

# DOES CUSTOMER ORIENTATION AFFECT EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN RETAIL STORES IN KERALA?

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## ABSTRACT

*The recognition of consumer needs plays a pivotal role in assessing the effectiveness of retail enterprises operating in the retail industry. In this context, the importance of customer orientation is widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in attaining success within the realm of retail sales personnel. The employees in retail stores may occasionally encounter supervisors who abuse their authority and engage in abusive behaviour. The study tries to investigate how customer orientation influences the job performance of retail salespeople under oppressive supervision and also investigates the potential moderating influence of contingent penalization and contingent rewards on the impact of harsh leadership. With the aid of the affective events theory (AET) as a theoretical foundation, we propose that abusive supervision is a contextual event that is connected to subordinates' affective responses, such as customer orientation and corresponding evaluative judgements of their workplace in the form of their job performance. Furthermore, an examination was conducted to ascertain the impact of contingent rewards and penalties on the association between abusive leadership and client orientation. Employees of retail establishments in Kochi and Trivandrum participated in the survey. A standardised questionnaire was used to gather the information from 72 employees. The study found that abusive leadership had a negative impact on customer orientation. Also, client orientation had a positive effect on work output. Furthermore, contingent punishment mitigated the relationship between oppressive leadership style and customer service orientation.*

**Keywords:** Customer orientation, Abusive supervision, Job performance, Contingent punishment, Contingent reward.

## INTRODUCTION

In the modern period, which is characterised by a service-based economy, customers place an increasing emphasis on the value of services and the standard of their experiential interactions (Zhou, 2016). Employees in retail businesses often serve as the key interface connecting consumers and companies. In order for organisations to effectively develop robust and long-lasting customer connections, it is imperative that staff possess the capability and willingness to recognize and fulfil client needs. This marketing strategy under consideration is most prominently illustrated by the notion of customer orientation. Customer orientation is characterised as the extent to which frontline personnel engage in the marketing idea by aiding consumers in their purchasing decisions with the aim of meeting their demands. According to Homburg et al. (2009), when employees possess a strong customer orientation, they have the power to cultivate loyalty and increase customers' willingness to pay. These outcomes have the potential to create revenue and enhance profitability. Numerous factors exert an influence on the

customer orientation of individual employees, as revealed by earlier research employing the employee-related approach. According to Lee et al. (2011), a key aspect is leadership style, and this is linked to abusive supervision.

Abusive supervision is one of the prevalent issues in contemporary organisational settings (Tillman et al., 2018). According to the estimation of Stephens et al. (2005), a considerable number of individuals, around 20 million, in the United States consistently encounter abusive working conditions. The provided statistics highlight the urgent requirement for the academic literature to focus on abusive supervision, commonly referred to as the "dark side" of management practice, as noted by Brown and Mitchell (2010). The behaviours that are perceived as abusive by employees have been characterised as unpleasant, aggressive, threatening, and distressing (Starratt & Grandy, 2010). Instances include favouritism among individuals at equivalent levels within an organisation, the deliberate neglect or avoidance of employees, the imposition of unrelated or unpleasant tasks as a form of punishment, the intimidation of employees with the prospect of job termination or other adverse consequences, humiliation in the presence of colleagues or other associates, the persistent identification of flaws in work output, and the dissemination of false information about subordinates in their absence. Consequently, individuals tend to harbour sceptical or unfavourable dispositions towards interpersonal interactions in the workplace which may adversely affect the sales in the retail industry (Pradhan et al., 2020). This abusive behaviour exerts a significant influence on crucial dimensions, namely job satisfaction, employee performance and organisational commitment (Mackey et al., 2015). Ma et al. (2020) analysed the incidence of abusive supervision in the retail sector and demonstrated that abusive management has a positive effect on service employees' customer-oriented service sabotage by lowering their organisational identification. Despite the fact that its adverse consequences are enduring and not readily discernible (Lipman-Blumen, 2005), it is frequently observed (Zang et al., 2021) and occasionally endorsed or fostered by organisations due to its potential for generating immediate outcomes. Numerous studies have documented the detrimental impacts of harsh supervision on workers (Fischer et al., 2021). On the other hand, the influence of oppressive supervision on clients has been understudied (Yang et al., 2021). The presence of abusive behaviour exhibited by a supervisor might generate ethical dilemmas that diminish customer-centric behaviours and impede a company's capacity to effectively cater to the needs of its customers (Friend et al., 2020). The present study aims to fill the knowledge gap of customer orientation of retail workers in Kerala in the presence of abusive supervision. The study investigates how abusive leadership affects client orientation and thereby job performance under the mediation of contingent reward and contingent punishment.

