveness. In their study, Yang and Hu (2021) discovered a favourable impact of the emotion of wonder on the propensity of Chinese consumers to forgive instances of service failures.

Another category encompasses factors relating to firms that impact consumer forgiveness. Several studies in the existing literature (Harrison-Walker, 2019; Ma, Zhong & Hou, 2020; Aw, Chuah, Sabri & Chong, 2022; Harrison-Walker, 2022) examined service recovery strategies as an antecedent to consumer forgiveness.

Table 6: Antecedents of Consumer Forgiveness

Antecedents of consumer forgiveness	Frequency	Represented studies
Consumer-related factors (18 factors)	17	Tsarenko & Tojib (2012); Yagil & Luria (2016); Latif & Uslu (2019); Wei & Ran (2019)
Firm-related factors (27 factors)	53	Xie & Peng S. (2009); Casidy & Shin (2015); Ghosh (2017); Fetscherin & Sampedro (2019); Harrison-Walker (2019); Ali (2023)
Relationship-based factors (15 factors)	12	Wolter et al. (2019); Wei et al. (2023)

The assessment of brand-related attributes is also conducted within the firm domain. Kim et al. (2019) revealed that individuals tend to have a higher inclination towards forgiveness regarding underdog brands than top-dog brands, particularly in nonrelational transgressions. In a recent study conducted by Tosun and Gürce (2022) within the banking sector, positive corporate social responsibility and favourable personnel images significantly impact brand forgiveness. This, in turn, leads to a reduction in bad word-of-mouth following instances of service failures. Fetscherin and Sampedro (2019) found an inverse relationship between the severity of a brand breach and the likelihood of forgiveness from the consumer towards the service provider. The sort of transgressions committed by an individual is a significant factor influencing the process of forgiveness (Sinha & Lu, 2016). Noor, Chao and Doosje (2023) conducted two research to examine the significance of perceived transgression kinds, specifically lack of integrity and competence, in the process of forgiveness towards businesses that have committed transgressions. In both research, organizations exhibited reduced levels of forgiveness when their misdeeds were linked to a deficiency in integrity. Commitment (Latif & Uslu, 2019), trust (Tosun & Gürce, 2022) and relationship quality (Wolter et al., 2019) are among the relational factors that affect consumer forgiveness. Hegner et al. (2017) found a strong positive relationship between brand love and brand forgiveness, thus confirming that consumers are more forgiving towards their beloved brands. In their study conducted in the Indian telecom and restaurant industries, Salagrama et al. (2021) found that continuance commitment influences forgiveness positively.

Consequences of consumer forgiveness

In contrast to the extensive scholarly focus on consumer forgiveness antecedents, examining the consequences of consumer forgiveness has received relatively limited attention. Findings indicate that there were 30 articles discussing at least one consequence of consumer forgiveness. The investigation into the consequences of consumer forgiveness appears to exhibit an increased trajectory, primarily in the latest scholarly articles. Specifically, within our sample of 30 articles that examine outcomes, 24 of them were published in 2019 or subsequent years. The analysis revealed 15 distinct consequences throughout a comprehensive review of 30 articles (Table 7). The consequences identified in this review were categorized into two groups: (1) positive consumer response and (2) negative consumer response. Most research efforts have focused on examining positive consumer responses (68.1%). Negative consumer responses got a relatively lesser emphasis (31.8%).

In a recent study conducted by Rasoli et al. (2022), the impact of consumer forgiveness on brand betrayal and brand hate among consumers of restaurants in Iran was examined. The study revealed that consumer forgiveness negatively affects brand betrayal and hate. Ghosh (2017) found that the promptness and effectiveness of webcare positively affect consumer forgiveness, which in turn influences consumer loyalty. A study conducted by Gannon et al. (2022) within the food delivery industry in Iran showed that implementing service compensation strategies leads to increased consumer forgiveness. Furthermore, this forgiveness was observed to impact consumer trust favourably.

Table 8 illustrates the moderators that were investigated, considering both elements within the conceptual framework: (1) the relationship between factors influencing consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness and (2) the relationship between consumer forgiveness and the consequences of consumer forgiveness. A total of 29 moderators were identified, with the majority of the studies (54.1%) focusing on moderating the relationship between consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness antecedents. The remaining studies (45.9%) aimed to moderate the link between consumer forgiveness and outcomes of consumer forgiveness.

