

고객 무례함 상황에서의 발언행동: 고객 지향성의 매개 역할과 리더 지원의 조절 역할 검토

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Voice in the Face of Mistreatment: Examining the Mediating Role of Customer Orientation and The Moderating Role of Leader Support

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Abstract

This study aimed to elucidate the mediating role of customer orientation in the relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior, and to examine how leader support moderates this mediated relationship. Drawing from a sample of 309 Korean frontline employees, the results revealed that customer mistreatment negatively relates to voice behavior, with customer orientation serving as a significant mediator. Additionally, leader support was found to moderate the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer orientation, as well as the indirect effect of mistreatment on voice behavior via customer orientation. Specifically, the negative effects of customer mistreatment were attenuated under high leader support. Theoretical and practical implications will be discussed.

Keywords : Customer Mistreatment, Customer Orientation, Voice Behavior, Leader Support

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I. Introduction

In recent years, the topic of customer mistreatment has garnered significant attention within organizational spheres, especially concerning frontline employees in the service sector (Bellamkonda and Sheel, 2023; Lu, Wu, Liu, and He, 2022; Park and Kim, 2020; Wang, Chen, and Chi, 2023; Wang, Zhu, Liang, and Xie, 2022). Customer mistreatment not only affects employee morale but also has tangible costs for businesses (Diefendorif et al., 2019; Grandey, Dickter, and Sin, 2004; Harris, Kacmar, and Zivnuska, 2007). Such mistreatment, characterized by rude, disrespectful, or unreasonable behavior by customers towards employees, can lead to high turnover rates, increased absenteeism, and increased recruitment and training costs (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, and Walker, 2008; Wang et al., 2011). The gravity of its consequences lies in its detrimental effect on employees' psychological well-being and, subsequently, organizational health (Sliter et al., 2012; Yang, Lu, and Huang, 2020). Furthermore, while extant studies have shed light on several dimensions of customer mistreatment, there remain notable gaps in our understanding.

Firstly, previous research has highlighted the detrimental effects of customer mistreatment. Specifically, such mistreatment has been linked to decreases in service performance, work effort, creativity, and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB). Simultaneously, it is associated with an increase in counterproductive work behaviors (CWB) and deviant actions (Bellamkonda and Sheel, 2023; Herscovis and Barling, 2010; Lu et al., 2023; Park and Kim, 2020; Wang et al., 2022). However, there is limited insight into how customer mistreatment may influence voice behavior (Lages et al., 2023). Voice behavior, especially in the service industry, is crucial as it pertains to employees speaking up, offering suggestions, or highlighting concerns which can lead to service innovations, improved customer experiences, and proactive problem-solving (Chamberlin,

Newton, and Lepine, 2017; Morrison, 2014; Sherf, Parke, and Isaakyan, 2021). Given the weight of voice behavior in the service domain (Madhan, Shagirbasha, and Iqbal, 2022), it's imperative to understand how customer mistreatment might suppress or influence it.

Secondly, the mediating mechanisms that bridge the gap between customer mistreatment and voice behavior have not been thoroughly examined (Madhan et al., 2022). Grounded in the Social Exchange Theory (SET; Blau, 1964), which posits that interpersonal relationships are formed and sustained through a mutual exchange of resources with expectations of future reciprocity, one could hypothesize that mistreated employees might reciprocate negatively towards customers (Cameron and Webster, 2011; Cheng. Guo, Tian, and Shaalan, 2020). Customer orientation, which refers to the intent and ability of employees to identify, understand, and respond to customer needs, stands at the heart of service roles (Grizzle et al., 2009; Saxe and Weitz, 1982). Consequently, when frontline employees face mistreatment, their intrinsic motivation to cater to customer needs—driven by the norm of reciprocity—might decline, leading to diminished customer orientation. This, in turn, could lead to decreased voice behavior that is vital for the service industry (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

Thirdly, the moderating influence of leadership behavior, specifically leader support, in the dynamics of customer mistreatment, is overlooked (Zhou and George, 2001). Most studies have focused on individual characteristics that attenuate the impact of customer mistreatment such as emotional intelligence, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and resilience (Al-Hawari, Bani-Melhem, and Qurafulain, 2020; Li et al., 2023; Szczygiel and Bazińska, 2021; Yao et al., 2022). Given the demanding nature of customer-facing roles, leader support is paramount as it can foster an environment where subordinates feel valued, understood, and protected (Eisenbeiss, Knippenberg, and Boerner, 2008; Stamkou et al., 2019; Sürücü, Maslakçi, and Sesen, 2022). Drawing once again from the Social Exchange Theory, leaders can act as agents of positive exchange, potentially offsetting the negative reciprocity spurred by customer mistreatment (Wayne, Shore, and Liden, 1997; Wu and Parker, 2017). Thus, this study theorizes that leader support can attenuate the detrimental effects of customer mistreatment on employees' customer orientation.