## **Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis Development**

The Affective Events Theory (AET) serves as a valuable framework for analysing the consequences of abusive behaviour exhibited by supervisors. According to AET, it is proposed that work-related occurrences influence employees' attitudes and behaviours through a mechanism driven by evaluative judgements. Employees can be affected by facets of their jobs such as their supervisor's support and relationship with them (Tillman et al., 2018). Adverse occurrences within the workspace, such as abusive supervision, can potentially influence worker's emotional well-being and outlook towards work (Islam et al., 2021), diminishing their affective commitments. Thus, affective experiences are excellent predictors of employee behaviour such as diminished client orientation.

The phenomenon of leader-reinforcing behaviour, particularly through the implementation of contingent incentive and punishment strategies, is widely acknowledged as a crucial factor in influencing the effectiveness of sales employees (Wang et al., 2021). The cognitive self-regulation impairment model elucidates the mediation of these two leadership behaviours in the relationship between rude leadership and client orientation. According to the theory of self-regulation impairment, the act of participating in self-regulation leads to the reduction of cognitive capacities that are inherently restricted. This depletion impedes the individual's later capacity to efficiently perform more duties (Muraven & Baumeister, 2000). We can presume, from the standpoint of self-regulation impairment, that abusive supervision has the potential to have a detrimental effect on salespeople's performance by draining cognitive resources that might otherwise be devoted to client orientation. The contingent self-regulation impairment model by Yang et al., (2021) aims to provide insight into the mechanisms through which abusive supervision negatively impacts the customer orientation of salespeople and thus diminishes their sales performance. This impairment is contingent upon the functional leadership behaviours exhibited by the same leader like contingent reward and contingent punishment. These two discrete leadership behaviours function as contingent variables that influence the degree of impairment in self-regulation.

The goal of the current study is to examine a theoretical model of customer orientation brought on by abusive supervision that is based on the idea of contingency self-regulation impairment. By exploring the influence of a superior's functional leadership behaviours, specifically contingent incentive and punishment, this research seeks to enhance our understanding of how these factors can shape the consequences of abusive supervision on employee output. The primary objective of this study is to ascertain whether the implementation of functional leadership behaviours has a moderating effect on the detrimental consequences of abusive supervision. The findings of this study offer significant implications for marketing professionals, namely in their understanding of how salespeople may channel their stress towards clients as a result of abuse from their superiors. Without taking this factor into account, it is conceivable that leaders may be unaware of the repercussions of their harsh behaviour and may also have a misguided belief that such an approach leads to favourable results.

### **Customer Orientation and Abusive Supervision**

The significance of customer orientation in modern sales theory is paramount. In the contemporary business landscape, the central objective of marketing and sales endeavours revolves around the precise identification and fulfilment of customer requirements, thereby generating value through enduring relationships. This fundamental principle encapsulates the concept of customer orientation. The customer orientation refers to the implementation of the marketing concept at the individual salesperson and customer level.

Brown et al. (2002) defines customer orientation as an employee's propensity or disposition to meet customer needs. It is also referred to as a group of customer-pleasing behaviours (Zablah et al., 2012). The prevailing body of research supports the notion that employees who prioritise the needs and satisfaction of customers significantly contribute to the overall performance of a business, particularly within the service sector where employees engage in direct interactions with consumers. It has already been demonstrated by Saxe & Weitz, (1982) that failure to enhance the customer orientation of frontline personnel may have negative effects on retailers' sales performance.

Tepper's comprehensive analysis of abusive supervision covers in depth the negative effects on employee attitudes, such as decreased job satisfaction, diminished organisational commitment, and increased intention to leave the organisation. These unfavourable attitudes may make employees less motivated and interested in providing excellent customer service, thereby diminishing their customer focus (Tepper, B. J., 2007). The study by Liu, Y., et al. (2013) investigates the association between abusive supervision and customer orientation. The study also investigates the role of emotional fatigue as a mediator in this relationship. It suggests that controlling management depletes the emotional reserves of employees, resulting in increased emotional fatigue. It may be difficult for emotionally exhausted employees to maintain high levels of client orientation. According to Liang et al. (2015), psychological contract breach is associated with oppressive supervision and customer orientation. According to their hypothesis, abusive supervision violates the perceived commitments and expectations of the psychological contract, leading to a decrease in customer orientation as a form of retaliation or disengagement. According to Lei, H. et al. (2016), perceived organisational support (POS) may moderate the relationship between oppressive management and client focus. It suggests that high levels of POS can enhance the customer-focused behaviour of employees and mitigate the negative effects of oppressive supervision.

