



Knowledge Hiding and Organizational Innovation: Examining the Role of Workplace Competition

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Abstract: This study investigates the relationship between competitive psychological atmosphere and knowledge-hiding behavior. It examines how organizational justice influences the link between knowledge hiding and psychological climate. Guided by the conservation of resources theory, this study explores how a competitive environment affects employees' knowledge-sharing tendencies and how perceptions of justice can reduce this behavior. A survey of 271 employees from fashion retail organizations in Karachi, Pakistan, was conducted, and data were analyzed using SPSS and SmartPLS. Results show that a competitive psychological climate significantly increases knowledge hiding, while organizational justice partially mediates this relationship. The study extends organizational behavior literature by contextualizing international findings within Pakistan's fashion retail sector and emphasizing the role of fairness in curbing counterproductive behaviors. As the first study to address knowledge hiding in this industry and region, it provides valuable insights into managing knowledge behavior in competitive settings.

Keywords: Competitive psychological climate, conservation of resources theory, knowledge hiding, organizational justice, organizational development.

JEL Classification: D91, M10, M12, M14.

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1. Introduction

The term 'knowledge hiding' (KH) refers to a deliberate effort by an employee to withhold or conceal knowledge requested by another person (Connelly et al., 2012). It is more than just a denial of knowledge exchange; rather, it is a purposeful, deliberate action intended to safeguard one's own benefit or prevent possible loss (He et al., 2021). Many employees withhold knowledge from their peers for fear that doing so will threaten their own position within the organization. This has a major negative impact on both the organization's competitive environment and its overall level of productivity. KH restricts information flow and undermines team dynamics, which limits innovation outcomes, in contrast to knowledge sharing, which fosters shared learning and creativity (Khan et al., 2023).

Employee behavior is significantly influenced by competitive psychological environments. Perceptions of disagreement among employees regarding career growth, rewards, recognition, or progress characterize a competitive workplace (Brown et al., 1998). Competition is an emotional attribute defined as an individual trait that encompasses the totality of individual abilities and the drive to excel and outperform others (Fletcher et al., 2008). According to another definition, competition is a social judgment that involves an incorrect allocation of resources or rewards due to the comparative performance of contributors in an activity (Mudrack et al., 2012).

The growing body of research on KH highlights its damaging effects on teamwork and organizational innovation, especially in psychologically risky and competitive settings. A thorough meta-analysis based on social exchange theory is presented by Škerlavaj et al. (2023), who emphasize how reciprocal dynamics influence the deliberate concealment of knowledge. Recent studies by Li and Wareewanich (2024) and Siachou et al. (2021) also examine how cooperative frameworks and

psychological safety reduce knowledge concealment and foster team openness and innovation.

In this regard, researchers have examined personal competition in the workplace. Some studies have also examined the consequences of personal competition in the workplace. A competitive team dynamic, according to Zhu et al. (2018), improves extrinsic motivation. Keller et al. (2016) studied how a competitive environment causes employees to become slaves to their jobs. The competitive climate, which has been found to motivate people and recognize their work (Nguyen et al., 2019), also contains unfriendly behavior with peer groups (Gläser et al., 2017; Nguyen et al., 2019), as well as the disposal of knowledge that could benefit their associates, workgroups, or organizations (Hernaus et al., 2019).

Organizational knowledge is a valuable non-physical resource in competitive situations. 'Organizational Capacity to Innovate in the Workplace' recommendations are a major source of office innovation (Xie et al., 2016). Although several attempts have been made to improve knowledge transfer in businesses, there has been no progress (Huang et al., 2008). Employees are generally uninterested in sharing their information, even when organizational structures facilitate knowledge transfers. This lack of passion is a roadblock to new ideas. Skepticism grows even when employees are convinced of the benefits of knowledge sharing (Bock et al., 2005; Leonard and Swap, 2005).

The retail industry employs many highly innovative persons. Employees must be talented and maintain a high level of expertise due to the nature of their employment. They must demonstrate dynamic knowledge within their organizations to thrive in a highly innovative industry (Bari et al. 2016; Chen et al., 2016). This challenge examines how most retailers interpret their experience in terms of the relevance of knowledge innovation, which is often overlooked as the dark side of the competitive psychological climate (CPC).

What is the special sense of knowledge hiding in workers or employees, and what are the major factors in the Pakistani fashion retail industry? The fashion sector is chosen for this research because it is a fast-paced, highly competitive, and innovation-driven environment where cooperation behaviors and knowledge concealment are very evident. The

study investigates some natural factors that alter knowledge concealment, but the extent to which an individual is affected by these obstacles varies across cultures.

