

"Perceived scarcity on workplace ethics: greed, social undermining cutting corner, and psychological entitlement"

Abstract

Purpose

This empirical study is built upon emerging research on ethical fading by investigating the influence of perceived scarcity on ethical fading in the workplace. The study develops and tests a moderated and sequential mediated model to understand the process through which perceived scarcity triggers dispositional greed, leading to social undermining and cutting corners, resulting in ethical fading. Furthermore, the study examines the role of psychological entitlement in this relationship. It posits that when psychological entitlement is high, perceived scarcity is more likely to incite ethical fading through dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners.

Design/ Methodology/ Approach

The current study is conducted by using, positivism research philosophy deductive approach, and survey method to test the formulated hypotheses. The suggested theoretical framework is examined utilizing. time-lagged data acquired from a subset of 357 individuals employed in small and medium-sized enterprise (SME) establishments.

Findings

The results suggested that perceived scarcity can lead to ethical fading with sequential mediation of dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners. Psychological entitlement positively moderates the relationship between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed.

Originality/ Value

The current study offers an original perspective on the critical nature of perceived scarcity, undermining, entitlement, and greed in relation to the strategic importance of effectively managing and controlling ethical fading. The results offer broad backing for the assumptions, presenting repercussions for theory, application, detailed practical implications, and potential areas of future research.

Keywords Perceived Scarcity, Dispositional Greed, Social Undermining, Cutting Corners, Ethical Fading, Psychological Entitlement.

Introduction

Ethical fading in the workplace setting is characterized as a cognitive progression whereby individuals, within the framework of decision-making, progressively lose awareness of ethical factors and prioritize alternative aspects such as monetary gain, professional progress, or personal motives (Rees *et al.*, 2019; Dufner *et al.*, 2024). Consequently, they tend to validate or rationalize their unethical conduct or choices by either disregarding or distorting the moral aspects of the circumstance (Gordon, 2024; Tenbrunsel *et al.*, 2010). Ethical fading is a common phenomenon in organizational settings, where individuals face complex and ambiguous ethical dilemmas that require careful moral reasoning and judgment (Sezer *et al.*, 2015). In response to a growing interest among business scholars, there has been a shift towards exploring the factors that contribute to ethical fading, aiming to gain a deeper understanding of its underlying dynamics and offer practical solutions for organizations and decision-makers (Rees *et al.*, 2019). Previous research has shed light on various antecedents of ethical fading, such as organizational injustice (Thai and Lumbreras, 2023; Schminke *et al.*, 1997), a hostile climate (Blomberg *et al.*, 2024), the presence of aggressive norms (Wu *et al.*, 2024), subpar subordinate task performance (Dill *et al.*, 2022), and instances of workplace deviance (Sezer *et al.*, 2015). These findings highlight the multifaceted nature of ethical fading and provide valuable insights for addressing and mitigating its effects within organizational contexts.

Despite the ongoing development in the field, the body of literature concerning the precursors of ethical fading still exhibits certain limitations. Firstly, prior research on ethical fading has predominantly concentrated on comprehending the behavioral and cognitive mechanisms that drive its manifestation (Thai and Lumbreras, 2023; Dill *et al.*, 2022; Rees *et al.*, 2019). This line of investigation has explored various factors including moral disengagement (Helzer *et al.*, 2023), frameworks for ethical decision-making (Hooker, 2022 p.15), the ethical climate within organizations (Burhan *et al.*, 2023), cognitive biases (Sezer *et al.*, 2015), and the influence of situational contexts (Sharif and Ghodoosi, 2022). However, there is a need to expand beyond these facets and delve into the intricate workings of the psychological processes that prompt individuals to disregard or justify unethical conduct, thereby playing a pivotal role in the emergence of ethical fading. Significantly, this nascent body of research has not yet elucidated the mechanisms through which perceived scarcity (Cialdini, 2001) catalyzes ethical fading (Yuan, 2024), thus impeding

our comprehension of the initial triggers and confining our theoretical understanding of this phenomenon. Furthermore, there remains a dearth of theoretical guidance concerning the circumstances under which specific psychological antecedents may induce ethical fading, limiting our knowledge of the psychological boundaries that contribute to this predicament (Reamer, 2022). Corroborating this notion, a recent study has underscored that the research on antecedents of ethical fading is still in its infancy and requires more robust theoretical guidance to advance our understanding (Feldman and Nativ, 2021; Helzer *et al.*, 2023; Kaptein, 2023). While numerous factors can contribute to ethical fading, the exploration of perceived scarcity holds particular significance due to both theoretical and practical considerations (Gupta and Gentry, 2019). Despite indications of a link between perceived scarcity and ethical fading in SMEs, the lack of theoretical mechanisms hinders progress in this area. Moreover, there is an insufficient explanation regarding the varying intensity of this relationship under specific conditions. Ethical fading can result from organizational, subordinate, and perpetrator-related factors like perceived scarcity (Kouchaki and Desai, 2015). Therefore, a comprehensive theoretical inquiry is necessary, considering employee-level mechanisms and boundary conditions. This holistic approach will enhance our understanding of the complex relationship between perceived scarcity and ethical fading. Moreover, while prior research has addressed the variables and relationships under study in isolated fragments, a comprehensive and integrated view remains absent. Therefore, this study aims to develop and test an integrated model that will significantly enhance the existing literature and deepen our understanding of these dynamics as shown in Figure 1.

Furthermore, the current study addresses limitations in the ethical fading literature by adopting a dispositional greed perspective. It proposes dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners as sequential mediators. Psychological entitlement, reflecting individuals' belief in deserving greater resources, moderates the dispositional greed process (Campbell *et al.*, 2004; Lee *et al.*, 2019). Perceived scarcity triggers a focus on personal goals, resulting in ethical fading (Naseer *et al.*, 2020). Dispositional greed drives the prioritization of personal gain, leading to social undermining and cutting corners (Enwereuzor, 2023). Psychological entitlement justifies unethical actions based on a sense of deserving special treatment (Lee *et al.*, 2019).

The study is imperative since it is conducted within SME organizations in Pakistan and, hence, provides valuable theoretical insights into the dynamics of perceived scarcity, entitlement,

and ethical fading, advancing knowledge in this field. In the context of Pakistan, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are grappling with the challenge of ethical fading, exacerbated by the country's status as an underdeveloped nation. The adverse impact of various factors such as the COVID-19 pandemic, frequent floods due to global warming, and an unstable economy, influenced by unpredictable political conditions, further compound this issue. Given these circumstances, employees within SMEs may perceive resources as scarce, increasing the likelihood of ethical fading.

