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**Exploring the Mediating Role of Moral Identity
on the Relationship between Perception of
Corporate Hypocrisy and Knowledge Hiding
Resilience**

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Abstract

The present study examine the relationship between corporate hypocrisy and knowledge hiding via intervening variable moral identity. To test the study hypotheses, the data from managerial level employees of WAPDA was collected using a survey questionnaire having five point Likert scale. Through random sampling technique and using G*Power, a total of 384 respondents were selected for this study. The findings suggest that perceived corporate hypocrisy has significant relationship with knowledge hiding. It was also found that moral identity did not mediate the relationship between corporate hypocrisy and knowledge hiding at 95% confidence interval. It is recommended that management of WAPDA should try their best to reduce the practices of corporate hypocrisy as it will increase employees' engagement in knowledge hiding. Limitations and directions for future research are also highlighted.

Key Words: Perceived Corporate Hypocrisy, Knowledge Hiding, Moral Identity, WAPDA

INTRODUCTION

The importance of knowledge in an organizational context is very important because it affects organizational effectiveness and sustainability (Papa et al., 2021). It is a strategic resource that an organization used to beat their competitor and achieve a long-lasting edge over its

competitors. Therefore, every organization tried its best to create an environment where knowledge sharing is facilitated, however, some employees intentionally hide their knowledge when requested by their colleagues or other organizational members (Connelly et al., 2012). Thus, a phenomenon where employees deliberately hide their knowledge from their colleagues is termed knowledge hiding (Connelly et al., 2012). The concept of knowledge hiding (KH) is different from a lack of knowledge sharing as knowledge hiding is the intentional refusal to share knowledge while the latter highlights unintended exclusion (e.g., lack of knowledge or low sharing intentions). Empirical investigations showed that KH is more detrimental and adversely affects organizational performance, innovation, and success (Jiang et al., 2019; Singh, 2019; Labafi, 2017). Therefore, in the recent decade, this concept gained considerable attention from scholars and practitioners to explore those aspects that motivate employees to practice in KH (Chin et al., 2021).

In the context of knowledge hiding (KH), past researchers considered interpersonal factors, i.e., team-member exchange (Tsay et al., 2014), leader-member exchange (Zhao et al., 2019), and distrust (Arain et al., 2018) and little attention was paid to situational factors. As rightly noted by Skerlavaj et al. (2018) that employee KH may occur in a broader context, therefore situational factors may affect employee KH. Therefore, studying the effect of situational variables on KH is very scarce and provides a crucial gap that needs to be investigated. In the recent past, some researchers highlighted the influence of situational factors on KH, such as organizational politics (Malik et al., 2019), time pressure (Skerlavaj et al., 2018), and workplace incivility (Saleh and Tarik, 2018). Hence, additional investigation is needed. Moreover, linking situational factors with KH under some boundary conditions is demanded (Skerlavaj et al., 2018).

In the present scenario, this study undertakes a situational variable, i.e., employee perception of corporate hypocrisy (PCH) that affects employee KH. PCH refers to “a belief that the firm claims to be something that it is not” (Wagner et al., 2009). As per the cruxes of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991), employees used their organizations as a reference to copy or to practice some behaviors, by following the procedures, i.e., attention, retention, and motivation. Perceived corporate hypocrisy is one of the references. First, employees’ attention will command when organizations ignore ethics for their short-term benefits (Goswami et al., 2018). Second, these immoral or unethical practices may lead to distrust and frustration among employees because of their involvement with this corporation (Miao and Zhou, 2020). Third, workers believe that all those immoral practices are suitable to my organization because it gives a lot of benefits, thus encouraging the employees to copy such manners in routine activities. For instance, employees who experience PCH will practice unethical behavior and hide their knowledge when demanded by their coworkers.

