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ORIGINAL RESEARCH

Exploring the Underlying Mechanism Between Perceived Injustice and Knowledge Hiding: An Empirical Investigation

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Purpose: Drawing on the assumptions of social exchange and conversation of resource theories, this study aims to empirically explore the underlying mechanism between perceived injustice and knowledge hiding in the organizational context. To explicate the relationship, this study examines the catalytic roles of employees' self-serving behavior and perceived organizational politics.

Methods: A moderated-mediation model is developed and tested. Data collected from 234 individuals from both manufacturing and service sector firms.

Results: The findings of the study propose that self-serving behavior positively mediates the link between perceived injustice and knowledge hiding. Moreover, the result of two-way interaction between employees' self-serving behavior and perceived organizational politics further amplifies the indirect relationship between perceived injustice and knowledge hiding.

Conclusion: The findings of this study help to enrich the extant research on knowledge hiding by determining and evaluating the factors that hitherto unspecified and explicate the relationship between perceived injustice and knowledge hiding within the organizational contexts. Moreover, this also highlights the importance of employing both individual and contextual elements together while studying knowledge hiding within the organizations.

Keywords: perceived injustice, knowledge hiding, self-serving behavior, perceived organizational politics, organizational context, moderated mediation

Introduction

In recent times, knowledge hiding (KH) as a phenomenon, has been receiving due attention by scholars of knowledge management.[1–3] KH is referred to as "an intentional attempt to withhold or conceal knowledge that has been requested by another person".[4] Considering the significance, KH holds a substantial share in today's workplace settings.[5] For instance, the result of a Western-based survey indicated that 76% of the respondents admitted that they had been involved in KH at workplace.[4] Similarly, the report of an Eastern-based survey confirmed that 46% of organizational employees confessed that they intentionally withhold knowledge at work.[6] These survey reports propose that KH behavior is prevalent in both Eastern and Western contexts. In competitive circumstances, individuals who are involved in KH behaviors are threatening to both individual and organizational performance,[7,8] and thus may be viewed as an element, ie, unethical and antisocial.[9] Scholars also realize that KH may have detrimental effects on organizations[10,11] either in the form of hindering organizational growth[12] or in financial loss.[13] For instance, KH among co-workers resulted in a financial loss of at least $31.5 billion a year for the "Fortune 500" companies.[14,15] Similarly, KH behavior has also cost up to $47 million in productivity to US organizations in a single calendar year.[16]

Past research highlighted many individual and organizational factors that contribute to affect individuals' KH behavior, such as power dynamics,[17] self-serving leadership,[18] job security,[19] trait competitiveness,[20] workplace ostracism,[13] and personality traits.[21–23] However, perceived injustice (PIJ) is also one of those critical facets that facilitates KH at workplace.[24,25] PIJ is defined as "an unfavorable workplace experience that is pervasive and significant across cultural settings".[25] Since perceptions about injustice in escalating KH behavior are well established in the

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literature; hence, it is important to realize why and how such perceptions intensifies KH behaviors. Because beliefs about PIJ may be stressful for organizational employees which might affect their job performance or career prospects.[25,26] To address this question, this study examines the potential role of employees' self-serving behavior (SSB) as an outcome of PIJ that may lead individuals to exhibit KH behavior at the workplace. SSB is a type of behavior that urge individuals to "disregard one's or group interests and, instead, prioritize their self-interest, for instance, by divesting scarce organizational resources away from collective purposes and toward themselves".[27]

According to Blau,[28] social exchange theory (SET) seeks to explain the behaviors involved in the transactions and relationship between two or more entities. Any sort of intervention into such reciprocal process of sharing resources between organization and its members may influence employees' behaviors and attitudes.[29] So, the type of treatment given by the organization would be reciprocated and reflected in employees' behaviors in a similar way.[30] Individuals are more concerned about the treatment they receive[31] as it plays a crucial role in their actions and moral judgment about others' behaviors.[32,33] Any sort of mistreatment may harm individual resources and exhort their adverse behavioral reactions such as KH.[34] Individuals may engage in KH to retaliate or undermine against others around them or to safeguard their personal interests.[4] Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that PIJ among individuals stimulates their SSB which in turn elevates KH.