Theory and Hypotheses Development

Theoretical Elucidation

The Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1988) suggests that human behavior is influenced by the complex interaction of cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors. Firstly, cognitive factors encompass an individual's thoughts, beliefs, expectations, and perceptions. Understanding the workings of the cognitions is crucial in understanding how our thoughts and beliefs influence our actions. The behavioral dimension focuses on the actions and behaviors that individuals participate in. Finally, the environmental dimension encompasses the social and physical environments in which individuals exist. Environmental factors also play a significant role in shaping behaviors, such as through social modeling, and can also have an impact on cognitive processes by creating opportunities for observational learning (Bandura, 2023).

Dealing with scarcity can activate cognitive processes involving managing and acquiring resources (Roux *et al.*, 2015). When people encounter a scarcity of resources, it impacts their beliefs and expectations regarding the availability of those resources (Clough *et al.*, 2019). This cognitive notion of scarcity influences their thoughts and attitudes toward acquiring resources, resulting in a tendency to desire more than necessary, known as dispositional greed (Sekhar *et al.*, 2020). Understanding dispositional greed requires examining the interplay of cognitive factors and personal beliefs regarding resource acquisition (Mussel *et al.*, 2018). These tendencies, in turn, can lead to behaviors such as social undermining and taking shortcuts (Nikelly, 2006). Individuals prone to greed are more likely to prioritize personal gain, even if it involves disregarding others or resorting to unethical methods. These behaviors are expressions of dispositional greed, influenced by cognitive processes such as perceived scarcity and personal factors such as individual beliefs and attitudes (Tripathi *et al.*, 2022).

Moreover, cognitive processes related to resource acquisition may distort ethical considerations, leading to ethical fading (Rees *et al.*, 2019). When individuals focus on acquiring limited resources, they may prioritize personal gain over ethical principles, resulting in ethical fading (Dill *et al.*, 2022). This distortion is influenced by cognitive factors (focus on resource acquisition) and environmental factors (workplace culture and societal norms). Additionally, psychological entitlement moderates the relationship between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed (Zeelenberg and Breugelmans, 2022). Individuals with a strong sense of entitlement may be more susceptible to perceiving scarcity and experiencing dispositional greed. Psychological entitlement acts as a cognitive and environmental factor that shapes individuals' responses to perceived scarcity, influencing their dispositional greed and subsequent behaviors (Bao *et al.*, 2020). The relationship between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed is strengthened when an individual is high on psychological entitlement. Overall, the integration of Social Cognitive Theory into the research model provides a comprehensive understanding of how cognitive, behavioral, and environmental factors interact to influence individual responses to perceived scarcity. It highlights the complex interplay between cognitive processes, behaviors, and environmental influences in shaping human behavior in resource-limited environments.

Perceived Scarcity, Dispositional Greed, Social Undermining, and Ethical Fading

Understanding the relationship between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed involves examining cognitive processes and observational learning (Liu *et al.*, 2019; Zeelenberg and Breugelmans, 2022). Perceived scarcity triggers cognitive processes, leading individuals to observe others' responses to limited resources (Gino and Pierce, 2009). Through observational learning, individuals may internalize these behaviors and develop a heightened desire to acquire scarce resources (Park *et al.*, 2022). Dispositional greed, as a personal characteristic, further shapes this relationship by influencing self-regulatory processes and goal-setting (Seuntjens *et al.*, 2019). Individuals high in dispositional greed may prioritize personal gain and pursue limited resources, even engaging in unethical actions (Zeelenberg and Breugelmans, 2022). Thus, within the framework of Social Cognitive Theory (Bandura, 1988), perceived scarcity and dispositional greed interact to shape behavior and decision-making regarding limited resources (Bao *et al.*, 2020). The literature consistently suggests a positive association between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed. Individuals perceiving scarce resources are more inclined to adopt a greedy mindset, seeing

a need to secure and hoard resources (Jiang and Hamamura, 2015; Harrison *et al.*, 2018). The perception of scarcity triggers a competitive mindset, focusing individuals on acquiring and accumulating resources to avoid deprivation (Vohs *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, dispositional greed amplifies this relationship, with individuals high in greed prioritizing self-interests and engaging in resource-acquiring behaviors even when resources aren't objectively scarce (Sekhar *et al.*, 2020; De Clercq, 2023). Individuals high in dispositional greed may engage in behaviors that undermine others, such as spreading rumors or sabotaging efforts (Aquino and Thau, 2009). Their preoccupation with personal gain can lead to perceiving others as threats, prompting undermining behaviors to maintain an advantage (Fan, 2002). Individuals high in dispositional greed are more likely to engage in social undermining behaviors when perceiving limited resources (Bruhn and Lowrey, 2012). Their greed intensifies their motivation to secure resources, even at others' expense. Literature also posits that individuals high in dispositional greed are more likely to engage in unethical shortcuts and rule-breaking to maximize their gain (Jonason and O'Connor, 2017; Stevens *et al.*, 2012). Their excessive desire for wealth and personal gain can override ethical considerations, leading them to prioritize their interests above ethical standards and regulations.

H1: Dispositional Greed and Social Undermining sequentially mediate the relationship between Perceived Scarcity and Ethical Fading

Perceived Scarcity, Dispositional Greed, Cutting Corners, and Ethical Fading

Perceived scarcity pertains to individuals' subjective perception of limited or inadequate resources, triggering competitive and self-centered behaviors (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Conversely, dispositional greed encompasses individuals' persistent longing for wealth and personal gain, often disregarding ethical principles (Seuntjens *et al.*, 2015). Dispositional greed can be enhanced by perceived scarcity, which later can make an individual break established rules for their good as taking shortcuts or bypassing established rules, procedures, or standards is commonly referred to as engaging in "cutting corners" (Smith *et al.*, 2021). On the other hand, ethical fading describes the process wherein ethical considerations become less prominent or visible in decision-making, thereby increasing the likelihood of unethical behaviors (Burhan *et al.*, 2023). According to Yang *et al.*, (2022) dispositional greed and engaging in unethical shortcuts can enhance the impact of perceived scarcity on unethical behavior in the workplace. It is supported by research that when individuals encounter perceived scarcity, it triggers their dispositional greed, intensifying their

pursuit of personal gain and advantages (Liu *et al.*, 2019). As dispositional greed intensifies, individuals become more inclined to prioritize their interests over ethical considerations, leading to a greater likelihood of resorting to unethical practices such as cutting corners (Pheko, 2018). Accordingly, when an individual engages in cutting corners can contribute to a phenomenon known as ethical fading. This occurs when individuals intentionally ignore established rules and ethical standards, gradually diminishing the significance of ethical considerations (Sakalaki *et al.*, 2007). Consequently, individuals may perceive the importance of ethical considerations, thereby increasing their susceptibility to engaging in unethical behaviors and displaying ethical fading (Smith *et al.*, 2021).

