

The Impact Of Workforce Outsourcing On Employee Work Life Quality: An Applied Study On Customer Service Of Online Shopping Organizations

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Abstract:

This research aims to examine the impact of workforce outsourcing on employee work-life quality in the context of customer service in online shopping in Jordan. The study utilizes the Job Demand and Resources (JDR) theory as the theoretical framework to explore how outsourcing practices influence the work-life quality of employees. 264 questionnaires were employed to gather data from the four big retail online shopping organizations employing outsourcing practices in Jordan. The collected data were analysed using the (SPSS v.28 and AMOS v.23) software. A descriptive analytical approach was used, and inferential analysis, utilizing a regression model, was conducted as well. The findings revealed that outsourcing with its two dimensions (Job demands and resources) has reached medium importance in the online shopping retail sector, and there is a statistically significant impact of outsourcing workforce on employee work-life quality. The study provides recommendations for organizations to provide training and support, create a supportive work environment, promote open communication, and develop career growth opportunities to retain permanent employees.

Keywords: *Outsourcing, employee work-life quality and well-being, Job Demand and Resources (JDR) theory, customer service, online shopping retail sector.*

Problem statement and questions

Employees' work-life quality and well-being have become a pressing and current issue in the retail sector due to various factors that impact the overall work environment and the experiences of employees (Tuzovic & Kabadayi, 2021). In recent years, organizations across the retail industry have increasingly recognized the importance of prioritizing employee well-being as the practice of workforce outsourcing has gained significant traction, with companies employing this strategy in their customer service operations (Buldeo Rai et al. 2019). Therefore, this research aims to address the research gap by conducting an applied study on the impact of workforce outsourcing on the well-being in terms of (job satisfaction and engagement, job security, performance, growth, and work-life balance) of customer service representatives in the retail sector, specifically focusing on international organizations that provide online customer service, where the researchers personally encounter instances outsourcing led to a decline in their well-being, sense of disconnection from the organization which served as a motive to investigate in this issue further, due to the importance of the retail

sector as it is one of the largest and most widespread industries globally (Alizadehsalehi, Hadavi and Huang, 2020). Studying this sector provides insights into a prevalent and relevant practice, which will be explained using the Job demands-resources theory, as it is considered one of the most prominent and widely used theories in the study of outsourcing and its impact on employees' well-being, that was developed by Arnold Bakker and Evangelia Demerouti in 2006, the theory states that when job demands (workload, personal conflict, and role ambiguity) are high while job resources (social support, autonomy, and opportunities) are low, engagement and satisfaction will increase which will affect negatively on employees' well-being. The study will also examine the impact of outsourcing, which can vary greatly among different groups of employees, as not all individuals are affected equally by the changes (Munch, 2010). While some employees may experience advantages, others may face disadvantages.

Previous research has explored the economic, organizational, and strategic aspects of outsourcing, the impact on employee well-being remains underexplored, as there is a lack of research specifically examining the impact of outsourcing on employees' well-being, and this research will bring attention to the often-neglected human aspect of outsourcing decisions.

Based on what was mentioned before, the study reveals some questions:

1. What is the level of workforce outsourcing (job demands and resources) and employees' work-life quality and well-being in the Jordanian retail sector?
2. What is the impact of workforce outsourcing (job demands and resources) on employees' work-life quality and well-being?
- 3.

The objectives of the study

The main objectives of this research are to identify and understand the specific job demands and resources that customer service representatives face as a result of outsourcing:

1. Assess the impact of workforce outsourcing on employees' work-life quality and well-being dimensions. This objective aims to measure and examine the impact of outsourcing on various dimensions of employee well-being in the Jordanian retail sector.
2. Examine the impact of job demands (workload, personal conflict, and role ambiguity) experienced by employees in different organizational levels on employees' work-life quality and well-being.

According to the JD-R theory, job demands refer to the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that require sustained effort and may be associated with physiological and psychological costs. Examples of job demands include workload, role ambiguity, and interpersonal conflict. These demands can exert a strain on employees and negatively affect their well-being (Demerouti & Cropanzano, 2010). On the other hand, job resources are the physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of work that help individuals achieve work goals and stimulate personal growth. Examples of job resources include social support, autonomy, and opportunities for skill development (Demerouti & Bakker, 2010). The JD-R theory suggests that when job demands increase, employees are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, and reduced well-being. Conversely, when job resources are plentiful and effectively utilized, employees are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as work engagement, job satisfaction, and improved well-being.

