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Illuminating the Untapped Insights: A Systematic Literature Review of Employee Cynicism in the Workplace

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Abstract

Employee cynicism; the negative attitude of employees developed by virtue of loss of trust in the organization, has become a significant challenge in the workplace as it impacts employees' trust, commitment, engagement, and overall workplace morale. This systematic literature review aspires to identify the antecedents, drivers, and outcomes of employee cynicism, alongside analyzing its theoretical foundations to provide actionable insights for future researchers. By following PRISMA guidelines the search process afforded 107 research articles from the two prominent databases i.e., Scopus and WOS and after screening 20 research articles were selected for the final study. The findings revealed significant antecedents, drivers, and outcomes of employee cynicism at individual and organizational levels. It also highlighted the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory and Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model as prominent theoretical foundations that either subsidize or heighten employee cynicism. Additionally, this review provided significant directions for future researchers.

Keywords: Employee Cynicism, Antecedents, Drivers, Outcomes, Systematic Literature Review

Introduction

In the present-day corporate landscape, organizations are striving to retain skilful, productive, and satisfied employees. Simultaneously, nurturing a trust-based relationship with them is equally important. However, the majority of organizations struggle to fulfill this requirement and literature shows that cynicism among employees has accelerated in recent years (Serrano Archimi et al., 2018). Actually, cynicism is not a new construct and studies in 1990s portrayed the presence of cynicism in workplace (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Mirvis & Kanter, 1991; Reichers et al., 1997). The roots of cynicism can be traced back to the ancient Greek cynics (Dean et al., 1998). The most often mentioned two major cynics are Antisthenes and Diogenes of Sinope (Dhar, 2009). According to them, individual wisdom was treated to be the highest virtue, and they questioned and criticized the majority's values and laws and customs (Copleston, 1962). The concept of cynicism has changed a lot and it has become a focus of study in various social sciences disciplines (Andersson, 1996; Dean et al., 1998). In the organizational behaviour literature, cynicism as a focal point of investigation was established recently and it remains in its first stage of scientific research development (Cole et al., 2006; Treadway et al., 2004; Wanous et al., 2000).

In the organization sciences, the work-related cynicism was explored in two major lines of research. The first one was the development and functioning of cynicism during the early stages of a work career, i.e., in the stage of socialization. In the early stage of a work career, an employee enters into an organization with a set of expectations, and in reality, he or she may have to experience a vast set of unmet expectations and unexpected events, thus a reality shock is happening there (Blau, 1964). In response to these employees tend to detach from their work roles and adopt a cynical attitude towards their organization and clients. This attitude is often referred to as occupational cynicism and this line of research primarily focuses on the professions like health care, social work, and police (Becker & Geer, 1958; Blau, 1964; Dhar, 2009; Meyerson, 1990; Niederhoffer, 1967). The second one was the presence of cynicism among employees in response to the adverse organizational circumstances. It is often called employee cynicism or organizational cynicism (Dean et al., 1998; Dhar, 2009).

In the new millennium employees were found to be more cynical, especially in organizational settings filled with scandals, mistrust, politics, and opportunistic behaviours (Abubakar & Arasli, 2016; Chiaburu et al., 2013; Twenge et al., 2004). Cynicism is often represented as a unpleasant relationship between employer and employees developed as a result of long working hours, work intensification, ineffective leadership and management, and layering and downsizing of organizations (Bunting, 2004). After repeated exposure to such an unpleasant environment, employees will be overwhelmed with negative thoughts and emotions and express some sort of disparaging behaviour towards the organization. These employees will then feel that their voice is not heard by their higher officials and they distrust the organizational policies and practices which then ultimately get reflected in reduced levels of performance or even no performance from the employees (Kuo et al., 2015).