In addition, due to the advancement of research in the area of KH, scholars explored intervention mechanisms of KH and come up with interesting results such as organizational identification (Zhao et al., 2019), and prevention focus (Cerne et al., 2014). Yet, these studies fail to explore the intervening role of employees’ cognition process. Based on the notion of

Bandura's (1986), Social Cognitive Theory, individuals perceive and will learn from their environment and practice such behaviors. Liao et al. (2016) noted that persons' ethical perceptions involving self-regulation and resulting activities are affected by social-environmental cues. Moral identity (a type of ethical perception) indicates a self-regulatory process that might be influenced by corporate hypocrisy. Particularly, PCH will weaken members' perception of practicing moral deeds, which is not a perfect and favorable environment for moral norms for employees, as a result adversely affecting their moral identity. Employees will maintain their moral self after demolishing their moral identity through unethical behaviors including KH (Wang et al., 2017). Therefore, moral identity may play an intervening role in the PCH-KH relationship.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

As per the notion of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) individuals learn and copy behaviors either positive or negative from their environment including those from their organization. This notion contends that a company serves as a good model for employees to follow and learn from. Visibility, influence, and credibility are qualities of effective referrals (Bandura, 1986). Due to workers' direct engagement or indirect news coverage, organizational behavior is extremely apparent, giving them the opportunity to monitor it (Bandura, 1991). An organization also has a set of processes, the authority to impose rewards and penalties, and the appearance of credibility (Bandura, 1986, 1991). Employees may therefore closely monitor corporate behavior and attempt to imitate it. So far very limited studies specifically examined how corporate hypocrisy affects employee behavior. According to us, corporate hypocrisy may negatively affect workers like CWB. Employee sabotage, withholding of effort, refusal to collaborate, breach of confidence, office gossiping and rudeness toward others are examples of actions that fall under the category of CWB (Spector and Fox, 2002). As the interpretation of a negative consequence is a major factor in deciding whether to perform CWB or not, CWB is the result of a complex interplay between the individual and the environment.

We contend that corporate hypocrisy, in the context of PCH, is one such example that inspires employees to imitate through three mechanisms—attention, retention, and motivation—and demonstrates knowledge concealment. First off, corporate hypocrisy is unethical since it goes against basic values, which are thus given more consideration by workers. Second, PCH is defined by deceit and inconsistent behavior, which might worsen the perceptions of employees. This is due to the fact that when a firm engages in deception when meeting its social obligations, it breeds mistrust and disillusionment among employees, who may believe they work for a subpar company (Miao and Zhou, 2020). Third, selfish actions that expose corporate dishonesty may serve as a motivator for employees. When there is PCH, the company may be able to preserve its reputation or generate money, but the punishment is typically implicit (Miao and Zhou, 2020). As a result, while dealing with other team members, employees are encouraged to model such actions. For instance, Zhao et al. (2019) argued that when an individual put in a knowledge request, a person having PCH is tried their best to give

him false information (evasive hiding), acting as if they are ignorant of the requested information (playing dumb), or blaming a third party (i.e., rationalized hiding).

Situational considerations frequently have an impact on an individual's ethical or immoral decision-making behavior (Ford and Richardson, 1994). According to this study, corporate hypocrisy may have a positive effect on workers' CWB. Employees operate in a social setting that is shared by everyone and characterized by agreed-upon moral norms (Saleh and Tarik, 2018). According to the social identity theory, when employees see corporate dishonesty, immoral, and self-interested behavior, they give up moral standards and norms, which results in their hostility and dissatisfaction with this phenomenon.

Moreover, knowledge may be transmitted from one discipline to another from the viewpoint of knowledge dynamics. Employees who are affected by corporate hypocrisy may affect their coworkers negatively. Employees who are dissatisfied with their company may use knowledge concealment to channel their negative feelings toward other targets (such as coworkers) (Khalid et al., 2018). Because the company determines its awards and promotions, employees do not focus their frustrations on the company (Bratianu and Bejinaru 2020).

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF MORAL IDENTITY (MI)

To understand the connection between PCH and MI, we use Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). According to SCT (Bandura, 1991), there are two factors that influence how employees form a MI in the workplace. People look for contextual signals to characterize, connect, and justify their moral traits in order to establish their MI. People adjust their moral identity in response to social input, which is what motivates people to form a moral identity in the first place.

We propose that PCH affects employees' MI through two processes, namely self-cognition and self-regulation, based on this reasoning. First, employees develop their MI by observing ethical or immoral behavior from their employer in the framework of morality (Lin et al., 2018). The moral views and moral cognition of workers may be twisted by unethical conduct. PCH is immoral because it breaches the law or violates social norms, disregards morals, and defrauds the public (Miao and Zhou, 2020). Additionally, employees' beliefs of immorality and dishonesty toward their employer influence their cognitive schema, which weakens their sense of morality.