Theoretical Framework

The roots of outsourcing go back to the 1960s and 1970s when large corporations started to explore outsourcing as a means of reducing costs and increasing efficiency (Da Silveira, 2014; Drauz, 2014). In recent years has gained significant attention as organizations strive to optimize their operations, reduce costs, and focus on core competencies (Siswanto, 2023). While outsourcing can offer several advantages, it is crucial to explore its potential implications for the well-being of permanent employees within the organization (Lok & Baldry, 2016). Initiating and managing a contractual relationship with an outside agency to deliver services that were previously performed internally is what Momme (2002) refers to as outsourcing. It involves acquiring products or services from external sources rather than relying solely on internal resources within an organization (Lankford & Parsa, 1999). Scholars from various scientific backgrounds and disciplines have extensively studied the concept of outsourcing in recent years, identifying it as a common practice in both private and public organizations and a significant element in business strategy (Kurdia et al. 2011). According to (Pratap, 2014) and (Bhattacharya, Singh and Bhakoo, 2012), a client has the option to outsource either a portion or the entire organizational task to one or multiple service providers. (Best, Langston, and de Valence, 2003) mention that the tasks outsourced by client organizations can also be performed internally by personnel, units, or departments within the client organization itself. Therefore, the decision to outsource is akin to a "make" or "buy" decision, where an organization chooses to either carry out an activity using its in-house staff (make) or contract it out to an external service provider (buy) (Ikediashi et al. 2014; Rajini & Kaluarachch, 2019 and Lubis et al. 2018). In the 1980s and 1990s, outsourcing continued to grow in popularity as companies sought to remain competitive in a rapidly changing global economy. The emergence of the internet and digital technologies further accelerated the trend towards outsourcing, as companies could now outsource not only manufacturing but also a wide range of services such as IT, customer service, and accounting (Bovaird, 2016). Today, outsourcing is a ubiquitous practice across all industries and sectors, and companies of all sizes and types are outsourcing various aspects of their operations to third-party providers. The outsourcing market is estimated to be worth billions of dollars annually and is expected to continue growing as companies seek to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized and digital world. (Lehdonvirta et al. 2015). The table (1) below highlights the advantages of outsourcing, and collected by the most recent authors who discussed outsourcing:

Table (1): The advantages of workforce outsourcing:

Author's name and year	Advantage of Outsourcing
(Gambal, Asatiani and Kotlarsky, 2022)	Cost Saving
(Asatiani, Penttinen and Kumar, 2019)	Focus on Core Competencies
(Bergeaud et al. 2021)	Access to Specialized Skills and Expertise
(Karamaşa et al. 2020)	Increased Efficiency and Productivity
(Khan et al. 2022)	Scalability and Flexibility
(Sen, Kotlarsky and Budhwar, 2020)	Risk Mitigation
(Sreedevi & Tanwar, 2018)	Quality

Resource: By the researchers according to previous studies.

While outsourcing can offer numerous benefits, it is important to consider and understand the potential disadvantages associated with this business practice.

1. Employees' well-being. As noted by Amos, Gadzekpo and Polytechnic (2016), outsourcing can lead to job insecurity, decreased employee morale and motivation, and decreased job satisfaction.

Furthermore, outsourcing can result in increased workload for remaining employees, potentially leading to stress and burnout (Bolumole, Grawe, and Daugherty 2016).

2. Quality: Quality is something that must be considered and explored, notes Patrick Wright, professor of HR studies at Cornell University. “The expectation is that the quality of service gets better, but there’s no quantitative data out there to support the actual decision saying that outsourcing is always cheaper and better.” One of the primary challenges is the potential for a loss of control over the quality of work being performed by the outsourced employees. (McCahery & de Rhoode, 2018) This can be particularly problematic when outsourcing tasks that are critical to the company’s operations or require a high level of expertise. “Most outsourcers provide satisfactory levels of service and product, but none of them provide exceptional service,” claims Michael Cornetto, (Washington, D.C.).