In accordance with the Affective Events Theory (AET), we hypothesise that abusive supervision is a phenomenon characterised by intense emotional experiences, which elicit a negative emotional response of the employee towards the customer which in turn affects the sales performance of the employees. According to research, negative situations, such as interactions with an abusive supervisor, induce more robust responses than positive events.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Abusive supervision negatively impacts customer orientation.*

## **Customer Orientation and Job Performance**

The proposal made by Cross et al. (2007) suggests that customer orientation has a significant role in forecasting the performance of salespeople. Liaw et al. (2010) also have found that effective leadership has the potential to strengthen this customer orientation. The adoption of a customer-oriented approach has been found to have a favourable influence on an organization's Perceived Customer Service Performance (PCSP). Research has indicated that the adoption of a customer-oriented approach has a favourable impact on the overall performance of an organisation (Li Sa et al. 2019). The study conducted by He et al. (2015) revealed that customer orientation has a substantial impact on the performance of service personnel. Using structural equation modelling to analyse the data, this study discovered that customer orientation strengthens the relationship between organisational identification and work performance among service employees. Furthermore, it was discovered that customer orientation strengthens the moderating influence of organisational identification on the association between service workers' personality traits and job performance. Liaw et al. (2010) conducted a study that demonstrated a direct positive impact of transformational leadership on employees' customer orientation. Additionally, the researchers found that this link is mediated by employee-perceived management support. According to the study, employees who receive and perceive support from transformational leaders demonstrate increased motivation to fulfil and prioritise customer needs. This, in turn, leads to the development of a customer-oriented mindset and improved job performance. Templer et al. (2020) examined the interactive effects of service employees' role clarity on Customer orientation, which influences customer satisfaction and loyalty, sales

development, and business performance. Thus several factors, including position clarity, managerial behaviour, and employee traits, have the potential to impact the level of customer orientation exhibited by individual employees. This, in turn, has been found to have a positive association with job performance enhancement. Furthermore, a service-oriented organisation has the potential to foster a culture that motivates employees to provide genuine and sincere services, thereby exerting a beneficial influence on customer performance. The extensive literature survey conducted indicates that customer orientation can exert a favourable influence on job performance, particularly in positions related to customer service and therefore the following hypothesis has been proposed.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Customer orientation influences job performance positively*

### **Moderating Impact of Contingent Reward and Punishment**

The significance of employees in the service industry cannot be underscored, as they play a crucial role in shaping the quality of service and the overall client experience with the organisation. Therefore, the tendency of service professionals to prioritise their attention towards consumers, known as customer orientation, is a vital factor in supporting efficient service delivery, achieving client happiness, and getting better business. But customer orientation is a surface attribute that depends on the environment (for instance, the context of work). Employee attitudes towards their jobs, job performance, and job happiness are thus influenced by their emotions at work, which depend on functional leadership behaviours like contingent incentives and penalties.

According to Judge and Piccolo (2004), the concept of contingent reward pertains to the extent to which bosses provide explicit direction and incentivize subordinates to meet predetermined goals. Sims (1980) defines contingent penalty as the extent to which bosses inspect, establish specific rules, and systematically implement disciplinary measures for their employees' actions. This particular style of leadership behaviour emphasizes providing salespeople with positive reinforcement, such as acknowledgement, and negative reinforcement, such as protest, based on their performance. Contingent reward and contingent punishment represent two distinct forms of transactional leadership, which possess the potential to attenuate the impact of abusive monitoring on customer orientation. According to a study conducted by Yang et al. (2021), the implementation of contingent punishment by a supervisor has the potential to mitigate the adverse consequences of hostile leadership on overall performance. Conversely, the utilisation of contingent reward may exacerbate the negative influence of abusive supervision.

The study conducted by Tremblay et al. (2012) aimed to assess the correlation between reward and punishment behaviours and employee satisfaction. The findings of the study indicated that the utilisation of contingent rewards was more successful in fostering favourable attitudes in the workplace compared to the implementation of contingent punishments. The study additionally presents empirical evidence supporting the notion that organisations stand to gain advantages by promoting the utilisation of both financial and social rewards among their managerial personnel.