H2: Dispositional Greed and Cutting Corners sequentially mediate the relationship between Perceived Scarcity and Ethical Fading

Moderation of Psychological Entitlement

Naseer *et al.*, (2020) established that psychological entitlement has the potential to act as a moderating variable in the relationship between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed. When individuals perceive scarcity, it can elicit feelings of competition and a desire for self-preservation (Effron and Miller, 2011). Individuals with high levels of psychological entitlement have their dispositional greed intensified, leading to a heightened belief in deserving more resources and privileges compared to others. This drives a stronger motivation for personal gain and advantages (Chen *et al.*, 2023). Conversely, individuals with lower levels of psychological entitlement may exhibit a weaker link between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed. Their reduced sense of entitlement acts as a protective factor, mitigating the impact of perceived scarcity on dispositional greed. They are less likely to attribute an inflated sense of deservingness to personal gain and may display a diminished drive for personal advantages (Chen *et al.*, 2023; Effron and Miller, 2011). Individuals high on dispositional greed have high psychological entitlement issues. Self-esteem theory (Nhan *et al.*, 2024) proposes that high levels of self-esteem may be the source of psychological entitlement. Individuals who have high self-esteem may have the perception that they are deserving of special treatment or rewards because they have a favorable perception of themselves and believe that they are naturally more worthy than others. To maintain their self-esteem, and elevated levels of psychological entitlement, the individual may possess an exaggerated belief in their entitlement to exceptional treatment or advantages. If their perception

regarding psychological entitlement is not adequately met, their entitlement could be exacerbated even further (Naseer *et al.*, 2020). When psychological entitlement is high and psychological needs are not met, individuals may be more likely to engage in unethical behavior, such as exploiting perceived scarcity and displaying dispositional greed. They may feel justified in pursuing personal gain at the expense of ethical considerations due to their entitlement beliefs.

H3: Psychological Entitlement moderates the relationship between Perceived Scarcity and Dispositional Greed such that when entitlement is high, dispositional greed is high

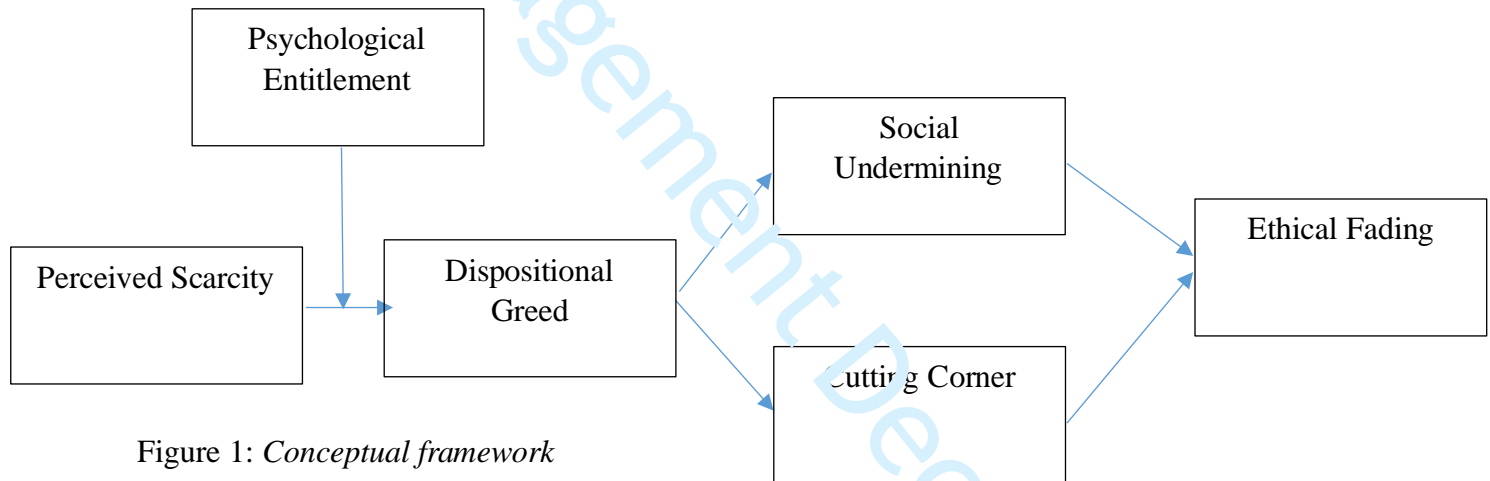


Figure 1: *Conceptual framework*

Source(s): Authors own work

Method

We gathered time-lagged data (three-week intervals) from the primary employees actively engaged in the SME sector of Pakistan. A three-week interval provides an adequate timeframe for changes to occur in the variables of interest (Burhan and Khan, 2024), such as perceived scarcity, psychological entitlement, cutting corners, social undermining, and ethical fading. Researchers (Malik *et al.*, 2023; Burhan *et al.*, 2023; Burhan and Malik, 2024) also use the same intervals for their time-lagged studies. This duration allows for potential shifts in participants' perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors to manifest, providing more meaningful insights into the dynamics over time (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2024). State Bank of Pakistan enlisted 22 SME categories in sub-sector