3. Additional costs: (Kaipia & Turkulainen, 2017) a powerful negative in an outsourcing review of 25 large companies by Deloitte Consulting. The survey looked at both business process and information technology outsourcing: 70% of the companies said they have had significant negative experiences with outsourcing projects – and were dissatisfied with its costs and complexity.

4. Reduced corporate robustness; by altering support functions, may require careful coordination of information flow with the agency (Bolumole, Grawe, and Daugherty 2016; Amos, Gadzekpo and Polytechnic (2016).

5. Miscommunication and collaboration: The communication between the outsourced employees and the company’s in-house team decreased (Agarwal & Srivastava, 2014). The control over outsourced functions may also be compromised. (Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2003; Amos, Gadzekpo and Polytechnic (2016).

Table (2): Disadvantages of outsourcing

Author's name and year	Disadvantage of Outsourcing
(Amos, Gadzekpo and Polytechnic, 2016)	Well-being
(McCahery & de Rhoode, 2018)	Quality
(Kaipia & Turkulainen, 2017)	Additional Cost
(Amos, Gadzekpo and Polytechnic, 2016)	Reduced robustness
(Agarwal & Srivastava, 2014)	Miscommunication and collaboration
(Bharadwaj, Saxena and Halemane, 2010)	Job security and turnover
(Amos, Gadzekpo and Polytechnic, 2016)	Maintaining skill supply

Resource: By the researchers from previous studies.

Work-life quality and Well-being

Work-life quality and well-being are crucial aspects of an individual's overall happiness and satisfaction. Achieving a healthy balance between one's professional life and personal life is essential for overall well-being (Holmes et al. 2020). It not only reduces stress and burnout but also positively influences physical and mental health (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Work-life

quality encompasses factors such as job flexibility, support from employers, and opportunities for personal growth, which all contribute to enhancing overall well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). Moreover, maintaining a good work-life balance has been associated with increased productivity and job satisfaction (Kossek et al. 2011). It is evident that prioritizing work-life quality is not only beneficial for individuals but also contributes to a more productive and healthier workforce.

The Theory of JD-R

The JD-R theory suggests that when job demands increase, employees are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as stress, burnout, and reduced well-being. Conversely, when job resources are plentiful and effectively utilized, employees are more likely to experience positive outcomes such as work engagement, job satisfaction, and improved well-being. Discussing the moderating variable, how different organizational levels can have varying effects on employee well-being due to the unique roles, responsibilities, and challenges associated with each level. The potential variation in the impact on different organizational levels can partially obscure the overall correlation between outsourcing and perceived well-being. When taking into account various dimensions of employee well-being, the decision to outsource, and the diversity among employees in terms of employment level, the connection between outsourcing and employee well-being becomes more ambiguous (Bockerman & Maliranta, 2013). The initial development of the JD-R Theory was influenced by earlier work in the areas of job stress and motivation. Bakker and Demerouti sought to integrate these two perspectives to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between work characteristics and employee outcomes. They aimed to explain not only the negative aspects of work, such as stress and burnout but also the positive aspects, such as engagement and motivation. The earliest publications related to the JD-R Theory appeared in the early 2000s. One influential paper, "Job Demands and Job Resources as Predictors of Absenteeism and Presenteeism," was published in the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* in 2003. This study demonstrated the relevance of job demands and resources in explaining employee absenteeism and presenteeism, highlighting the practical implications of the theory. Over the years, the JD-R Theory has been refined and expanded through empirical research and theoretical contributions. The impact of the JD-R Theory is evident in its widespread adoption by researchers and practitioners worldwide. The theory has been applied to various domains, including healthcare, education, information technology, manufacturing, and service industries, among others. It has been used to guide interventions and organizational practices aimed at improving employee well-being, performance, and organizational outcomes. According to the previous discussion, the Job Demands-Resources theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014, 2017; Demerouti, et al. 2001) suggests that all job characteristics can be categorized into two primary groups: job demands and job resources, each with distinct properties and predictive value. Job demands refer to aspects of work that require energy expenditure, such as workload, complex tasks, and conflicts. Workload and complexity can be considered as challenge demands that facilitate high performance, while conflicts are hindrance job demands that hinder performance (LePine et al. 2005). Examples of job resources include performance feedback, social support, and skill variety, which serve as motivating job characteristics that give employees a sense of purpose and fulfil their fundamental psychological needs, namely competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 1985). From the perspective of the JD-R model, workforce outsourcing can impact employee well-being by changing job demands and resources. For example, when tasks are outsourced, employees may face higher job demands as they may need to adapt to new work processes, longer working hours, or increased performance expectations. This can lead to increased stress, burnout, and reduced well-being (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Additionally, employees may

