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RESEARCH PAPER

Perceived over Qualification and Cyber Loafing: Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement and Moderating Role of Moral Identity

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to study the impact of perceived over qualification on cyber loafing with the mediating role of moral disengagement and moderating role of moral identity. Organizations face challenges in hiring and managing employees who perceive themselves as overqualified, which can lead to moral disengagement and cyber loafing. Understanding the impact of perceived over qualification is crucial for talent retention. Data were collected online from 343 employees of Pakistani government and private sector organizations by using convenience sampling technique. Data was processed in SPSS 21. The findings of this research work indicates a positive and significant relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing. Moreover, moral disengagement mediates the relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing. Furthermore, High moral identity moderates the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber loafing. Future research should expand the model, consider additional moderators and mediators such as ethical leadership and ethical climate.

Keywords:	Cyber Loafing, Moral Disengagement, Moral Identity, Perceived over Qualification

Introduction

Perceived over qualification refers to an individual's perception of their education and is a construct used in industrial-organizational psychology. It indicates a poor person-job fit, where assigned duties are less than the employee's qualifications (Maynard & Yonova, 2013). This can lead to negative consequences such as cyber loafing (Fernandes, 2016), where employees take advantage of their private internet access for personal use while pretending to work. Cyber loafing is difficult to observe by others as it is performed privately (Zhang et al., 2020). Managers often hire overqualified employees based on the potential benefits of their performance rather than considering any disadvantages or special considerations for management. High power distance cultures have been shown to experience less anger and frustration towards over qualification responses compared to lower power distance cultures (Harari et al., 2017). Perceived over qualification is considered a barrier in the continuation of a job, leading to uncontrollable behaviors like moral disengagement and cyber loafing.

During COVID-19, negative behaviors of overqualified employees were less observed due to a sense of the organization being in crisis (Wu et al., 2022). Studies have shown that perceived over qualification not only produces negative behaviors but can also promote negative behaviors at work (Dar et al., 2022). Employees who have a perception of over qualification face more rejections while working with underqualified managers, which results in increased negative behaviors in the form of cyber loafing (Zhang et al., 2022). Over qualified persons have a positive association towards their career success (Aslam et al., 2022). Organizations can manipulate perceived over qualification to get positive outcomes, which are helpful for organizational success. Leaders should consider over qualified employees when making decisions, as they can have innovative ideas (Toker et al., 2022).

In Pakistan, there is more room for studying these variables because outcome variables like cyber loafing are not reported directly by employees. While there has been extensive research conducted on the concept of perceived over qualification, there is limited empirical evidence regarding the behaviors exhibited by overqualified employees, specifically in relation to cyber loafing (Wu & Chi, 2020). Previous research has mainly focused on the potential inconsistent results of over qualification but did not look at the possible value to attitudes and behaviors of overqualified employees (Ma et al., 2020). This study examined moral disengagement as a mediator along with moral identity as a moderator to understand the negative outcomes of perceived over qualification in the form of cyber loafing and whether perceived over qualification plays any role in shaping employees' negative behavior. The study uses moral identity as a boundary condition under which moral disengagement effects cyber loafing. This work provides analytical material for perceived over qualification and cyber loafing, as well as helping organizations deal with perceived over qualified employees. Drawing upon the person-job fit theory, this research contributes to existing knowledge and fills the literature gap.

Literature Review

Person-job fit (PJ) theory by Jeff Edwards is used in this study to understand the relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing. PJ fit refers to the compatibility between individuals and their job or tasks at work. It emphasizes high PJ fit when selecting employees (Deng et al., 2020). Perceived over qualification can be a person-job misfit, leading to unethical behavior and poor job attitudes. Managers may not consider overqualified individuals for interviews or selection processes due to lack of clarification or explanations (Liu & Wang, 2012). By considering equity theory, research suggested that perceived over qualification is an unjust situation, which increases the level of moral dis-engagement and leading to cyber loafing. Perceived inequity arise when there is feeling among employees that they are over qualified which also lead them to cyber loafing (Cheng et al., 2020). The theory focuses on behavioral outcomes of over qualification and the impact on job seekers' intentions towards rewards (Jahantab, 2023).

