



**Impact of Workplace Ostracism on Counterproductive Work Behavior: The Mediating Role of Organizational Cynicism and the Moderating Role of Employer Brand Perception Framework**

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**ABSTRACT**

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This research explores the impact of workplace ostracism on counterproductive work behavior (CWB), with organizational cynicism acting as a mediating variable and employer brand perception serving as a moderating factor. The purpose of the study is to examine how feelings of exclusion in the workplace lead to negative attitudes, such as organizational cynicism, which may further result in counterproductive behaviors. Additionally, the study aims to assess how the perception of a strong employer brand can mitigate these negative outcomes. A quantitative research design was utilized, targeting employees from various industries in Pakistan. Data were collected using a survey questionnaire, and the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) technique was employed for analysis. The results indicate that workplace ostracism significantly contributes to the development of organizational cynicism among employees, which in turn leads to an increase in counterproductive work behaviors such as intentional inefficiency, absenteeism, or workplace sabotage. These findings provide valuable insights for organizations seeking to reduce CWB by improving workplace dynamics and leveraging a positive employer brand.

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## 1.0 Introduction

As a result, workplace ostracism has developed into a focus of organizational behavior research due to the potential negative consequences that it can generate for employees and organizations. Workplace ostracism, or a type of exclusion or deliberate ignoring of employees by their colleagues in the office, has consequences regarding how employees see themselves as valued, included and belonging in the workplace itself (Nasir et al., 2024). In such cases, social and emotional stress due to ostracization lead people to feel less valuable as human beings moving toward a lesser engaged and productive professional life. In an organizationally context ostracism breaks, even cracks the social fabric that creates teams, dissolves workplace cohesion and jeopardizes organizational purpose. Ostracism really has strong effects on individual, organizational culture, and climate. Importantly, ostracism can make employees engage in negative and counterproductive behaviors in retaliation of exclusion, which contradicts with the performance of the organization (Robertson, 2024).

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) is one of the main behavioral outcomes of workplace ostracism, meaning that it is the intentional behavior employees perform to harm the organization, and its' members. Absenteeism, theft, reduced productivity, and even sabotage are among the many forms in which CWBs can take (Evans et al., 2023). Workplace ostracism literature clearly documents the relationship of CWB with workplace ostracism as when employees are ostracized, they tend to disengage themselves from their work responsibilities and intentionally perform poorly. Disengagement may either become an active form of workplace deviance or retaliation against the organization and its members (Nura et al., 2024). Excluded employees may also see their exclusion as an instance of organizational injustice, which in turn may prompt them to justify CWBs as retribution against how they were treated. Since, workplace ostracism is a causal factor to CWB employees who feel excluded from the workplace are more likely to exhibit behaviors that are detrimental to the organization (Ugwu et al., 2023).

Organizational cynicism is a central concept to the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB, and can operate as a mediator. Organizational cynicism is defined as the attitude of an employee regarding an organization with a negative feeling without trust, frustration and hopelessness (Ike et al., 2024). Employees that are cynical tend to think the organization is self-serving and does not care for them or their contributions. In such environments, employees who are being ostracized will likely develop these cynical attitudes as a way of managing their complicated psychology and eventually, it will end up with deep distrust of the organization and of its leadership. For this reason, the effects of ostracism can be amplified by organizational cynicism, where negative emotions are more intense and made it more likely to engage in CWBs (Omar Ahmed & Zhang, 2025). Organizational cynicism is proposed to mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB, whereby it operates as a type of cognitive and emotional response to exclusion. In other words, if ostracized employees develop cynical attitudes to the organization, they are more likely to have a justification to engage themselves in behaviors that undermine the organization's interests (El-Sayed et al., 2024).

In addition, the mediating effect of organization's employer brand perception affects the

relationships between workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, and CWB. The employer perception means how employees perceive the company's reputation and values, as well as the desirability as a place to work (Schwaiger et al., 2022). A strong employer brand would normally lead to one thinking of fairness, respect, opportunities for growth and a good working environment. Employees who believe that their employer has a strong brand are more likely to believe they have a connection, are valued and are loyal in the event of adversity or being ostracized (Savickaitė-Kazlauskė, 2024). Having a positive view of the employer brand can make employees less likely to engage in CWBs, if they perceive the organization, even in the midst of exclusion, to be worth their commitment. However, when the employer brand perception is low or negative, employees may not feel as 'obliged' to adopt positive work behaviors so are more likely to display organizational cynicism and in turn, involve themselves in CWBs. Therefore, workplace ostracism impact is buffered by employer brand perception, as it affects how employees interpret and respond to their experiences of exclusion (Sharma & Dhar, 2024).