Dean et al., (1998) defined cynicism as “negative behavior in an organization that is characterized by a belief about the insufficient integration environment in an organization, negative feelings for the organization, and the tendency of showing the abusive behavior towards the organization”. According to them employee cynicism is defined as “a tendency to engage in disparaging and critical behavior toward the organization in a way that is consistent with their belief that it lacks integrity”. They also opined that cynical employees will have strong criticism toward their organizational leaders in a language and tone that is cynical, they tend to reduce their discretionary behaviours and be reluctant to go beyond what is strictly required from them (Neves, 2012; Serrano Archimi et al., 2018). Such employees are often characterized by frustration, hopelessness, and disillusionment and they believe that the principles of honesty, sincerity, and fairness are violated to protect the self-interest of individuals (Dhar, 2009). Andersson (1996) and Dean et al., (1998) observed that cynicism has affective, cognitive, and emotional components. The affective component consists of the emotional reactions of the employees towards the organization, the cognitive component implies that the employee felt the lack of sincerity, honesty, and integrity in the organization and the behavioural component denotes the critical expressions and negative tendencies of employees towards the organization (Durrah, 2020). The cynicism can develop over time as employees are working in an environment that is supposed to have characteristics like excessive workload, hectic work schedules, inappropriate leadership, and inadequate resource support. Generally, employees tend to express their feeling of cynicism through pessimism, frustration, distrust, and contempt towards the organization (Abraham, 2000). Once cynicism is developed it may either remain high for many employees or it may decline if proper corrective action is taken (Mantler et al., 2015). Researchers from the past opined that cynicism would lead to several negative consequences like lower levels of job satisfaction, organizational commitment, work motivation, higher tendency to engage in counterproductive work behaviours, and adversely affected in-role as well extra-role performance (Andersson & Bateman, 1997; Brandes et al., 1999; Chiaburu et al., 2013; Cole et al., 2006; Johnson & O’Leary-Kelly, 2003; Mantler et al., 2015; Serrano Archimi et al., 2018; Wanous et al., 2000).

Though the concept of cynicism has its roots in the ancient period, the cynicism literature is varied and scanty. A systematic study of employee cynicism, its potential antecedents, drivers, and outcomes in the workplace is still infancy. Hence this study intends to undertake a systematic literature review on employee cynicism to achieve the following research objectives;

- To identify the antecedents, drivers, and outcomes of employee cynicism in the workplace.
- To analyse the theoretical foundations concerning employee cynicism in the literature.
- To offer directions for future research to identify the significance of employee cynicism in the workplace.

Method

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is defined as a “systematic, explicit, and reproducible method for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing the existing body of completed and recorded work made by researchers, scholars, and practitioners” (Fernández Del Amo et al., 2018). Here the SLR is conducted according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method. To understand what has been done the past researchers on a particular topic the SLR is a good option (Ataur Rahman & Masudur Rahman, 2023). The SLR is different from other review methods in the sense that it adopts a replicable, scientific, and transparent review procedure and it minimizes the chance of bias during the process of searching, identification, screening, and reporting (Mengist et al., 2020). Hence it ensures significant and reliable findings from the literature review.

In the first step, two databases i.e., Scopus and WOS were selected for collecting the research papers related to employee cynicism for conducting the SLR. The keywords which were entered under elements title, abstract, and keywords for obtaining the research papers were “Employee cynicism”, “Cynicism”, “Employee cynicism management”, and “Employee’s cynicism” using the Boolean operator “OR” to broaden the search results. As a result, a total of 107 studies were retrieved from these two databases after limiting the results to “Business Management and Accounting, Social Sciences, and Psychology” subject areas in Scopus, “Management, Psychology applied, Psychology multidisciplinary, and Social Sciences interdisciplinary” WOS categories, and “English” language on August 16 2024. In the next step out of the 107 studies, 22 duplicate studies were removed and 42 studies were selected after a thorough reading of abstracts only. Out of the screened 42 studied 9 were unable to retrieve and 33 were retrieved. In the final stage a detailed reading of the selected 33 studies was conducted then 13 studies were removed that were not properly focusing on the concept of employee cynicism and 20 studies were included for review. The whole search process is depicted in Figure 1.