Studies indicate that within the framework of robust distributive justice (Thau and Mitchell, 2010) and a favorable dynamic between supervisors and subordinates (Lian et al., 2012), there exists the potential for abusive leadership to amplify employee deviance. According to Hilton et al. (2021), there exists a noteworthy positive correlation between democratic

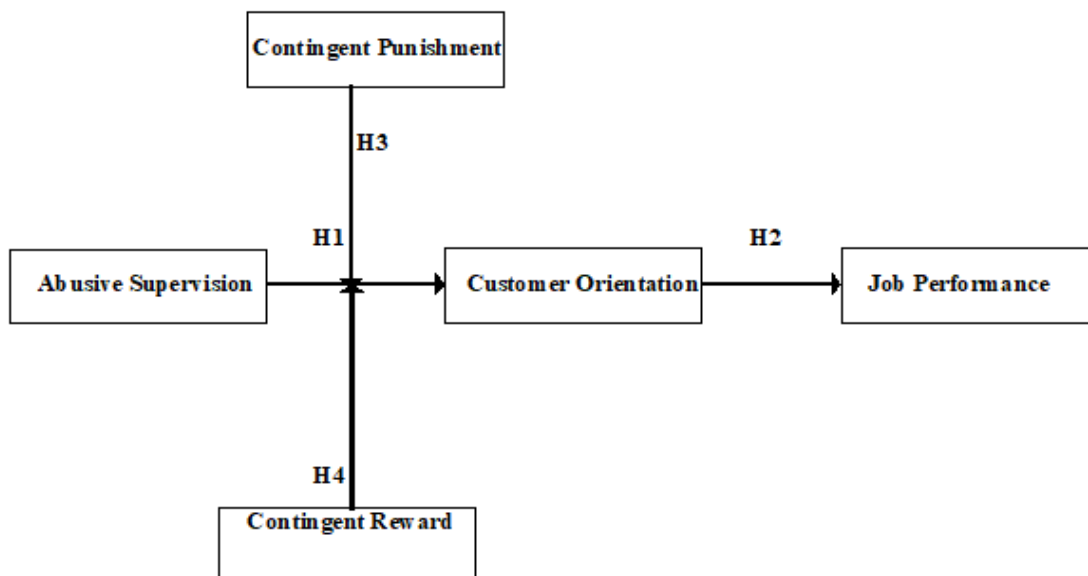
leadership and contingent reward with regards to organisational success. Furthermore, the implementation of contingent rewards plays a crucial role in enhancing and regulating the correlation between democratic leadership and the overall success of an organisation. Therefore, the combination of democratic leadership and contingent incentives is expected to result in improved organisational performance. This study has made a noteworthy contribution to the existing body of literature on leadership and organisations. This has been accomplished by highlighting the effectiveness of contingent incentives as a moderator in the context of the correlation between democratic management and organisational performance within the telecommunications sector. The study by Lee et al. (2011) revealed a partly mediating effect of service employees' emotions characterized by functional leadership behaviours on the relationship between leadership style and their client orientation.

The hypothesis that follows has been put out in light of the literature mentioned above.

**H<sub>3</sub>:** *The relationship between abusive supervision and customer orientation is moderated by the presence of contingent punishment.*

**H<sub>4</sub>:** *The relationship between abusive supervision and customer orientation is moderated by the presence of contingent reward.*

Based on the conceptual framework depicted in Figure 1, this study develops the following hypotheses through a review of the literature in order to investigate the relationship between abusive supervision, customer orientation, and job performance via the mediation of contingent reward and contingent punishment. The theoretical underpinning of the framework is based on the theory of affective events (AET). The variable being measured in this study is job performance, which serves as the dependent variable. The variables being examined in this study encompass abusive supervision, contingent punishment, and contingent reward. The variable being examined as a mediator is consumer orientation.



**FIGURE 1**  
**THEORETICAL MODEL**

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in a sample population consisting of 72 retail store employees in Kochi and Trivandrum. The age distribution of the population does not exceed 35 years, with the respondents falling within the age range of 20 to 34 years. The impact of contingent punishment on the association between abusive supervision and customer orientation is a significant factor. The primary data was collected via questionnaires from sales personnel working in retail shopping centres in Kochi and Trivandrum. The majority of the questions are formulated utilising the 5-point Likert scale with the following response options: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neutral, 4 - agree, and 5 – strongly agree. The investigation was carried out over the period spanning from May 2023 to June 2023. The research model was analysed using Warp PLS 8.0, employing structural equation modelling (SEM) techniques. Squared multiple correlations were utilised to analyse the structural model, which depicts the interconnections among the latent constructs. In addition, hypothesis testing and validation of the overall model fit were also employed. The moderated mediation was evaluated using SPSS 28.