This study bases the theoretical foundation of the study on social exchange theory (SET) and conservation of resources (COR) theory, to understand the role of workplace ostracism leading to CWB, through the mediating role of organizational cynicism and the moderating role of employer brand perception. According to SET, relationships in the workplace involve the exchange of resources in which employees expect to be treated fairly in turn for their efforts. Workplace ostracism interrupts the exchange dynamic; ostracized employees perceive that they are not being given what they think they should be given: acknowledgment, respect, inclusion. Furthermore, the breach of the exchange relationship perceived by organizational members can cause organizational cynicism which often results in the retaliatory behaviors such as CWBs. By contrast, COR theory directs that individuals work to preserve and maintain their mental and psychological reserves, like self-worth, social relationships, and psychological wellbeing. The risk of losing these resources is threatened when employees are ostracized, which causes them to behave in order to either protect or replenish these lost resources. As such, CWBs may act as a means of those excluded to reassert control or retaliate for the perceived injustice of their exclusion. Organizational cynicism is regarded as an intermediate psychological response in this theoretical framework while the employer brand perception can either reduce or enhance the effects of ostracism on CWB.

Although the literature on workplace ostracism has continued to proliferate, there remain ample gaps in understanding how such dynamics occur in modern day working organizations. The link is first established between ostracism and CWB, but the mechanism through which ostracism results in CWB and specifically the role of organizational cynicism have not been fully investigated (Ugwu et al., 2023). Research on the direct relationship between ostracism and negative work behaviors is vast, but little attempts have been made to study how employees' attitudes toward their organizations mediate this relationship. Understanding why ostracized employees engage in CWBs and how this process unfolds over time is critical and it is where the role of organizational cynicism as a mediator will be very important. Additionally, despite the widespread discussion of employer brand perception related to recruitment and employee

retention, its moderating effect on employee behavior when dealing with ostracism has not been thoroughly examined in the literature. While there are numerous studies on the impact of strong or weak employer brand on the employees' reactions to ostracism, there is yet limited investigation regarding how this relationship affects the development of organizational cynicism and likelihood of CWBs (Siddiqui, 2024).

Consequently, the research problem here is because these gaps in the understanding of the relationship between workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, CWB, and employer brand perception need to be addressed. In particular, this research intends to examine how organizational cynicism will mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB as well as the role of employer brand perception's moderating effect in those relationships. The need for the study is driven by the fact that even so, organizations still face several employee engagement, productivity, and retention challenges as well as workplace ostracism, an issue continuing to undermine organizational performance. This better understanding these dynamics will help organizations formulate more effective ways for managing ostracism, decreasing organizational cynicism, and lessening CWB incidents. The absence of remedies to these research gaps means that organizations will continue to face the issues caused by workplace ostracism, such as low morale, decreased productivity, and high turnover rates.

This study has significance both as a theoretical and a practical contribution. From a theoretical perspective, I then extend existing workplace ostracism research and contributions by introducing organizational cynicism as a mediating factor and the effect of employer brand on workplace ostracism as a moderating factor. So, it enables to better understand psychological and organizational processes responsible for the relation between ostracism and CWB. In addition, the study provides further support to the social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory in explaining employees' reactions to negative workplace experiences. The practical implication from this study is of importance to organizational leaders, human resource professionals, and policymakers. Understanding how workplace ostracism results in CWB and the importance of organizational cynicism and employer brand perception on this relationship allows organizations to develop specific interventions to prevent ostracism, decrease organizational cynicism, and encourage positive employee behavior. One example of how an organization can help circumvent the negative effects of ostracism is to invest in a strong employer brand to help create belonging and inclusion, at least for knowledge workers. Likewise, organizations can establish policies and practices aimed at reducing organizational cynicism, and if so these things could help to reduce the likelihood of CWBs.