Employees in this circumstance require input to control their MI (Bandura, 1991). Few hypocritical companies, however, face penalties (Miao and Zhou, 2020), and this may impair workers' capacity for moral self-regulation. Employees may then replace or dilute their morale as a result (Liao et al., 2016). Therefore, when employees sense corporate duplicity, they might not try to self-regulate and lose their MI. We now discuss how moral identity and knowledge concealment are related. According to social cognitive theory, people behave morally in accordance with their MI. However, those who lack moral identity exhibit poor moral cognition, act unethically toward others, and prioritize their own interests over those of the group (Bergman, 2002). As was already established, when employees sense corporate duplicity, their moral identity is harmed. Employees with poor moral identity are therefore more likely to put their own interests ahead of those of others and act unethically.

Employees with a lower MI specifically enhance their knowledge-hiding actions. Employees with a lower MI will put their own interests first and purposefully keep their information from their coworkers when asked for knowledge. For instance, they may pretend to be ignorant of the information asked (playing dumb), make assurances they won't keep (evasive concealment), or justify withholding the information by saying it's too important (i.e., rationalized hiding). According to Jennings et al. (2015), employees' unproductive work practices increased when their moral identity was poor. Employees with poor MI treated people unethically (Liao et al., 2016).

According to social cognition theory, MI intervenes in the connection between PCH and KH. PCH offers contextual signals based on SCT (Bandura, 1991) that affect employees' moral identities. The MI of employees is harmed by PCH because of its immoral and dishonest characteristics (Goswami et al., 2018). Therefore, MI drives employees to behave in an unethical way with other people (Liao et al., 2016), for instance, by purposely suppressing facts from colleagues.

Employees turn cognitive information into emotional knowledge when they weaken their MI as a result of a hypocritical workplace culture. Additionally, once employees have bad moral cognition, they pass along this emotional understanding to their coworkers by concealing rational knowledge or abilities. To stimulate the conversion of emotional information into intellectual knowledge is what this means. When considered as a whole, PCH may induce knowledge concealment in workers by undermining their moral integrity. Thus, based on the cited literature, the following hypotheses were developed.

H₁: Employee perception of corporate hypocrisy is significantly related to knowledge hiding.

H₂: Moral identity play an intervening role in the relationship between corporate hypocrisy and knowledge hiding.

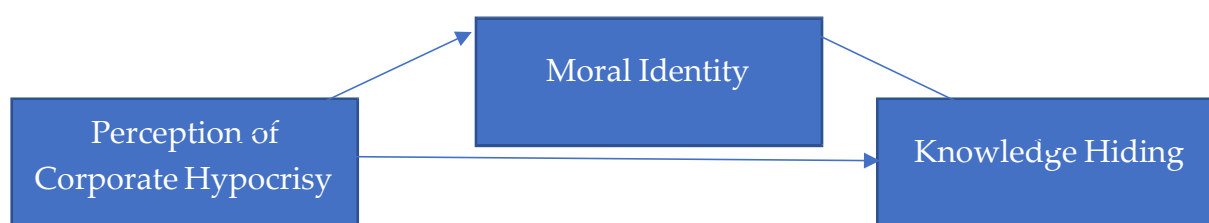


FIGURE 1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE CURRENT STUDY

METHODS

SAMPLE AND POPULATION

The population of the present study is employees of the WAPDA Peshawar circle. There are around 2500 employees and 400 managerial staff (Line Superintendent, SDO, and Executive Engineers). The target population for this study is managerial level employees as they have higher qualifications (i.e., BS/Master's and above) and have the knowledge of how to accurately respond to the survey questionnaire. The present study used a simple random sampling technique for data collection. The sample size for the present study is selected through power

analysis using G*Power software. Recent research also recommended the use of power analysis for sample size selection (e.g., Hair et al., 2018; Ringle et al., 2019; Memon et al., 2020). The power analysis calculates the sample size based on the significant level, effect size, and power. Power is the statistical ability to correctly reject the null hypothesis when it is false. Effect size is the magnitude of each individual variable on the dependent variable. The significant level is the probability of rejecting the null hypothesis. In the present study, G*Power 3.1 was used for sample size calculation. It is freely downloadable. Using a power of 80%, effect size at a lower level of 0.04, and a significant level of .05, 384 samples were obtained. Therefore, the sample size of the study in hand is 384 employees from whom data was collected. The graphical representation of the sample size is reported in the following figures.