Thus, this study aims to fill these gaps by examining how customer mistreat-

ment influences voice behavior among service sector employees, with a specific focus on the mediating role of customer orientation and the moderating effect of leader support. This approach is grounded in Social Exchange Theory, which suggests that the negative reciprocity driven by customer mistreatment can be mitigated through positive social exchanges facilitated by supportive leadership.

Therefore, this study contributes the extant studies as follows. First, while previous research has predominantly focused on outcomes like service performance, work effort, and organizational citizenship behavior, our study uniquely centers on voice behavior. This aspect is critical in the service industry for encouraging innovation and proactive problem-solving, yet its relationship with customer mistreatment is underexplored. Second, the author delves into the mediating role of customer orientation—a key element in service roles, yet not thoroughly examined in the context of customer mistreatment. By doing so, the author seeks to elucidate how mistreated employees' orientation to serve customers affects their likelihood of engaging in voice behavior. Third, this study emphasizes the critical role of leadership in shaping positive social exchanges that buffer employees against external adversities such as customer mistreatment. This nuanced understanding adds to SET by showing how supportive leadership can foster positive reciprocal behaviors, counteracting the negative impacts of customer mistreatment. Fourth, this study extends extant SET research by applying SET to the domain of customer–employee interactions, a relatively underexplored. By demonstrating how negative exchanges with customers (mistreatment) influence employee behaviors (voice behavior), this study broadens the scope of SET, emphasizing its applicability in understanding external stakeholder interactions.

In summary, based on SET framework, our research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how customer mistreatment impacts employee behaviors in the service sector, particularly highlighting the roles of customer orientation and leader support in this dynamic. By doing so, it contributes to both academic literature and practical implications in managing service sector employees effectively.

II. Hypotheses Development

2.1 The Relationship between Customer Mistreatment and Voice Behavior

Social Exchange Theory (SET) posits that human interactions are driven by a series of exchanges where individuals anticipate certain benefits in return for their actions or contributions (Blau, 1964). At the core of SET lies the principle of reciprocity, suggesting that positive actions from one party will lead to positive responses from the other and vice versa (Gouldner, 1960). Drawing upon this theory, this study can unravel the intricate relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior.

Customer mistreatment, often characterized by behaviors such as rudeness, belittling, or unreasonable demands (Skarlicki, van Jaarsveld, & Walker, 2008), stands in stark opposition to the positive and respectful exchanges advocated by SET. Such negative encounters can drain emotional resources (Grandey et al., 2004) and lead to feelings of violation, resentment, or perceived injustice among employees (Hershcovis and Barling, 2010). As SET underscores the importance of reciprocity, when employees face such negative behaviors from customers, they might become less motivated to engage in behaviors that aren't directly required of them or that go above and beyond their basic duties (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

Voice behavior, a form of proactive or discretionary behavior, involves employees speaking up, offering suggestions, or highlighting concerns for the betterment of the organization (Chamberlin et al., 2017; Morrison, 2014). It plays a pivotal role in organizational adaptability, improvement, and innovation (Parke, and Isaakyan, 2021; Sherf et al., 2021). However, for employees to actively engage in voice behavior, they require a supportive environment that encourages open communication and values their inputs (Detert and Burris, 2007).

Drawing upon SET, when frontline employees experience mistreatment from customers, the negative reciprocity associated with such encounters may deter them from engaging in proactive behaviors like voicing concerns or suggestions (Cameron and Webster, 2011; Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). Simply put, the perceived

lack of respect and appreciation from customers can stifle the employees' intrinsic motivation to contribute beyond their explicit job roles (Cheng et al., 2020; Wayne et al., 1997). If employees feel they are not being treated with respect, their willingness to engage in behaviors that are not directly rewarded or acknowledged (Liang et al., 2012), like voice behavior, might diminish.

Given the central tenets of SET and the documented effects of negative interactions on employee behaviors, it is logical to hypothesize a negative relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior. Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1. Customer mistreatment is negatively related to voice behavior.

2.2 The Mediating Role of Customer Orientation

Social Exchange Theory (SET) contends that interactions between individuals are based on mutual exchanges where anticipated benefits drive their actions or contributions (Blau, 1964). One of the central principles of this theory is reciprocity, suggesting that actions from one party lead to corresponding responses from another (Gouldner, 1960). This principle forms the foundational understanding of how customer mistreatment may influence voice behavior through the mediation of customer orientation. Customer orientation refers to the propensity and ability of employees to identify, comprehend, and appropriately respond to customer needs (Grizzle et al., 2009; Saxe and Weitz, 1982). It is an essential facet in service roles, reflecting the employee's dedication to fulfilling customer requirements and enhancing their overall experience (Anaza and Rutherford, 2012; Zablah et al., 2012; Zhang, 2010). A high degree of customer orientation suggests that employees are willing to go above and beyond to ensure customer satisfaction and address their concerns.