### Results

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of the 72 participants. Male respondents constitute the majority (55%). 48.6% of respondents fall within the age bracket of 20-25, 37.5% within the age bracket of 26-30, and 13.89% within the age bracket of 31-35. The majority of respondents are undergraduates (44%), while only 10% are post-graduates. 42% of the responding employees earn between INR20,000 and INR30,000, while 18% earn less than INR20,000 and 12% earn more than INR30,000.

Demography		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	32	44.44
	Male	40	55.56
Age (in years)	20-25	35	48.61
	26-30	27	37.5
	31-35	10	13.89
Education	Undergraduate	44	61.11
	Postgraduate	10	13.89
	Others	18	25
Income levels (in INR)	below 20k	18	25
	20k-30k	42	58.33
	30k and above	12	16.67

Source: Primary data.

Table 2 presents Cronbach's alpha coefficients for all constructs, indicating that their values exceed 0.6, with the exception of contingent reward, which approaches 0.6. Furthermore, the composite reliability of all the constructs is approximately 0.8 or close to 0.8. Therefore, the questionnaire has satisfactory reliability. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are

greater than or close to 0.5, suggesting that the convergent validity of the constructs is satisfactory or acceptable. The average variance extracted (AVE) values for both Contingent Punishment and Contingent Reward exceed 0.5, indicating satisfactory convergent validity. The convergent validity of Abusive Supervision, Customer Orientation, and Job Performance is deemed satisfactory, as evidenced by their AVE values approximating 0.5.

Constructs	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Abusive Supervision	0.726	0.814	0.424
Customer Orientation	0.652	0.783	0.425
Job performance	0.646	0.780	0.421
Contingent Punishment	0.649	0.811	0.590
Contingent Reward	0.582	0.783	0.559

Source: Warp PLS output.

The factor loadings of the items within a construct are displayed in Table 3, demonstrating that these loadings surpass a threshold of 0.5 for their respective constructs. Furthermore, it has been shown that the cross-loadings exhibit values below 0.5. This assertion is applicable to all the constructs. Hence, it may be deduced that the convergent validity of all the constructs is robust.

Items\ Factors	Abusive Supervision	Contingent Punishment	Contingent Reward	Customer Orientation	Job Performance
Forgets	<b>0.561</b>	0.105	0.287	0.067	0.135
Suitabl	<b>0.652</b>	-0.289	0.342	0.101	0.101
Rulesac	<b>0.710</b>	0.343	-0.316	-0.193	0.054
Nags	<b>0.623</b>	0.144	-0.266	0.008	-0.090
Punish	<b>0.615</b>	-0.181	-0.137	0.028	0.138
Goodorb	<b>0.732</b>	-0.126	0.123	-0.015	-0.137
Disappr	0.213	<b>0.692</b>	-0.035	0.358	-0.319
Perform	-0.016	<b>0.818</b>	0.045	-0.111	0.141
Productivity	-0.171	<b>0.787</b>	-0.016	-0.199	0.134
Positive	-0.104	0.203	<b>0.851</b>	-0.244	0.034
Special	0.023	-0.290	<b>0.486</b>	0.169	-0.186
Commend	0.092	-0.038	<b>0.846</b>	0.148	0.073
Customer	-0.196	0.057	-0.148	<b>0.680</b>	0.046
Bestint	-0.104	0.014	0.101	<b>0.712</b>	0.001
Problem	0.222	0.085	-0.095	<b>0.564</b>	0.056
Bestsuit	-0.104	0.014	0.101	<b>0.712</b>	0.001
Helpful	-0.267	-0.052	0.277	<b>0.485</b>	0.014
Company	0.137	0.191	-0.130	-0.089	<b>0.685</b>
Highpro	-0.294	0.063	-0.125	-0.159	<b>0.756</b>



rupees	0.134	0.045	-0.049	0.041	<b>0.752</b>
salesof	-0.216	-0.192	0.019	0.186	<b>0.565</b>
salesta	0.216	-0.191	0.413	0.083	<b>0.492</b>

Table 4 presents the square root of the AVE for each construct along the diagonal. Furthermore, it can be shown that the square root of the AVE surpasses all the correlation values inside the corresponding row/column. This finding suggests the presence of discriminant validity for all the constructs. Therefore, the presence of construct validity is established by the demonstration of both convergent and discriminant validity of the constructs. The presence of reliability, content validity, and construct validity in the questionnaire evaluation ensures that it is both trustworthy and valid, hence ensuring the relevance of the obtained data.

