

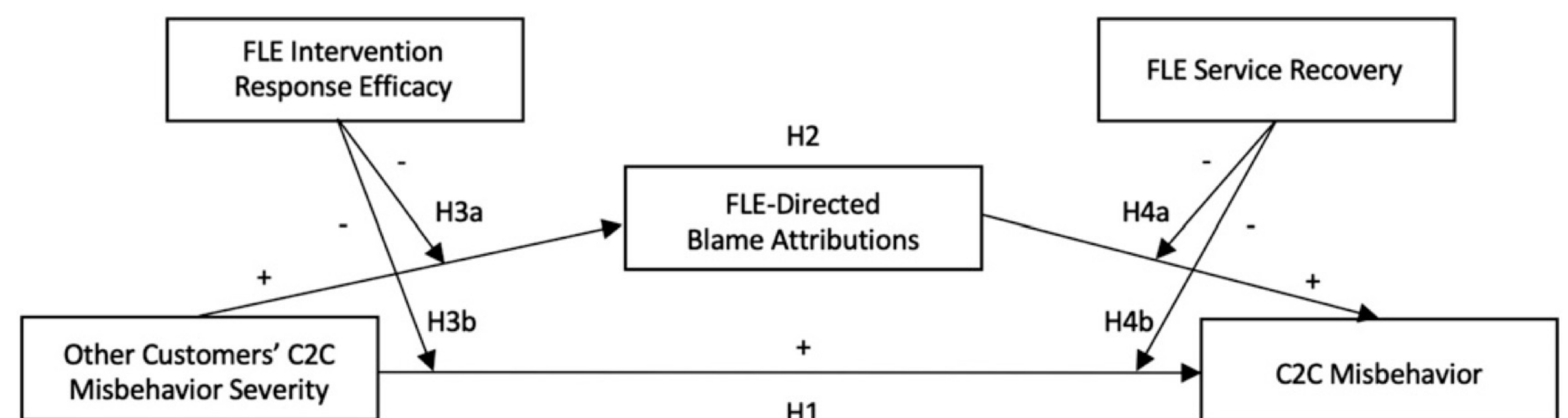
Customer-to-Customer Misbehavior

Stopping the Spread: How Blame Attributions Drive Customer-to-Customer Misbehavior Contagion and What Frontline Employees Can Do to Curb It.

Motivation

- Service encounters are increasingly characterized by customer-to-customer (C2C) interactions in which **customers regularly become the targets of other customers' misbehavior**.
- Initial research provides evidence of the **contagiousness of such C2C misbehavior** in the absence of frontline employees (FLEs), i.e., C2C misbehavior spreads beyond the initial perpetrator as victims target other innocent customers.
- We need to better understand **whether, how, and why C2C misbehavior spreads** when FLEs are involved and **what FLEs can do to curb it**.

Theory



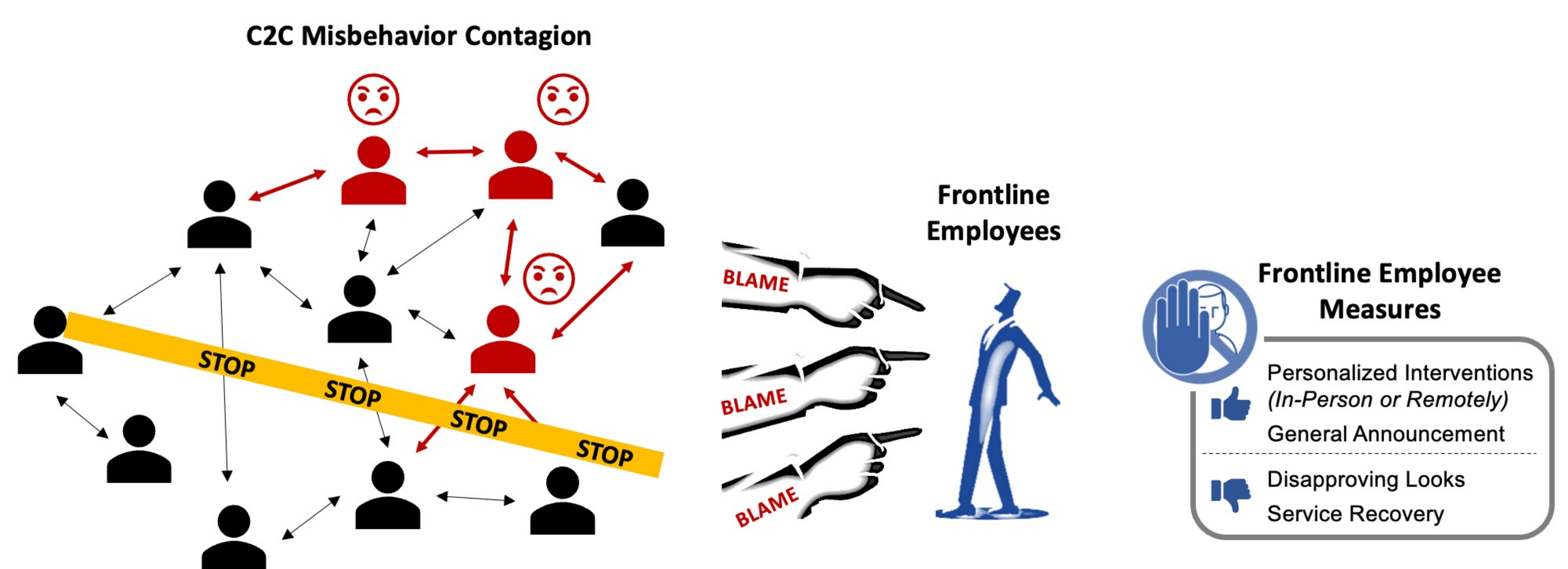
- This research is based on **social information processing theory** and **attribution theory**. Both theories account for the role of the social environment without neglecting the influence of cognitive processes on human behavior.
- Both theories allow us to explain how the actions of misbehaving customers and FLEs drive or curb C2C misbehavior contagion and to derive our **hypotheses H1-H4** (see model above).

Method

- Study 1 examines our baseline model in a **co-working context** (H1, H2). Study 2 uses an **airline context** and examines the moderating role of FLE intervention response efficacy and FLE service recovery in curbing C2C misbehavior contagion (H3, H4) (S1 and S2 were **online experiments**).
- Study 3 explores C2C misbehavior contagion in a **field experiment** (i.e., rail travel, see photos below). We observed how **rail customers**, while waiting on the platform, responded to another customer's C2C misbehavior and subsequent FLE interventions.
- We employed **actors** who acted as regular customers and were **instructed to engage in C2C misbehavior** by violating prevalent social norms and explicit service rules. To test FLE interventions, **actual FLEs** of the service provider **responded** to the actor's behavior.



Results



- Our results show that **FLE-directed blame attributions drive the spread of C2C misbehavior** while perpetrator-directed blame attributions reverse it. These blame attributions are stronger the more severely customers judge other customers' misbehavior.
- Findings further rule out alternative contagion mechanisms (social norms and emotional contagion) and show that **contagion spills over to C2C misbehavior unrelated to the initial transgression**.
- By specifying how contagion unfolds and by explicating the central role of blame attributions in C2C misbehavior contagion, this research uncovers its social dynamics, thereby **extending existing theory on customer misbehavior and attribution theory in multi-actor settings**.
- Managerially, this research **provides FLEs with explicit guidance** on what to do (**personalized FLE interventions delivered either in person or remotely**) and what not to do (disapproving looks, FLE service recovery) when faced with C2C misbehavior.