Drawing from SET, when frontline employees encounter mistreatment from customers, such as disrespectful or demeaning behavior, they might perceive a break in the positive exchange dynamics (Cameron and Webster, 2011; Cheng et al., 2020; Skarlickiet al., 2008). The negative reciprocity triggered by such interactions might demotivate employees from actively engaging in behaviors that cater to customer needs and preferences (Cheng et al., 2020), leading to a decline in their customer orientation (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). This is be-

cause consistent negative experiences might erode their motivation to understand and cater to customer requirements, viewing such efforts as futile or unappreciated (Grandey et al., 2004).

Employees with a high customer orientation are more likely to voice out concerns, provide suggestions, or highlight areas of potential improvement, considering their intrinsic motivation to better the customer experience (Gazzoli, Chaker, Zablah, and Brown, 2022; Lam and Mayer, 2014). However, if their orientation towards customers diminishes due to recurrent mistreatment, their likelihood to engage in proactive voice behavior may also wane (Liang et al., 2012). This suppression emerges as they might no longer perceive the value in advocating for improvements or changes, especially if they feel detached or disillusioned by negative customer interactions (Gazzoli et al., 2022).

Given the foundational tenets of SET, it is plausible to posit that while customer mistreatment directly hampers voice behavior, an essential pathway through which this effect is channeled is the decline in customer orientation. The negative interactions dampen the employees' zest for customer-centric behaviors (Cameron and Webster, 2011), which in turn mutes their voice behaviors aimed at enhancing the service environment. Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2. Customer orientation mediates the relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior.

2.3 The Moderating Role of Leader Support

Social Exchange Theory (SET) is rooted in the principle that human interactions are shaped by a mutual exchange, where individuals anticipate benefits based on their contributions or actions (Blau, 1964). One cornerstone of SET is the concept of reciprocity, emphasizing that actions from one party elicit corresponding reactions from the other (Gouldner, 1960). Using this theoretical foundation, this study can delve into how leader support moderates the relationship between customer mistreatment and customer orientation. Customer mistreatment, often characterized by rudeness, belittling, or unreasonable demands (Skarlicki et al., 2008), can disrupt the positive exchange dynamics advocated by SET. Such mistreatment can, over time, erode an employee's motivation and drive to cater

to customer needs, thus diminishing their customer orientation (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005).

Leadership plays a crucial role in shaping the experiences and behaviors of employees (Eisenbeiss et al., 2008). Leader support represents the extent to which leaders provide emotional, instrumental, and informational support to their subordinates (Stamkou et al., 2019; Sürücü et al., 2022; Wayne et al., 1997; Wu and Parker, 2017). In a high-leader support environment, employees often feel valued, protected, and understood, fostering positive reciprocity and nurturing their willingness to invest in their roles (Stamkou et al., 2019; Wu and Parker, 2017; Zhou and George, 2001).

Drawing from SET, in the presence of leader support, the negative experiences stemming from customer mistreatment may be attenuated. The reason is that even if customers mistreat employees, the consistent support from leaders can serve as a counterbalance, reaffirming the employees' value and worth in the organization (Walumbwa et al., 2011; Wu and Parker, 2017). As a result, employees might be more resilient in maintaining their customer orientation, viewing the mistreatment as isolated incidents rather than normative organizational experiences (La Rocco and Jones, 1978). In contrast, in low leader support environments, the negative repercussions of customer mistreatment might be amplified, further eroding customer orientation, as employees might perceive both customers and the organization at large as devaluing their efforts and contributions (La Rocco and Jones, 1978).

Therefore, understanding the interaction between customer mistreatment and leader support becomes paramount in predicting customer orientation. A supportive leader might act as a buffer the detrimental effects of customer mistreatment. Given this intricate interplay informed by SET, this study predicts the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 3: Leader support moderates the negative effect of customer mistreatment on customer orientation. Specifically, when leader support is high rather than when it is low, the negative effect would be attenuated.