Table 7: Consequences of Consumer Forgiveness

Consequences of consumer forgiveness		Frequency	Represented studies
Positive consumer response	Repurchase intention	9	Tsarenko & Tojib (2015); Salagrama et al. (2021)
	Satisfaction	5	Tathagata & Amar (2018)
	Re-Patronage intention	4	Elbaz, Soliman, Al-Alawi, Al-Romeedy & Mekawy (2023)
	Loyalty	3	Trampe, Konuş & Verhoef (2014); Ghosh (2017)
	Trust	3	Xie & Peng (2009); Gannon et al. (2022)
	Reconciliation	2	Harrison-Walker (2019)
	Help the brand	1	Kuchmaner et al. (2023)
	Brand Credibility	1	Ali (2023)
	Restoration of Corporate Brand Image	1	Feng, Lyu, Li & Lu (2022)
	Brand relationship quality	1	Nobi, Kim & Lee (2022)
Negative consumer response	Complaining intention/Behaviour	4	Wolter et al. (2019); Lin & Chou (2022); Tosun & Gurce (2022)
	Brand hate	1	Rasouli et al. (2022)
	Brand Betrayal	1	Rasouli et al. (2022)
	Negative Word Of Mouth	6	Harrison-Walker (2019); Salagrama et al. (2021); Elbaz et al. (2023)
	Switchover intention	2	Riaz & Khan (2016); Honora et al. (2022)

Mediators and moderators of consumer forgiveness

Need for closure (Hassey, 2019), interpersonal attachment styles and thinking Styles (Alnawas et al., 2022), and consumer power (Wei et al., 2020) were examined as consumer-related moderators in the link between the antecedents of consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness. The study by Xu et al. (2022) examines the moderating role of interdependent self-construal and indulgence in the relationship between perceived emotional intelligence similarity and consumer forgiveness. According to the findings of Alnawas, Al Khateeb, Abu Farha & Ndubisi (2022), it has been suggested that the relationship between service failure severity and brand forgiveness is not universally negative. Instead, several variables have the potential to either enhance or diminish this association. The study findings

indicate that individuals with a secure attachment type and a holistic thinking approach are less affected by the degree of service failures when forgiving a brand. On the other hand, those with an anxious attachment style and an analytic thinking approach are more influenced by service failure severity in terms of brand forgiveness.

Firm-related factors such as brand transgression (Kim et al., 2019), service failure severity (Liu & Li, 2022), and corporate reputation (Li et al., 2022) have a moderating role in the link between antecedents of consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness. Moreover, relationship-based factors are the third most commonly investigated moderators. In their study, Christodoulides et al. (2021) discovered that when companies limit consumers' ability to voice their grievances freely, requesting them to engage in self-censorship, the emotional tone observed in the language used within the related complaints tends to be more positive. This effect is stronger for consumers with strong prior self-brand connection consumers with strong self-brand connections.

The predominant focus of research on consumer forgiveness and its outcomes lies in examining the moderating effects of company-related factors. According to a recent study by Wei et al. (2023), the reputation of online stores in China positively modifies the relationship between consumer forgiveness and continuous trust. In a study by Zhang et al. (2023), performance expectancy significantly impacts brand forgiveness and revisit intentions among male hotel customers. However, this influence was not observed among female hotel customers, as performance expectancy did not affect their forgiveness and revisit behaviours. Moreover, relational factors moderate the relationship between consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness consequences. The study conducted by Lin and Chou (2022) demonstrated that certain relationship elements, such as the duration of the connection and affective commitment, negatively mediate between service recovery dissatisfaction and consumer forgiveness.