This research contributes to our understanding of knowledge concealment in knowledge-based institutions and examines the barriers to information hiding. There are several ways this research contributes to the literature on employee behavior in organizations. First, it uses the results of previous studies conducted in Europe and other countries and applies them to organizations in Pakistan. Second, it establishes a mediating effect of organizational justice (OJ) on the relationship between CPCs and KH in the workplace. Third, while numerous studies have examined the positive and negative impacts of CPCs, this study is the first of its kind on KH in the fashion retail industry's sales environment in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Competitive Psychological Climate

A CPC is a work environment in which employees believe they can receive rewards or benefits from their company only if they outperform their co-workers. At universities and other organizations where performance comparisons are frequent, co-workers tend to see each other as competitors. Although competition may motivate and encourage high performance, it can also lead to negative results, depending on how individuals perceive and manage competition (Mudrack et al., 2012; Hernaus et al., 2019).). Therefore, a CPC is defined as employees' perceptions of an environment where competing with peers is necessary to gain access to rewards, recognition, and promotions.

There have been numerous studies on the characteristics and implications of CPCs. An example is the development of the CPC scale by Xu et al. (2024), which identifies crucial dimensions: performance-based competition and colleague-initiated rivalry. The negative organizational implications of CPCs include KH (Murtza and Rasheed, 2023), office envy, psychological contract violation (dos Santos et al., 2023), and reduced work efficiency (Rasheed and Murtza, 2023).

Although competition can increase motivation and concentration, leading to improved performance (Schrock et al., 2016), excessive

competition can result in employees prioritizing outperforming others over collaboration (Kumar Jha and Varkkey, 2018). Constant evaluation by supervisors can increase CPC levels in stressful job settings. When competitiveness is associated with unjust treatment or poor task distribution, these situations can be detrimental to employees' behavior and attitudes in the long run. In addition, when employees experience high CPC levels, the likelihood of turnover increases due to heightened internal competition and lack of career advancement opportunities (Nouri and Parker, 2013). Thus, we propose the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant relationship between CPC and KH.

H2: There is a significant relationship between CPC and OJ.

2.2. Organizational Justice

The fair and unbiased treatment of individuals within an organization is referred to as OJ (Cropanzano and Greenberg, 1997; Cropanzano et al., 2017). 'Organizational justice, at its most basic level, is a branch of psychology that focuses on the concept of equality in the workplace. This is the concept of fairness as it pertains to organizational rivalry,' i.e., fair human resource management. Greenberg (1987) describes an organization's 'right to express intuition,' a term also used by French (1964) to describe the concerns of fairness and equitable treatment within organizations. The concepts of 'justice' and 'fairness' are employed. Overall, this review centers around 'equity' (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; French, 1964; Sheppard et al., 1992).

OJ leads to trust (Cohen-Charash and Spector, 2001; Colquitt et al., 2001). High levels of OJ (a fair distribution of resources) lead to trust, engagement, and constructive behavior in the workplace. Perceived injustice, on the other hand, can result in dissatisfaction, reduced cooperation, and negative behavioral responses. Therefore, OJ has a substantial impact on employees' reactions to organizational practices and is fundamental to understanding workplace dynamics and the role of fair treatment.

According to the conservation of resources (COR) theory, employees may hide knowledge to protect their resources because they

perceive their organizations as being unjust. Previous work also indicates that lower levels of OJ are linked to higher levels of KH behaviors (Connelly et al., 2012; He et al., 2021).

2.3. Knowledge Hiding

KH refers to the act of purposefully concealing knowledge from others upon receiving requests for such information (Connelly et al., 2012). While organizations strive to promote knowledge sharing within their frameworks to increase efficiency and productivity, it should be noted that knowledge belongs to individuals who may not wish to reveal it (Kelloway and Barling, 2000). Such actions are typically impulsive and can significantly influence individual and organizational outcomes.

Over the last few years, scholars have paid considerable attention to KH, studying its predictors, outcomes, and mechanisms. For instance, Zhang et al. (2025) meta-analysis summarizing results of a variety of scientific articles illustrates that KH is influenced by factors such as individual characteristics, leadership style, and human resource management practices, resulting in adverse effects on individuals' performance and psychological well-being.

KH can be understood at a theoretical level through COR theory, which holds that individuals seek to preserve their resources (including knowledge), particularly when competing in an environment (Halbesleben et al., 2014). Because individuals believe that knowledge provides them with a competitive advantage, they may intentionally hide it to protect their position (Jahanzeb et al., 2020). This is supported by empirical evidence that workplace competition causes individuals to engage in self-serving behaviors, such as withholding knowledge from co-workers perceived as competitors (Hernaus et al., 2019; Xiao & Cooke, 2019).