Alongside various organizational elements, studies have confirmed that both situational and individual factors are equally important in predicting employees' behaviors at the workplace.[4,35] To advance in the existing literature, this study further considers perceived organizational politics (POP) as a situational factor, that when interacts with an individual factor (ie, SSB), influences KH behavior. POP "involves an individual's attribution to behaviors of self-serving intent, and is defined as an individual's subjective evaluation about the extent to which the work environment is characterized by co-workers and supervisors who demonstrate such self-serving behavior".[36]

Ferris, Kacmar[37] argued that organizational outcomes are usually affected by the subjective percept of organizational politics, which in turn, influences individuals' emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. High perception of organizational politics may impel individuals to engage in KH behavior in order to safeguard their personal interests.[38] Conversation of resource (COR) theory also suggests that individuals' behaviors are driven by their desires in avoiding resource losses and protecting existing resources[39]. For instance, individuals believe that hiding knowledge may facilitate them in gaining political advantage at the workplace as it ultimately turns into a source of power.[22] To build the argument and drawing the tenet of COR theory, we propose that organizational employees behave self-servingly and hide knowledge to others, when exposed to a highly political environment.

Recent studies proposed that both personal and situational factors are important[40] and should be given due attention as it determines employees' behaviors about unfair treatment,[41] injustice[42] and KH.[43] Thus, responding to such needs and recent calls in the literature, we contend that PIJ may have a potential in affecting individuals' intentions to hide knowledge.

Thus, the main aim of this study is to empirically examine the underlying mechanism between PIJ and KH. To explore this relationship, both SSB and POP are included as mediator and moderator, respectively, and investigated to decide whether these factors amplify or attenuate such potentially harmful outcomes, ie, KH. In respect of this the authors claim that this study holds some valuable contributions. First, to the best of authors' knowledge, no study hitherto examined the relationship between PIJ and KH through these underlying catalysts (ie, SSB and POP) which is believed to be a valuable contribution in the extant research. Second, this study will also highlight the importance of both individual and contextual factors together while studying KH. Third, the study will significantly contribute to curbing KH behaviors in organizational contexts which may help reduce the potential risk of non-financial or financial loss. Therefore, the present study addresses the following questions:

(1) Does the PIJ positively impact employees' SSB? (2) Does employees' SSB positively related to KH? (3) Does employees' SSB mediates the relationship between PIJ and KH? (4) Does POP moderate the SSB-KH relationship? Figure 1 shows the relationships to be analyzed.

Review of Literature and Hypotheses Development

The research framework of this study is established using the theoretical lens of both SET[28] and COR theory[39] to explicate those elements that trigger KH behavior among individuals at workplace.

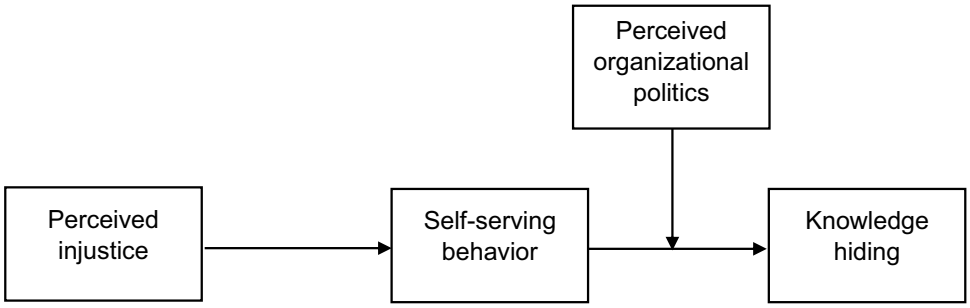

Figure 1 Theoretical framework (moderated mediation model).

Knowledge Hiding

Knowledge is defined as "the idea, information, or expertise required by the employees of an organization to complete specific tasks".[4,44–46] In knowledge-intensive organizations, employees are exposed to a complex power/knowledge paradigm that determines their KH behaviors.[47] Thus, employers consider KH is as counter-productive[48] and deviant behavior.[49] Scholar have agreed that KH specifically involves the concealment or withholding knowledge from others.[19] Connelly, Zweig, Webster, Trougakos[4] described three forms of KH: (1) playing dumb which is referred as the false claims by the individuals against the requested information or knowledge, (2) evasive hiding is all about providing incorrect or wrong information or knowledge to the requestor, and (3) rationalized hiding is the logical explanation for individuals' reluctance to share knowledge. Since each form of KH holds a negative connotation of individuals' behavior at workplace, this study considers KH as a unidimensional construct.