Table 8: Mediators and Moderators of Consumer Forgiveness

	Moderators	Frequency	Represented studies
The link between consumer forgiveness antecedents and consumer forgiveness	Consumer related factors	11	Tsarenko & Tojib (2015); Sinha & Lu (2016)
	Firm related factors	7	Kim et al. (2019); Liu & Li (2022)
	Relationship-based factors	2	Christodoulides et al. (2021)
The link between consumer forgiveness and outcomes of consumer forgiveness	Consumer related factors	4	Gannon et al. (2022)
	Firm related factors	11	Tathagata & Amar (2018)
	Relationship-based factors	2	Ma et al. (2020)
Mediators			
The link between consumer forgiveness antecedents and consumer forgiveness	Consumer related factors	18	Ran et al. (2016); Yang & Hu (2021)
	Firm related factors	10	Wei & Ran (2019)
	Relationship-based factors	5	Aw & Labrecque (2023); Papadopoulou et al. (2023)
The link between consumer forgiveness and outcomes of consumer forgiveness	Firm related factors	1	Rasouli et al. (2022)

Table 8 illustrates the mediators that have been examined, encompassing two aspects outlined in the conceptual framework: (1) the relationship between determinants of consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness and (2) the relationship between consumer forgiveness and the consequences of consumer forgiveness. The review revealed a total of 33 mediators. Most previous research (97.1%) examines the mediators between consumer forgiveness antecedents and consumer forgiveness. Consumer-related factors were investigated as mediators. These factors included regulatory focus (Ran et al., 2016), rumination (Hur & Jang, 2019), and empathy (Wei et al., 2020). Moreover, it has been observed that firm-related factors and relationship-based factors are the most commonly studied mediators. In their research conducted in the United States, Hur and Jang (2019) discovered that self-focused rumination and distraction positively impact consumer forgiveness within the hotel industry. Conversely, they found that provocation-focused ruminating amplifies the adverse consequences of service failure severity on consumer forgiveness. Wang et al. (2023) showed that the perception of solid sincerity and empathy mediated the impact of the pleading face emoji on consumer forgiveness. Aw and Labrecque (2023) demonstrated that parasocial interactions enhance brand trust and forgiveness with the mediating role of brand self-congruity.

On the other hand, a small percentage of research (2.94%) was devoted to examining the mediators in the link between consumer forgiveness and its outcomes. The study by Rasouli et al. (2022) showed that the perception of brand betrayal mediated the relationship between consumer forgiveness and brand hate.

Research gaps and directions for future research

Depending on the findings outlined in the review, this part of the study aims to address certain gaps detected in the existing body of knowledge. Afterwards, various suggestions will be presented for researchers to contemplate in future study endeavours of consumer forgiveness.

Conceptual issues and suggestions

The review of the consumer forgiveness literature indicates a lack of agreement regarding conceptualising and measuring consumer forgiveness. The concept of consumer forgiveness pertains to interpersonal forgiveness and is assessed as a multifaceted process encompassing cognitive, behavioural, and emotional aspects. The measurement of this notion, which has its foundations in psychology, was examined due to criticisms of the scales derived from psychological literature. Consequently, endeavours were made to construct scales that address this issue (Christodoulides et al., 2021). Further investigation is required to enhance and elucidate the various aspects of consumer forgiveness in response to criticism within this domain. Additional research is needed to establish a precise conceptual framework for consumer forgiveness supported by robust theoretical underpinnings.

Examining the literature on consumer forgiveness reveals that 25% of the research lacks the utilization of any theoretical framework when providing the conceptual framework. Among the remaining articles, attribution theory emerged as the most used theoretical framework. This theory is commonly employed in the literature on service compensation. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research that explores other significant theories, such as social exchange theory and justice theory, in the context of service recovery. Hence, incorporating research inquiries and hypotheses developed from existing theories in studies will yield substantial contributions to the existing body of literature. Furthermore, applying the theories outlined in the research findings allows for the development of conceptual infrastructures. Alternatively, the theoretical framework can be enhanced by incorporating novel and diverse ideas derived from the findings.