When employees are forced to see their coworkers as rivals in highly competitive work environments, it directly affects their level of trust, making them less inclined to share information. People try to protect important resources, such as organizational information, to obtain an advantage, according to COR theory (Halbesleben et al., 2014). As a result,

employees in highly competitive workplaces find it simpler to use KH strategies to protect themselves.

H3: There is a significant relationship between OJ and KH.

2.4. The Mediating Role of Organizational Justice

Individual or group perceptions of OJ are referred to as institutional justice (Colquitt, 2001; Erdogan and Bauer, 2021). Clear institutional justice fosters a healthy work environment and a sense of civic responsibility among employees (Erdogan and Bauer, 2021). There is evidence that equitable awareness is associated with several positive attitudes.

The three categories of justice, according to Bies and Moag (1986), are distributive, procedural, and interactional. Informational justice is a fourth category, according to Colquitt (2001) and Greenberg (1990). In relation to distributive justice (Adams, 1965), the fairness of the distribution of outcomes for workers/employees concerns how fairly they perceive the distribution of resources or rewards. Upon realizing an unfair distribution of outcomes, individuals generally try to rectify the situation by either changing their level of input effort or demonstrating unproductive behaviors (Sheppard et al., 1992). Procedural justice, as defined by Bies and Moag (1986), relates to an employee's perception of how fair a process is and encompasses the rules and procedures for distributing resources and making decisions.

Organizational justice (OJ) is closely monitored by organizations because employees' attitudes, behaviors, and job outcomes are greatly influenced by their sense of fairness. This shows that OJ has a significant impact on how individuals in an organization behave and how business culture is formed (Ouyang et al., 2015). Equity theory, widely used in the field of corporate performance, is grounded in the equity perspective (Chen et al., 2015). The degree to which workers believe that organizational policies and procedures are just and equal is known as organizational justice (OJ). (Whitman et al. 2012).

Consider how, according to COR theory, the positive association between CPCs and knowledge concealment is minimized when an

organization's integrity is regarded as high in a competitive workplace. In this context, COR theory views OJ as an artificial signal because it can provide meaningful direction for employees in dealing with a highly competitive work environment (Greenberg, 2004). As a result, salespersons are exposed to the work's non-competitive nature, which leads to greater results than other approaches. It emphasizes the notion that in a competitive workplace with a high level of honesty, employees are more likely to provide information. Then we propose the following hypothesis:

H4: OJ has a mediating effect on the relationship between KH and CPC.

Stevan E. Hobfoll developed the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which has been a key theoretical underpinning for organizational justice (OJ) studies.. COR theory focuses on the acquisition and loss of resources in an organization. It is stated that an employee's perception and approach to resources depend on the context. Hence, organizational actions, such as policies and leaders' and managers' approaches, neither have a direct impact on outcomes nor does OJ directly impact any outcome. Instead, organizational factors indirectly affect employees through their influence on the perception of fairness and power. This leads to changes in their psychological resources.

2.5. Conservation of Resources Theory

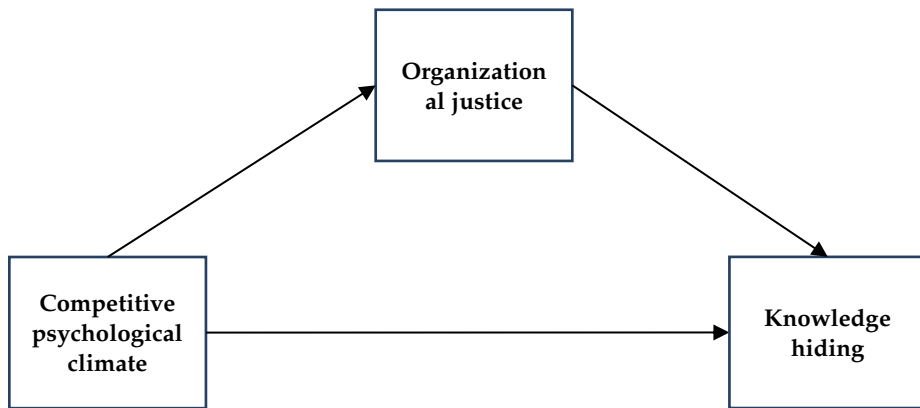
The COR theory framework is crucial for understanding how employees behave in an organizational setting. This theory holds that people always try to acquire and protect resources because they think doing so will enable them to achieve their goals (Hobfoll, 1989; Halbesleben et al., 2014). Any item, personality trait, state, or energy that individuals value for helping them achieve objectives might be considered a resource. Similarly, depending on whether they invest in or protect their resources, people receive messages about the environment that can be either favorable or harmful.