Perceived Injustice and Knowledge Hiding

A stream of behavioral studies highlights that organizations' interactions are embedded in a system of fairness and justice especially when organizations seek to compare costs and rewards in such interactions.[50,51] So, justice plays a pivotal role in a healthy relationship performance.[52] The perception of a fair justice system enhances commitment, relationship investment and knowledge sharing behavior among organizational employees.[53] Conversely, injustice may increase the potential of generating conflicts, deteriorate trust,[54] and ultimately spoil relationships among employees.[55] Scholars have characterized organizational justice into three dimensions: (1) distributive justice which refers to being fair while giving rewards (most often financial) to employees, (2) procedural justice which involves a fair process and procedure of compensating employees, and (3) interactional justice refers to the informational and interpersonal interactions among employees.[56–59] However, any sort of unfair treatment or PIJ may support negative reactions (eg, SSB) and escalate KH among employees. This study considers all dimensions of injustice in a single construct as PIJ. The findings of a study showed that intentions of hiding knowledge among knowledge-intensive groups are predicted by organizational factors such as social exchange, task interdependence, and perception of (in)justice.[60] The likelihood of KH in response to PIJ increases because individuals at workplace sought to delineate themselves with attributes that are mismatched to those which determine their organizations.[61] Such perceptions of unfair treatment create psychological distances among employees, that as a result, elevate their KH behavior.[49,62,63]

Mediation by Self-Serving Behavior

SET[28] has been considered as one of the crucial paradigms in understanding employees' behaviors at the workplace.[64] SET entails that individuals seek to formulate exchange relationships with their immediate supervisors and organizations which are solely based on their experiences.[65–67] Such relationships bring forth reciprocal behaviors at the workplace[68] in which individuals behave in the same way as what they get, eg, bad against bad or good against good.[69] Studies on organizational (in)justice are broadly focused on individuals' perceptions about (un)fair treatments and their significant impacts on individuals' workplace behaviors and attitudes.[63,70] Employees' PIJ may foster deviant behaviors[71] and potential opportunism at their workplace.[72] Moreover, the

perceptions of such mistreatment increases individuals' SSB which in turn diminishes their voice and prosocial behavior.[70] The preceding literature manifests that perceptions of injustice are strong predictors of molding employees' adverse behaviors (eg, SSB) at the workplace. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that PIJ strongly intensifies employees' SSB at the workplace which is hypothesized as follows:

Hypothesis 1: Perceived injustice has a significant and positive impact on employees' self-serving behavior.

Research suggests that employees' engagement in SSB may have many detrimental outcomes at the workplace.[73] These include stealing, cheating, corruption, loafing, and knowledge hiding.[18] Considering the tenets of SET, employees' SSB not only restricts them in generating creative ideas at the workplace but also predicts a reciprocal distrust loop in which they are more prone to hide knowledge.[74] If the individuals perceive that their personal interests are at stake or there is any harm to their personal competitiveness, they engage in KH.[4] The strategy of KH enables individuals to maximize their personal interest and gaining competitive advantage at the workplace.[75] Similarly, individuals make self-interested strategies to misguide their co-workers to get more incentives and personal benefits at the workplace, thus their motivation in engaging KH becomes justified.[76] In this study, we are suggesting SSB is one of the contributing factors that urge organizational employees to observe KH behavior. Thus, keeping in view the pertinent literature, following hypothesis is developed:

Hypothesis 2: Employees' self-serving behavior is positively associated with knowledge hiding.

SET proposes that employees are motivated by their personal interests. Every act of sharing something valuable (eg, knowledge) may prompt a reciprocal behavior which then initiates a mutual process of exchanging rewards.[19] Scholars agree that employees' interaction within the organization represents a two-way reciprocal exchange with others which is embedded with expectations and potential rewards.[77,78] However, when individuals have some conflicts with their subordinates, colleagues, managers, or employers, they may perceive that quality of their interactions gets compromised.[79] Considering the perspective of interactional injustice, the phenomenon of perceived quality (ie, fairness, dignity, respect, and politeness) talks about the treatment which employees receive from other members of the organization.[56] So, if the employee feel that norms of interactions are violated, they may indulge in retaliatory behavior[80] such as KH. The COR theory[39] also suggests that when organizational employees are threatened in losing their resources (ie, knowledge), the behave self-servingly and seek protection against perceive threats (ie, injustice) by hiding these resources.[81,82] Thus, keeping in view the relevant studies, we devise the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 3: Employees' self-serving behavior positively mediates the link between perceived injustice and knowledge hiding.

Moderation by Perceived Organizational Politics

POP viewed as an important situational factor in organizational behavior studies is mostly perceived with negative connotation.[63] A politically charged environment possesses uncertainties and ambiguities that impulse individuals to engage in unlawful self-serving tactics for their personal gains.[83] In a similar vein, political activities are usually viewed as self-serving actions in which individuals do not bother to consider the welfare of their colleagues or even the organizations.[84] In addition, a political work environment having self-centered behaviors and selfish motives impels individuals to protect their self-interests.[85] For instance, a few motives of a political behavior include promoting one's personal interest, fighting for the valuable rewards, and evening the score against the past organizational injustice.[80] Individuals also manifest several illegitimate political activities (eg, influencing favoritism-based promotion and pay decisions, building coalitions, and backstabbing) which are planned strategically to protect, benefit or enhance their self-interests, often irrespective of the well-being of the organization.[86]

