



Internal Marketing Illegitimate Tasks & Customer-Oriented Behavior: A Theoretical Perspective

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Abstract: Internal marketing (IM) is a blunt step on the part of organization to acknowledge the key role of employees in developing or making it successful. While in customer-oriented behaviors employees offer a special status to customers by valuing their true needs. Many benefits are attached to giving quality service to customers and research is full of instances and evidence to prove the point. If customer service is not improving and instead waning despite a pro-employee approach, current theoretical perspective answers it. Illegitimate tasks feature heavily in modern-day organizations. The desire and dream to serve customers can face colossal challenge from indulging people into tasks their job roles do not support. Service firms can wield positive influence by enabling employees to work on their core tasks. Hence the argument is illegitimate tasks are a hurdle in building a solid relationship with employees and thus customers. Organizations can seek strength and scale from this model to encourage customer-oriented behaviors.

Key Words: Internal Marketing, Customer-Oriented Behavior, Illegitimate Tasks, Employees, Customers

Introduction

Product quality is already on a certain saturation level in a variety of product lines and now competition is shrinking profit margins everyday (Zarrin et al., 2025). That is why service quality is so much emphasized to create differentiation. Though customer value is a sum of both product value and service value (Zarrin et al., 2025); but the dominant share of service industry is a reality that no one can deny. Hence, frontline employees role becomes more important. Over the years customer expectation is going up and up (Zarrin et al., 2025). So, they expect to get those features of services that have not been categorically requested at any time (Zarrin et al., 2025). Quality strategies of a service firm have a central character, that is front line employee; and owing to this fact it is a critical part of customer orientation (Peccei & Rosenthal, 2000).

COB is a special type of behavior centred around assisting customers and voicing their concerns (Hu & Choudrie, 2025). COB is belief system that prioritize interests of customers over other considerations in order to develop a stable and prosperous organization (Ismail, 2023). In COB, employees look after the best interests of customers. Primary concern in customer orientation is to deliver high value to customers on a continuous basis (Ismail, 2023). This is how switching intentions can be suppressed and retention intentions can be encouraged (Ismail, 2023). Literature shows that customer orientation can effectively work on service quality, customer engagement and firm performance; emphasizing to establish a culture of service where needs and expectations are met (Dzogbenuku et al., 2025; Nilasari et al., 2025). Good thing about customer-oriented employees is they are capable of adjusting their behaviors for customers' need fulfillment as well as the work environment to go well with customers' demands (Matsuo, 2024).

Actions of employees are much deep-seated going beyond positive attitudes and entering into a world requiring concerted effort and energy to serve customers (Peccei & Rosenthal, 1997). It is not without cost and the one who has paid this cost is none other than the employee (Peccei & Rosenthal, 1997). That is why to justify this cost organizations continuously work to improve their status and bring in the concept of internal customer. Globalization has substantially

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increased competition and a mounting challenge is how to discover strategies that could help companies survive (Baca & Reshidi, 2024; Hussin et al., 2023; Čivić et al., 2025). Amid high competition and evolving customer preferences companies are increasingly shifting their focus towards human capital to calm competition and bolster organizational competitiveness (Baca & Reshidi, 2024; Hussin et al., 2023; Čivić et al., 2025). When an organization applies marketing approaches towards its own employees then it is called internal marketing (Khoshkalam Soleymandarabi et al., 2024). IM is a strategic tool at the disposal of an organization to enhance their bond with employees (Brown, 2025; Hu & Choudrie, 2025; Hussin et al., 2023; Saad Khalil El-Sherbiny, 2025). Organizational effectiveness is an outcome of better IM techniques (Hussin et al., 2023; Čivić et al., 2025).

Employees do not bound themselves to a set of duties but go beyond them to serve customers in customer orientation (Xia et al., 2021). At the same time Xia et al. (2021) also say that provision of resources to employees is the responsibility of organization. Amongst those resources the present study proposes to be provided by organization are in the form of IM. In Hu and Choudrie (2025) view IM is a holistic management process relying on marketing strategies to understand mutual exchanges that happen between employer and employee within a firm to achieve objectives. Aim of IM is to improve satisfaction and commitment of employees to a level where they enhance service quality to organizational customers (Khoshkalam Soleymandarabi et al., 2024; Čivić et al., 2025; Saad Khalil El-Sherbiny, 2025). Studies on IM and COB are their but due to inconsistency in the findings of researchers where one finds no relationship between the two (Ferdous, et al., 2021) while others showing a significantly positive relationship (Fu, 2013); stimulates to explore more of this relationship. Moreover, the studies (FU, 2013; Park & Tran, 2018) that have been done so far have only managed to explore limited number of IM dimensions or combination of those dimensions' thus inviting other researchers to do more investigation on this relationship. A justification, therefore, exists to fill this critical research gap. Since customer-oriented behaviors have a direct bearing on quality service and the best organizational offerings (IM dimensions) can only lure employees to serve customers well.