2.4 The Integrative Model

An integrative approach, grounded in comprehensive theoretical frameworks,

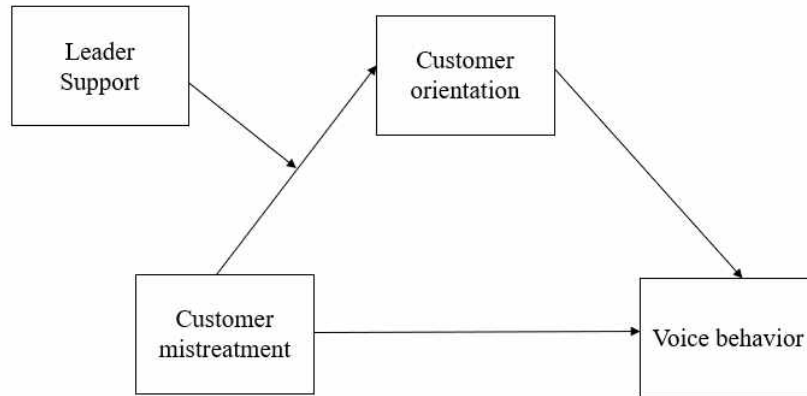
can provide a nuanced understanding of the interplay between various constructs in organizational behavior. By bridging mediation and moderation processes, we aim to unravel the indirect effect of customer mistreatment on voice behavior, taking into account the pivotal roles of both customer orientation and leader support.

Grounded in the principles of SET (Blau, 1964), when leader support is high, employees might perceive mistreatment as isolated incidents rather than reflective of the broader organizational environment. The sustained support from leaders can bolster their resilience, attenuating the decline in customer orientation even in the face of mistreatment. This, in turn, sustains voice behavior, as employees continue to feel valued and heard in their organization. Thus, the indirect effect of customer mistreatment on voice behavior via customer orientation is reduced.

Conversely, in environments with low leader support, employees might perceive mistreatment as a normative experience, compounded by the perceived lack of organizational backing. This perception amplifies the negative impact on their customer orientation, which subsequently suppresses their voice behavior even further. In this situation, the indirect effect of mistreatment on voice behavior through customer orientation intensifies. Drawing upon this integrative model, this study proposes the following hypothesis. Also, our theoretical model is illustrated in Figure 1.

Hypothesis 4: The indirect effect of customer mistreatment on voice behavior via customer orientation is moderated by leader support. Specifically, when leader support is high, the indirect effect will be attenuated compared to when it is low.

<Figure 1> Theoretical Model



III. Method

3.1 Sample and Procedure

Data were gathered from 337 full-time employees using an online questionnaire distributed by a survey company in Korea, from August 29, 2023, to August 30, 2023. To enhance the authenticity and dependability of the collected data, attention check items were embedded within the survey (e.g., “Please click strongly disagree”). After scanning the responses, 29 respondents who did not successfully complete the attention check items were omitted. This refinement led to a finalized 309 participants. Within this participants, 145 were female (47%) and 163 were male (53%). The average age of the respondents stood at 38.21 years ($SD = 7.81$). A significant portion, 271 in total (about 88% of the participants), had achieved a 4-year university qualification. The largest group of respondents, comprising 157 individuals (51%) came from the services industry, followed by 69 respondents from manufacturing (22%) and the residual 83 individuals (27%) were affiliated with diverse other sectors. Also, on average, the participants had 9.21 years of organizational tenure ($SD = 7.24$).

3.2 Measurement

This study utilized questionnaires with items based on a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. All measurement items are displayed in Table 1. First, customer mistreatment was measured with seven items from Skarlicki et al (2008). This construct was assessed using items that captured the frequency and nature of negative behaviors exhibited by customers toward the employees. A sample item is: “Customer often belittle or demean me during interactions”. Customer orientation was measured with three items developed by Stock and Hoyer (2005) that gauged employees’ willingness to address and prioritize customer needs and concern. A sample item is: “I voluntarily assist customers even if it means going beyond job requirements”. Also, the author measured voice behavior using five items from Morrison (2014). These items were tapped into using items that looked into how often and willingly employees raised concerns, offered suggestions, or highlighted potential areas of improvement. A sample item is: “I proactively develop and make suggestions for issues that may influence the work unit”. In addition, leader support was measured with extant seven items from Wayne et al (1997). These items assessed the perceived emotional, instrumental, and informational backing employees felt they received from their leaders. A sample item is: “My supervisor understands my problems and needs”. Finally, the author controlled for variables like age, gender, and educational level, as these might influence the perceptions of employees regarding mistreatment, their orientation towards customers, voice behaviors, and perceptions of leader support.