In contrast to the assumptions of SET, employees in a "politically charged" work environment might not be motivated to employ reciprocal responses.[43] Therefore, they draw themselves out from pro-social behaviors[30,64] and get involved in deviant behaviors such as KH.[25,62,87] In knowledge-intensive organizations, collaboration among employees requires knowledge sharing.[88] Employees confront immense competition because they not only feel the pressure to perform but

the urge to outperform others.[20,89] Such competitive pressure, when coupled with a "highly political environment" drives employees to hide knowledge in gaining competitive advantage and staying ahead in the race.[20] Moreover, they may also hide knowledge from others as a defensive behavior.[85] Because a highly political work environment advocate employees to display defensive behavior so they cope up with unfairness, uncertainties and stress at their workplace.[90,91] By drawing on the COR theory, it may be argued that employees, when exposed to a stressful situation, usually tend to minimize the loss of their resource (ie, knowledge) by not sharing it with others in order to safeguard their capital.[39] Thus, we believe that POP may compliment the reasons of individuals' engagement in SSB at their workplace.[92] Such behaviors usually predict a reciprocal loop of distrust that impels employees to hide knowledge with others[74] in order to safeguard their personal interests[4] and to remain indispensable in their organizations.[93]

Therefore, it is fair to propose that in a politically charged work environment, and where self-serving activities are in abundance, employees will prefer to hide knowledge with others. Nevertheless, perceptions of a highly political work environment, when combined with SSB, may intensify their indulgence in KH behavior. So, the logic is hypothesized as follows:

Hypothesis 4: Perceived organizational politics will moderate the relationship between employees' self-serving behavior and knowledge hiding and the positive relationship will be stronger (weaker) at higher (lower) levels of perceived organizational politics.

If employees perceive their work environment as highly political, they become more conscious to preserve their personal resource by attributing deviant behavior (eg, SSB) in response to the unfair treatment from their supervisor and organization.[63] Moreover, perceptions of such environment may also lead employees in engaging KH – a form of counterproductive behavior.[19,85] Because when organizational employees experience politics in the environment, the probability of their indulgence in counterproductive/deviant work behaviors turns high.[94] So, it is fair to expect that employees' PIJ propels them to resort to SSB leading them to exhibit KH, especially when they perceive politics at the workplace. Therefore, we propose the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5: Perceived organizational politics will positively moderate the indirect relationship of perceived injustice on knowledge hiding via employees' self-serving behavior. However, this indirect relationship will be stronger (weaker) at higher (lower) level of perceived organizational politics.

Methods

Procedure

In this survey-based study, data were gathered through questionnaires and distributed to the individuals employed in both manufacturing and service sector of Pakistan. The questionnaire was formulated in English language as it is employed as the official language in all organizational sectors.[63,95,96] To reduce the bias, entire data were collected in two different waves to maintain an appropriate temporal separation (time lag) between predictor, moderator/mediator, and criterion variables. Because if the lag is short, it cannot diminish the salience of the predicting variable. And if the lag is too high, then it allows factors that may intervene and contaminate between predictor and criterion variables.[97] Hence, this present research adopted a lag of six weeks which seemed to meet the criteria as above. Specifically, at first wave (time 1), 263 respondents were asked to fill the questionnaire on PIJ and POP. They were also requested to rate their opinions on questions about social desirability bias.[98] At this time, we also noted their demographical information (eg, age, gender, education, and work experience). After six weeks (time 2), these respondents were approached again to share their opinions on questions about SSB and KH. The style of the questionnaire remained unchanged as floated in the first wave. To attain appropriate and fair responses, additional information about confidentiality was also added at the prefatory section of the questionnaire in both waves. After equating the collected responses, a final sample of 234 was found valid and reasonable for analysis in the study with an overall 88.97% response rate.

Sample

The selection of the companies was done using professional and personal links; contacts of one of the authors who also assisted in data collection procedure. For data collection, we targeted both manufacturing and service sector of Pakistan because it contained a broad range of knowledge-intensive firms such as academia, food, packaging, healthcare, telecom, IT,

and banks. We approached more than 130 companies, and the final sample was taken from 102 companies. In the final sample of 234, 76 respondents were females and 158 were males with an average age of 34.68 years (SD = 6.27). The average organizational experience was 11.03 years (SD = 5.78). Moreover, the sample contained a diverse range of educational qualifications including secondary school certificates (1.70%), college degree holders (3.84%), university graduates (26.06%), master's degree holders (44.44%), respondents with post-grad university degree (20.51%), and doctorates (3.41%).