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3 profiling reports (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2023). By taking the lead from the report,
4 supermarkets and retail shops, tactile fabrics, and fan industry-related SMEs were taken into
5 consideration in the current study. The selected SME sectors align with the research objectives and
6 aims of the study. By examining ethical fading in these specific sectors, the study addresses
7 relevant research questions and hypotheses related to the factors influencing ethical decision-
8 making in the Pakistani context. Moreover, Supermarkets and retail shops, Textile, and the fan
9 industry are significant contributors to Pakistan's economy (Burhan and Khan, 2024). These
10 sectors play a crucial role in generating employment, fostering economic growth, and contributing
11 to the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Furthermore, the selected SMEs represent a diverse
12 range of industries, including retail, textile, and manufacturing. By focusing on multiple sectors,
13 the study can provide insights into ethical issues and behaviors across different industries, allowing
14 for broader generalization of the findings.
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25 Due to the inherent sensitivity of the variables involved, particularly their direct connection
26 to ethical and moral considerations, we took significant measures to ensure the confidentiality and
27 anonymity of the participants in our research study. Prior to data collection, the employees were
28 informed about the nature of the research and given the freedom to choose whether or not to
29 participate. Their informed consent was obtained before proceeding. For the data collection
30 process, questionnaires were distributed in sealed envelopes, each containing a unique code to
31 differentiate between employees to maintain anonymity, and considering the time-lagged nature
32 of the study. In the initial stage, data related to demographic information and perceived scarcity
33 were gathered. Because of the sensitivity of the variables such as dispositional greed, social
34 undermining, cutting corners, ethical fading, and psychological entitlement (observed negatively
35 in society), so careful and deliberated efforts were made to maintain confidentiality. After the
36 collection of the initial demographic information, codes were assigned to each questionnaire that
37 was used in the next stage of data collection. After three weeks, the employees were requested to
38 complete another questionnaire assessing the mediating variables, such as dispositional greed,
39 cutting corners, and social undermining. Finally, after an additional three weeks, the employees
40 were asked to fill out a questionnaire focusing on ethical fading. Based on the codes, each
41 questionnaire was pinned together and analyzed accordingly. We employed a purposive sampling
42 technique, targeting employees involved in operational roles who were also part of the decision-
43 making process. A minimum qualification of graduation was set as a criterion for inclusion in the
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study. To mitigate common method biases, we followed a procedural roadmap suggested by Podsakoff (2024), which included ensuring the comprehensibility of the questionnaire through a pre-testing phase. Two academics, one language instructor, and five managers from SMEs reviewed the questionnaire, confirming its suitability and usability for data collection. By implementing these measures, we aimed to gather reliable and meaningful insights into the moral and ethical dynamics within SMEs in Pakistan. Since we have also conducted pre-testing to ensure clarity and comprehension, no issues of understanding the statements were encountered. This thorough preliminary evaluation confirms that the statements were well-understood by the participants, thereby enhancing the reliability and validity of the study's findings. In the context of our data analysis, sequential mediation is undertaken following the guidelines outlined by Hayes (2018). Specifically, our study hypothesizes a sequential mediation model whereby the relationship between the independent variable (e.g., perceived scarcity) and the dependent variable (e.g., ethical fading) is posited to be mediated by multiple intermediary variables (e.g., dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners) sequentially. It is acknowledged that prior research in similar domains often presents parallel or single mediation models. However, we contend that the sequential mediation approach holds particular value in our investigation. This method enables us to delve into the intricate pathways through which the independent variable exerts its influence on the dependent variable, offering a more nuanced comprehension of the underlying mechanisms at play (Hayes, 2018). Questionnaire is attached as an annexure.

Measures

Perceived Scarcity

At Time 1 Zhang *et al.*'s (2022) scale was adapted to capture the response related to perceived scarcity. The said scale was consisted of five items and rated using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree. The sample items are "I anticipate that employee will compete to acquire job-related resources", "I believe that the current supply of resources is limited", and "I am concerned that the scarcity of job-related resources will impact employee's survival". The reliability of the scale is identified as 0.771. Perceived scarcity refers to an individual's enduring tendency to perceive resources as scarce or limited across various situations. In this regard, it is categorized as a dispositional trait and reflects a stable aspect of the individual's cognitive processing and perception of their environment.

Psychological Entitlement

Psychological entitlement is taking an individual's personal beliefs (dispositional) regarding themselves. Responses related to psychological entitlement were collected at Time 2 (after 3 weeks), it were assessed by the participants using six items from Campbell *et al.*'s (2004) scale of psychological entitlement. Sample items include "I honestly feel I'm just more deserving than others" and "I demand the best because I'm worth it." Responses for these items were made on a 5-point response scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree ($\alpha=0.853$).

Dispositional Greed

At Time 3, with an interval of three weeks, dispositional greed was assessed by the participants using seven items from Seuntjens *et al.*, (2015b) scale of dispositional greed. Sample items include "Actually I am kind of greedy". Responses for these items were made on a 5-point response scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree ($\alpha=0.851$). Dispositional greed is considered an individual tendency rather than greed within a social context.

Cutting Corners

In the current study, cutting corners reflects a dispositional factor where individuals engage in unethical or shortcut behaviors to achieve desired outcomes, regardless of the specific situation. This trait reflects a stable characteristic of the individual's ethical decision-making process. At Time 3, it was assessed by the participants using five items from Jonason and O'Connor (2017). Sample item reads: "I use shortcuts at work to get ahead". The reliability of the scale is identified as 0.828.

Social Undermining

Social undermining is taken as a dispositional factor, which refers to an individual's enduring tendency to engage in behaviors that undermine the achievements, goals, or well-being of others within social or organizational contexts. This trait reflects a stable aspect of the individual's interpersonal behavior. At Time 3, it was assessed by the participants using five items from Duffy *et al.*, (2002) scale of social undermining. Sample items include "Belittled another team member's idea". Responses for these items were made on a 5-point response scale from 1=strongly disagree to 5=strongly agree ($\alpha=0.839$).

Ethical Fading

At Time 4, ethical fading was assessed by the participants using five items from Zhang, (2019) scale of ethical fading. The Cronbach's Alpha of said scale is identified as 0.718. Sample items are “*I believe that ethical principles become less important when faced with competitive pressures*” and “*I sometimes overlook ethical concerns in pursuit of goals*”.

Ethical fading in the current study is taken as a dispositional factor which refers to an individual's enduring tendency to overlook or diminish the importance of ethical considerations in decision-making across various situations.

Respondent's Profile

Table 1 Demographic analysis (n=357)

Category	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	305	85.4	85.4	85.4
Female	52	14.6	14.6	100.0
<i>Age</i>				
20-30	197	55.2	55.2	55.2
31-40	144	40.3	40.3	95.5
41 and Above	16	4.5	4.5	100.0
<i>Experience</i>				
0-5	186	52.1	52.1	52.1
6-10	162	45.4	45.4	97.5
11 and Above	9	2.5	2.5	100.0

Source(s): Authors own work

Results

Analytical Approach

To examine the moderated-mediation model specified in our study, we employed a methodology described by Preacher *et al.* (2007) and Hayes (2018) utilizing the AMOS and macro models developed by Hayes (2018). This macro extends the functionality of the PROCESS macro created by Hayes in 2013 and utilizes bootstrapping techniques to generate 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals for the conditional indirect effects of the independent variable on the

dependent variable through the mediator, considering various levels of the proposed moderators. Before conducting the analyses, we specified 5000 bootstrap samples (Edwards and Lambert, 2007). Consistent with previous research (e.g., Cole *et al.*, 2008; Eissa and Wyland, 2018), we performed multiple analyses. Firstly, we ran a test for assessment of direct relations, and mediation model. This approach allows for a more meaningful interpretation of the interaction effects in the model. Before that measurement is also obtained to confirm the convergent validity.

Measurement Model

For the assessment of the measurement model, the current study focused on discriminant validity, convergent validity, and internal consistency reliability.