<Table 1> Measurement Items

Measurement	Items	Cronbach's alpha	Reference
Customer mistreatment	1. My customer took out anger on me.	0.92	Skarlicki et al (2008)
	2. My customer made insulting comments or stupid.		
	3. My customer treated me as if I am inferior or stupid.		
	4. My customer yelled at me.		
	5. My customer showed that they		

	are irritated or impatient.		
	6. My customer spoke aggressively to me.		
	7. My customer made comments that questioned my competence.		
Customer orientation	1. I voluntarily assist customers even if it means going beyond job requirements.	0.90	Stock and Hoyer (2005)
	2. I help customers with problems beyond what is expected or required.		
	3. I often go above and beyond the call of duty when serving customers.		
Leader support	1. My supervisor understands my problems and needs.	0.88	Wayne et al (1997)
	2. I am aware of how satisfied my supervisor is with what I do.		
	3. My supervisor recognizes my potential.		
	4. My supervisor uses his/her power to help me solve problems in my work.		
	5. My supervisor would 'bail me out' at his/her expense.		
	6. I have enough confidence in my supervisor that I would defend and justify his/her decision if he/she were not present to do so.		
	7. I have a very good working relationship with my supervisor.		
Voice behavior	1. I proactively develop and make suggestions for issues that may influence the work unit.	0.94	Morrison (2014)
	2. I proactively suggest new projects which are beneficial to the work unit.		
	3. I raise suggestions to improve the unit's working		

	procedures.		
	4. I make constructive suggestions to improve the unit's operation.		
	5. I proactively voice out constructive suggestions that help the unit reach its goals.		

IV. Data Analyses and Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability Testing

Table 2 delineates the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations for the study variables. Regarding the reliability of measures, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients underscored the internal consistency of the scales used for each construct. As shown in Table 1, the reliabilities of customer mistreatment, customer orientation, leader support, and voice behavior were 0.92, 0.90, 0.88, 0.94, respectively. These values suggest a high degree of reliability for the measurement items, indicating their consistency in gauging their respective constructs.

Also, a significant negative correlation emerged between customer mistreatment and both customer orientation ($r = -0.17$, $p < 0.05$) and voice behavior ($r = -0.21$, $p < 0.01$). Moreover, a notable positive correlation was observed between customer orientation and voice behavior ($r = 0.25$, $p < 0.01$). These findings underscore the assertion that customer orientation could act as a mediator in the relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior.

<Table 2> Descriptive Statistics

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	38.21	7.81						
2. Gender	.47	.50	-.12**					
3. EDU	3.16	.72	.15**	.07				
4. CM	3.04	1.06	-.05	.03	-.08			
5. LS	3.97	.96	.07	.08	.10	-.25***		
6. CO	3.81	.89	.13*	-.06	.11*	-.32***	.33***	
7. VB	4.17	.93	.10	-.14*	.09	-.45***	.18**	.42***

Note. For gender, 1 = women, 0 = men. CM = customer mistreatment; LS = leader support;
CO = customer orientation; VB = voice behavior
* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

4.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis and Common Method Variance

For the assurance of distinct empirical uniqueness among study variables, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was executed. As a result, the hypothesized four-factor model provided an excellent fit to the data: $\chi^2(177) = 451.66$, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94; RMSEA = 0.06. As shown in Table 3, the theoretical model outperformed alternative model (e.g., 3-factor model, 2-factor model and 1-factor model), underscoring the theoretical model's superiority.

In addition, the author addressed possible concerns about common method variance using Harman's single-factor test. The results showed a single factor explained only 22.79% of the variance, which is much less than the 50% benchmark suggested by Podsakoff and Organ (1986). This means that common method variance is probably not a major issue in this study.

Also, prior to hypothesis testing, all variables in this study were mean-centered to minimize potential multicollinearity. Moreover, to assess possible multicollinearity issues between the independent variable, customer mistreatment, and the moderating variable, leader support, the author computed the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and the Tolerance values, drawing from the approach suggested by Thompson, Kim, Aloe, and Becker (2017). The VIF values for customer mistreatment and leader support were .914 and .914, respectively, while the Tolerance statistics were 1.271 for both. These values adhere to the commonly accepted criteria that the Tolerance should be greater than 0.2, and the VIF should be less than 10 to rule out serious multicollinearity concerns (Farrar & Glauber, 1967).

Additionally, the author performed exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to validate the factor structure for customer mistreatment (7 items), customer orientation (3 items), leader support (7 items), and voice behavior (5 items). As shown in Table 4, the EFA results provide compelling evidence for the distinctiveness of the four constructs. The factor loadings are well above the commonly accepted threshold of .40, suggesting that each set of items reliably measures its corresponding construct. This confirms the factorial validity of the

measures used in the study, supporting their use in further analyses.