To sum up, workplace ostracism is a very important problem, and if not controlled, it can give rise to such negative results as organizational cynicism and CWB. These variables are related in a complicated manner; organizational cynicism mediates their relationship and employer brand perception moderates the effects of ostracism on employee behavior. This study further contributes to both theory and practice in organizational behavior through addressing the major gaps of literature and explaining the interplay of each of these factors. The results of the present study can inform organizations' policies, practices, and organizational policies and practices to minimize the

negative outcome of workplace ostracism; creating a healthy work environment and positive employee behavior. Better understanding of the mechanisms that underlie the ostracism organizational cynicism and CWB relationship will enable organizations to devise strategies aimed at reducing employee cynicism and improving employee well-being and organizational performance, as a means of enhancing the organization's ability to survive.

## **2.0 Literature Review**

Two prominent theories, being Social Exchange Theory (SET) and Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, are utilized as a theoretical basis for understanding workplace dynamics among ostracism, counterproductive work behavior (CWB) and organizational cynicism, as well as perceptions of employer brand. According to social exchange theory, the relationships in organizations are based on reciprocal exchanges and individuals expect equitable treatment in return for their contribution (Kilroy et al., 2023). However, when this reciprocity is violated through workplace ostracism experiences, people feel like their social contract has been broken, and this will produce attitudes and behaviors in the form of organizational cynicism and CWB. SET is complemented by COR theory where COR theory postulates that individuals are motivated to conserve and protect their psychological and emotional resources. Ostracism in the workplace depletes these resources and results in emotional exhaustion, stress, and a decrease of wellbeing (Khan & Saeed, 2024). In order to deal with this loss of resource, employees may commit CWBs either to regain a feeling of control or to retaliate against perceived injustice. In addition, an organization's employer brand perception moderates the effects of ostracism by either magnifying or lessening the detriments of ostracism. Thus, a positive employer brand could serve as a buffer, lessening the chance of cynicism and CWBs but a negative employer brand perception could exacerbate the effect of cynicism and CWBs (Naseer et al., 2021).

Workplace ostracism has been fortunately linked to several negative employee outcomes in a host of recent empirical studies such as decreased job satisfaction, increased turnover intentions, and CWB. According to retaliation via CWB, by employees who had experienced workplace ostracism, was one of the ways to retaliate for perceived mistreatment (Sabir et al., 2024). Employees with lower emotional resilience levels showed a much greater extent of this behavior, indicating the role of individual differences in how employees respond to ostracism. In particular, similar to the findings of ostracized employees were found to be more prone to cynical attitudes towards the organization, which in turn, led to a rise in CWBs (Ugwu et al., 2023). The findings of this study demonstrated that organizational cynicism mediates the relationship between ostracism and CWB, suggesting the need to concentrate on employee attitudes so negative behaviors can be thwarted. This matter is also pointed out by another study by in which workplace ostracism resulted in a fall in both organizational commitment and firm level job performance. In sum, these studies highlight the remarkable influence that ostracism exerts on employees' attitudes and behavior, and particularly, how CWB can result from continued exclusion (Rosado, 2024).

In recent research, MWBO, organizational cynicism had been explored further as a mediator in the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB. Workplace ostracism (defined as the social rejection of an individual in the workplace) often directly leads to

organizational cynicism, characterized as negative attitude toward one's employer characterized by feelings of distrust and frustration (Aplin-Houtz et al., 2023). If employees feel they are being deliberately excluded or not taken seriously as employees, this can be taken as a sign that the organization is not just or is not to be trusted. The cynicism of this is then viewed through a lens where all things within the organization become subject to disengagement, reduce job satisfaction and CWBs (Attaway, 2024). An example of such a study is by which found that employees with higher levels of organizational cynicism were more likely to engage in CWBs given they perceived that their organization treated them unfairly. This finding supports a notion that workplace ostracism leads to negative employee behaviors through the critical psychological mechanism of organizational cynicism (Sahoo et al., 2023).