experience a reduction in job resources, such as autonomy, social support, and opportunities for growth and development, as these resources may be transferred to external service providers. This can further impact employee well-being negatively. This theoretical framework provides insights into the potential impact of outsourcing on employee well-being, job performance, and social relationships. While outsourcing may provide benefits such as cost savings and increased efficiency, it is important for organizations to consider the potential negative consequences of outsourcing on employees and to take steps to mitigate these effects.

Customer service and outsourcing

Customer service outsourcing is when a company hires a third-party company to handle all or part of its customer service operations (Ejem et al. 2021). This can include answering calls, responding to emails, and resolving customer issues. Overall, outsourcing customer service can be a good option for companies that are looking to save money, improve scalability, or gain access to expertise (Elhoushy, Salem and Agag, 2020). However, it is important to carefully consider the potential drawbacks before making a decision.

- The type of customer service needed: Outsourcing companies offer a variety of customer services; it is important to choose one that meets their specific needs. For example, if 24/7 customer support is needed, they will need to choose an outsourcer that offers this service.
- The location of the outsourcer: The location of the outsourcer can affect the cost of the service, as well as the time it takes to resolve customer issues.
- The language skills of the outsourcers: This will ensure that customers can get the help they need, regardless of their language skills.
- The quality of the customer service: This will help ensure that the company is choosing an outsourcer that provides high-quality customer service.

Design and Methodology

The research focuses on customer service associates and team managers in the Jordanian retail sector. The researcher chose to study the retail sector because it heavily relies on outsourcing compared to other industries and due to their previous employment in the retail sector noticed a significant problem related to the impact of workforce outsourcing on employees' well-being. This observation motivated the researcher to investigate the issue further. The population sample was taken from the "Big 4" companies related to customer service in the online shopping retail sector in Jordan. The data provided below is an approximate representation based on information available from each company's HR department up to February 2023. To collect data, the researcher designed an online questionnaire and distributed it via Google Forms. The sample size of 264 participants was determined using Sekaran's table to ensure accuracy and minimize errors (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). The desired confidence level and confidence interval (margin of error) are 95% and 5% respectively. To enhance the validity of the findings, 300 questionnaires were distributed to the study population in the previously mentioned companies. The sample size has been determined based on statistical power analysis to achieve sufficient confidence in the results. The data collection employed a non-probability convenient sampling method to gather information from a specific segment capable of providing relevant insights based on their location or role. Ultimately, 264 valid questionnaires were received and included in the analysis. The items were carefully crafted using information from reputable prior publications and academic sources in the field of business administration, such as (Borst et al. 2017, Scanlan & Still, 2019, Bakker et al. 2005, Morgeson & Humphrey, 2006, Van den Broeck et al. 2010).

Participants' socio-demographical characteristics:

A total of 264 employees participated with the majority of them being customers service associates 178 (67.4%) compared to 86 (32.6%) team managers, more than half of the sample was females 141 (53.3%) compared to 123 (46.6%) males, most of the participants were under thirty years old 185 (70.1%), have fewer years of work experience “less than one year” 113 (42.8%) and have bachelor degree 121 (45.8%).

Table (3): Participants’ socio-demographical characteristics N=264

Variables	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	123	46.6
	Female	141	53.4
Job Position	Customers service associate	178	67.4
	Team managers	86	32.6
Age	less than 20 years	56	21.2
	20-30 years	129	48.9
	31-40 years	51	19.3
	41 or above	28	10.6
Years of Experience	One or less	113	42.8
	2-3 years	50	18.9
	3-4 years	64	24.2
	5 or more years	37	14.0
Qualification	Higher school or equivalent	93	35.2
	Bachelor	121	45.8
	Master	41	15.5
	PhD	9	3.4

Results:

Outsourcing is a latent variable and is measured through two observed variables namely job demand and job resources, the standard multiple linear regression was employed to investigate the impact of job demand and job resources on employees' work life quality and well-being. The results in table (4) have revealed that the model is statistically significant $F(2,261) = 97.887, p < .001$ implying that the model has a prediction power to predict employees' well-being, the adj $R^2 (.424)$ revealing that 42.4% of the variance in well-being has explained by the job demand and job resources collectively. In investigating the impact of each predictor, the results revealed that the job demand had an inverse correlation with employees' well-being, as the job demand increases by one unit, the employees' well-being will reduce by $(B = -.325 \text{ unit}, t = 8.126, p < .001)$, after controlling on other predictor. Moreover, the job demand has uniquely explained about (14.44%) of employees' well-being variance. On the other side the job resources have demonstrated a positive impact on employees' well-being, for each one-unit

increase, the employees' well-being is expected to increase by ($B=.321$ unit, $t= 8.941$, $p<.001$) besides, the job resources have uniquely explained about (17.47%) of employees' well-being variance.

Testing hypotheses

H01: Workforce outsourcing (Job demands) has no impact on employees' well-being.

The null hypothesis (H_0) states that workforce outsourcing (Job demands) has no impact on employees' well-being. The significance level (α) is set at 0.05. After conducting the statistical analysis, the obtained p-value was (0.001) which is less than the significance level ($\alpha=0.05$), thus the null hypothesis was rejected. In other words, there is statistically significant evidence to support the claim that workforce outsourcing (Job demands) has an impact on employees' well-being.

H02: Workforce outsourcing (Job resources) has no impact on employees' well-being.

After conducting the statistical analysis, the obtained p-value was 0.001. which is less than the significance level ($\alpha=0.05$), reject the null hypothesis. In other words, there is statistically significant evidence to suggest that workforce outsourcing (Job resources) does have an impact on employees' well-being.

Since the moderation effects for both customer service associates and team managers in the relationship between job demand and employees' well-being are not statistically significant (i.e., p-values are greater than the significance level), fail to reject the null hypothesis. This suggests that the organizational level does not significantly influence the relationship between job demands and employees' well-being, while the organizational level played a moderator role between the job resources and employees' well-being donating the effect of job resources on employees' well-being was significantly higher among team manager than the customer service associates, thus the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table (4): The impact of workforce outsourcing on employees' well-being

Predictor	Unstandardized B coefficient	Std. Error	Standardized Beta	t-value	p-value	Part correlation	Unique variance explained (Part2)
Job demand	-.325	.041	-.393	8.126	<.001	-.380	14.44
Job resource	.322	.036	.433	8.941	<.001	.418	17.47

F (2,261) =97.887, p<.001, $adjR^2=42.4\%$

Results and discussion

The findings of this study disclosed that job demands have a negative impact on employees' work life quality and well-being, in contrast to job resources which have a positive impact. The analysis also showed a significant difference in the level of impact on job resources between customer service associates and team managers, (Boon & Kalshoven, 2014) studied different organizations that match the data found in the research, higher support, and opportunities for higher hierarchical levels. While no impact on job demands which has been investigated by

(Garrick et al. 2014) on well-being, which means both categories have the same level of workload, personal conflicts, and role ambiguity.

The findings suggest that employees in the studied organizations face a balanced level of challenges in their work, which matches (Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli, 2003) results. A moderate workload indicates that employees are required to perform a reasonable number of tasks and responsibilities without feeling overwhelmed by excessive work pressure. Similarly, moderate ambiguity suggests that employees encounter some level of uncertainty or vagueness in their job tasks. Additionally, personal conflicts at a lower level indicate that interpersonal issues in the workplace are not pervasive but do arise occasionally. For job sources, the findings indicate that employees have access to a reasonable level of support and opportunities in their work environment which matches (van den Tooren & de Jong, 2014) findings. Opportunities for growth and development can motivate employees to enhance their skills and career prospects. Social support from colleagues and supervisors can foster a sense of camaraderie and teamwork, providing employees with emotional and instrumental assistance when needed. Autonomy in their roles implies that employees have a certain level of independence and decision-making authority in performing their tasks. The analysis revealed that workforce outsourcing had a moderate impact on employees' work life quality and well-being in both customer service associates and team managers. It was found that outsourcing negatively affected job satisfaction, engagement, performance and growth, job security levels, and work-life balance in both groups (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

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