According to COR theory, a person experiences stress when they are deprived of resources, threatened with losing resources, or fail to receive a reward after expending time and effort in obtaining resources (Hobfoll, 1989). For example, an employee may become stressed and lose self-esteem because their work does not receive positive feedback, or

because their effort and time do not yield the expected results. This causes the employee to become defensive and conserve their limited resources.

In accordance with the COR model (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), an employee's success depends largely on their ability to acquire organizational information and conserve valuable resources. They feel stressed when such resources are compromised. OJ, in terms of outcome or results, procedural justice, and interpersonal justice (Greenberg, 1990; Colquitt et al., 2001), is a vital psychological instrument that makes workers feel confident and secure. In situations where the perception of high levels of OJ prevails, the chances for successful resource acquisition are higher, thereby resulting in favorable outcomes such as better work performance, motivation, and commitment.

Figure 1: Hypothesized Framework



3. Research Methodology

The research methodology is discussed in this section. It entails the methods and techniques that are used in data collection and analysis. In testing the hypotheses, this study applied the quantitative approach. Structured questionnaires were used to collect primary data and facilitate a systematic analysis of the relationship between the variables.

3.1. Sample and Procedure

Punch (2013) states that the sampling frame is the operational list from which the research sample is taken, whereas a population is the total collection of people, events, or objects pertinent to a study. Each event to

be covered in a study represents a separate population. Ideally, each individual or group within a population will have at least one common trait (Busha & Harter, 1980) or an identifiable and definable subset of the population (Punch, 2013).

This study examines the research needs by formulating hypotheses and generating findings using a quantitative approach. This quantitative methodology's data can be generated in several stages (Newman & Benz, 1998), resulting in a collection of information that can be suitably generalized to the entire sample group.

The present study aims to reach employees of fashion retail companies in Karachi, Pakistan. To gather data from respondents, the author developed and used an online questionnaire. The survey was posted online for approximately one month and shared with fashion retail industry employees. Of the 283 questionnaires received, 12 were not included in this analysis due to insufficient or missing data. In addition to addressing ethical concerns about the confidentiality of information, employees of all participating companies were assured in person and via email that data and information derived from this research would be used solely for research purposes (i.e., to increase knowledge and understanding). Furthermore, all participating companies and their employees were assured, in person and via email, that their data would remain confidential and would not be released to anyone outside the company or participating agencies. This study's sample size was calculated using the N10 construction formula (Hair et al., 2011).

3.2. Study Variables

This study has three variables.

3.2.1. Competitive Psychological Climate

A four-item scale adapted from Fletcher et al. (2008) was used to examine the CPC. Higher ratings indicate a stronger view of a competitive work environment on a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

3.2.2. Knowledge Hiding

Connelly et al. (2012) created a 13-item scale to measure knowledge concealment. A seven-point Likert scale, with 1 denoting 'strongly disagree' and 7 denoting 'strongly agree,' was used to record responses. Higher scores denote higher levels of KH behavior.

3.2.3. Organizational justice

The measure of OJ used in this study comprises nine items drawn from Colquitt (2001). The items are measured on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 represents strong disagreement and 7 represents strong agreement, with higher scores indicating greater fairness perception.

3.3. Data Analysis Technique

The partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) analysis approach, which consists of two models, a measurement model and a structural model, is identified as a second-generation method. The structural model includes hypothesis testing, while the measurement model establishes data reliability and validity (Hair et al., 2012). This strategy allows researchers to produce more useful mediation results and more thorough variability outcomes than other methods (Hair et al., 2011).

3.4. Ethical Considerations

When discussing research ethics, establishing processes is crucial. Researchers must follow specific rules, such as obtaining participants' agreement before beginning any research. Participants must be informed about the research procedure, have the option to withdraw at any time, and have their privacy and identity protected. In this study, all these ethical requirements were followed, ensuring that no physical or psychological harm was caused to participants.

4. Data Analysis

Information obtained from the samples via a disseminated questionnaire was used to conduct a comprehensive study. The data was analyzed using a variety of programs, including MS Excel and SPSS. Table 1 shows respondents' demographic data.