MEASURES

PERCEPTIONS OF CORPORATE HYPOCRISY (PCH)

Perception of corporate hypocrisy was measured using a six items scale by Wanger et al. (2009). To measure this scale a five point Likert scale was used.

KNOWLEDGE HIDING (KH)

To measure knowledge hiding, this study used a 12 items scale of Connelly et al. (2012). This scale measures knowledge hiding on three main dimensions, i.e., evasive hiding, rationalized hiding and playing dumb.

MORAL IDENTITY (MI)

To measure MI a scale originally developed by Aquino and Reed (2002) was adopted and used. This scale has five items and all were measured using a five-point Likert scale.

RESULTS

The reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha procedure of the variables used in the study are reported in Table 1. As depicted, there are five items that measure moral identity and its alpha value is 0.894 which is more than the suggested value of 0.70. PCH was measured using 6 items questionnaire and having an alpha value of 0.885. Similarly, KH was assessed using a 12 items questionnaire and its alpha value was obtained 0.904. Therefore, based on this result, it is stated that the scales used to measure the study variables are reliable.

TABLE 1: RELIABILITY RESULTS

	No. of Items	Alpha	Status
Moral Identify	05	0.894	Reliable
Perception of Corporate Hypocrisy	06	0.885	Reliable
Knowledge Hiding	12	0.904	Reliable

Table 2 shows regression coefficients of PCH and KH. As depicted, the *t* value for PCH is 12.784 which is higher than the standard value of ± 1.96 indicating that PCH has a significant relationship with KH. Moreover, the value of *p* is also lower than 0.05, i.e., .000, confirms that a significant relationship exists between PCH and KH.

TABLE 2: COEFFICIENTS

	B	S.E	t	p	f	R²
Constant	1.632	0.166	9.851	0.000	163.43	0.666
PCH	0.590	0.46	12.784	0.000		

MEDIATION ANALYSIS

To test the mediating hypothesis, we followed Hayes (2018) PROCESS procedure. The details of the mediating analysis are reported as below.

STEP 1: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PCH AND MI

TABLE 3: COEFFICIENTS

	Coeff.	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	.33	.09	3.61	.00	.15	.51
PCH	.89	.03	34.72	.00	.84	.94

The coefficients table reported above shows that PCH has a significant relationship with moral identity because the t-value is more than the standard value of ± 1.96 .

STEP 2: RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PCH AND KH

TABLE 4: COEFFICIENTS

	Coeff.	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.63	.17	9.85	.00	1.31	1.96
PCH	.59	.05	12.78	.00	.50	.68

The coefficients table reported above shows that PCH has a significant relationship with KH because the t-value is more than the standard value of ± 1.96 .

STEPS 3 & 4: RELATIONSHIP OF PCH AND MI WITH KH

TABLE 4: COEFFICIENTS

	Coeff.	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
Constant	1.56	.17	9.17	.00	1.22	1.89
MI	.22	.12	1.79	.08	.02	.47
PCH	.39	.12	3.25	.00	.15	.63

The coefficients table reported above shows that PCH has a significant relationship with KH because the t-value is more than the standard value of ± 1.96 . Moreover, the t and p values of MI are insignificant at a 95% confidence interval. Therefore, it was found that MI did not mediate the relationship between PCH and KH.

Table 5: Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects

	effect	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
TE	.59	.05	12.78	.00	.50	.68
DE	.39	.12	3.25	.00	.15	.63
IE	.20	.09			.05	.41

The total effect of PCH on KH is 0.59. It means that 59% effect is passing towards KH and it is also significant, i.e., $t = 12.78$, $p = .00$. Moreover, the direct effect of PCH on KH is 0.39. It Means

that 39% effect is passing directly from PCH to KH and it is also significant, i.e., $t = 3.25$, $p = .00$. However, the indirect effect of PCH on KH which is 20% and also insignificant at 95% confidence interval.