Employees generally expect to perform duties for what they are exactly hire for but the reality is they also have to undertake work that contradicts fairness norms and judiciousness practices (Iqbal et al., 2025). This is what illegitimate task is; a task not formally a part of an individual job and still he has to carry it out; compromising fairness principles. Its two types are unnecessary and unreasonable tasks. unnecessary tasks are of frivolous nature that can be avoided by restructuring work or improving methods. In unreasonable tasks the violation is more severe and one has to do tasks of either higher level or lower level that are in no way could be expected from the person. The competition has also given rise to illegitimate tasks as once defined job boundaries are now blurring (Stengård et al., 2024). So, illegitimate task is just the appropriate word to describe this modern workplace stressor (Iqbal et al., 2025). A common theoretical framework to understand illegitimate tasks is stress as offence to self (SOS) (Stengård et al., 2024). Owing to its significance and prevalence more and more researchers are showing interest in illegitimate tasks (Stengård et al., 2024). Though illegitimate tasks forcing stressful reactions and responses are quite well documented in the literature; it is a new discovery leaving many areas that are yet to be discussed (Park & Park, 2024). Moreover, its origins are in Europe; majority of research work comes from Western European countries and Asian perspective is largely not in the studies (Park & Park, 2024). Scholars like Shanchang and Khantong (2024) call it of huge significance to unravel theoretical and real-world aspects of it in present day organizations. Since illegitimate tasks are notorious for their negative character; plus, they are a threat to the jobholder in various ways like affecting performance (Iqbal et al., 2025). That is why their moderating role is being brought to light for the first time that they may affect the relationship between IM and COB. Thus, all these facts make it a vital gap begging for researchers' intervention.

Social exchange theory will underpin our current research. According to Vuong et al., (2025) role of SET is crucial to understand reciprocal relations between organization and employees. IM depicts a positive package for employees pushing them to return back in the form of customer oriented behaviors; thus establishing a reciprocal relationship. However, an increased reliance on illegitimate tasks can influence the powerful partnership of IM and COB. The priorities promoted by IM and COB one crowning employee and the other knighting customers respectively can find a punch from illegitimate tasks. Since illegitimate tasks are not favored by employee so according to SET they are likely to lessen their customer orientation. Moderators according to Gonzalez-Mulé and Aquinis (2018) have been a rich source

of advancing a theory or/and guiding managers to work in a certain way. Moreover, multidimensionality of IM also offers us the potential to expand boundaries of social exchange theory. Since frontline employees have a critical role in connecting organizations of service nature to their customers; that is why it is important to see what motivates people to undertake customer-oriented behavior (Ferdous, et al., 2021; Ferdous & Polonsky, 2014). All the above arguments and evidence from literature and theory staunchly back this idea that IM, COB and illegitimate tasks in one model can have impactful contribution on theoretical front.

Literature Review

Customer-Oriented Behavior

COB is a special type of behavior centred around assisting customers and voicing their concerns (Hu & Choudrie, 2025). Customer orientation is the most critical of intangible strategic resources for the success of an SME (Ismail, 2023). This is how switching intentions can be suppressed and retention intentions can be encouraged (Ismail, 2023). Primary concern in customer orientation is to deliver high value to customers on a continuous basis (Ismail, 2023). Higher levels of customer oriented behaviors mean employees are dealing customers respectfully and also raising the quality of service (Vuong et al., 2025). COB is belief system that prioritizes interests of customers over other considerations in order to develop a stable and prosperous organization (Ismail, 2023). Good thing about customer oriented employees is they are capable of adjusting their behaviors and work environments to go well with customers' demands (Matsuo, 2024). Though HR considers employee as asset but Xu et al. (2023) call customer-oriented ones as true assets. COB emancipates an organization from the clutches of short-sightedness; employee thinks and acts beyond a mere transaction (Khalid & Hadi, 2021a). For a frontline employee of a customer-oriented organization, it is mandatory to frequently reach customers to meet all interface requirements to keep them happy and satisfied (Vuong et al., 2025).