Table 2 *Items loading, Reliability, and Convergent Validity*

Constructs	Indicators	Loadings	CA	CR	AVE
Ethical Fading	EFF1	.784	0.718	0.809	0.51
	EFF2	.826			
	EFF3	.808			
	EFF4	.737			
Psychological Entitlement	PE1	.798	0.853	0.941	0.728
	PE2	.854			
	PE3	.961			
	PE4	.882			
	PE5	.885			
	PE6	.939			
Dispositional Greed	DG1	.940	0.851	0.948	0.724
	DG2	.898			
	DG3	.859			
	DG4	.845			
	DG5	.874			
	DG6	.927			
Cutting Corner	DG7	.893	0.828	0.916	0.686
	CC1	.781			

	CC2	.922			
	CC3	.845			
	CC4	.878			
	CC5	.851			
	SU1	.749			
	SU2	.942			
Social Undermining	SU3	.714	0.839	0.92	0.705
	SU4	.935			
	SU5	.953			
	PSC1	.931			
	PSC2	.938			
Perceived Scarcity	PSE3	.793	0.771	0.918	0.594
	PSC4	.723			
	PSC5	.609			

Note: CA= Cronbach's Alpha, CR= Composite Reliability, AVE= Average Variance Extracted, Model fit measures= CMIN/DF= 2.787, CFI= 0.935, SRMR= 0.077, RMSEA= 0.071, PClose= 0.05

Source(s): Authors own work

Table 2 shows that all composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha values were higher than the required minimum of 0.70, indicating acceptable reliabilities for all measures used in the current study (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Convergent validity is also established by inspecting the outer loading of individual indicators and the average variance extracted (Hair *et al.*, 2019). The prior research indicated that the loadings of items that are less than 0.40 must be removed from the model. The retained item loading, as indicated in Table 2, is significantly less than the defined range. Moreover, as indicated by Hair *et al.* (2019), the ave values are greater than 0.50, so convergent validity is also confirmed for the model after removing the weak loadings of items.

Furthermore, the current model is also assessed for discriminant validity. Table 3 shows the correlation among the different variables considered for the study. It is also contained in the mean and standard deviation. The mean and standard deviation provide insights into the

distribution and variability of responses across the constructs measured in the study. Participants reported relatively high levels of dispositional greed (Mean = 4.01, SD = 0.663), indicating a significant tendency towards self-interest and personal gain among the sample. This finding underscores the prevalence of dispositional greed within the studied population and its potential implications for ethical decision-making in organizational settings. Additionally, perceived scarcity (Mean = 3.76, SD = 0.625) and psychological entitlement (Mean = 3.02, SD = 0.883) also showed notable average scores, suggesting that participants perceived resources as relatively scarce and exhibited varying degrees of entitlement beliefs. These metrics help contextualize the study findings within the broader attitudes and perceptions of the sample, offering a clearer understanding of how these factors contribute to behaviors such as social undermining (Mean = 3.86, SD = 0.634) and cutting corners (Mean = 3.74, SD = 0.599), ultimately influencing ethical fading (Mean = 3.48, SD = 0.535). The intercorrelation among constructs such as perceived scarcity with dispositional greed ($r = 0.484, p < 0.001$), dispositional greed with social undermining ($r = 0.456, p < 0.001$), cutting corners ($r = 0.353, p < 0.001$), and social undermining with ethical fading ($r = 0.203, p < 0.005$) confirmed that the model is discriminately validated since all the correlations are less than 0.60 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Since all the prerequisites obtained through the measurement model confirmed that the model is valid and suitable for assessment of the structural model and formal regression analysis, the structural model is obtained accordingly.

Table 3 *Correlation and Discriminant Validity*

Constructs	Mean	S.D	MSV	MaxR(H)	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. DG	4.01	.663	0.24	0.997	0.851					
2. PSC	3.76	.625	0.24	0.985	0.484***	0.771				
3. PE	3.02	.883	0.11	0.988	0.225***	0.163**	0.853			
4. CC	3.74	.599	0.23	0.925	0.475***	0.339***	0.235***	0.828		
5. SU	3.86	.634	0.22	1.001	0.456***	0.469***	0.198***	0.429***	0.839	
6. EF	3.48	.535	0.12	0.811	0.307***	0.152*	0.338***	0.353***	0.203**	0.72

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$, DG= Dispositional Greed, PSC= Perceived Scarcity, PE= Psychological Entitlement, CC= Cutting Corner, SU= Social Undermining, EF= Ethical Fading

Source(s): Authors own work

Structural Model

Before assessing the structural model, a variance inflation factor (VIF) test is run to confirm that there is no multicollinearity in the data. Based on the obtained results, it has been concluded that no issue of multicollinearity is detected since all the values of VIF are below 3 (Hair *et al.*, 2019). Table 3 presents the regression analysis, prior to mediation, where it has been interpreted that the perceived scarcity is having a significant impact on dispositional greed ($\beta = 0.482$, $p < 0.001$). The value of CR (t) is also greater than 3 (Hair *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, dispositional greed is identified as a significant predictor of social undermining ($\beta = 0.498$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 10.79$) and cutting corners ($\beta = 0.452$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 10.235$). It also records the impact of social undermining and cutting corners on ethical fading. It has been observed that social undermining is significantly impacting ethical fading ($\beta = 0.153$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 4.044$), and cutting corners is also impacting ethical fading ($\beta = 0.257$, $p < 0.001$, $t = 6.449$).

Table 4 Regression Results for direct relations and mediation

Relationships	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
DG<---PSC	0.482	0.052	9.326	***
SU<---DG	0.498	0.046	10.79	***
CC<---DG	0.452	0.044	10.235	***
EF<---SU	0.153	0.038	4.044	***
EF<---CC	0.257	0.04	6.449	***
EF<---PSC	0.205	0.038	5.351	***
Total Effects		LLCI 95%		ULCI 95%
Effect of perceived scarcity on ethical fading through social undermining	0.157	.059		.136
Effect of perceived scarcity on ethical fading through Cutting Corner	0.263	.126		.274

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, DG= Dispositional Greed, PSC= Perceived Scarcity, PE= Psychological Entitlement, CC= Cutting Corner, SU= Social Undermining, EF= Ethical Fading

Source(s): Authors own work

The mediation-related results are also presented in Table 4. The lower and upper bounds of the confidence intervals do not contain zero, confirming the mediation effects of dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners on the relationship between perceived scarcity and ethical fading. Consequently, the hypotheses related to mediation are accepted. The total (direct and

indirect) effect of cutting corners on ethical fading is 0.263, indicating that when cutting corners increases by 1 unit, ethical fading increases by 0.263 units due to both direct and indirect effects. Similarly, the total effect of social undermining on ethical fading is 0.157, suggesting that when social undermining increases by 1 unit, ethical fading increases by 0.157 units.