Measures

In this survey-based study, a Likert scale of 5-point ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree") was used to gauge all study variables.

Independent Variable: Perceived Injustice

Niehoff, Moorman[99] developed a 20 items scale to measure organizational justice. We used 15 items from this scale to measure perceived justice following Khattak, Zolin, Muhammad.[63] Since, this study emphasizes on perceived injustice, so the score of each item was reverse coded as the score of injustice. This justice scale was comprised of three sub-dimensions of justice, ie, distributive (in)justice, procedural (in)justice, and interactional (in)justice. Distributive (in) justice was evaluated using five-item scale measuring the pay levels, fairness, job responsibilities and workload. One of the items of this scale included "My work schedule is fair". Procedural (in)justice was measured by employing a scale of six-items to assess formal work procedures. One of the items included "Job decisions taken by my manager/boss are taken in an unbiased manner". Interactional (in)justice was analyzed using four-items scale. The example included "My manager/boss explains very clearly any decision made about my job". Hence, PIJ was taken and measured as a single construct. The coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.91.

Dependent Variable: Knowledge Hiding

KH was gauged on 12-items scale devised by Connelly, Zweig, Webster, Trougakos.[4] This scale unfolded with the following statements "I agree to help him/her but never really intend to". The coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.89.

Mediating Variable: Self-Serving Behavior

An eight-items scale devised by Rus, Van Knippenberg, Wisse[100] was employed to measure SSB. This scale opened with the following sample item: "I have negotiated a bonus for myself that was substantially higher than the bonus my subordinates received". The coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.82.

Moderating Variable: Perceived Organizational Politics

A scale of 15-items developed by Kacmar, Carlson[101] was employed to assess the phenomenon of POP. This scale unfolded with a sample statement: "There has always been an influential group in this department that on one ever crosses." The coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha was 0.62.

Control Variables

In this study, gender, age, education, work experience, and social desirability bias are included as control variables because past research suggest that these factors may cause a potential confounding effect on human behaviors.[102–104] Therefore, to get a purified effect, control for these variables is essential.

Analysis of Data and Results

Measurement Models

To establish discriminant validity among all study variables, a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were carried out via using JASP 0.14.1. Given the length of measuring variables, an items-parceling approach is adopted[105] to develop indicators for measuring variables and to formulate an appropriate sample size-to-indicator ratio.[106,107] In this study, the items of PIJ, KH, and POP were covering three sub-dimensions each, so these measures were parceled into the indicators accordingly. Similarly, a random parceling into three indicators was made as well for SSB. Since, this study employed a unidimensional scale, thus parceling strategy remained

appropriate and productive.[108] Furthermore, model fitness was analyzed on the bases of fit indices, ie, TLI, CFI, SRMR, and RMSEA. The discriminant validity of study variables emerged by comparing the fit of the constrained models. Considering all the constructs and their sub-dimensions, four possible combinations could be generated for models' comparison. As shown in Table 1, a four-factors model (perceived injustice, self-serving behavior, perceived organizational politics, and knowledge hiding) yielded a reasonably good fit within the given data, ie, $\chi2$=107.938, df = 48 (p<0.001), TLI = 0.915, CFI = 0.938, SRMR = 0.062, and RMSEA = 0.073. All of these indicators were effectively conforming the criteria as suggested by[109] hence, showed enough support for an adequate discriminant validity among all study variables.

Moreover, using SPSS 24.0, we also analyzed the standardized factor loadings of the parcels developed for each construct to determine convergent validity. The subsequent resulting values of factor loadings are reported in Table 2 suggesting a good fit against cut-off values of average variance extracted (AVE) proposed by[110–113] and composite reliability (CR) as suggested by,[114,115] hence the results were evident enough for reasonable convergent validity among each construct.

Table 1 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Description	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	TLI	CFI	SRMR	RMSEA
One-factor model	676.984	54.000	12.537	0.214	0.357	0.211	0.222
Two-factor model	209.441	53.000	3.952	0.799	0.839	0.090	0.112
Three-factor model	149.447	51.000	2.930	0.869	0.898	0.081	0.091
Four-factor model	107.938	48.000	2.249	0.915	0.938	0.062	0.073

Notes: One-factor model: [PIJ, SSB, POP, KH combined]; Two-factor model: PIJ, [SSB, POP, KH combined]; Three-factor model: PIJ, [SSB, POP combined], KH; Four-factor model: PIJ, SSB, POP, KH.
Abbreviations: TLI, Tucker-Lewis index; CFI, comparative fit index; SRMR, standardized root mean square residual; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation.