<b>Constructs</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
Abusive Supervision	<b>0.651</b>	0.047	-0.023	-0.114	0.009
Contingent punishment	0.047	<b>0.768</b>	0.531	-0.073	-0.265
Contingent Reward	-0.023	0.531	<b>0.747</b>	-0.081	-0.318
Customer Orientation	-0.114	-0.073	-0.081	<b>0.652</b>	0.394
Job Performance	0.009	-0.265	-0.318	0.394	<b>0.648</b>

Source: Computed data.

The constructs of the model were assessed using established scales, which are presented in Table 5. The descriptive statistics shown in Table 5 indicate that the average values of customer orientation and work performance are 4.225 and 4.053, respectively. The mean value of customer orientation is the greatest, suggesting its significant influence in the study and among the employees that participated in the survey. The employees at retail stores perceive a strong customer orientation when engaging in product sales, which in turn contributes to their positive perception of job performance. The average values for abusive monitoring, contingent punishment, and contingent reward are 3.197, 3.444, and 3.574, respectively. This suggests that the employees perceive a relatively low presence of abusive monitoring. Additionally, it was emphasised that the presence of contingent reward outweighs the presence of contingent punishment.

<b>Constructs/Items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
<b>Abusive Supervision</b>	3.197	0.662
(Tepper, 2000; (Yang & Schaninger, 2010)		
(1 = never; 7 = very often)		
My supervisor forgets a rule he/she has made		
My supervisor only keeps rules when they suit her/him		
My supervisor enforces a rule or does not enforce a rule depending on his/her mood.		

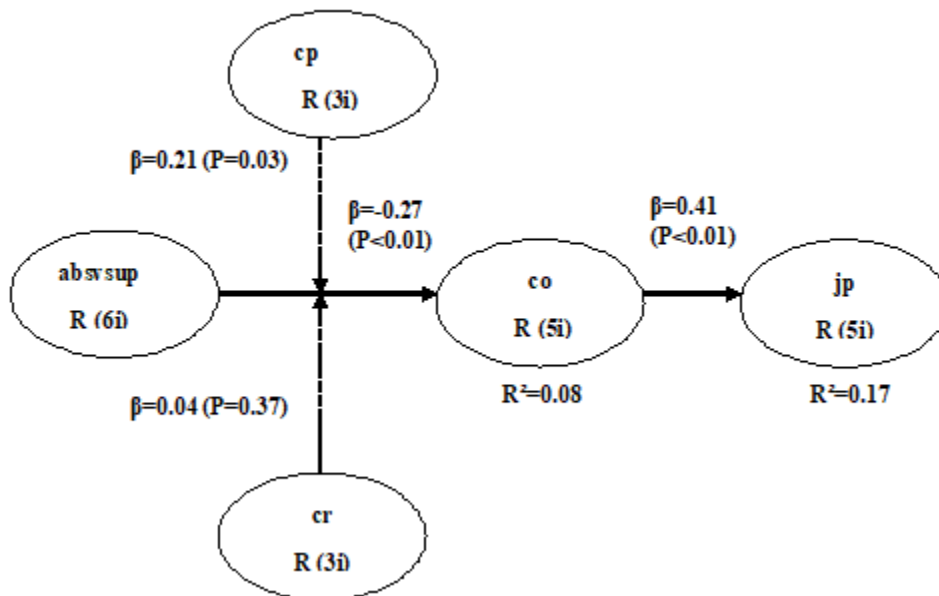
My supervisor nags me about little things.		
My supervisor threatens to punish me		
My supervisor tells me that I am bad or not as good as others		
<b>Customer Orientation</b>	4.225	0.467
<b>(Homburg et al., 2009)</b>		
<b>(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</b>		
I try to figure out what a customer's needs are		
I have the customer's best interests in mind		
I take a problem-solving approach in selling products or services to customers		
I recommend products or services that are best suited to solving problems		
I try to find out what kind of product would be most helpful to a customer		
<b>Job Performance</b>	4.053	0.539
<b>(Miao and Evans, 2013)</b>		
<b>(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</b>		
contributing to my company's market share;		
selling high profit margin products		
generating a high level of dollar sales		
generating sales of new products;		
exceeding sales targets		
<b>Contingent Punishment</b>	3.444	0.811
<b>(MacKenzie et al., 2001)</b>		
<b>(1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree)</b>		
My supervisor would indicate his or her disapproval if I performed at a lower level		
My supervisor let me know about it when I perform poorly		
My supervisor points it out to me when my productivity is not up to par		
<b>Contingent Reward</b>	3.574	0.788
<b>(MacKenzie et al., 2001)</b>		
<b>(1 = strongly disagree; 7 = strongly agree)</b>		
My supervisor always gives me positive feedback when I perform well		
My supervisor gives me special recognition when I produce at a high level		
My supervisor commends me when I exceed my productivity goals		

Source: Computed data.