Besides being a mediating variable, organizational cynicism was also found in recent studies to moderate the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB at the mediator of employer brand perception. The term employer brand perception is the aspect of how employees perceive their company's image, values and attractiveness as a place to work (Onur et al., 2024). When an employer brand is strong, it is associated with positive workplace experiences; more engaged satisfied and committed employees. On the contrary, a bad employer brand perception may result in disengagement, low motivation, and a higher chance of CWB. In the world of workplace ostracism, a strong employer brand may serve to shield from negative effects of exclusion by encouraging employee loyalty and a sense of belonging despite adversity. For instance, reported that employees who had a positive perception of their employer's brand were less likely than others to engage in CWBs following experiences of ostracism because they remained committed to the organization's mission and values in general. While a weak employer brand perception will only magnify the negative impact of ostracism, it will result in higher organizational cynicism and a higher likelihood of CWB (Lee-Kugler et al., 2024).

Although there is increasing literature on what past studies have shown about the relationships between CWB and workplace ostracism; between CWB and organizational cynicism; between CWB and employer brand perception, there is still a gap. First, the first part of most of the presently done researches examines the direct relation between ostracism and CWB without considering any mediating and moderating variables that affect this relation (Ahmad Izhan et al., 2024). Particularly, the studied phenomenon is not analyzed in detail in empirical studies, so it is important to assess how organizational cynicism and perception of the employer brand affects employee responses to ostracism. Second, although the negative consequences of workplace ostracism have been well documented, there is a lack of research about what organizations can do to mitigate the incidence rate of workplace ostracism, and its negative results. Secondly, most of the research on workplace ostracism that exists has taken place in Western contexts and there have been relatively few studies examining how the dynamics occur in non-Western or cross cultural settings. Of course, globalization of the workforce is happening, and, as such, it is important that we probe the potential influence of cultural differences to how people experience and react to being ostracized (Mathis, 2024).

Several hypotheses regarding impact of workplace ostracism on CWB can be developed

based on theoretical and empirical literature to direct future research. First, following social exchange theory and COR theory, it is expected that workplace ostracism will have a positive relationship with CWB, as ostracized employees will try to regain a sense of control or seek revenge for the perceived mistreatment (H1) (Murtaza et al., 2021). Second, it is hypothesized that organizational cynicism will mediate the relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB such that employees who experience ostracism will become cynical about their organization which then would lead to an increase in CWBs (H2). Third, it is hypothesized that employer brand perception will moderate the relation between workplace ostracism and CWB by suggesting that employees whose perceptions of the employer brand is positive are less likely to engage in CWBs following experiences of ostracism (H3). On the contrary, employees with a negative perception of the employer's brand are predicted to have a stronger relation of ostracism to CWB (H4). These hypotheses depict the intricate interrelation between workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, employer brand perception and CWB; and suggest a framework for future research to assist organizations in developing strategies to alleviate the negative repercussions of ostracism (Liu et al., 2024).

To conclude, workplace ostracism is one of the greatest issues that would have serious and negative effects to employees and organizations. The theoretical basis of this study comes from social exchange theory and conservation of resources theory to explain the relationship between ostracism and CWB via the mediating effect of organizational cynicism and the moderating effect of employer brand perception. Research studies show that employees ostracized by their organization are more likely to engage in CWBs when they begin to feel cynical about their organization. However, a positive employer brand perception can serve as a buffer in that it reduces the odds with which CWBs will ensue following ostracism experiences. Although these insights have been made, there are still some gaps in the literature that need to be filled mostly regarding the mediating and moderating variables that play a role in the relationship between ostracism and CWB. Further research should better explore these dynamics and develop work site ostracism interventions to attenuate its negative effects.

### **3.0 Methodology**

The research design for this study was quantitative since it aimed to collect, analyze, and interpret numerical data that was to be used in looking at the relationships that exist between workplace ostracism, counterproductive work behavior (CWB), organizational cynicism, and employer brand perception. Positivist research philosophy was followed; it states that the reality is objective and can be understood through observable and measurable empirical data. This is consistent with the objective of finding causal relationships between the variables by testing hypotheses using statistical analysis. The research itself was conducted in Pakistan by sampling different industries' employees so the findings could be generalized among a broad range of the organizational contexts. The study was delimited to the employees working in the public and private sector organizations of Pakistan. Considering the wide coverage of the study, it was imperative to encompass participants from various departments and levels of hierarchy in order to obtain a comprehensive view of workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism and employer

brand.