Person-job fit is a crucial factor in job selection, as it determines whether an individual is fit for the organization's needs and goals (Cable & Judge, 1996). It is often determined by factors such as knowledge, skills, and abilities. Overqualified employees may not develop the necessary organizational commitment at the initial job period (Werbel et al., 2013). Research suggests that profile comparison of overqualified individuals can help assess person-job fit, as it is the overall match between an individual's strengths and weaknesses and job requirements (Caldwell & Reilly, 1990). Managers should be concerned about employees' perception of person-job fit, as it influences attitudes and decisions. Organizations are successful when they provide a meaningful working environment and the right person for the right job. High person-job fit is achieved when employees can be flexible and adapt to their job requirements (Scroggins, 2003). The person-job fit theory explains the effects of perceived over qualification (Ma et al, 2009), highlighting the importance of effective selection processes to achieve high levels of person-job fit.

Perceived over Qualification and Cyber Loafing

"Perceived over qualification is a directional misfit between job and person, where capabilities and experience exceed job requirements" (Kristof-Brown et al., 2005). Overqualified employees believe that because of their training, skills, and experience, they should be treated better. The perception of overqualification hurts employee engagement and retention (Erdogon et al., 2020). Overqualified employees can't use their skills, knowledge, and experience. Overqualified workers do not do extra work if they believe their knowledge, skills, and abilities exceed their job requirements, which strengthens the link between overqualification and cyber loafing (Sesen & Ertan, 2022).

Cyber loafing is transparent workplace deviance (Lim & Chen, 2019). Cyber loafing is described as employees' purposeful internet use at work (Lim, 2002). Unfair employment relationships increase employee rage and moral disengagement, causing cyber loafing (Blau et al., 2006). Restubog et al. (2011) found that older workers cyber loaf more. Overqualified workers' stress is reduced by cyber loafing (Stoddart, 2016). Managers often focus on the pros of hiring overqualified workers rather than the cons (Fine & Edward, 2017).

Studies reveal that cyber loafing by overqualified people are due to stress and negatively affect company atmosphere (Akgan, 2020). Cyber loafing causes laziness, distraction, poor performance, and increased internet costs. Workplace stress must be managed and self-discipline helps people handle any job condition. Today's fast internet may encourage cyber loafing, so people spend more time on non-work-related internet activities. According to studies, browsing improves emotions, however emailing negatively affects them because it involves sending and receiving emails from coworkers (Lim & Chen, 2012). Cyber loafing increases as more workers utilize the internet (Lieber, 1998). Companies that supply internet to employees must know that employees will cyber loaf daily. Organizations now decide how much internet loafing they can accept (Lim et al., 2001). Since cyber loafing is hard to detect, some employees implement company-owned software for personal emailing or downloading licensed content to respond to their employer's unjust practices (Lim, 2002). Hence based on the preceding discussion of literature it is hypothesized that:

H_1: Perceived over qualification positively relates with cyber loafing.

Mediating Role of Moral Disengagement

Moral disengagement is a concept in social psychology that refers to the belief that ethical standards do not apply to oneself in each context (Fiske, 2004). Overqualification can cause stress and indicate job unsuitability (Sathyanaryana & Maran, 2011), but receiving qualification justice does not constitute morally reprehensible behavior (Bandura et al., 2000). Human behavior is classified by social customs or morality (Bandhura, 2007), and moral disengagement contributes to negative attitudes towards organizations and cyber loafing (Hymel et al., 2005). Organizations with moral disengagement are likely to act unethically (Moore et al., 2012).

Researchers have linked moral disengagement to cyber loafing, and employees who act unethically to meet high-performance goals may face consequences (Nocera, 2020). Overqualified employees may want to achieve a goal at any cost, ethical or not (Welsh et al., 2020). There should be targeted interventions whose core responsibility is to challenge moral disengagement with respect to over qualification (Runions et al., 2019). Moral disengagement can increase overqualified employees' unethical behavior (Ring & Hurst, 2019). Cyber loafing is also linked to moral disengagement. However, employees with low moral disengagement despite overqualification are less likely to engage in it (Luo & Bussey, 2019). Morally disengaged people use lame excuses for their illegal and dishonest behavior.