PRISMA flow diagram

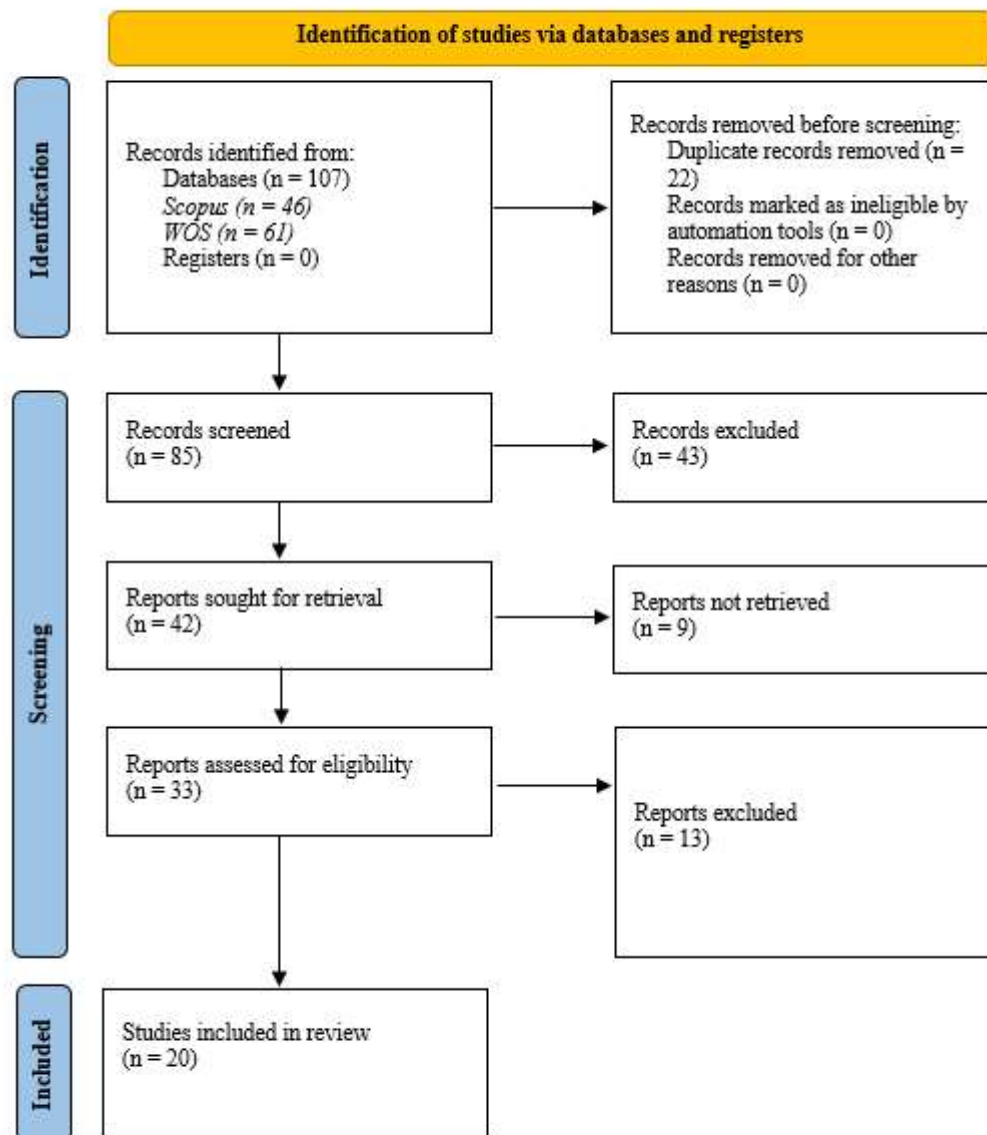


Figure.1 PRISMA flow diagram of the included studies

Table. 1 Article included in the review process

Author & Year	Antecedents	Mediators	Moderators	Outcomes	Theory
(Chiaburu et al., 2013)	Negative affectivity, Positive affectivity, Trait cynicism, Perceived organizational support, Perceived justice, Psychological strain, Psychological contract violation, Perceived organizational politics.	NA	NA	Job satisfaction, Job performance, Organizational commitment, Intention to quit.	NA
(Megeirhi et al., 2020)	Perceived tolerance for workplace incivility	Cynicism	Income level	Job search behaviour	Conservation of Resources Theory (COR)
(Abubakar et al., 2017)	Favouritism/ Nepotism	Employee cynicism	Gender	Withdrawal behaviour	Job Demands-Resources Model (JDR Model)
(Srivastava & Adams, 2011)	Cynicism	Job enrichment, Leader-member exchange, Co-worker support	NA	Job satisfaction	NA
(Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018)	Tolerance to workplace incivility	Employee cynicism	NA	Knowledge hiding behaviour, Job search behaviour	Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), Psychological Ownership Theory
(Rho et al., 2021)	Negative affectivity, Organizational identification, Colleague cynicism, Trust in management, Perceived resource availability, Participative work environment	NA	NA	Administrative reform, Cynicism, Support for the change	NA
(Kim et al., 2009)	Top management competence, Top management trustworthiness	Employee cynicism	NA	Organizational commitment, Job performance	NA
(Dedahanov, 2022)	Abusive supervision	Employee cynicism	Positive reappraisal	Employee voice (Promotive voice)	NA
(Kuo et al., 2015)	Psychological contract violation, Abusive supervision	Gossip (Job-related and Non-job related)	NA	Employee cynicism	Social Information Theory, Social Cognitive Theory
(English & Chalon, 2011)	Employee cynicism, Perceived fairness of change management and personnel practices	NA	NA	Affective organizational commitment	NA
(Durrah, 2020)	Injustice perception	Employee's cynicism	NA	Work alienation	NA
(Bufquin, 2020)	Social judgments of supervisors, Social judgments of co-workers	Exhaustion, Employee's cynicism	NA	Turnover intentions	NA
(Abubakar & Arasli, 2016)	Employee cynicism	NA	Procedural justice	Intention to sabotage	NA
(Bommer et al., 2005)	Transformational leader behavior	NA	NA	Employee cynicism about organizational change	Social Learning Theory