<Table 3> The Results of CFA

Model	$\chi^2(df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$
4-factor	451.66 (177)	0.95	0.94	0.06	
3-factor	882.91 (180)	0.85	0.83	0.11	431.25 (3)**
2-factor	1062.75 (182)	0.61	0.59	0.16	611.09 (5)**
1-factor	1390.28 (183)	0.48	0.47	0.24	938.62 (6)**

Note)**: $p < .01$

4 factor: Customer mistreatment, leader support, customer orientation, voice behavior

3 factor: Customer mistreatment + leader support, customer orientation, voice behavior

2 factor: Customer mistreatment + leader support + customer orientation, voice behavior

1 factor: Customer mistreatment + leader support + customer orientation + voice behavior

<Table 4> The Results of EFA

Items	Factor			
	Customer mistreatment	Customer orientation	Leader support	Voice behavior
CM1	0.81	0.02	0.07	0.00
CM2	0.79	-0.01	0.05	0.04
CM3	0.82	0.00	0.03	0.02
CM4	0.78	0.03	0.04	0.01
CM5	0.77	0.04	0.02	-0.01
CM6	0.80	0.01	0.03	0.03
CM7	0.83	-0.02	0.04	0.05
CI1	0.08	0.82	0.02	0.01
CI2	0.05	0.80	0.00	0.03
CI3	0.04	0.83	-0.01	-0.01
LS1	0.01	0.04	0.76	0.00
LS2	0.02	0.05	0.79	0.01
LS3	-0.01	-0.01	0.80	0.03
LS4	0.00	0.03	0.81	0.02
LS5	0.03	0.09	0.77	0.00
LS6	0.02	-0.02	0.75	0.01
LS7	0.04	0.01	0.74	0.02
VB1	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.78
VB2	-0.01	0.02	0.01	0.80
VB3	0.01	0.03	-0.02	0.77
VB4	0.02	0.00	0.04	0.75
VB5	0.03	-0.02	0.03	0.79

Eigen Value	4.35	2.58	3.92	2.06
V a r i a n c e Explained(%)	29.32	18.43	10.29	9.21
C u m u l a t i v e Variance(%)	29.32	47.75	58.04	67.25

Note. CM=customer mistreatment, CO=customer orientation, LS=leader support, VB=voice behavior.

4.3 Hypotheses Tests

The author employed hierarchical regression to test the direct relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior. After controlling for gender, age, and education level, the results revealed that customer mistreatment was significantly and negatively related to voice behavior ($\beta = -.33$, $p < .001$). Thus, Hypothesis 1 was supported.

Next, the author test the hypothesis 2 to examine the mediating effect of customer orientation. In Model 2 in Table 5, customer mistreatment significantly predicted customer orientation ($\beta = -.25$, $p < .001$). Also, as shown in Model 5 in Table 5, customer orientation significantly predict the voice behavior ($\beta = 0.20$, $p < .001$). To further verify the mediation effect of customer orientation, a bootstrapping analysis with 5,000 samples was conducted. The total effect of the customer mistreatment on voice behavior was significant, with an estimate of 0.48 (SE = 0.06, 95% CI [0.37, 0.59]). When accounting for the customer orientation, the direct effect of the customer mistreatment on voice behavior was also significant, with an estimate of 0.25 (SE = 0.05, 95% CI [0.15, 0.35]). Most importantly, the bootstrapping analysis revealed a significant indirect effect of the customer mistreatment on voice behavior through customer orientation. The indirect effect was estimated to be 0.23 with a standard error of 0.04. The confidence interval for this effect was entirely above zero ([0.16, 0.31]), indicating that customer orientation significantly mediates the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. In summary, these results provide robust support for the mediating role of customer orientation in the relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior, supporting Hypothesis 2.

Next, to assess the moderating effect of leader support, a hierarchical regression was performed. As shown in Model 2 in Table 5, the interaction term

was found to be significant ($\beta = .12$, $p < .01$). To probe the interaction further, the author plotted the simple slopes in Figure 2. For high leader support (+1 SD), the negative effect of customer mistreatment on customer orientation was attenuated ($\beta = -.13$, $p < .01$). Whereas, for low leader support (-1 SD), the effect was more pronounced ($\beta = -.51$, $p < .001$). This results support to Hypothesis 3.

To test the conditional indirect effect, the author utilized a bootstrapping method with 5,000 samples. As shown in Table 6, the results indicated that the indirect effect of customer mistreatment on voice behavior via customer orientation was significant and more negative for those with low leader support (indirect effect = $-.35$, $SE = .05$, 95% CI $[-.45, -.26]$) compared to those with high leader support (indirect effect = $-.18$, $SE = .04$, 95% CI $[-.26, -.11]$). These findings provide evidence for the moderated mediation posited in Hypothesis 4.