Table 2 Convergent Validity

Variable	Parcels of Items	Standardized Factors Loadings	CR (>0.6)	AVE (>0.4)
Perceived injustice	Parcel 1	0.721	0.880	0.712
	Parcel 2	0.917		
	Parcel 3	0.881		
Self-serving behaviour	Parcel 1	0.745	0.812	0.594
	Parcel 2	0.887		
	Parcel 3	0.663		
Perceived organizational politics	Parcel 1	0.645	0.738	0.485
	Parcel 2	0.702		
	Parcel 3	0.738		
Knowledge hiding	Parcel 1	0.809	0.864	0.679
	Parcel 2	0.831		
	Parcel 3	0.832		

Abbreviations: CR, composite reliability; AVE, average variance extracted.

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

The descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) and correlation matrix for the variables are reported in Table 3. In the matrix, SSB was positive and significantly correlated to both PIJ and KH. Similarly, the relationship between POP and KH was also significant and positive.

Hypotheses Testing

The four-factors model (Figure 1) represents a moderated mediation model in which the effect of moderation lies at the second stage of the mediation. We conducted a series of regression models via using PROCESS macro v3.5[116] in SPSS 24.0 to test the devised hypotheses and estimating the direct, indirect, and conditional indirect effects. Moreover, the effects of mediation, moderation, and moderated-mediated were tested by employing the bootstrapped approach method (with five-thousand samples) and rendering 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs)[117] If the CI is without zero, it stands significant.[118] Furthermore, while calculating the conditional indirect effect, both SSB and POP were mean centered[118] prior to estimate the interactional effect and to avert multicollinearity.[119]

Table 4 shows the results of the regression models applied to test the hypotheses. The results suggest that PIJ had a significant and positive impact on employees' SSB, hence providing support to H1. Results also revealed that employees' SSB also had a positive relationship with KH, thus supported H2. Likewise, the results of hypothesized mediation revealed that CIs were without zero values (ie, $\beta = 0.12$, BootSE = 0.04, CI = 0.04, 0.22), hence lending support to H3 (ie, full mediation of employees' SSB in the link between PIJ and KH).

In support of H4, the results as given in Table 4 indicated that POP positively moderated the relationship between employees' SSB and KH, because the coefficient of two-way interaction (POP×SSB) had a significant and positive impact on KH (ie, $\beta = 0.47$, BootSE = 0.16, $p < 0.05$), hence H4 is supported. This interaction is also plotted as in Figure 2.

Table 5 reports the results of conditional indirect effect (ie, PIJ → SSB → KH). It showed that the effect sizes were different at both values of POP. At low value, the effect of was significant and positive (no zero exists between LLCI and ULCI) (ie, $\beta = 0.07$, BootSE = 0.04, 95% CI = 0.01, 0.16), and became amplified at high value of POP (ie, $\beta = 0.16$, BootSE = 0.06, 95% CI = 0.05, 0.28). Hence, fully supported H5. Moreover, the index value

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender	0.32	0.47	—								
2. Age	34.61	6.27	−0.10	—							
3. Work_Exp	11.03	5.78	−0.18**	0.90***	—						
4. Education	3.88	0.94	0.35***	0.06	−0.05	—					
5. SDB	3.37	0.49	−0.06	0.1	0.08	0.04	—				
6. PIJ	2.62	0.68	−0.12	0.05	0.08	−0.09	0.08	—			
7. SSB	2.20	0.74	−0.09	0.03	0.00	−0.10	−0.05	0.21**	—		
8. KH	2.21	0.76	−0.17*	0.02	0.03	−0.15*	−0.07	0.09	0.55***	—	
9. POP	3.18	0.41	0.01	−0.01	0.02	−0.13*	0.05	0.11	0.08	0.16*	—

Notes: Significance Levels: *$p < 0.05$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.
Abbreviations: SD, standard deviation; Work_Exp, working experience; PIJ, perceived injustice; KH, knowledge hiding; SSB, self-serving behavior; POP, perceived organizational politics; SDB, social desirability bias.

Table 4 Regression Results

Description	Self-Serving Behavior			Knowledge Hiding		
	Model 1			Model 2		
	β	Std.Err	LLCI, ULCI	β	Std.Err	LLCI, ULCI
Control Variables						
Gender†	−0.09	0.11	−0.31, 0.13	−0.24**	0.10	−0.43, −0.04
Age	0.03	0.02	0.00, 0.07	−0.01	0.02	−0.04, 0.02
Work experience ‡	−0.03	0.02	−0.07, 0.00	0.01	0.02	−0.02, 0.04
Education	−0.07	0.06	−0.18, 0.04	−0.01	0.05	−0.11, 0.08
SDB	−0.10	0.10	−0.30, 0.09	−0.03	0.09	−0.20, 0.14
Study Variables						
PIJ	0.22**	0.07	0.08, 0.36	−0.03	0.06	−0.15, 0.09
SSB				0.54***	0.06	0.43, 0.65
POP				0.26**	0.10	0.06, 0.46
POP × SSB				0.47***	0.17	0.14, 0.81
R^2	0.06**			0.36***		
F – statistics	F (6, 227) = 2.74 $p < 0.01$			F (9, 224) = 14.26 $p < 0.001$		