This study of sample size relied on the fact that the main method of data analysis is partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM). Since PLS-SEM requires a sufficient sample size to obtain reliable results, the targeted number of respondents is 300 for sample collection. In this regard, a non-probability sampling strategy was adopted whereby purposive sampling was used to identify respondents with direct firsthand experience of work dynamics which could potentially influence perceptions of ostracism, cynicism and brand perception. By using this sampling strategy, I could include people that would be likely to provide important information related to the research questions. Further, an effort was made to achieve diversity in the sample, with respect to age, gender, and tenure, to ensure the enhancement of the generalizability of results.

A structured survey questionnaire was electronically distributed in various organizations of Pakistan to collect data. A questionnaire was developed to measure the key variables of interest, namely workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, counter productive work behavior and employer brand perception using existing well-established scales. To measure how much employees felt excluded or ignored by their coworkers, the workplace ostracism scale developed by Ferris et al. (2008) was utilized. The scale developed by Dean et al. (1998) to measure organizational cynicism presents employees' negative attitudes toward their organization. The measurement of counterproductive work behavior was done using Spector et al. (2006) 19 items scale which measures a variety of deviant behaviors employees may partake in to harm the organization. A scale adapted from Berth on et al. (2005) was used to measure employer brand perception, which entails employees' perceptions about the attractiveness and reputation of the organization as an employer.

Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was used to analyze the collected data in testing the hypothesized links among the variables in the study. Since PLS-SEM can handle the complex models that are characterized by multiple relationships and that PLS-SEM is favorable for exploratory research, it was chosen. First, the reliability and validity of the measurement model was evaluated using internal consistency reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity prior to conducting the main analysis. The reliability of the constructs was assessed by means of Cornbrash's alpha and composite reliability, and convergent validity was assessed by means of average variance extracted (AVE). Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio of correlations was used to assess discriminant validity. Variance inflation factors (VIF) were computed to check for Multicollinearity among the predictor variables such that the variables are not excessively correlated with each other. The measurement model was then confirmed for reliability and validity, and the structural model was analyzed to test relations proposed between workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, and counterproductive work behavior and employer brand perception. Goodness-of-fit of the structural model was assessed using model fit indices (i.e., standardized root means square residual (SRMR)) indicating the overall goodness-of-fit.



Also, in regards to ethical consideration, the research conformed to the voluntary participation, informed consent, and confidentiality principles. Before the respondent completed the questionnaire, the purpose of the study was explained to all respondents in a clear manner, and the rights of the participants were explained. The participation was completely voluntary and respondents were free to withdraw from this study at any stage without any negative outcome. All participants were provided with informed consent, and their responses were made anonymous by not collecting any personally identifiable information. All these data were used exclusively for research purposes and kept confidential during the whole period of data analysis. Moreover, the study abided by relevant ethical guidelines and has been approved by the appropriate institutional review board (IRB) before collecting data.

This study employed the methodological approach to generate reliable and valid findings on the impact of workplace ostracism on counterproductive work behavior, its mediating role of organizational cynicism and moderating the impact of employer brand perception. PLS-SEM was used to explore the complex relationships among these variables and the outcomes of workplace ostracism and provide insights for researchers and practitioners who wish to understand and deal with workplace ostracism.

#### 4.0 Findings and Results

##### 4.1 Reliability Analysis

**Table 4.1 (Cornbrash’s Alpha and Composite Reliability)**

Constructs	Cornbrash’s Alpha	Composite Reliability (CR)
Workplace Ostracism	0.88	0.91
Organizational Cynicism	0.84	0.89
Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)	0.87	0.90
Employer Brand Perception	0.82	0.88

The Cornbrash’s Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) values assess the internal consistency of the constructs in the reliability analysis. All the values are greater than 0.70 and we can deduce that these values show that they have good internal consistency and reliability. This implies that the items for each construct (workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, CWB, and employer brand perception) are well aligned and help to measure the concepts reliably...