Table 1: Demographics

		Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Experience (years)	0–5	67	24.7	24.7	24.7
	6–10	164	60.5	60.5	85.2
	10+	40	14.8	14.8	100
Age (years)	18–25	40	14.8	14.8	14.8
	26–40	186	68.6	68.6	83.4
	40+	45	16.6	16.6	100
Qualification	Matric.	12	4.4	4.4	4.4
	Inter.	33	12.2	12.2	16.6
	Graduate	91	33.6	33.6	50.2
	Master's	127	46.9	46.9	97
	MS/PhD	8	3	3	100
Total		271	100	100	

The workforce has an experienced subset, as evidenced by the fact that 60.5 percent of members worked for six to ten years, another 24.7 percent for up to five years, and 14.8 percent for more than ten years. As a result, the vast majority are either relatively young or have just started working: 68.6 percent are aged 25–40, 16.6 percent are over 40, and 14.8 percent are under 25. With 33.6 percent of the sample having completed college and 46.9 percent earning a graduate degree, the sample's overall education level is high. However, there are lower numbers with certificates (4.4 percent), intermediate education (12.2 percent), and MS/PhDs (3 percent).

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha) for the latent variables generated by SPSS are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.
CP1	271	2	7	5.8081	0.86927
CP2	271	2	7	5.9262	1.03373
CP3	271	2	7	5.8782	0.94865
CP4	271	2	7	5.941	0.90483
KH1	271	2	7	6.0221	0.95814

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. dev.
KH2	271	2	7	5.8339	1.06027
KH3	271	2	7	5.9225	0.9533
KH4	271	2	7	5.6937	0.99178
KH5	271	2	7	5.9815	1.07997
KH6	271	2	7	5.9557	0.96123
KH7	271	2	7	5.8745	0.98833
KH8	271	2	7	5.8303	0.93133
KH9	271	3	7	5.9668	0.76182
OJ1	271	1	7	5.8524	0.99647
OJ2	271	2	7	6.0185	0.83646
OJ3	271	4	7	5.8967	0.59351
OJ4	271	4	7	5.9852	0.71993
OJ5	271	2	7	6.0738	0.92801
OJ6	271	4	7	5.9926	0.58368
OJ7	271	4	7	5.8819	0.6447
OJ8	271	4	7	5.9742	0.58632
OJ9	271	2	7	5.9225	0.85065
Valid N (listwise)	271				

Note: CP1–CP4 = competitive psychological climate items, KH1–KH9 = knowledge hiding items, OJ1–OJ9 = organizational justice items.

Most respondents agree with the questionnaire items, as evidenced by the high average values (more than 5.5 on a seven-point scale) for all items tested in relation to CPC, KH, and OJ. KH items vary from 5.69 to 6.02, CPC items range from 5.81 to 5.94, and OJ items vary from 5.85 to 6.07. All item have low to moderate standard deviations for the three constructs, indicating consistent response patterns for each measure. These findings show that individuals in this organization have a high degree of KH behaviors, a highly competitive perception of the climate, and generally high levels of perceived OJ in relation to these behaviors.

4.2. Reliability Analysis and Validity (Convergent and Discriminant)

The Cronbach's alpha number shows the questionnaire's high reliability. Table 3 shows the questionnaire's reliability for each variable and the validity of the constructs.

Table 3: Constructs' reliability analysis

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability	AVE
CPC	0.832	0.835	0.714
KH	0.914	0.920	0.680
OJ	0.718	0.767	0.400

AVE = average variance extracted.

This indicates that all latent variables have high internal consistency and reliability (the minimum alpha is 0.718), and each factor has an alpha value greater than 0.70. The author use measures to assess convergent validity (average variance extracted [AVE]) and assessed the reliability of the constructs, particularly composite reliability.

As the results above show, the composite reliability of all constructs was greater than 0.70, ranging from 0.767 to 0.920, clearly indicating that all items consistently measured the relevant constructs (Hair et al., 2016). While an AVE above 0.5 is preferred, according to Fornell and Larcker (1981), an AVE below 0.5 can be tolerated where the composite reliability exceeds 0.6, thus meeting the required criteria.

4.3. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

To show discriminant validity—a crucial aspect of assessing the distinctions between measuring instruments for various components—the square root of the AVE should have a greater Pearson correlation than other constructs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (Table 4).

Table 4: Fornell-Larcker criterion

	CPC	KH	OJ
CPC	0.925		
KH	0.792	0.862	
OJ	0.571	0.629	0.688

Table 5: Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT)

CPC	KH	OJ
CPC		
KH	0.899	
OJ	0.713	0.732

All valid HTMT results in Table 5 are less than or equal to their proposed threshold of 0.90, demonstrating discriminant validity in this study. Even though the association CPC-KH is close to the threshold (0.899), the constructs demonstrate sufficient distinctiveness for this study.