Internal Marketing

Quality is a result of multiple factors; however one unique factor that could affect it is the employee, and that is why it is also a source of competitive advantage (Isazadeh et al., 2025). Organizations can maintain differentiation among competitors by valuing employees (Isazadeh et al., 2025). Majority of organizations have realized the importance of employees and that is why more than any technology or processes they are the biggest avenue for investment (Saad Khalil El-Sherbiny, 2025). In fact, a hallmark of successful businesses is they actively work on employee issues (Čivić et al., 2025). IM started in the mid 1970s and gave an alternate approach to the then dominating school of thought that always showed concern about external customers (Khalid & Hadi, 2021b). The philosophy that employee is an internal customer and in fact a strategic resource, is central to IM (Hussin et al., 2023). IM is about recruiting and retaining those ambitious to serve customers (Hussin et al., 2023; Čivić et al., 2025). As customers are becoming more diverse and competition getting fiercer; satisfying customers to a level where they support organizational survival requires some specialty, and that very specialty is IM (Isazadeh et al., 2025). Companies can better their business performance by properly implementing IM; guaranteeing higher motivation and satisfaction for employees (Čivić et al., 2025).

Internal Marketing and Customer-Oriented Behavior

Organizational success depends on the ability to follow customer expectations though the attention paid to customers varies from organization to organization (Khoshkalam Soleymandarabi et al., 2024). Organizations work on service excellence strategy to brand themselves champions in serving customers (Dzogbenuku et al., 2025). COB talks about adequately understanding target customers and ensuring their interests are first; to continuously offer superior value to them (Khoshkalam Soleymandarabi et al., 2024). Customer orientation has a remarkable ability to create value; believed to be critical for a sustainable growth (Dzogbenuku et al., 2025). COB is not just to satisfy customers; it takes customer into the realm of loyalty (Khalid & Hadi, 2021a). For a frontline employee of a customer-oriented organization it is mandatory to frequently reach customers, to meet all interface requirements, to keep them happy and satisfied (Vuong et al., 2025). While making decisions, customers do consider the attitudes and behaviors of employees due to their regular engagements with them (Ferdous & Polonsky, 2013). Extant literature reveals that to initiate a change in behaviors of employees the right way is to introduce IM (Olorunsola et al., 2022).



One can find studies in all types and forms of organizations but mainly IM is found in service sector as a strategy to motivate employees (Khoshkalam Soleymandarabi et al., 2024). Valuing employees actually stimulates employees to increase their human and social capital for organizational good (Xu et al., 2023). Increased competition is a modern day reality for service industry forcing firms to adopt differentiating strategies to stand out from competition (Olorunsola et al., 2022). One such differentiating strategy is the internal marketing (Olorunsola et al., 2022). When we say goal is employee motivation then the supposition is motivated employees would follow the policies and decisions of organization (Xu et al., 2023). IM influenced customer oriented behavior in the studies of (Fu, 2013; Nart et al., 2019, Park & Tran, 2018). Thus the following proposition comes out:

PI: IM positively influences COB in employees.