##### 4.2 Validity Analysis

**Table 4.2 HTMT Ratio for Discriminant Validity)**

Constructs	1	2	3	4
1. Workplace Ostracism	1.00			
2. Organizational Cynicism	0.65	1.00		
3. Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)	0.58	0.62	1.00	
4. Employer Brand Perception	0.42	0.55	0.50	1.00

The HTMT (Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio) is used to assess discriminant validity which means one construct is not the same from another construct. It is proven that all HTMT values are below 0.85 and hence confirm that the constructs (workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, CWB, and employer brand perception) are sufficiently distinct. Furthermore, this implies that there is no Multicollinearity or there is no overlap among the constructs as each taps a unique dimension of the phenomenon under study.

### 4.3 VIF (Variance Inflation Factor)

**Table 4.3 Variance Inflation Factor**

Constructs	VIF
Workplace Ostracism	1.25
Organizational Cynicism	1.28
Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)	1.35
Employer Brand Perception	1.12

Multicollinearity among predictor variables is evaluated by the VIF values. The model does not have a serious problem of Multicollinearity as all VIF values are below the common threshold of 3.00. It guarantees that the independent variables (workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, and employer brand perception) will not overlap too much on predicting CWB

### 4.4 Model Fitness Indices

**Table 4.4 Model Fitness Indices**

Fitness Indices	Value	Threshold
SRMR (Standardized Root Mean Square Residual)	0.045	< 0.08
NFI (Normed Fit Index)	0.92	> 0.90
R-squared (CWB)	0.64	
R-squared (Organizational Cynicism)	0.52	

A SRMR value of 0.045 is a good model fit, as it is below the threshold of 0.08. The NFI value of 0.92 indicates a strong fit of the model of the data since it is greater than the threshold of 0.90. The independent variables explain 64% (R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in CWB and 52% (R<sup>2</sup>) of the variance in organizational cynicism. Finally, the model fits well with the data and account for a significant proportion of variance in the key dependent variables.

#### 4.5 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) Path Coefficients

**Table 4.5 Structural Equation Modeling**

<b>Path</b>	<b>Coefficient (<math>\beta</math>)</b>	<b>t- value</b>	<b>p- value</b>	<b>Result</b>
<b>Direct Effects</b>				
Workplace Ostracism → Organizational Cynicism	0.68	11.24	<0.001	Supported
Organizational Cynicism → CWB	0.71	10.67	<0.001	Supported
Employer Brand Perception → CWB	-0.42	-4.87	<0.001	Supported
Workplace Ostracism → CWB	0.59	9.45	<0.001	Supported
<b>Mediation Effect</b>				
Workplace Ostracism → Organizational Cynicism → CWB	0.48	8.93	<0.001	Supported
<b>Moderation Effect</b>				
Workplace Ostracism × Employer Brand Perception → CWB	-0.28	-3.76	<0.001	Supported

The SEM results indicate that workplace ostracism has a significant positive effect on organizational cynicism ( $\beta = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB) ( $\beta = 0.59$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Additionally, organizational cynicism significantly contributes to CWB ( $\beta = 0.71$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), confirming its mediating role, as evidenced by the indirect effect of workplace ostracism on CWB through organizational cynicism ( $\beta = 0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Furthermore, employer brand perception negatively impacts CWB ( $\beta = -0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), suggesting that a strong employer brand reduces counterproductive behaviors. The moderation effect is also significant, as employer brand perception weakens the positive relationship between workplace ostracism and CWB ( $\beta = -0.28$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), indicating that a well-perceived employer brand can mitigate the negative consequences of workplace ostracism. These findings highlight the critical role of employer branding and organizational cynicism in shaping employee behavior.

#### 5.0 Discussion and Conclusion

The study findings are important in helping us understand the relationships that exist between workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism, counterproductive work behavior (CWB), and brand perception of the employer. The results show that workplace ostracism has strong

positive impact on organizational cynicism, confirming that being excluded and isolated from coworkers will lead to the development of negative attitudes towards one's organization. This finding is consistent with past studies that have demonstrated the negative influence of workplace ostracism on the employee attitudes, such as alienation, frustration, and commitment reduction (Ferris et al., 2017). Finally, the strong positive link between organizational cynicism and CWB reinforces that employees with cynical attitudes toward their organization will engage in the abusive behaviors that undermine the organization's goals (Abu-Bakr et al., 2017). This implies that cynicism functions as a vital mediator between ostracism and CWB that, in turn, supports a counterproductive chain reaction in the organization.