<Table 5> The Results of Hierarchical Regression

Variables	Customer orientation		Voice behavior		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Age	.12*	.10	.07	.08	.09
Gender	-.05	-.04	-.02	-.01	-.03
Education	.08	.06	.03	.04	.05
CM		-.25***		-.30***	-.28***
LS		.15**			.18**
CM \times LS		.12**			.10*
CO					.20***
VB					
R ²	.03	.15**	.02	.10**	.20***
ΔR^2		.12**		.08**	.10**

Note. N=309, CM = customer mistreatment; LS = leader support; CO = customer orientation;

VB = voice behavior

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

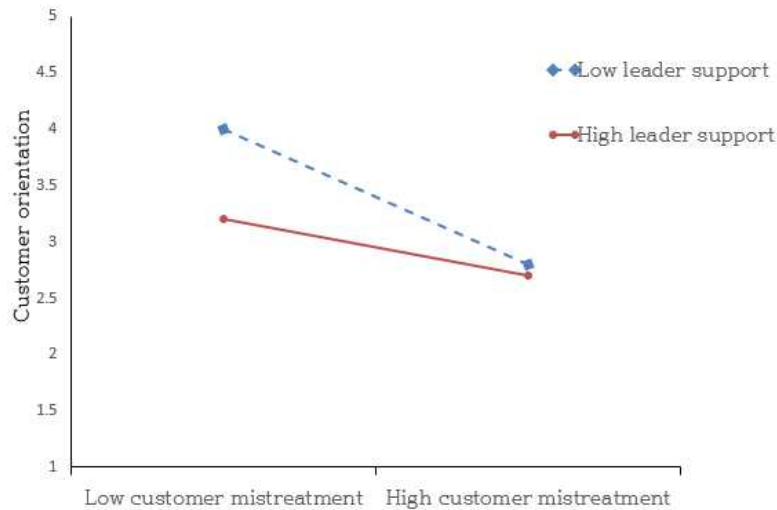
<Table 6> The Results of Bootstrapping Analysis

	Customer mistreatment → Customer orientation → Voice behavior		
	b	SE	95% CI
High leader support	-.18	.04	[-.26, -.11]
Low leader support	-.35	.05	[-.45, -.26]

Note. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000.

Confidence intervals that do not contain zero indicate significant indirect effects.

<Figure 2> The Moderating Effect of Leader Support



V. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the intricate dynamics between customer mistreatment, voice behavior, customer orientation, and the potential moderating effect of leader support, framed within the context of Social Exchange Theory (SET). This findings elucidate several key insights into these relationships.

First, as posited in Hypothesis 1, there was a significant negative relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior. This aligns with SET, which posits that negative interactions can lead to retaliatory or withdrawal behaviors, as evidenced by the reduced likelihood of employees expressing their opinions

after experiencing mistreatment. This emphasizes the potential detrimental impact of negative customer interactions on employee engagement and involvement.

In Hypothesis 2, we proposed and confirmed that customer orientation mediates the relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior. This mediation resonates with SET's principle of reciprocal exchanges, where mistreated employees might reduce their customer-focused behavior, leading to decreased voice behavior. This pathway suggests that mistreatment can erode the extent to which employees prioritize and focus on customer needs, subsequently dampening their motivation or perceived safety in voicing concerns or suggestions.

Hypothesis 3 introduced the idea that leader support could moderate the negative effects of customer mistreatment on customer orientation. This echoes SET's emphasis on the value of positive social exchanges in the workplace. In conditions of high leader support, the detrimental impact of customer mistreatment on customer orientation was significantly attenuated. This highlights the pivotal role leaders can play in buffering against the adverse effects of challenging customer interactions. Specifically, leader support can provide a protective layer, perhaps by offering emotional or instrumental support, which can mitigate some of the negative consequences of customer mistreatment.

Finally, Hypothesis 4 suggested a moderated mediation where the indirect effect of customer mistreatment on voice behavior, via customer orientation, would be influenced by leader support. The bootstrapping analysis revealed that this effect was indeed present and varied significantly based on the level of leader support. The negative indirect effect was more pronounced when leader support was low, but was reduced under conditions of high leader support.

Taken together, this study not only demonstrates the application of SET in understanding employee reactions to customer mistreatment but also highlights the importance of supportive leadership in managing these dynamics. While customer mistreatment can negatively affect employee behaviors and attitudes, leader support can act as a mitigating factor, reducing potential harm and maintaining employee engagement. Organizations should not only strive to reduce instances of customer mistreatment but also ensure that leaders are equipped to offer the necessary support to their teams, bolstering resilience and fostering a proactive voice culture.

5.1 Theoretical Implications

The current research offers several noteworthy theoretical contributions. First, this study extends SET by illustrating how external factors, such as customer mistreatment, significantly influence voice behavior. Previous studies have mostly considered internal organizational factors as antecedents to voice behavior (e.g., organizational culture, job satisfaction). This research underscores the external factors, particularly customer mistreatment, as a significant determinant of voice behavior. This broadens the spectrum of considerations for researchers examining what motivates or inhibits employee voice in the workplace.