When the difference between the correlation matrix the model predicts and the empirical correlation matrix is so small that it can be entirely attributable to sampling error, the model is said to fit well. Model fit measures how well the data obtained fits into the research model. The model fit indicators obtained through the Warp PLS software are given in Table 6. Since all the quality indices fall within the ideal range of values, the data obtained can be interpreted to fit the research model quite well Table 6.

Table 6 MODEL FIT INDICES	
Fit Indices	Values
Average Path Coefficient	APC = 0.234; P= 0.009
Average R- Squared	ARS = 0.124; P= 0.070
Average adjusted R -squared	AARS = 0.098; P = 0.099
Average Block VIF	AVIF = 1.179; acceptable if <= 5 ideally <= 3.3
Average Full Collinearity VIF	AFVIF = 1.545; acceptable if <= 5 ideally <= 3.3
Tenenhaus GOF	GOF= 0.280; small > = 0.1 medium >= 0.25 large >= 0.36
Sympson's paradox ratio	SPR = 0.750 acceptable if >=0.7 ideally = 1
Statistical Suppression ratio	SSR =0.500 acceptable if >=0.7
Non-linear bivariate casually direction ratio	NLBCDR = 0.875 acceptable if >=0.7

The path model (Figure 2) will elucidate the interplay between the dependent variable, the independent variable, and the potential influence of moderating variables. The nature and the magnitude of the relationship between the variables is evaluated through this model. Since  $\beta = -0.27$ , for each unit increase in abusive supervision results in a corresponding decrease in customer orientation. When there is unit variation in customer orientation, the job performance changes by 0.41. ( $\beta=0.41$ ). The association between customer orientation and abusive supervision is moderated by contingent punishment. As contingent punishment levels rise by 1 unit, there is an increase of 0.21 in the impact of abusive supervision on customer orientation ( $\beta =0.21$ ). As  $\beta =0.04$ , the contingent reward does not significantly moderate their association.



**FIGURE 2  
PATH MODEL**

Note: absvsup- Abusive Supervision, cp- Contingent Punishment, cr-Contingent Reward, co- Customer Orientation, jp- Job performance.

Testing of Hypotheses shown in Table 6 highlights that when retail employees experience abusive supervision then their customer orientation is reduced. This implies that such employees will not try to understand customer needs and recommend products or have customer best interest in their mind. The table reveals that the employees with high customer orientation will have high job performance. Additionally, the detrimental impact of abusive supervision on customer orientation decreases as contingent punishment increases. This suggests that the impact of abusive supervision on customer orientation will be less obvious when the supervisor expresses disapproval when employees perform below expectations. Contrarily, contingent rewards have little effect on the link between customer orientation and abusive supervision. This suggests that the effect of harsh monitoring on retail employee's customer orientation will not be less pronounced when providing positive feedback to staff along with it Table 7.

Hypotheses	Path Coefficient	P values	Hypothesis testing results
H1: Abusive supervision negatively impacts customer orientation	-0.273	< 0.01	Accept
H2: Customer orientation positively impacts job performance	0.414	< 0.01	Accept
H3: The association between abusive supervision and customer orientation is moderated by contingent punishment	0.213	0.028	Accept
H4: The association between abusive supervision and customer orientation is moderated by contingent reward	0.038	0.374	Reject

Source: Computed data.

The Moderated mediation was tested using Model 9 of SPSS process. But, the moderated mediation of customer orientation was not significant.

## Discussion

Extensive research has been conducted to properly examine the detrimental consequences of harsh leadership on employees (Fischer et al., 2021). However, the majority of these studies have mostly focused on how abused subordinates display hostile attitudes towards the abuser, their coworkers, and the organisation (Tepper et al., 2017). The investigation of the effects of abusive monitoring on customers, however, has received less attention in academic research. The study significantly adds to the body of knowledge in the fields of abusive supervision, customer orientation, job performance, contingent punishment, and contingent rewards. First, there is a conflict between consumer orientation and coercive supervision. This finding is consistent with earlier studies (Lyu et al., 2016; Al-Hawari et al., 2020; Yang et al., 2021) that found a link between abusive leadership and customer-oriented organisational citizenship behaviour. Gazali Gazali & Zainurrafiqi Zainurrafiqi (2023) also found out that rude supervision has a negative and significant effect on customer orientation. According to the study by Ma et al. (2020), abusive supervision is positively correlated with the sabotage of customer-focused services. The second finding of this study is that customer orientation and work performance are positively correlated which is in accordance with the investigations of Boles et al., (2001); Kuo et al., (2022);