Notes: N = 234, Gender† (0=female, 1=male) and Work experience ‡ are coded as continuous variables. Significance Levels: **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$.
Abbreviations: SDB, social desirability bias; PIJ, perceived injustice; SSB, self-serving behavior; POP, perceived organizational politics; LLCI, lower limit confidence interval; ULCI, upper limit confidence interval.

of moderated mediation was adequate to prove a successful moderated mediation at the second stage of mediation path (ie, Index = 0.10, BootSE = 0.05, 95% CI = 0.003, 0.217). The results were significant because CI was without zero value.

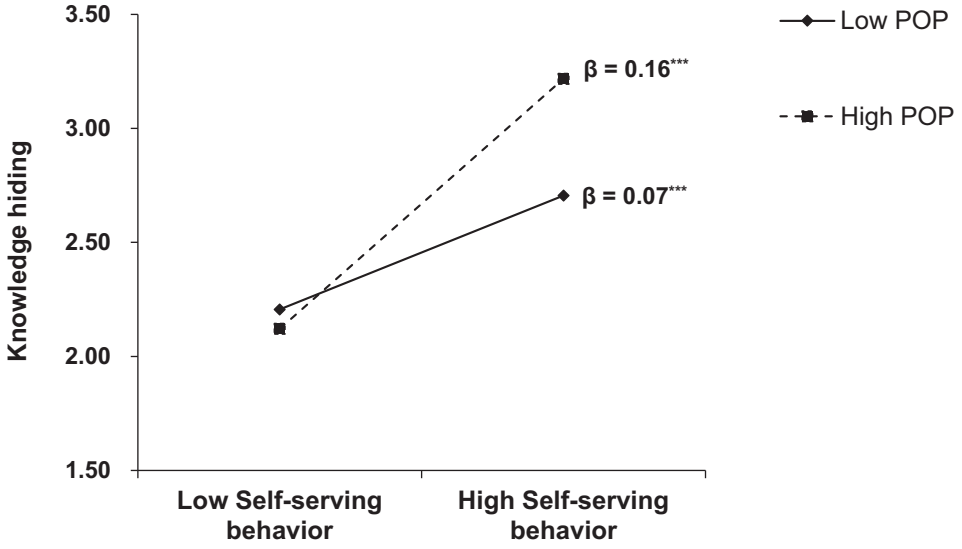

Figure 2 The moderating effect of perceived organizational politics (POP) on the relationship between employees' self-serving behavior and knowledge hiding.

Table 5 Conditional Indirect Effect of Perceived Injustice on Knowledge Hiding Through Employees' Self-Serving Behavior at Three Levels of Perceived Organizational Politics

Levels of POP	Conditional Indirect Effect	Std. Error	Boot LLCI, ULCI
Low POP (−0.41)	0.07	0.04	0.01, 0.16
Mean (0.00)	0.11	0.04	0.04, 0.21
High POP (0.41)	0.16	0.06	0.05, 0.28

Notes: N = 234. Bootstrap sample size = 5000.
Abbreviations: POP, perceived organizational politics; LLCI, lower limit confidence interval; ULCI, upper limit confidence interval.

Discussion

The main aim of this study was to explore the underlying mechanism between PIJ and KH. The results of this study successfully supported the hypothesized moderated-mediation model which evidenced that both employees' SSB and POP appeared to be the key underlying mechanisms. Moreover, we established that employees' perception of injustice positively predicted their SSB at the workplace. These findings are aligned with the past research which determined a significant relationship of injustice and counterproductive and deviant workplace behaviors.[63,120] Results also revealed that employees' SSB, stemmed with PIJ, facilitates KH. Because the likelihood of KH is eminent in those individuals who look up to maximize their personal interests.[87] We also found a significant and positive relationship between POP and KH. The findings were coherent with previous studies proposing that an environment, which is politically charged, urge organizational employees to exhibit KH.[38,85] Furthermore, the findings also unveiled that POP moderates the association between employees' SSB and KH. Based on the results, we may conclude that a high political work environment escalates the intentions of hiding knowledge among self-serving employees when already experiencing injustice at the workplace.