4.4. Hypothesis Testing

CPC is an exogenous latent variable, OJ is a mediator and endogenous latent variable, and KH is an endogenous latent variable, according to structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis in SmartPLS 4.0. Table 6 presents the SEM path, the standardized effect, and the p-value of the hypothesis testing.

Table 6: Hypothesis testing

Hypothesis	SEM path	Standardized effect	p-value	Decision
H1	CPC-KH	0.752	***	Accepted
H2	CPC-OJ	0.712	***	Accepted
H3	OJ-KH	0.213	***	Accepted

SEM = structural equation modeling.

Table 6 shows that CPC has a significant positive effect on KH (0.752, $p = 0.000^{**}$). CPC has a significant effect on OJ (0.712, $p = 0.000$). OJ has a significant positive effect on KH (0.213, $p = 0.00^{***}$). Therefore, hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 are accepted.

4.5. Mediation Analysis

Table 7 presents the results of the mediation study (H4) as well as the standardized indirect influence of an exogenous latent variable on an endogenous latent variable via OJ. The author followed Preacher and Hayes' (2008) instructions for conducting mediation analysis. The mediation analysis can be completed by assessing the indirect influence using the bootstrapping method. Preacher and Hayes' method does not require the direct influence of the independent variable on the dependent variable. However, Baron and Kenny (1986) state that it was initially a necessary step in the conventional, widely criticized process of testing mediation analysis. Furthermore, based on whether the indirect effects were statistically significant, this method was employed to choose the proper kind of mediation.

Table 7: Values of indirect effect, p-value, and mediation effects

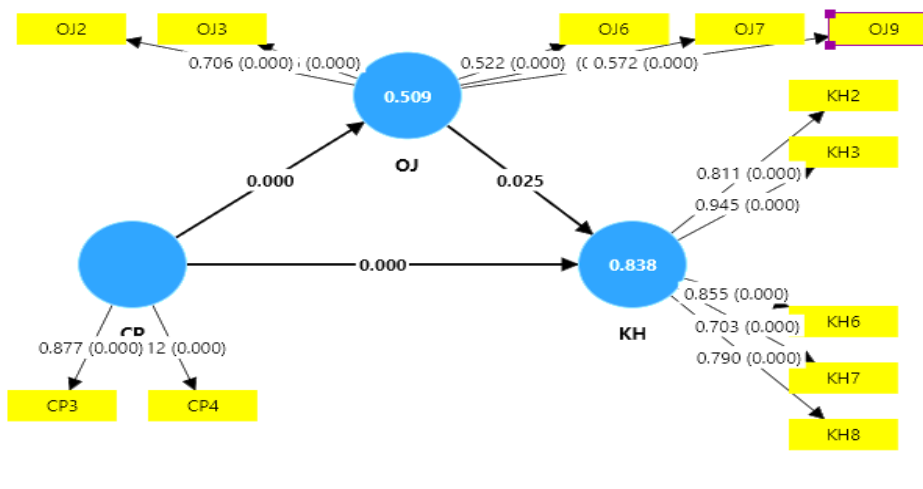
Hypothesis	SEM path	Standardized indirect effect	p-value	Decision
H4	CPC-OJ-KH	0.152	0.041	Accepted

Using maximum likelihood estimation and the suggested 5,000 non-parametric bootstrap resampling technique, Table 7 demonstrates that OJ partially mediates the relationship between CPC and KH (0.152, $p = 0.041^{**}$) (Hair et al., 2016). This supports H4. According to the findings, the change in OJ perception is linked with the change in the competitive psychological atmosphere of the organization, and both have effects on KH. The findings reveal the mediating effect of OJ. Therefore, OJ acts as a critical variable in this link.

4.6. Overall Model Testing

The hypothesized relationship between variables is analyzed using PLS-SEM. This approach is appropriate for evaluating the measurement and structural model, as this research's model contains an independent variable (CPC), a mediator (OJ), and a dependent variable (KH). Figure 2 illustrates the results of the structural model analysis, including direct and indirect relationships among the variables.

Figure 2: The overall model



Note: CP = competitive psychological climate, KH = knowledge hiding, OJ = organizational justice.

5. Discussion of Findings

The current study investigates how organizational justice (OJ) mediates the relationship between knowledge hiding (KH) and a competitive psychological climate within firms. The results provide important new knowledge about the behavioral impact of working in a competitive environment and significant empirical support for the hypothesis being tested.