Research has shown that employees in physical work environments are less morally engaged than those in virtual work environments due to the absence of a system of checks and balances (Scully-Russ & Torraco, 2020). Moral disengagement fosters self-control and prevents unethical behavior, and overqualified employees who view their current job as a career are less likely to engage in negative behavior (Dar & Rahman, 2020). High moral disengagement is associated with online activity, which may harm them and others (Yang et al., 2021). Studies show that moral disengagement causes unethical behavior and mediates negative emotions (Fida et al., 2014). Based on the literature, it is hypothesized that:

H$_2$: Moral disengagement mediates the relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing.

Moral Identity as a Moderator between Moral Disengagement and Cyber Loafing

Moral identity is a crucial factor in determining an individual's ethical behavior and influencing their decision-making processes (Hardy & Carlo, 2011). It reveals the aspects of a firm and justifies workplace relationships and job duties. Social networking and work environments also affect morality, and organizations consider moral identity when hiring creatives (Zheng et al., 2019). According to Wang et al. (2017), higher moral identities respond better to organizational initiatives, and moral identity softens moral disengagement and cyber loafing.

Moral identity bonds employees to their companies, promoting ethical behavior and positive results (Itani et al., 2022). High moral identity helps people understand moral disengagement (Jiang et al., 2022), which creates unethical behaviors and influences how other factors lead to ethical or unethical behavior (Moore, 2015). Overqualified employees have low moral identity, which increases the negative correlation between moral disengagement and cyber loafing (Mingzheng et al., 2014). Moral identity indicates willingness to act ethically in ethical situations and predicts morality. Leaders with strong moral identity are followed by employees, and moral disengagement leads to cyber loafing (Giessner et al., 2015).

Moral identity negatively impacts moral disengagement only when moral awareness is low (Shao et al., 2008). High moral identity reduces moral disengagement and cyber loafing, protecting overqualified and morally disengaged workers from cyber loafing (Hardy et al., 2015). Research has shown that moral employees are less likely to engage in unethical behavior because they are less likely to become morally disengaged and feel guilty when they do (Kavussani & Ring, 2017). Based on above literature, we hypothesized that:

H₃: Moral identity plays a moderating role between moral disengagement and cyber loafing, such that when moral identity of employees is high it weakens the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber loafing.
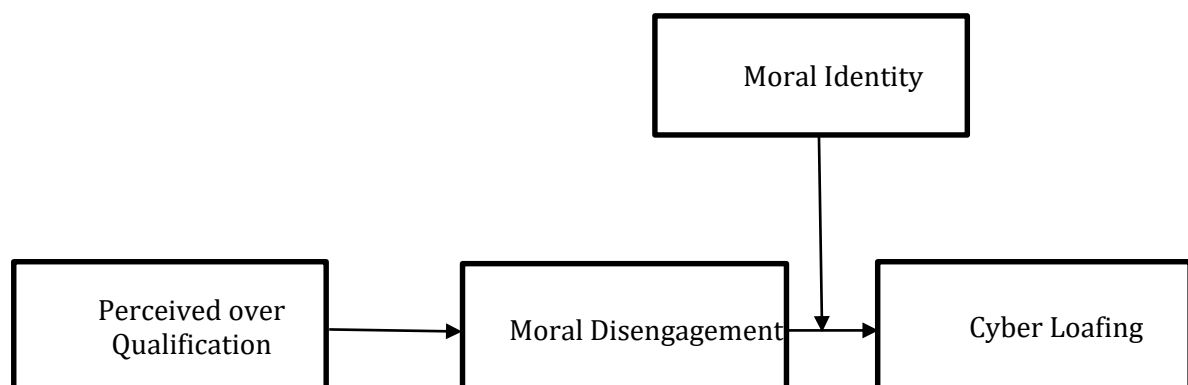
Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 Theoretical Framework