Theoretical Implications

This study can make several theoretical contributions. Firstly, it enriches the existing literature on KH by identifying its crucial antecedents that are caused by PIJ. Though few studies investigated that employees' perceptions of unfair treatment might motivate them to hide knowledge,[4,49,121] but little empirical studies investigated that how PIJ contribute in exhibiting KH behaviors among employees. Thus, based on the concepts of social exchange[28] and COR[39] theories, this study helps in filling these gaps by identifying the potential causes of KH in response to PIJ. In organizational contexts, the perceptions of injustice are very much visible and possess many detrimental outcomes. Recent studies determined certain elements that evoke employees' KH behaviors when they perceive some sort of injustice such as role conflict,[5] workplace bullying,[122] and abusive supervision[40]. Secondly, this study fairly revealed the mediating role of employees' SSB in the PIJ-KH relationship. To the best of authors' knowledge, no study has yet explored this mediating mechanism linking PIJ and KH. So, to fulfil this essential gap we suggested that employees' SSB, predicted by PIJ, represents as a crucial impediment which strongly intensifies KH. Thirdly, to get more in-depth insights about the association between employees' SSB and KH, we examined the moderating impact of POP on SSB-KH relationship. The findings enrich the pertinent literature on KH by exhibiting that a politically charged environment encourages self-serving employees to exhibit KH. The results also proved that two-way interaction between SSB and POP positively affected KH. The findings are in alignment with the study by[9] and fairly propose a joint consideration of both individual and situational factors while advancing in the studies related to organizational behavior, psychology and KH.

Practical Implications

This study offers some notable implications for the practitioners. First, any perceptions of injustice may cause a psychological disengagement among employees leading them to hide knowledge. So, there should be a mechanism that could monitor and address the potential elements of injustice as the workplace.[123] This could only be done when

employers review their policies (compensation, HR, equity, whistleblowing, etc.) and design them in a way that all employees may freely participate to raise their concerns. Such steps may guarantee to boost employees' sense of ownership about their work and organization.[124] Second, the empirical findings revealed that employees' SSB mediates the PIJ-KH relationship. Therefore, a healthy corporate culture should be adopted to ensure value, transparency, trust, and respect to deal with such behaviors. For example, if employers value fair decisions regarding lay-offs, demotions, etc., they may gain trust of its employees that in turn, elicit their urge to pursue collective interests rather than personal interests.[125] Third, POP when rooted with unfairness may sabotage the effort-reward expectancies. So, strategies could be made that may diminish the POP which include: (1) implementing a transparent performance-based reward system, (2) formulating clear guidelines and rules to ensure fairness while allocating the resources, and (3) providing open forums to employees for negotiating and discussing their concerns with top managers fearlessly. Lastly, the employers should review its management practice to curb the prevalence of KH by promoting a culture of collaboration, learning, and cooperation. Moreover, they should emphasize having collective ownership of knowledge,[6] promoting norms and building rewards systems against knowledge sharing.[18]

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The study carries some limitations. First, the present study tested KH as a single construct, which might be extended by considering its three sub-dimensions (playing dumb, evasive and rationalized hiding)[4] for further investigations. Moreover, potential unique predictors may also be explored for each dimension of KH along with specifying the interventions that could effectively evaluate their adverse effects.[20] Second, this study identified employees' SSB as a connector between injustice and KH relationship. However, other individual factors such as psychological contract breach,[122] cynicism,[126] and power dynamics[127] may also be considered while investigating injustice and KH relationship. Third, this study employed POP as a moderating variable that augmented KH behavior in self-serving employees. Variables, such as thriving at work,[128] or perceived mastery climate[129] may also be added as buffers to exert negative effect on KH. Fourth, this survey-based study gathered data from knowledge intensive firms of Pakistan, which might call the issue of generalizability. So, the findings may not be uniformly applicable in other cultural contexts. To ensure replicability, more studies are to be conducted outside Pakistan considering the moderating roles of individual and cultural differences.[130]

Conclusion

The findings of this study help to enrich the extant research on the detrimental effects of PIJ within the organizational contexts by exploring the catalytic roles of employees' SSB and POP on KH. We demonstrated that employees' SSB positively mediates PIJ-KH relationship. Further, POP also moderates the positive relationship between employees' SSB and KH. The two-way interaction between SSB and POP further escalates the employees' intentions to hide knowledge. This study also presents the importance of employing both individual and contextual elements while studying KH within organizations.

Data Sharing Statement

The data that support findings and conclusions of this study will be available from the corresponding author upon a reasonable request.

Statement of Ethics

The present survey-based study involved human participants and conducted adhering to the Declaration of Helsinki guidelines, further reviewed, and approved by the Committee of Professional Ethics FAST School of Management, National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences, Lahore Campus. Moreover, all participants furnished their informed consent after receiving a guarantee of anonymity and data security from the authors.

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Disclosure

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