Author & Year	Antecedents	Mediators	Moderators	Outcomes	Theory
(Cole et al., 2006)	Perceived supervisor support, Psychological hardiness	Emotion (positive emotion and negative emotion)	NA	Employee cynicism	Affective Events Theory
(Nicholson et al., 2014)	Civility	NA	NA	Workplace cynicism	Job Demands-Resources Model (JDR Model)
(Mantler et al., 2015)	Intention to leave, Job change	NA	NA	Cynicism	NA
(Nan & Selamat, 2022)	Organizational justice	Perceived organizational support	NA	Employee cynicism	Social Exchange Theory
(Serrano Archimi et al., 2018)	Perceived corporate social responsibility	Organizational trust	NA	Employee cynicism	NA
(Abubakar et al., 2018)	Tolerance to workplace incivility, Employee cynicism	NA	NA	Job search behaviour	NA

Analysis and Synthesis

The thrust of a systematic literature review is the analysis and synthesis of the filtered studies. This section deals with the publication trend analysis, focus country analysis, ADO analysis, and theoretical foundations of the selected literature. The antecedents, mediators, moderators, outcomes, and theoretical foundations of the reviewed articles are shown in Table 1.

Publication trend

The publication trend of articles on employee cynicism in both Scopus and WOS shows a significant increasing trend post-2017, with more articles between 2022 to 2024. Earlier years showed minimal and fluctuating research activity on employee cynicism, but after 2017 it took a turning point with consistent and growing interest in the topic. Both databases showed the peak years as 2023 and 2024, depicting that the topic of employee cynicism is gaining more academic attention and now its boom period is going on.

Focus country

The Scopus and WOS showed that developed nations like USA, UK, and Canada dominated the research landscape of employee cynicism and China, Pakistan, and Turkey were identified as the emerging research hubs. Though developed countries dominated the landscape, developing countries are also making notable contributions and their engagement in research is expected to increase through collaborative efforts. So, the diverse geographical spread of research on employee cynicism indicates that the research is becoming more globalized.

ADO Analysis

From the 20 articles reviewed various antecedents, drivers, and outcomes of employee cynicism were identified. It is shown in the figure. 2.