Material and Methods

Cross-sectional research was used in this study. Government and nongovernmental employees were invited to participate via online questionnaire link. The study included CEOs, top managers, supervisors, and part-time workers. Data was collected and hypothesized relationships tested using quantitative methods. This study would examine the hypothetical deductive reasoning approach, which explicitly focuses on the determinism point of view of discovering the truth using evidence. The above reasoning and prevailing hypotheses would be used to test and endorse the expected hypothesis, which would then

be empirically tested to validate the proposed theory. To pass or fail the test, hypothesis findings must match experimental evidence. According to this method, experimental investigation uses a theory in a method that can be accurately created by testing empirical statistics. This analysis uses quantitative method to collect consistency data to compare variables and show the study's variables' relationship. The sample came from public and private organizations. Respondent information was confidential and used for research. Due to time and resource constraints, convenient sampling was used. Data collection involved 410 individuals. Of these, 401 responded. According to the study's inclusion criteria, 343 responses (83.6%) were eligible for inclusion. 58 filled questions were excluded due to missing data or study inclusion criteria. Close-ended questionnaires from various sources measured variables. All variables' questionnaires were based on previous research. The questionnaire had five sections: demographic variables (age, gender, qualification, and experience), perceived over qualification, cyber loafing, moral disengagement, and moral identity. Perceived over qualification was measured by using a standardized scale of 4 items (adopted from Johnson & Johnson, 1997). Moral disengagement was measured by using standardized scale of 8 items (Moore et al., 2012). Cyber loafing was measured by using standardized scale of 11 items (adopted from Lim, 2002). Moral identity was measured by using standardized scale of 5 items (adopted from Aquino & Reed, 2002).

Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, reliability, and correlation of variables. Perceived over qualification has a mean score of 3.33 and a standard deviation of 0.58. Cronbach alpha values range from 0.82 to 0.91, indicating high reliability, exceeding the recommended level 0.70 as suggested by Fornell and Larcker (1981) of greater than 0.70.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviation, Correlations, and Reliabilities

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4
1. Perceived over Qualification	3.33	0.58	(0.87)			
2. Moral Disengagement	2.91	0.55	0.238**	(0.85)		
3. Moral Identity	3.28	0.66	-0.201**	0.059	(0.91)	
4. Cyber Loafing	2.74	0.53	0.290**	0.256**	0.105*	(0.82)

The table shows a significant and positive correlation between perceived over qualification and moral disengagement (r=0.238, p<0.001). the result of correlation analysis also represents that there is a positive and significant relationship between Perceived over qualification and cyber loafing (r = 0.290, p < 0.001). These findings provide initial evidence supporting the hypotheses.

Regression Analysis

Direct Path

To evaluate the hypotheses, Process Model 14 proposed by Hayes (2017) was used. Table 2 presents the standardized regression coefficients and their corresponding standards. The acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses is contingent upon the outcomes of these parameters.

Table 2
Direct Effect

Path	β	S.E
Perceived over Qualification → Cyber Loafing	0.336***	0.041

*p<0.05, **p<0.01, ***p<0.001

The table 2 represents the direct effect of perceived over qualification on cyber loafing. The findings of the study show that perceived over qualification is positively related with cyber loafing (β= 0.336, p < 0.001). Hence, hypothesis 1 i.e. Perceived over qualification positively relates with cyber loafing is supported by the results.

Mediation Effect

The results of the mediation hypothesis, as outlined in Hypothesis 2, are shown in Table 3. This hypothesis posits that moral disengagement acts as a mediator in the association between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing.

Table 3
Mediating Effect of Moral Disengagement

	β	S.E	LLCI	ULCI	Result
Direct Effect	0.398	0.04	0.32	0.44	Accepted
Indirect Effect	0.093	0.01	0.09	0.15	
Total Effect	0.491	0.05	0.41	0.56	

The results of the mediation hypothesis, including direct, indirect, and total effects, are presented in Table 3. There was a significant direct effect shown (β = 0.398, SE = 0.04, LLCI = 0.32, ULCI = 0.44). The findings of this research study also found a significant indirect effect (β = 0.093, SE = 0.01, LLCI = 0.09, ULCI = 0.15). The total effect, which includes both direct and indirect effects, was found to be statistically significant (β = 0.491, SE = 0.05, LLCI = 0.41, ULCI = 0.56). Furthermore, the confidence intervals don't include the value of zero. Therefore, the result of the mediation analysis represent that Hypothesis 4 is supported, i.e.; moral disengagement mediates the relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing.