Methodological issues and suggestions

This study revealed several gaps in the methodological approaches employed in the existing body of knowledge on consumer forgiveness. It is important to highlight that most of the research on consumer forgiveness has adopted a quantitative approach. The presence of established measurement scales (Xie & Peng, 2009; Tsarenko & Tojib, 2012) in the existing body of research may account for this phenomenon. Researchers may employ qualitative and mixed-method approaches in future studies to gain a more comprehensive knowledge of the underlying structure. Furthermore, utilising mixed methods studies is highly advantageous in enhancing the depth of theoretical understanding and facilitating the generalization of study findings. Hence, it is advisable to consider employing a mixed-method approach for future research endeavours to explore consumer forgiveness. Furthermore, it is postulated that the persistence of this upward trajectory in quantitative research may pave the way for the emergence of meta-analytical research in future periods.

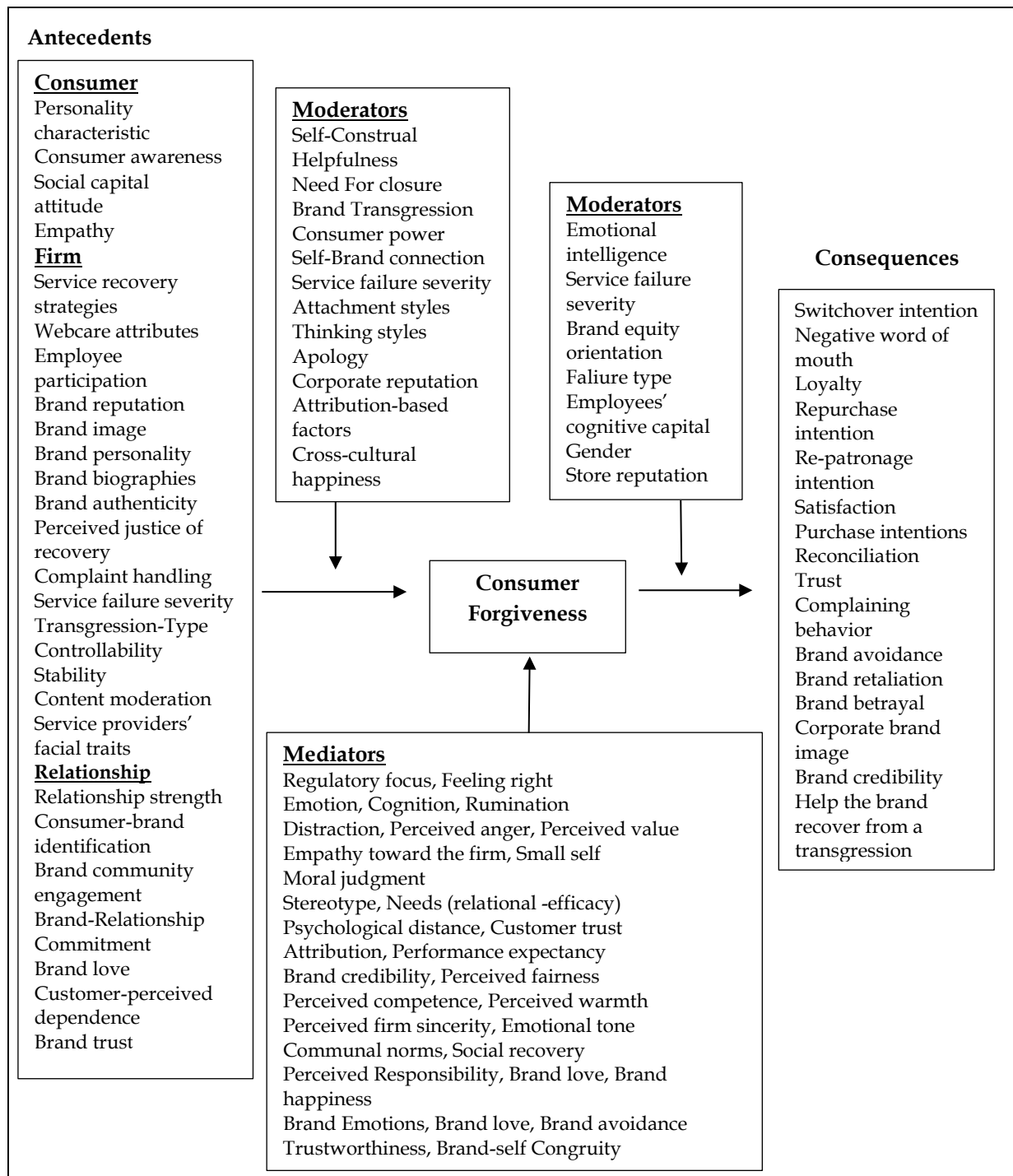


Figure 5: Integrated Framework

Although there is a substantial body of research in the hospitality and tourism field, it is well acknowledged that the amount of scholarly investigations conducted on other industries is inadequate. Hence, it is advisable to direct future research efforts towards other industries.