“Employees have an attitude of fear, confusion, respect, and deliberate attempts towards better performance based on information about the competitive environment around them, both in and out of their company.” As such, given the predominant competitive-type mindset that has infiltrated Pakistan’s businesses and the non-existence of a competitive-type work environment for sales and marketing people, it is essential (and prudent) to continue extending the potential effect of anything achieved. There is much more to be done in the retail segment of Pakistan’s industry with regard to the competitive psychological environment and the need for open discussion/exchange of ideas.

The COR theory shows that salespersons who worked in a competitive environment or at a point of sale were more prone to hide their expertise. According to the findings of this study and the theoretical presentation of KH (e.g., Kumar Jha & Varkkey, 2018), a CPC creates an atmosphere in which associates keep work-connected learning and knowledge to themselves to maintain a competitive advantage. It also demonstrates that OJ aids the association between CPC and knowledge concealment, providing management with insight, particularly in competitive climates.

The current findings support H1: that there is a significant positive relationship between the level of competitiveness and concealment of knowledge. This is consistent with previous research showing that high competitiveness creates self-protective and adaptable behaviors by employees (Fletcher & Nusbaum, 2010; Connelly et al., 2012). Employees will be more likely to conceal valuable knowledge if they feel their promotions, rewards, recognition, or career advancement are directly related to that knowledge. This strengthens the argument that, although competitive environments may increase employee performance, they

may also negatively impact collective behavior and knowledge sharing, both of which are vital to innovation.

H2 is supported by the study's second conclusion, which finds that a competitive psychological environment significantly influences OJ. Results show that an employee's perception of fairness is affected by the type of work environment in which they work. In a highly competitive atmosphere, employees could view decision-making procedures and results as being unfair/biased, particularly when incentives are not distributed appropriately. These findings also support past research showing how organizational climates play an important role in shaping justice perceptions (Colquitt et al., 2001; Fletcher and Nusbaum, 2010). Excessive competition can lead to negative attitudes among employees because perceptions of unfairness are negatively affected.

H3 confirms a strong positive association between OJ and knowledge concealment, which appears to be counterintuitive. Still, it can begin to make sense when we consider the relative dynamics involved. Because of the goals of resource preservation and the causes of conflict, employees may persist in concealing information in contexts where they perceive procedural and/or distributive justice as being relatively just. Recent research suggests that justice perceptions alone will not necessarily eliminate KH behavior in contexts where workers can conceal knowledge easily (Sun et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2023).

Ultimately, the results of the mediation analysis show that fairness in the workplace partially mediates the relationship between two variables, i.e., KH and competitive psychological climate, which provides evidence to support H4. This finding indicates that employee perceptions about fairness in a competitive context influence both directly and indirectly the KH of employees. The study advances our understanding and adds to existing literature by identifying the psychological mechanism through which competition in the work environment influences knowledge-related behaviors. In particular, the study's findings suggest that employees perceive competitive work environments through a fairness lens; this perception affects behavior, providing additional evidence that competition affects work behavior.

This research responds to a fresh request to investigate the personal repercussions of knowledge concealment (Connelly et al., 2012). We examined how information concealment affects employee well-being in the workplace, as well as when this effect is most likely to occur. The results show that workers with higher levels of knowledge hiding (KH) had worse mental health and, as a result, were less successful at work.

The author postulates an positive optimistic relationship between a CPC and knowledge concealment based on COR theory. According to COR theory, a competitive work environment allows employees to develop their assets and seek advantages over their peers to attain their own goals (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Jahanzeb et al., 2020). In a competitive work setting, salespersons, in particular, hide their own qualities, such as knowledge, from their peers. According to Hernaus et al. (2019), employees may engage in unethical activities in the workplace to maintain a competitive advantage.

5.1. Managerial Implications

The empirical findings in this paper have significant ramifications for senior executives, particularly retail executives. The current study demonstrates that leadership efforts may not always result in increases in organizational growth, which is consistent with previous research (Wittchen et al., 2013; Serenko, 2021). The competitive psychological atmosphere may have a negative impact on information sharing among employers. Science, on the other hand, becomes a significant resource that others can use to perform in competitive environments. The foundation is then laid by a habit of information concealment, which can sometimes transform negative approaches into progressive ones, innovations, and ideas. Even in highly competitive environments, many organizations must adopt appropriate incentive structures to ensure workers are supported and ready to deliver their best work, thereby helping them thrive in the long run (Schaufeli, 2016).

Furthermore, trained workers focus their attention and efforts on building team governance processes. In the organization, training should be provided to ensure that current concepts and processes are effectively conveyed, allowing workers to better understand what to do and how to do it, while communicating the knowledge process.