Moreover, the lower-level confidence interval and upper-level confidence interval for the relationship between perceived scarcity and ethical fading through dispositional greed and social undermining range from 0.059 to 0.136, respectively. The confidence intervals for the relationship between perceived scarcity and ethical fading through dispositional greed and cutting corners range from 0.126 to 0.274. Since neither path contains zero within the confidence intervals, it confirms that dispositional greed, cutting corners, and social undermining mediate the relationship between perceived scarcity and ethical fading. Table 5, along with Figures 2 and 3, illustrates the moderating role of psychological entitlement in the relationship between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed. The results confirm that psychological entitlement significantly moderates this relationship, supporting hypothesis 2.

Beside this, the current study also used the Variance Explained For (VAF) for testing the sequential mediation by using the guidelines of Hair *et al.*, 2014). The formular of VAF is as under:

$$VAF = \text{Indirect Effect} / \text{Total Effect}$$

It is suggested in he guidelines that if the value of VAF is greater than 0.80 is regarded as full mediation; a VAF value between 0.20 and 0.80 is partial mediation and a value less than 0.20 is regarded as no mediation. The indirect effects of Perceived Scarcity on Ethical Fading through Greed and social undermining is 0.048 and total effects are .157. So according to the formula, the value is 0.182, so partial mediation is recorded. Similarly, Perceived Scarcity on Ethical Fading through Greed and cutting corner is 0.058 and total effects are .263. VAF value obtained as 0.22 i.e. between 0.20 and 0.80. So partial mediation is identified.

Table 5 Regression Results for Moderation

Relationships	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P
DG<---PE	0.189	.031	6.037	***
DG<---PSC	0.482	.052	9.326	***

DG<---Interaction	0.028	.007	3.843	***
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Note: *** $p < 0.001$, DG= Dispositional Greed, PSC= Perceived Scarcity, PE= Psychological Entitlement

Source(s): Authors own work

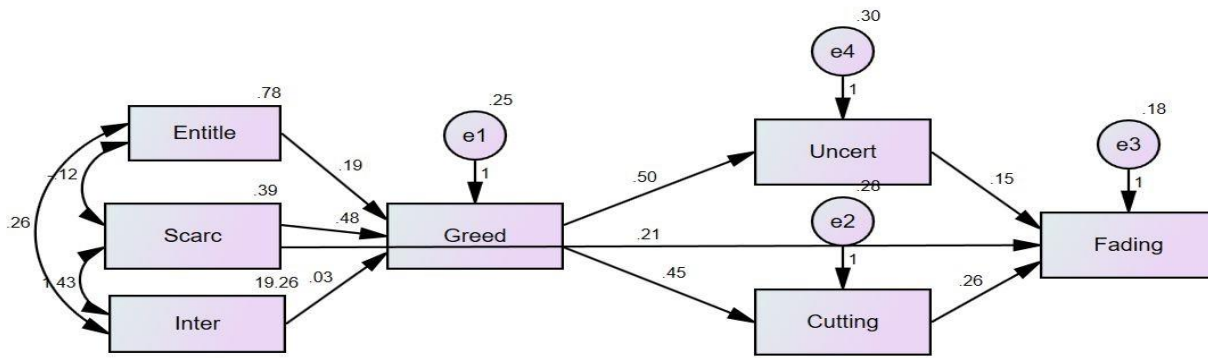


Figure 2 Structural Model

Source(s): Authors own work

In Figures 3 and 4, it is observed that the association between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed varies significantly across different levels of psychological entitlement. The strongest positive association is found among individuals reporting low perceived scarcity, whereas the association weakens notably for those reporting high perceived scarcity. Conversely, individuals with high psychological entitlement show a weaker overall association between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed. This suggests that psychological entitlement moderates the relationship, influencing how strongly perceived scarcity affects dispositional greed.

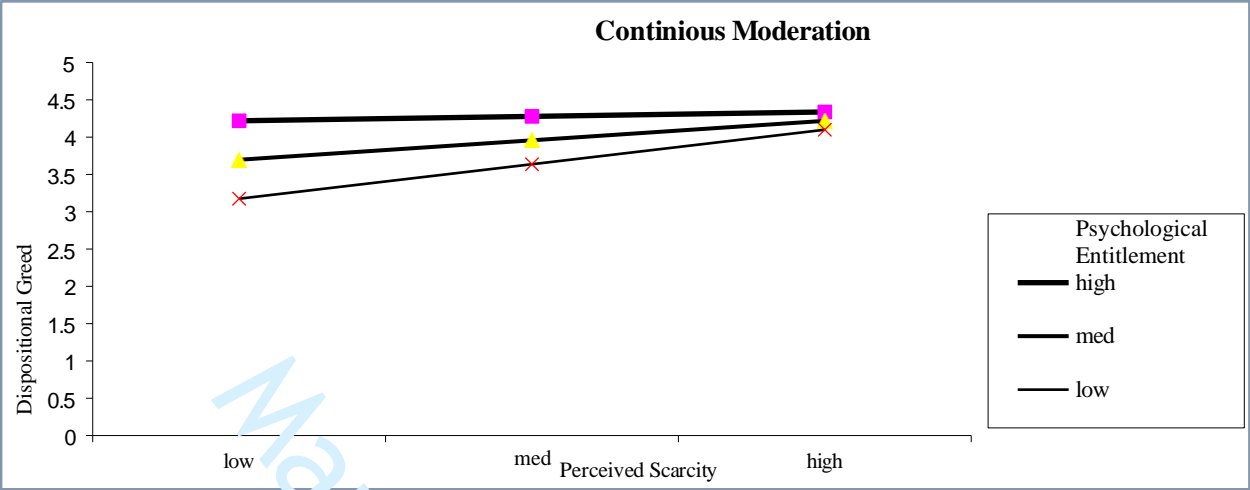


Figure 3 *Interaction of perceived Scarcity, and Psychological entitlement for continuous moderation*