DISCUSSION

The aim of the research in hand was to investigate the link between PCH and KH directly and indirectly via mediation MI. To test the relationship, the participants from a large electricity provider in Pakistan namely WAPDA were selected. Managerial-level employees of this organization working in the Peshawar division were selected. This particular organization was chosen based on the notion that this organization is involved in hypocritical statements and hypocritical misconduct. So, it is expected that employees of this organization may involve in knowledge hiding due to its organization's involvement in unethical practices. Through a simple random sampling technique, and using Power analysis for sample size selection, this study selects 384 employees to participate in the study. All the study employees were informed about the study objectives and were assured of their confidentiality. For data collection, a survey scale was used. The used in the present study was adopted from previous studies and their reliability was ensured using Cronbach's alpha procedure. After the distribution of 384 questionnaires among participants, only 220 questionnaires were received back. Out of these 13 questionnaires were found either incomplete or incorrect and therefore discarded from the study. Finally, the study utilized 207 responses for onward analysis.

The results of the study found that the perception of corporate hypocrisy is significantly related to knowledge hiding. It is also found that MI did not mediate the link between PCH and KH at a 95% confidence level. Thus, the study achieved both objectives and the first alternate hypothesis is accepted while the second alternate hypothesis is rejected. As found by the past studies, our study also offers similar results. As Zhao and Liu (2021) while conducting their study in a large manufacturing organization found that PCH and KH have a significant relationship. Similarly, Miao and Zhou (2020) linked PCH with counterproductive work behavior and found that PCH is significantly related to KH. One possible justification for such a result is social learning theory as Bandura (1986) stated that individuals can learn from their environment and behave accordingly. Here the employees of WAPDA learn from their organization and they also practice unethical behavior by not sharing knowledge with their colleagues. The findings of this study are also consistent with Malik et al. (2019) as they found that employee hides their knowledge either to maintain their power in the organization or status. Scheidler et al. (2019) also have the same findings regarding corporate hypocrisy. Our findings are also supported by Khalid et al. (2018) results as they found that dissatisfied employees as an act of revenge may hide their knowledge from their colleagues.

CONCLUSION

The present study investigated the link between the perception of corporate hypocrisy and knowledge hiding. Moreover, the intervening mechanisms of MI was also checked. The research chooses their participants from WAPDA (a large government organization that provide power and energy services to the community). The data from the 207 participants were analyzed. The

findings suggest that the perception of corporate hypocrisy has a significant association with knowledge hiding. Moreover, the link between PCH and KH is mediated by MI. Thus, the notion of social learning theory that “individuals can learn from their environment and behave accordingly” is supported.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings discussed above, this study offers some recommendations to the top-level management of WAPDA to overcome knowledge-hiding practices among employees and to develop a knowledge-sharing culture in the organization. It is recommended that WAPDA should avoid hypocritical practices or any other practices that are unethical or that adversely affect societal benefits. Because employees of such organizations may also be involved in unethical practices learned from their organization. The management of WAPDA should avoid knowledge-hiding practices among their employees as that not only badly affect individual performance but also adversely affect organizational performance as well. These practices might be overcome when an organization involves itself in ethical practices. The top management of WAPDA should develop and facilitate a culture of knowledge sharing. By doing so, both individual, as well as organizational performance, will be improved.

LIMITATIONS AND AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the present study adds important contributions to the existing body of knowledge but has some noticeable limitations as well. First, the study may commit common method variance due to collection of data at a single point in time. Future researchers are advised to replicate this study using a longitudinal research design. Second, data were only collected from one organization, i.e., WAPDA, therefore generalizability of the findings may be an issue. Thus, to avoid this limitation, future researchers should select a diverse nature of organizations to generalize the findings. Third, the present study used knowledge hiding as a composite variable and ignore the effect of each dimension of KH, i.e., evasive, playing dumb, rationalized, and bullying hiding. It will be effective to conduct a study where the impact of each of these dimensions of KH was individually treated with PCH. Finally, this study is conducted in Peshawar, Pakistan. Future studies may conduct a similar nature of study in other cultures.

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