In addition, the competitive climate, sales market volatility, and sales effectiveness are all factors to consider.

Managers must support employees' comprehension of the OJ process. While a positive work environment is important, honest personal behavior and a clear description of remuneration schemes can counter unproductive work performance (Larkin and Pierce, 2015). Managers must strive to create and maintain a fair balance of justice to protect employees from KH behavior caused by a CPC. Doing so promotes a favorable climate and reduces the undesirable results of a competitive environment.

Managers in Pakistani organizations are expected to refrain from favoritism and other informal practices, such as promotions without merit and unfair talent acquisition and appraisal systems. Even in organizational environments where resources are limited, employee fairness in resource distribution can help alleviate employees' feelings of injustice and the stress they cause.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

This study adds several significant theoretical insights to the literature on knowledge management and organizational behavior. An important finding is that the extent to which competitive workplace conditions impact KH practices is strongly influenced by employees' perceptions of OJ. Our results show that OJ has a significant mediating influence ($\beta = 0.152$, $p = 0.041$) between KH and CPC. This implies that employees are less likely to hoard knowledge, even in competitive environments, if they feel properly treated. This emphasizes how important fairness perceptions are, theoretically, for understanding and controlling how employees react to competitive pressure.

According to expansions of social exchange theory, employees conceal information to safeguard their own interests when they perceive unfairness in competitive environments, which erodes relational trust and reciprocity norms (Cropanzano et al., 2017). This result is also consistent with recent advances in OJ theory, which contend that employees' willingness to act prosocially is influenced by their psychological interpretations of competitive dynamics, which are filtered through

perceptions of fairness (Colquitt et al., 2001). The outcome also adds to the growing body of research on knowledge management, which acknowledges that justice can either facilitate or hinder information sharing, depending on the context (Bernatović et al., 2021). According to the theory, competitive settings do not always result in knowledge concealment; they do so only when they increase feelings of unfairness, which makes OJ an important mediating factor and a boundary condition in models of knowledge behavior.

This research generated a model that is fully integrated and validated from an analytical perspective. The model explains the relationships between KH, perceived OJ, and the competitive nature of the environment in organizations. Such findings contribute to a growing field of research focusing on negative organizational phenomena and form a basis for further theoretical advancements in organizational psychology and knowledge management.

5.3. Limitations and Future Direction

Some constraints can guide future research. Employees' knowledge-hiding behavior is often shaped by their perceptions of a competitive workplace climate. To determine whether knowledge concealment and the competitive climate interact similarly across time, a long-term study will be useful. As a result, we are working on a data-gathering method. However, additional approaches, such as field research or experimental methods, may be valuable in confirming our findings.

Because we collected data only from salespersons in specific retail sectors in Pakistan, our findings may not be generalizable across other professions and positions. To improve overall outcomes, future research should collect data from multiple groups of workers from various firms, industries, and cultures.

Our research examines comprehensive knowledge concealment. Future studies may need to examine other types of knowledge concealment. Lastly, future studies should look at other moderators that can affect employees' knowledge-hiding behavior, such as affective states

and personality qualities like self-efficacy and emotional intelligence.
Conclusion

Several implications can be drawn from the theory as presented above. As stated in previous studies on the relationship between competition and KH (e.g., Peng et al., 2021; Semerci, 2019), there is no consistency of results. Thus, the aim of our research was to explore this area. COR theory, which states that employees engaged in sales activities perceive risks to their work and engage in inefficient activities to defend their resource bases (i.e., knowledge), is used to investigate the dark side of the CPC in the sales setting (Jahanzeb et al., 2020).

This study shows a positive correlation between CPC and the KH behaviors of salespersons. Thus, this research contributes to an ever-expanding literature on how a CPC can negatively impact an organization in the long term. We have defined a boundary condition for the relationship between CPC and withholding knowledge behavior within the context of COR. Specifically, we demonstrate that salespersons' change in the likelihood of withholding knowledge (due to their perception of a CPC) results from each salesperson's evaluation of OJ as an indicator of whether to use it as a resource in developing new coping strategies. These findings shed light on the circumstances in which the harmful impact of a competitive psychological environment is mitigated.

Knowledge concealment is common, and it stymies corporate growth (Peng, 2013). One source of evidence for this hindrance is research on the harmful effects of knowledge concealment. Individuals may also conceal information pertaining to their interpersonal relationships and creative ideas or skills (Černe et al., 2014). By expanding this line of study to focus on explicit psychological effects (defined by co-learning and activating experiences), our findings suggest that knowledge concealment benefits/rewards the people in the workplace while compromising peace of mind.

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