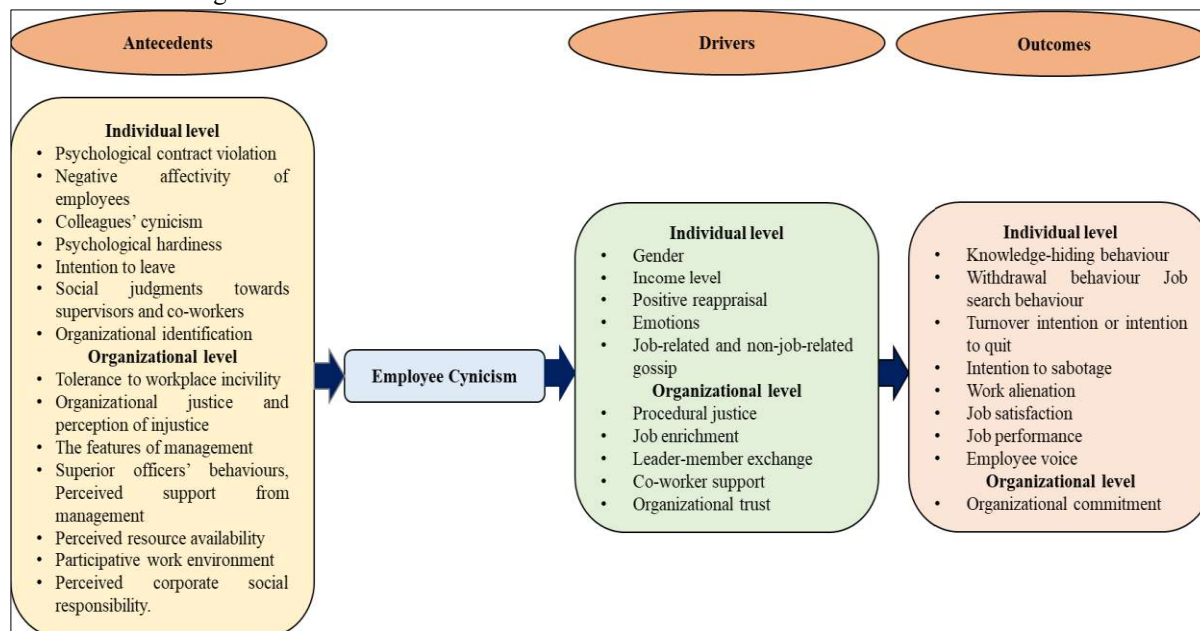


Figure. 2 ADO Framework

Antecedents

Out of the 20 articles taken for this systematic review, the majority identified various antecedents to employee cynicism. A few identified employee cynicism as an antecedent of job satisfaction (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Srivastava & Adams, 2011), job performance (Chiaburu et al., 2013), organizational commitment (Chiaburu et al., 2013; English & Chalon, 2011), intention to quit (Chiaburu et al., 2013), job search behaviour (Abubakar et al., 2018), and intention to sabotage (Abubakar & Arasli, 2016). Hence higher levels of cynicism among the employees will lead to higher intention to quit, intention to sabotage, and job search behaviour and lower job satisfaction, job performance, and organizational commitment.

The major antecedents of employee cynicism identified can be divided into two i.e., at the individual level and the organizational level. The individual-level antecedents include psychological contract violation, negative affectivity of employees, colleagues' cynicism, psychological hardiness, intention to leave, social judgments towards supervisors and co-workers, and organizational identification. The organizational level antecedents include tolerance to workplace incivility, organizational justice and perception of injustice, the features of management, like their competence and trustworthiness, superior officers' behaviours, such as abusive supervision and transformational leadership, perceived support from management, perceived resource availability, participative work environment, and perceived corporate social responsibility.

Psychological contract violation denotes an employee's perception that his/her organization failed to fulfill their work-related promises. Kuo et al., (2015) recognized that psychological contract violation as an antecedent of employee cynicism, which may lead to affective and emotional responses of employees and the development of a cynic attitude that their organization is not trustworthy or they lack integrity.

Psychological hardiness of an employee signifies their ability to face and cope with adverse or challenging situations. Cole et al., (2006) emphasise that the more an employee's psychological hardiness the more positive attitude and positive emotions the individual is feeling and which in turn ensures lower levels of cynicism among them.

Intention to leave reflects the individual's thoughts and feelings regarding quitting their current job. Mantler et al., (2015) identified that cynicism will be high for employees having lower levels of intention to leave who remained at their same job and those who experienced internal job changes despite lower levels of intention to leave.

Social judgements towards superiors and co-workers refers to the perception that an employee holds about the attitudes, behaviours, and actions of the superiors and co-workers. Bufquin (2020) affirms that social judgments toward supervisors and co-workers are significant predictors of employee cynicism. When employees judge

their co-workers and supervisors as competent, warm, and moral persons it will subside the cynic attitude of employees.

Tolerance to workplace incivility refers to an organizational climate that is unresponsive to uncivil behaviours in the workplace. Aljawarneh & Atan (2018) and Megeirhi et al., (2020) identified the tolerance to workplace incivility as a significant antecedent of employee cynicism. The workplace incivility and organizations' unresponsive to that will enhance the negative emotions of employees, leading to heightened cynicism.

Organizational justice perception means the perception of an employee regarding the fairness of treatment they received from their organization. Durrah (2020) and Nan & Selamat (2022) assert that organizational justice and perception of injustice will influence the employees' cynicism i.e., the perception of injustice will enhance the cynic attitude among employees and the perception of justice will curtail the same.

The features of management like their competence (Kim et al., 2009), their trustworthiness (Rho et al., 2021) and the superior officers' behaviours like abusive supervision (Dedahanov, 2022), transformational leadership behaviour (Bommer et al., 2005), and perceived support from them (Cole et al., 2006) were also found to be the predictors of employee cynicism. A management that is so trustworthy, and competent and the superior officers who exhibit transformational leadership and exert much support to their subordinates are said to lessen the cynic attitude of employees and they tend to generate some sort of trust-based relationship with employees.

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) indicates a business model where organizations integrate environmental and social concerns in their operations and interactions. Serrano Archimi et al., (2018) affirm that perceived corporate social responsibility is a significant antecedent of employee cynicism i.e., the CSR initiatives of an organization create a positive impression about the organization in the minds of employees and in turn enhance the general perception of a superior officer and reduce the cynic attitude of employees.