Source(s): Authors own work

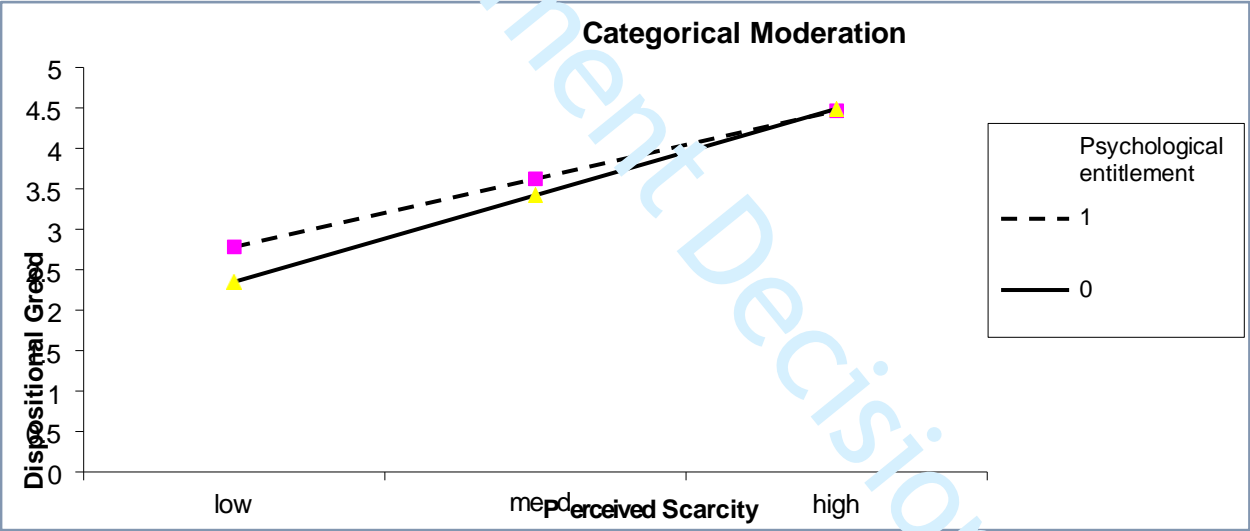


Figure 4 *Interaction of perceived Scarcity, and Psychological entitlement for categorical moderation*

Source(s): Authors own work

Discussion

In this study, we employed social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1988) alongside existing research on dispositional greed to construct and explore a moderated mediation model, aiming to elucidate the

process through which perceived scarcity contributes to ethical fading. Our primary objective was to unravel the mechanisms and conditions underlying this process. Encouragingly, our findings substantiate our hypotheses, underscoring the influence of dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners on ethical fading. We corroborate that perceived scarcity's impact on ethical fading (Dill *et al.*, 2022) is mediated through a sequential pathway involving dispositional greed (Bao *et al.*, 2020), social undermining, and cutting corners (Enwereuzor, 2023). Although our model is unique and previously unexplored, our results align harmoniously with extant literature examining analogous variables. For instance, Enwereuzor, (2023) demonstrated a positive association between dispositional greed and cutting corners ($p < 0.001$, $\beta = 0.258$), while another study highlighted the heightened impact of perceived scarcity on behavior choice. Across diverse contexts wherein individuals perceive scarcity, there exists a propensity to evoke dispositional greed, subsequently fostering cutting corners and social undermining. Building upon the observed patterns in Figures 3 and 4, it becomes evident that nuances within perceived scarcity, dispositional greed, and psychological entitlement play pivotal roles in shaping the dynamics of ethical fading (Quin *et al.*, 2022). Notably, the pronounced slopes in these figures unveil intriguing insights: individuals reporting low perceived scarcity exhibit the steepest slope, indicative of the strongest positive association with dispositional greed (Effron and Miller, 2011). Conversely, for those reporting high perceived scarcity, the slope tends to flatten, suggesting a weaker association (Chen *et al.*, 2023). This nuanced differentiation underscores the complex interplay between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed, which varies depending on the level of perceived scarcity experienced by individuals. The identification of psychological entitlement as a significant moderator sheds light on the mechanisms underlying the relationship between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed. By magnifying the impact of perceived scarcity, psychological entitlement accentuates individuals' propensity to succumb to dispositional greed, thereby exacerbating the risk of ethical fading (Chen *et al.*, 2023).

Theoretical Implications

Our research significantly contributes to the existing body of literature in several key ways. Firstly, the research advances the limited but expanding stream of literature by identifying both proximal factors (i.e., dispositional greed, cutting corners, social undermining) and distal factors (i.e., perceived scarcity) at the employee level. By doing so, we shed light on the cognitive processes

and attitudes of employees that contribute to the occurrence of abusive ethical fading (Kismini *et al.*, 2020). Our study builds upon existing research by examining the role of psychological entitlement as a moderator in the serial mediation process. The current study seeks to elucidate how psychological entitlement influences the relationships among these variables. Drawing from theories of narcissism and entitlement (Campbell *et al.*, 2004), the results suggested that individuals high in psychological entitlement are more likely to engage in unethical behaviors, such as cutting corners and social undermining, when faced with perceived scarcity. Hence, the study contributes to the literature by highlighting the mediating role of social undermining in the relationship between dispositional greed and ethical fading. By elucidating these complex pathways, our research aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the mechanisms underlying ethical fading and offer practical implications for addressing this phenomenon in organizational contexts.

The study also includes the sequential pathway from perceived scarcity to dispositional greed, cutting corners, and ethical fading, hence it extends the framework by emphasizing the nuanced interplay between these variables. Drawing from Bandura's social cognitive theory (1988), we propose that individuals experiencing perceived scarcity may exhibit ethical fading due to the cognitive mechanisms of moral disengagement, with psychological entitlement exacerbating this process. By elaborating on the mediating role of social undermining, our research sheds light on the interpersonal dynamics that perpetuate unethical behaviors in organizational settings. Moreover, we contribute to the theory by exploring the underlying motivations driving dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners, addressing critical theoretical gaps identified by scholars (Rees *et al.*, 2022; Enwereuzor, 2023). Through our comprehensive theoretical framework, we offer valuable insights into the complex mechanisms underlying ethical fading and pave the way for future research to develop effective interventions aimed at promoting ethical decision-making in the workplace.

Lastly, our study examined the concept of perceived scarcity within the unique context of a developing country with limited resources. While perceived scarcity has been studied extensively across disciplines such as psychology, sociology, and social justice, its exploration within organizational settings, particularly in underdeveloped regions, remains relatively underexplored. So, the research contributes to the emerging body of literature on perceived scarcity in the

workplace, aligning with calls for further investigation into this construct to inform managerial practices. Drawing from theoretical insights on perceived scarcity and its implications, we aim to provide a deeper understanding of how perceived scarcity influences ethical decision-making processes and subsequent behaviors among employees. Specifically, our findings highlight the significant association between perceived scarcity and dispositional greed, which in turn leads to social undermining and cutting corners at the individual level. Moreover, our study underscores the role of psychological entitlement as a moderator in this relationship, drawing on social cognitive theory and insights from the literature on scarcity and greed. By empirically demonstrating the link between psychological entitlement, perceived scarcity, and unethical decision-making processes, our research offers valuable insights for organizations grappling with the challenges posed by resource constraints and ethical dilemmas in the workplace.