Moderation Effect

Hypothesis 3 highlighted the moderating effect of moral identity between the relationship of moral disengagement and cyber loafing, weaken the link when moral identity is high.

Table 4
Moderating Effect of Moral Identity

Paths	β	P-value
Moral Disengagement → Cyber loafing	0.252	0.001
Moral Identity → Cyber Loafing	-0.270	0.001
Interaction (Moral Disengagement x Moral Identity) → Cyber Loafing	0.137	0.017

Table 4 represent the results of moderation effect which shows significant value of interaction term (Moral Disengagement X Moral Identity) with β = 0.137 and p < 0.001. The findings indicates significant moderating effect of moral identity when compared to the stand-alone impact of moral disengagement on cyber loafing is greater (β = 0.252, p < 0.01) than the combined effect of moral disengagement and moral identity. It indicates that when moral identity is high the positive relationship of moral disengagement and cyber loafing is weaken. Thus, hypothesis H3 is accepted by the findings of the study.

Discussion

The study aimed to explore the relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing in Pakistan. The results showed a significant positive association between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing, with moral disengagement playing a significant role in this relationship. The finding of the study also indicates that moral disengagement mediated the relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber

loafing. The moderating effect of moral identity was also explored, suggesting that if an employee's moral identity is high but they are morally disengaged, they will not engage in cyber loafing. Moral disengagement is a process that convinces people to follow unethical standards, and a high moral identity weakens the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber loafing. The results showed that the existence of moral identity significantly moderates the relationship between moral disengagement and cyber loafing and weakens this relationship. This suggests that when an employee perceives themselves as overqualified, they will morally disengage when their moral identity is low, leading to more cyber loafing.

The research aimed to extend existing literature on perceived over qualification by considering the P-J fit theory, which suggests that organizations can get favorable responses only when there is a match between employees' qualifications and their jobs. The study also demonstrated that moral disengagement acts as a mediator between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing, further addressing the moderating effect of moral identity between moral disengagement and cyber loafing. Data were collected through questionnaires circulated to employees working in public and private organizations in Pakistan through Google docs.

Conclusion

Perceived over qualification, a result of poor person-job fit, can lead to negative consequences such as cyber loafing. Hiring managers should focus on selecting candidates who are best fit for the job, and HR departments should have a deep understanding of hiring strategies and jobs. Organizations should monitor employees and adjust their positions if their mindset changes. Moral identity can also motivate overqualified employees to avoid cyber loafing. HR managers should recognize that perceptions of over qualification are a symptom, not a cause of negative attitudes. Cyber loafing can have positive impacts, such as promoting new ideas, stress relief, and increased learning flow. Managers should understand the importance of ethical values and standards and organize training programs to restrain moral disengagement and cyber loafing. Strategies should also be introduced to enhance employee wellbeing, ensuring they feel valued and appreciated for their skills. This study provides valuable insights for improving workplace efficiency, but can be replicated for larger, diversified samples.

Recommendations

This research has some limitations due to time and resource constraints. It only examined one moderator and mediator. However, Future research should extend the model and check the other moderators and mediators as well. In future researchers should consider ethical leadership and ethical climate as moderators. The study only found a negative relationship between perceived over qualification and cyber loafing, but it can also be possible to examine positive relationship for further research. The study's focus on Pakistan's culture may result in different results in other countries. So, in future research can be conducted in another country. The sample size is small, which affects the results significantly. Future research should consider larger sample sizes for testing the model. The COVID-19 pandemic affected data collection methods, requiring Google Docs' method. Future research should recommend face-to-face coordination for data collection. Despite these limitations, the study encourages potential researchers to explore the positive dimensions of perceived over qualification, moral disengagement, and cyber loafing.

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