Second, the current study introduces customer orientation as a mediating mechanism. Within the framework of SET, by empirically validating customer orientation as a mediator between customer mistreatment and voice behavior, this study introduces a new mechanism that explains how external customer interactions can translate to internal organizational behaviors. This offers a fresh perspective, suggesting that how employees view and prioritize customers can be a pivotal link in understanding their engagement and proactive behaviors within the organization.

Third, this study highlights the protective role of leadership. In line with SET, the study emphasizes the critical role of leadership in shaping positive social exchanges that buffer employees against external adversities. While the role of leadership in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors is well-established, this study sheds light on its specific moderating role in the context of negative customer interactions. This provides a more nuanced understanding of the buffering effects of leadership, suggesting that leaders can shield employees not just from internal organizational challenges but also from external adversities.

Fourth, the finding that the indirect effect of customer mistreatment on voice behavior, channeled through customer orientation, varies based on leader support introduces a more complex interplay of factors affecting workplace behavior. This adds depth to the literature on moderated mediation, suggesting that organizational outcomes resulting from external interactions can be contingent on multiple internal factors operating in tandem.

Fifth, this study contributes to SET by broadening SET's application to cus-

customer–employee interactions. Previous SET research has predominantly focused on exchanges within the organization, particularly between employees and their supervisors or peers. Our study extends this by applying SET to the domain of customer–employee interactions, a relatively under–explored area in SET research. By demonstrating how negative exchanges with customers (mistreatment) influence employee behaviors (voice behavior), this study broadens the scope of SET, emphasizing its applicability in understanding external stakeholder interactions. Also, by highlighting the moderating role of leader support, this research introduces an additional layer of complexity into SET. It illustrates how the quality of internal social exchanges (e.g., perceived leader support) can influence the employee's reaction to external negative exchanges. This nuanced exploration provides a more comprehensive understanding of how different types of social exchanges (supportive leader versus rude customers) interact within the SET framework.

5.2 Practical Implications

This research findings not only contribute to the academic discourse but also offer several actionable insights for practitioners. First, given the detrimental impact of customer mistreatment on voice behavior, organizations should prioritize training programs that equip employees with the skills to handle challenging customer interactions. These could include communication strategies, emotional intelligence workshops, and stress–management techniques to navigate and recover from negative customer encounters.

Second, since customer orientation mediates the relationship between mistreatment and voice behavior, organizations can benefit by fostering a strong customer–centric culture. This could be achieved by emphasizing the value of customers in organizational narratives, rewarding customer–centric behaviors, and ensuring that employees have the resources and training to prioritize customer needs effectively.

Third, the significant moderating role of leader support suggests that effective leadership can act as a buffer against the negative effects of customer mistreatment. Organizations should prioritize leadership training that emphasizes supportive behaviors, active listening, and strategies to uplift team morale in the

face of external challenges.

Fourth, given the potential decrease in voice behavior following customer mistreatment, organizations should establish clear and accessible platforms for employees to voice their concerns, suggestions, or experiences. This could be in the form of regular feedback sessions, anonymous suggestion boxes, or digital platforms, ensuring employees feel safe and encouraged to share their perspectives.

Fifth, considering the negative implications of customer mistreatment, organizations might benefit from implementing wellness initiatives or mental health support systems. Such programs could help employees cope with the emotional toll of difficult customer interactions, ensuring their well-being and sustained engagement.

5.3 Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the above implications, there are some limitations in this study. First, one of the primary limitations of this study stems from its cross-sectional design. Given that the data was collected at a single point in time, it precludes our ability to make causal inferences or understand the temporal dynamics between customer mistreatment, voice behavior, customer orientation, and leader support. Future studies could adopt a longitudinal approach, collecting data across multiple time points. This would allow researchers to examine the causal relationships and temporal patterns between the variables of interest more robustly.

Second, relying on self-report measures could introduce biases such as social desirability or recall biases. It is possible that participants may have either over-reported or under-reported certain behaviors or perceptions, leading to potential distortions in the relationships explored. To mitigate potential biases from self-reporting, future studies could incorporate multi-source feedback, such as supervisor evaluations or peer assessments, providing a more holistic view of voice behavior and other variables.

Third, the current research was based on Korean employees, which provides valuable insights into the dynamics in this cultural context. However, this specificity might limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural or organizational settings. Cultural nuances, societal norms, or organizational practices

unique to Korea could influence the observed relationships. It would be enlightening to compare the observed dynamics across different cultural contexts. This could shed light on whether the relationships between customer mistreatment, voice behavior, customer orientation, and leader support are universally consistent or are influenced by cultural variables.

Fourth, beyond customer orientation and leader support, future research might explore other potential mediators (e.g., emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction) and moderators (e.g., job autonomy, organizational support) that could influence the relationship between customer mistreatment and voice behavior.

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