This review revealed that cross-cultural and cross-national studies have received less attention in the literature on consumer forgiveness. Most studies on consumer forgiveness have been conducted in a single country. In addition, most forgiveness studies have predominantly focused on research conducted within non-Western cultures, prompting inquiry over the applicability of these findings to Western cultural contexts. Hence, a comprehensive understanding of the factors that prompt forgiveness can be achieved by investigating the cultural factors that shape the forgiving process (Zourrig et al., 2009). Given the potential influence of cultural characteristics on consumer forgiveness, it is imperative to perform further cross-cultural investigations to ascertain the generalizability of research findings across diverse cultural contexts.

Topics and suggestions regarding variables

This review revealed that consumer-related, firm-related and relationship-based factors significantly influence consumer forgiveness. However, there is a relatively diminished emphasis on consumer- and relationship-based determinants compared to firm-related determinants. In future research endeavours, it is recommended to emphasise variables such as consumers' personality traits, demographic characteristics, and relational factors as antecedents of consumer forgiveness.

The available body of research on the consequences of consumer forgiveness is found to be significantly constrained. Future researchers are encouraged to produce more research on exploring consumer forgiveness consequences. The research on the outcomes of consumer forgiveness provides a list of positive and negative consumer responses. This list revealed that negative responses were ignored. Hence, future scholars are invited to conduct further studies on the impact of consumer forgiveness on negative responses.

The current body of research on the factors that mediate the relationship between consumer forgiveness and its outcomes is lacking in scope. It is advisable to do further research to elucidate the underlying mechanisms that govern the relationship between consumer forgiveness and the consequences of consumer forgiveness. It is suggested to examine further consumer-related and relational factors that explain this relationship mechanism.

Table 9: Suggested Research Questions for Future Research

Themes	Suggested research questions
Consumer related factors	What are the consumer personality traits and demographic characteristics that affect consumer forgiveness?
	How do consumer characteristics influence consumers' desire for a specific form of service recovery?
	How do consumer responses mediate the link between consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness consequences?
Firm related factors	How do a company's attributes interact with consumers' characteristics in influencing forgiveness?
Relationship-based factors	Which factors moderate the link between relational factors and consumer forgiveness?
	How do relational factors mediate the link between consumer forgiveness and consumer forgiveness consequences?

In terms of moderators, firm-related moderators and relational moderators were mostly ignored in the link between consumer forgiveness and its antecedents. As a result, future studies should emphasise this topic more to understand better the relational settings that amplify consumers' forgiveness tendencies. Furthermore, future studies should focus on the interaction of firm attributes with consumer-related aspects in influencing forgiveness. Table 9 presents the research questions for future research concerning the highlighted themes.

Conclusion

The current state of research on consumer forgiveness is characterized by its nascent stage. This study provides a comprehensive overview of the developing body of knowledge on consumer forgiveness using a systematic literature review. This study and its suggestions are expected to benefit scholars interested in this topic. Seventy-seven articles retrieved from the Scopus database were subjected to content analysis. The descriptive overview presents the distribution of publications across different years and journals. Subsequently, an examination was conducted on the theoretical underpinnings and methodological patterns. The examination of antecedents, consequences, mediators, and moderators in consumer forgiveness literature has been accomplished through thematic analysis. This study has provided clarification on the idea of consumer forgiveness and its associated literature. It has also shed light on the current understanding in this area and suggested future studies. As a result, this study has contributed to the existing literature.

In addition to its contributions, it is important to highlight two limitations of the present study. The first limitation of the study is the use of a single database. The second limitation of the study is the examination of only applied research articles. In future studies, the scope of the research can be expanded with evaluations made by accessing more databases and studies (book chapters, conference papers).

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