Rho et al., (2021) stated that the negative affectivity of employees, colleagues' cynicism, perceived resource availability, organizational identification, and a participative work environment are the antecedents of employee cynicism. Employees exhibiting higher negative affectivity are more prone to the experiences of negative aspects of work environment and they exhibit a distrustful and cynical attitude towards their organization. Increased belief that an employee's colleague has a cynical attitude towards the organization will also engage the employee to develop a cynical attitude. Adequate resource availability, a feeling of identification within the organization, and an organizational environment that is so participative in nature will lessen the feeling of cynicism among employees.

Drivers

Identifying the factors that drive employee cynicism to various desired as well as undesired outcomes is of greater importance. The major drivers of employee cynicism identified at the individual level are gender, income level, positive reappraisal, emotions, and job-related and non-job-related gossip. At the organizational level drivers like procedural justice, job enrichment, leader-member exchange, co-worker support, and organizational trust were identified.

The demographic factors like income level and gender were identified as significant moderators of the relationship between employee cynicism and its outcomes. When employees perceive uncivil behaviours, they tend to exhibit a cynic attitude, which in turn increases job search behaviour among employees. When the income level of an employee is high, the influence of organizational tolerance to workplace incivility on job search behaviour through employee cynicism will be reduced and vice versa (Megeirhi et al., 2020). Abubakar et al., (2017) identified that women employees are more likely to exert work withdrawal behaviour than men employees when cynicism is at higher levels.

Srivastava and Adams (2011) identified job enrichment, leader-member exchange, and co-worker support as significant drivers of employee cynicism. Job enrichment refers to a method for motivating employees by devising a job to have more challenging and interesting tasks, which often requires more skills from employees and more pay from the organization. Leader-member exchange describes the nature of relationship established between a leader and a subordinate (Gerstner & Day, 1997). Co-worker support implies the quality of relationship between the worker and his/her colleagues. Srivastava and Adams (2011) admit that an employee having higher levels of cynicism will have less job satisfaction because he/she will feel that the job is less enriched, the leader-member exchange quality is low, and they receive less support from co-workers.

Positive reappraisal is the strategy of reinterpreting negative events and occurrences positively. Dedahanov (2022) states that positive reappraisal in the workplace, moderates the influence of abusive supervision on employee cynicism i.e., employees who receive abusive supervision as well as who have positive reappraisal

behaviour are less likely to have cynic attitude as they modify their thoughts about the unpleasant behaviour from their supervisors and vice versa.

Gossip refers to the informal and light conversation about other people's attitudes, behaviours, and actions. Kuo et al., (2015) opined that job-related as well as non-job related gossip influence employee cynicism i.e., the job related gossip causes cynicism and non-job related gossip reduces the cynicism of employees. They also state that the psychological contract violation and abusive supervision experienced by employees influence job-related and non-related gossip and the psychological contract violation influences the employees to exhibit a cynic attitude through job-related gossip.

The employees' perception of support from the organization, justice, and organizational trust were also found to have significant influence on employee cynicism. Abubakar and Arasli (2016) declared that the organizational justice deflate or inflate the influence of employee cynicism on the intention to sabotage. Nan and Selamat (2022) affirms that organizations can improve the employees' perception of organizational support and lessen the employee cynicism by improving organizational justice practices. Serrano Archimi et al., (2018) identified that the CSR initiatives by an organization influences the organizational trust, which in turn negatively influences the employee cynicism. Cole et al., (2006) reported that perceived support that an employee felt from their supervisor and their psychological hardiness lead to more positive emotions and lessen the negative emotions of employees and employees' cynicism increases with increase in negative emotions and lessen with increase in positive emotions.

Outcomes

The literature identified various outcomes of employee cynicism at individual and organizational levels. Knowledge-hiding behaviour, withdrawal behaviour, job search behaviour, turnover intention or intention to quit, intention to sabotage, work alienation, job satisfaction, job performance, and employee voice were identified at the individual level. At the organizational level organizational commitment was identified.

Knowledge hiding behaviour refers to an intentional negative organizational behaviour of withholding or concealing valuable information and it may have positive as well as negative intentions (Connelly et al., 2012). The cynical attitudes of employees heightened by the tolerance to workplace incivility lead employees to feel that the organization undervalues them and it makes them unwilling to share their knowledge, fearing that others will exploit the knowledge for their benefit (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018).