Locander et al., (2023) and Rod & Ashill, (2010). The findings of this study provide more support for the notion proposed by Knight et al. (2007) that the relationship between role stress and work performance is mediated by customer orientation. The study's findings indicate that the relationship between abusive supervision and customer orientation is influenced by the presence of contingent punishment. The findings of this study provide more support to the previous research conducted by Yang et al. (2021), which showed that the implementation of contingent punishment mitigates the relationship between abusive supervision and consumer orientation. The correlation between abusive supervision and customer orientation is unaltered by the presence of contingent compensation, so leading us to our fourth proposition. The findings of this study contradict the research conducted by Yang et al (2021), which demonstrates that contingent pay enhances the relationship between abusive supervision and customer orientation. The study conducted by Zang et al. (2023) revealed that employees who were subjected to abusive supervision had reduced levels of positive affect and heightened levels of negative affect. These emotional states then influenced their customer orientation.

## CONCLUSION

The study investigated the association between abusive supervision and employee work performance in the retail industry, with a focus on customer orientation. The study drew upon the self-regulation impairment technique, recognising the significant role of customer orientation in predicting the effectiveness of salespeople, and the potential for proficient leadership to enhance its efficacy. This study presents empirical findings that demonstrate the adverse effects of abusive supervision on the job performance of salespeople, particularly through diminishing their client orientation. Furthermore, it is imperative to underscore that contingent reward and contingent punishment yield divergent outcomes in the context of abusive supervision. The inclusion of contingent punishment functions as a safeguard against the adverse consequences linked to abusive supervision, while the inclusion of contingent reward intensifies these consequences. This study emphasises the need of upholding consistent and transparent conduct in the supervision of sales personnel to achieve targeted performance results.

## Managerial Implications

The study provides valuable insights for retail store managers. Organisations must take measures to prevent the occurrence of abusive supervision within their ranks since it has been found to have a negative impact on customer orientation. The role of retail store staff is crucial in fostering client loyalty towards the store. It is imperative for retail store staff to provide individualized attention to every consumer. Therefore, the significance of customer orientation in retail store personnel cannot be understated, as it directly impacts their overall job performance. Furthermore, it may be argued that the presence of abusive supervision within the context of retail store environments may lead to negative consequences for employees. It is imperative for retail establishments to undertake comprehensive measures aimed at cultivating a customer-centric mindset among their workers. The mitigating effect of contingent punishment on customer orientation is observed in the context of harsh monitoring. Supervisors can receive training to promptly identify and address errors made by retail shop personnel, thereby avoiding the need for ongoing and burdensome corrective measures. Another significant managerial discovery derived from this study pertains to the potential negative consequences associated with the use of contingent rewards subsequent to employee mistreatment. The presence of supervisor

maltreatment, coupled with the subsequent provision of contingent rewards, imparts a paradoxical communication to the employee, leading to a state of perplexity and psychological strain. The presence of incongruous behaviours demonstrated by a supervisor possesses the capacity to engender ethical dilemmas that weaken customer-centricity and impede a company's efficacy in delivering effective customer service (Friend et al., 2020). Thus, the efficacy of rewards, recognition, and positive feedback provided by supervisors is rendered ineffective in the context of abusive supervision within a retail store. Training programmes play a crucial role in mitigating the adverse consequences associated with abusive supervision inside the workplace.

## Limitations

The survey was conducted among sales personnel of major retail shopping malls near Kochi and Trivandrum through in-person visits and the distribution of questionnaires. There exists a potential for responders to exhibit a lack of complete honesty when completing questionnaires. Additionally, there were limitations pertaining to time and location. Consequently, was unable to obtain the expected quantity of samples.

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**Received:** 27-Aug-2023, Manuscript No. AMSJ-23-13941; **Editor assigned:** 28-Aug-2023, PreQC No. AMSJ-23-13941(PQ); **Reviewed:** 29-Sep-2023, QC No. AMSJ-23-13941; **Revised:** 20-Dec-2023, Manuscript No. AMSJ-23-13941(R); **Published:** 03-Jan-2024