It is also noteworthy that employer brand perception serves as a moderating role. The results reveal that organizational cynicism has a negative impact on CWB and this effect is reduced by a strong, positive employer brand perception. In this way, employees' positive view of their employer's brand leads them to engage in less counterproductive behaviors, even if they are cynical. Consistent with branding literature, the strong employer brand can act as a buffer against the stressor impact (Collins & Stevens, 2002), because the strong employer brand can create subordinate feelings of pride, loyalty, and belonging to the organization (Mitten, 2006). The findings of this study draw attention to the role of organizational reputation in employees' behavior and its protective function in an environment of organizational conflict in the form of ostracism by demonstrating that employer brand perception protects employees from its harmful consequences.

One more important finding from this study is that workplace ostracism is directly related to CWB. Past research has indicated that ostracism should lead to CWB indirectly through negative emotional states, but this study shows that ostracism may also directly influence CWB. When employees are excluded by both peers and supervisors, they may choose to take deliberate actions that harm the organization (such as wasting time, spreading rumors, or sabotaging work processes). Consequently, organizations are urged to be proactive in workplace ostracism, it indeed affects employee wellbeing, but rather goes on to directly increase organizational inefficiencies.

Theoretically, the study has implications for literature on workplace ostracism by showing its direct and indirect effect on employee behavior. In the model, organizational cynicism and employer brand perception are incorporated to provide a fuller understanding of how ostracism results in counterproductive outcomes. These dynamics are understood from the theoretical basis of the Resource Based View (RBV) and the Social Exchange Theory (SET). From an RBV perspective, workplace ostracism depletes human and social capital of an organization lowering employee engagement and productivity while SET explains how negative exchanges in the workplace result in retaliatory behavior in the form of CWB.

The study carries much practical implications. Organizations must bring about active steps to eradicate workplace ostracism and create an inclusive culture wherein all the employees feel being valued and supported. To avoid exclusionary behaviors, leadership training, conflict resolution programs and team building activities could be implemented. Moreover, creating a positive firm image also acts as a protective effect, preventing the occurrence of organizational

cynicism and the negative behavioral outcomes that accompany it. Branding strategies should be invested on in companies to ensure that internal and external perceptions of the organization are aligned to positive values, integrity and respect of employees. This will improve the employee morale and reduce the tendency to engage in counterproductive behaviors.

This study concludes that workplace ostracism has a significant contribution toward organizational cynicism, which, in turn, results in higher counterproductive work behavior. While cynicism can harm a company's employer brand perception to some extent, a robust employer brand perception may mitigate the negative effects, thus offering what could be a valuable buffer against employee harmful behaviors. A great deal of work needs to be done by organizations to, on one hand, reduce ostracism and, on the other, build a strong positive employer brand to improve performance and maintain a healthy work environment. By taking a dual approach to this, the escalation of cynicism and CWB is prevented while also creating a more productive and committed workforce.

For organizations, some recommendations are to establish strategies to detect and treat workplace ostracism early. Managers need to be trained to identify signs of exclusion and step in in a way that will help restore harmony at the workplace. In addition, organizations should work towards enhancing their employer brand via endeavors which communicate corporate responsibility towards the wellbeing of employees and emphasize on embracing an inclusive culture. While branding efforts should be aimed at luring new talent, branding efforts should also be used to keep a good internal brand that fosters employee engagement and loyalty. The creation of a more resilient workforce that is less susceptible to the negative effects of workplace stressors can be achieved by doing so.

It is worthwhile to look further how cultural and contextual factors affect the relationships between workplace ostracism, organizational cynicism and CWB. The present study was done in the particular cultural environment and the results may differ in other situations. Future studies could also investigate other possible moderators (e.g., organizational justice or emotional intelligence) that could help explain other ways the variables work in conjunction with the dynamics of workplace ostracism and employee behavior.

**Ahsan Murtaza:** Problem Identification and Theoretical Framework

**Muhammad Asif:** Data Analysis, Supervision and Drafting

**Khansa Masood:** Methodology and Revision

Conflict of Interests/Disclosures

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