Illegitimate Tasks as a Moderator

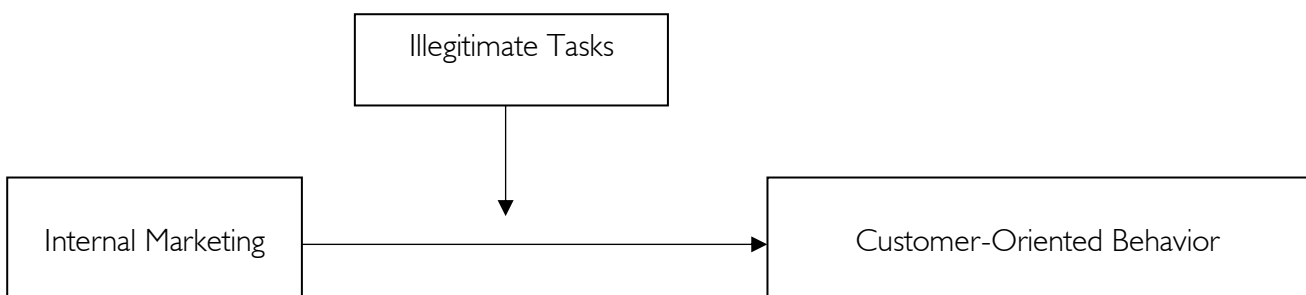
Generally, organizations offer a job description to employee detailing their duties; thus, generating expectations on how the work will be done (Dong et al., 2025). But the problem starts when they are assigned illegitimate tasks and they have a feeling their expectations are breached as they are asked for jobs not a part of their professional role (Dong et al., 2025). This breach makes it really challenging and hard for employees to remain positive toward their employer (Dong et al., 2025). Employees deem all roles not following their expectations illegitimate (Shanchang & Khantong, 2024). Semmer et al. (2019) say that emphasis of SOS theory is that for individuals, self-esteem both in personal and social context counts at workplace and sparks stress for that reason. According to SOS, employees consciously try to preserve and protect their self-image and any danger (violating job role) to it could lead to stress (Shanchang & Khantong, 2024). Negative effects of illegitimate tasks not only hit professional identity but threaten organizational cohesion (Shanchang & Khantong, 2024). Its negative effects can even overstep the workplace boundaries (Iqbal et al., 2025). However, a distinction needs to be made that individual perceptions are the final authority to label any task illegitimate, depending upon its positive or negative outcomes (Iqbal et al., 2025). Every organization has a unique culture of its own so that very culture also helps us to determine whether the task is illegitimate (Semmer et al., 2019).

Ramifications of illegitimate tasks are not only for job satisfaction and well-being but act upon job organizational effectiveness and job performance (Iqbal et al., 2025; Shanchang & Khantong, 2024). Illegitimate tasks was found jeopardizing task performance and the proactive work behavior through the mediation of job identity (Ma & Peng, 2019). Findings of Zhao et al. (2023) were also not different as they found it negatively effecting in-role and extra-role performances by inhibiting thriving at work. Since customer orientation is also a certain type of job performance (Oh et al., 2024), so it is likely to affect the relationship between IM and COB. Besides, literature dominates with evidence that it is a negative forces crippling individuals and organization in multiple ways. On top of all these the inconsistency highlighted in above paragraphs on the influence of IM on COB also guides us to following proposition:

P2: Illegitimate tasks moderate the relationship between IM and COB

All the above discussions culminate on the following model:

Figure 1
Theoretical Model



Conclusion

This study makes a substantive theoretical contribution to IM and service management literature by challenging the prevailing assumption that internal marketing unconditionally influences COB. Research certainly supports this assumption but ignores the role of identity and role of prestige in relation to customer-focused behaviors. Present study reconceptualizes IM by focusing on tasks that compromise identity and respect of employees and theorizes that perceived legitimacy of tasks are crucial for this relationship. Thus, with the help of SOS theory, the proposed model considers for the first time the identity and respect violation perspective. It also contributes in the sense that even organizations having good IM systems in place can neutralize/weaken the positive motivational effects by generating feelings of disrespect, cynicism, and moral offense. This way, the study extends IM theory beyond motivational and attitudinal/behavioral explanations and integrate it into broader SOS context. Moreover, it also explains why employees may not be fully engaged in COBs despite receiving organizational support. Employees, therefore, find illegitimate tasks contrary to IM teachings and reduce emotional labor in customer interactions. Hence, current work emphasizes on task legitimacy and proposes to introduce organizational practices not causing stress to the employee. Ultimately, such organizations can have more say in managing employee behavior at the crucial customer interface.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Although it is a novel theoretical framework integrating internal marketing, customer –oriented behavior and illegitimate tasks; still it has certain limitations. Well the greatest limitation of this study comes from its methodological constraint, the non-empirical side; offering only a theoretical model. It is up to the future researchers and scholars to prove how far the theoretical version finds support from data. Empirical evidence should also weigh in to guide practitioners to follow a particular line of action to navigate competitive landscape. Majority of studies take illegitimate tasks as a single construct, researchers may use its two components (unnecessary tasks and unreasonable tasks) to find their separate effect. Moreover, IM also offers us choices to make use of numerous activities available at the disposal of an organization to steer employees in the desired direction (Čivić et al., 2025). Scholars can, therefore, capitalize on this multidimensional reflective construct to adopt different combinations of its dimensions perfect for their settings and leave those they consider unproductive. Since internal marketing not only facilitates organizational operations for serving customers in a better way but also helps in effective utilization of resources (Khoshkalam Soleymandarabi et al., 2024).

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