Withdrawal behaviour is the tendency of an employee to reduce the time spent on their job responsibilities as a result of dissatisfaction (Hanisch & Hulin, 1990). It includes actions like arriving late and leaving early, absenteeism, taking leaves unnecessarily or it may be a fake one. Abubakar et al., (2017) states that employees become more cynic as they feel the presence of favouritism or nepotism which in turn enhances their work withdrawal behaviour.

Job search behaviour of an employee denotes the search for more alternative job opportunities and collecting information about them. Employee cynicism was found to have a positive influence on the job search behaviour of employees. When employees tolerate uncivil behaviours in the workplace they exhibit cynical attitudes. The cynical attitude is often said to be an early form of escape and this will lead to the job search behaviours from the employees before quitting the current one (Abubakar et al., 2018; Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018; Megeirhi et al., 2020).

Turnover intention or intention to quit refers to the intention of an employee to leave their current job and switch to another one. When an employee has a cynical attitude towards their organization they tend to have negative attitude towards their job role as well as the organization which lessen their satisfaction and commitment and enhance their intention to quit that particular organization (Bufquin, 2020; Chiaburu et al., 2013).

Intention to sabotage is a negative attitude that an employee hold towards an organization. According to Abubakar & Arasli (2016) intention to sabotage refers to "a negative dispositional attitude, negative destructive state of mind which is characterized by alienation, withdrawal, and termination". They confirm that employee cynicism will enhance the tendency to exhibit deviant behaviours like the sabotage intentions and justice climate in an organization may heighten or lessen the same.

Work alienation is an employee's feeling of disconnection from their job role, coworkers, and the organization. According to Kobasa et al., (1982) work alienation is "a representation of an unenthusiastic attitude toward the work that indicates a low level of engagement with the job role". Durrah (2020) proved that the cynicism of employees significantly influences their work alienation, as cynicism increases the work alienation increases. Moreover, they revealed that the injustice perception of employees often enhances their cynicism which in turn enhances work alienation.

Job satisfaction can be defined as a “pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Locke, 1976). An employee’s cynical attitude will lead to reduced levels of job satisfaction. Because the negative feelings developed as a result of cynicism will negatively influence the job experiences of employees and they feel that the job is less enriched, the quality of leader-member exchange is low, and coworker support is also lacking (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Srivastava & Adams, 2011).

Job performance assesses the contribution of an employee toward the achievement of organizational objectives. Having a cynical attitude towards an organization may motivate them to lower their contribution to the success of that organization, which results in a lower level of job performance (Chiaburu et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2009). The cynical employees often express their frustration and disappointment towards the organization by lowering their performance.

Employee promotive voice implies the voicing of innovative ideas to improve the functioning of the overall organization. The promotive voice aims at developing the organization and making it a better one. When the employees are suspicious about the intentions and motives of their top-level management as well as the total organization they will withdraw from providing suggestions for organizational improvement, hence employee cynicism negatively influences the promotive voice of employees (Dedahanov, 2022).

Organizational commitment refers to an employee’s emotional attachment towards the organization, their intention to stay with the organization on account of the limited alternative opportunities or the cost of leaving, and the felt obligation to continue membership in the organization. Employees with higher levels of cynicism will have lower levels of commitment towards the organization. Cynic employees will have lower levels of trust and higher levels of negative affect on the organization hence they exhibit lower levels of commitment also (Chiaburu et al., 2013; English & Chalon, 2011; Kim et al., 2009).

Theoretical Foundations

This review identified various theoretical foundations for studying employee cynicism i.e., conservation of resources theory, job demands-resources model, psychological ownership theory, social constructivism, social information theory, social cognitive theory, social learning theory, affective events theory, and social exchange theory. Considering all these theories and models the conservation of resources theory and job demands-resources model were identified as the prominent theoretical foundations.

The conservation of resources theory implies that individuals aspire to protect their valued resources and when they are threatened with resource loss, they will become stressed (Hobfoll, 1989). The workplace incivility and tolerance of that will deplete employees’ valued resources and they tend to exhibit cynical behaviours as well as job-seeking behaviours (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018; Megeirhi et al., 2020). The job demands-resources model underlines the importance of job demands like emotional strains and workload and job resources like feedback and support in influencing the employees’ attitudes and wellbeing (Demerouti et al., 2001). High job demands and limited job resources will enhance the stress, cynicism, and physical and mental health issues of employees (Abubakar et al., 2017; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Nicholson et al., 2014).