Practical Implications

The research presents meaningful practical implications for addressing and mitigating unethical behavior in the workplace, with distinct implications for both developing and developed countries. In economies with limited resources, our theoretical model's core components—dispositional greed, cutting corners, and social undermining—underscore the mechanisms linking perceived scarcity to ethical fading. Our findings highlight that in environments marked by uncertainty or unequal resource distribution, employees are more prone to exhibit dispositional greed, engage in cutting corners, and participate in social undermining, all of which contribute to ethical fading. Therefore, creating a culture within organizations that fosters fairness and equitable resource allocation becomes imperative, albeit challenging. Leadership at the executive level plays a pivotal role in this endeavor. Executives must lead by example, communicating that integrity, fairness, and high moral standards are not only expected but valued within the organization (Burhan *et al.*, 2023). This necessitates clear communication that unethical behavior will not be tolerated and that ethical conduct is the norm (Fan, 2002).

Our research offers practical guidance for organizations in developing countries to cultivate an environment that discourages unethical behavior. Emphasizing the significance of organizational culture and leadership in minimizing unethical decision-making becomes paramount. Encouraging open communication, transparency, and accountability can contribute to fostering an atmosphere where individuals are inclined to make ethical decisions, even in situations

of perceived scarcity or uncertainty. In contrast, in developed countries, where resources may be more abundant, the focus shifts slightly. While the principles of fairness, integrity, and ethical conduct remain essential, organizations may face different challenges related to maintaining ethical standards in a competitive and rapidly evolving business landscape. Nonetheless, the principles of fostering a culture of transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership remain universally relevant. Ultimately, these efforts contribute to the establishment of a robust ethical foundation and the preservation of the organization's integrity, regardless of the economic context. By prioritizing ethical considerations and promoting a culture of integrity, organizations can navigate the complexities of ethical decision-making and cultivate environments conducive to sustainable success and positive societal impact.

Using the results of the current study, organizations might prioritize honesty as a key value beginning with the hiring process. This can be accomplished by including ethical decision-making questions in interviews and using integrity assessment tests during the selection process. Ethics training should be included in staff orientation to underscore the importance of ethical decision-making. This training can include discussions about the potential consequences of unethical behavior as well as advice on how to overcome ethical quandaries that employees may face in their roles. Organizations should establish clear rules and consequences for ethics infractions to limit the risk of dispositional greed, cutting corners, and social undermining. Employees are more likely to appreciate the importance of ethical behavior and the potential consequences of engaging in unethical behavior if these expectations are communicated and enforced regularly (Quade *et al.*, 2019). Importantly, our research emphasizes the importance of moral participation. Organizations and decision-makers should therefore prioritize hiring and selecting organizational leaders who demonstrate integrity in their decision-making. Managers and executives who demonstrate ethical behavior and a commitment to moral involvement can serve as role models for other employees, impacting the ethical atmosphere of the organization.

Employing these tactics and cultivating an integrity culture can help organizations create an environment where dispositional avarice, cutting corners, and social undermining are disallowed. This proactive approach to supporting ethical decision-making can aid in the development of a workplace culture that values integrity and promotes the well-being and success of both individuals and organizations. Psychological entitlement has a huge importance in raising

the likelihood of dispositional greed, cost-cutting, and social undermining behaviors which is also shown by our findings. For this reason, organizations should always remain focused and must pay special attention to whether their staff displays psychological entitlement indications. Management of the organizations can make a significant step forward by communicating a consistent framework that recognizes and values all organizational members equally. Organizations can accomplish this through recognition programs, performance awards, and the development of an inclusive and egalitarian culture (Burhan *et al.*, 2023). Psychological entitlement among employees can also be reduced by instilling a sense of value and gratitude in them. Furthermore, organizations should prioritize the recruitment and selection of leaders who believe in the importance of aligning organizational rewards to genuine job attributes and performance levels. Those leaders who prioritize meritocracy and fairness can help establish a culture that discourages entitlement and promotes a more balanced approach to rewards and privileges (Malik *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, creating a workplace environment where individual, team, and organizational goals are aligned is essential. When goals are properly defined and employees understand how their efforts contribute to the overall success of the organization, entitlement is reduced and a sense of group responsibility and collaboration is fostered. Organizations can reduce the risk of entitlement and create a more positive and ethical work environment by employing these tactics. As a result, greater productivity, employee happiness, and overall organizational success may result.

Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

While our research has made significant contributions, certain limitations offer opportunities for future investigation. One limitation is the potential sampling bias associated with our purposive sample. To enhance the generalizability of findings, future research could employ more diverse and representative samples. Another limitation is the simultaneous collection of two variables in our time-lagged design, which prevents definitive conclusions about the directionality of these variables. However, our theoretical foundation based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1988) supports the hypothesized direction of the study variables, indicating that dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners precede engagement in unethical behavior. Future studies could utilize experimental or longitudinal designs to provide stronger evidence of causality. The use of self-reported measures for assessing dispositional greed, social undermining, cutting corners, and ethical fading introduces the possibility of common method variance. Future research

could employ multiple data sources or objective measures to mitigate this concern and enhance the validity of the findings. To address these limitations, future studies should aim to replicate and extend our empirical findings using various research designs and methods. This would further validate the predictive validity of our proposed model and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the relationships among dispositional greed, social undermining, cutting corners, and ethical fading.

In conclusion, our research contributes to the existing literature by incorporating the boundary conditions of psychological entitlement and examining the impact of perceived scarcity on ethical fading through the mediating factors of dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners. While our study is one of the first to explore these relationships, there are additional personality traits that could further influence the occurrence of dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners. For instance, personality traits such as conscientiousness and agreeableness have been found to strongly predict ethical attitudes and moral behaviors, even in challenging circumstances. Individuals high in conscientiousness exhibit responsibility and principled behavior, while those high in agreeableness show empathy and compassion (Malik et al. 2023). It is plausible to argue that entitled employees who possess high levels of conscientiousness and agreeableness are less likely to engage in dispositional greed, social undermining, and cutting corners, thus reducing the likelihood of abusing their subordinates. On the other hand, traits such as neuroticism, Machiavellianism, or paranoia may have contrasting effects on these behaviors. Exploring the influence of additional personality traits on the relationship between perceived scarcity, dispositional greed, social undermining, cutting corners, and ethical fading could provide valuable insights into the complex interplay of individual differences in ethical decision-making processes. Future research could delve deeper into the role of personality traits and their interactions with entitlement in shaping unethical behaviors within organizations, thus contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the underlying mechanisms involved. Lastly, the data were collected from selected SMEs, including those in the retail, textile, and manufacturing sectors, providing insights into ethical issues and behaviors across different industries and allowing for broader generalization of the findings. However, a limitation of this study is that other industries within the context of SMEs were not considered. Future studies could test the model in other industries to further generalize the results.

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