The theories like social information theory, social cognitive theory, and social learning theory analyse how workplace interactions like gossip influence employee attitudes and enhance cynical behaviours (Bommer et al., 2005; Kuo et al., 2015). The affective events theory stresses the role of emotional outbursts to workplace events in moulding the attitudes of employees (Cole et al., 2006). While the social exchange theory highlights the reciprocity, the connection between negative perceptions in the workplace to withdrawal behaviours like cynicism (Nan & Selamat, 2022). Together, these theoretical underpinnings provide a detailed understanding of the nature of employee cynicism.

Discussion and Directions for Future Research

This systematic literature review offers a detailed exploration of employee cynicism in the workplace, pointing out its antecedents, drivers, outcomes, theoretical foundations, publication trends, and geographical focus. The employee cynicism was identified as a significant antecedent of several workplace outcomes. It detrimentally influences employees’ performance, satisfaction, and commitment while enhancing their sabotage, job-searching behaviours, and turnover intentions. The antecedents of employee cynicism were identified at individual and organizational levels. At the individual level the psychological hardness, social judgments of supervisors and colleagues, psychological contract violation, negative affectivity, intention to leave, and organizational identification were identified to play the role antecedents. Then the organizational level antecedents include perceptions of justice and injustice, tolerance for workplace incivility, transformational leadership, abusive supervision, participative work environments, management competence and trustworthiness, and corporate social responsibility initiatives. Future researchers could probe more deeply how these

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antecedents connect with and affect employee cynicism. In addition, the role played by cultural dimensions could also be explored, as these aspects have a unique influence on the development of employee cynicism and its consequences.

The drivers of employee cynicism identified in this review include both individual and organizational levels factors. The individual level drivers include gender, income level, positive reappraisal, emotional responses, and job-related and non-job-related gossip. At the organizational level the drivers such as job enrichment, organizational trust, procedural justice, co-worker support, and leader-member exchange were identified. Both these individual and organizational level drivers were found to play a pivotal role in shaping the orbit of employee cynicism. The upcoming researchers could explore how these drivers mediate or moderate the linkage between identified antecedents and outcomes of employee cynicism while recognizing the strategies to lessen the adverse effects.

Employee cynicism was found to impact both individual and organizational level outcomes. The outcomes such as work alienation, knowledge-hiding behavior, sabotage, employee voice, job search behavior, withdrawal behavior, turnover intentions, job performance, and job satisfaction were founded at the individual level. At the organizational level organizational commitment was identified as a prominent outcome. However, the influence of employee cynicism on broader outcomes such as financial performance, productivity, customer related outcomes such as satisfaction, service quality, etc. needs more attention. Future researchers could delve more into these kinds of broader outcomes.

This review highlighted the prominent theoretical backgrounds of employee cynicism as the conservation of resources theory and job demands-resources model. Even though some other theoretical frameworks were identified these two were the most frequently applied frameworks. The future studies could shed light on more theoretical backgrounds associated with employee cynicism.

From a methodological perspective, the majority of the studies were found to be in cross-sectional nature, pointing to the need for longitudinal research on employee cynicism. Future researchers could explore more about cynicism by using qualitative approaches. The publication trend and focus country analysis reveal a notable hike in scholarly initiatives in cynicism literature dominated by developed nations.

Conclusion

This systematic literature review was started to identify the antecedents, drivers, outcomes, and theoretical foundations of employee cynicism. The review divulged a set of antecedents of employee cynicism at the individual and organizational levels, such as psychological contract violation, psychological hardiness, intention to leave, negative affectivity of employees, social judgments towards supervisors and co-workers, colleagues' cynicism, organizational identification, tolerance to workplace incivility, the features of management, like their competence and trustworthiness, organizational justice and perception of injustice, superior officers' behaviours, such as abusive supervision and transformational leadership, perceived resource availability, participative work environment, perceived support from management, and perceived corporate social responsibility. This implies that an organization should address these factors to lessen the possibility of enhancing employee cynicism. The drivers identified including gender, income level, emotions, positive reappraisal, job-related and non-job-related gossip, procedural justice, co-worker support, leader-member exchange, job enrichment, and organizational trust also imply that to reduce employee cynicism action should be taken to address these mentioned factors. The outcomes identified, including knowledge-hiding behaviour, work alienation, job search behaviour, turnover intention or intention to quit, withdrawal behaviour, intention to sabotage, job satisfaction, job performance, employee voice, and organizational commitment unveil the far-reaching repercussions of employee cynicism. Finally, the linkage between these identified antecedents, drivers, and outcomes was found to have theoretical foundations prominently conservation of resources theory and job-demands resources model.

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