

# The Effect of Workplace Ostracism on Interpersonal Deviant Behavior in the Context of Big Data: A Moderated Mediation Model

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**Abstract**—With the rapid development of information technology, the widespread use of intelligent platforms and data analysis has made negative workplace behaviours more insidious. The negative impact on employees and their organizations is being further expanded. The study used a questionnaire survey method with 213 corporate employees to examine the influence path of workplace ostracism on employees' interpersonal deviant behaviours in the context of big data based on social exchange theory and conservation of resource theory, and constructed a moderated mediation model. The results of the study showed a significant correlation between workplace ostracism, emotional exhaustion, self-control and interpersonal deviant behaviour of employees, helping to enrich the study of negative behaviours in the workplace and provide practical insights for modern management of enterprises based on big data.

**Keywords**—workplace ostracism; interpersonal deviant behavior; moderated mediation model; big data

## 1. Introduction

Along with the rapid development of information technology and the advent of the knowledge economy, companies must establish heterogeneous and sustainable competitive advantages to stand out from the market competition, which requires a positive synergistic effect within the company and the establishment of collaborative and agile teams. However, interpersonal conflicts within groups, such as workplace ostracism, which is prevalent in the workplace, may combat the effectiveness of teamwork [1]. Workplace ostracism prevents employees from building lasting and meaningful relationships in the organization [2], which has destructive effects on employees, such as leading to anxiety and depression [3], frustrating employees' need for a sense of belonging and self-esteem [4], and affecting employees' performance [5]. Interpersonal deviant behaviour is one of the prominent reactions of employees facing workplace ostracism [2]. The popularity of information technology since the 21st century, especially the application of big data, artificial intelligence and other technologies in business management, has brought more challenges while providing convenience. The increased invisibility and frequency of interpersonal deviant behaviours among employees will make it more difficult for organizational individuals and teams to prevent such risks [6].

In recent years big data technology has become one of the main ways to regulate work behaviour. Yang, J. (2021) proposed an intelligent management method based on big data for the

abnormal behaviour of employees in the financial industry [7]. Sun, X. (2021) combined the advantages of wind control of big data and the difficulties of employee behaviour management audit. It then proposed the realization path of employee behaviour management audit in commercial banks [8]. The combination of workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviant behaviour has been less explored by scholars, especially in big data. The use of various information platforms makes these two behaviours present new characteristics. At the same time, applying big data technology can quickly obtain, process and integrate employee information, providing a basis for preventing and controlling negative workplace behaviours. So it is vital to analyze the impact of workplace ostracism on interpersonal deviant behaviour in the context of big data with theoretical and practical significance.

Based on social exchange theory and conservation of resource theory, with emotional exhaustion as the mediating variable and self-control ability as the moderating variable, this study explores the intrinsic relationship and mechanism of action between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviant behaviour. It provides practical guidance for enterprises to cope with workplace ostracism and prevent interpersonal deviant behaviour based on big data. The research model is shown in Fig. 1.

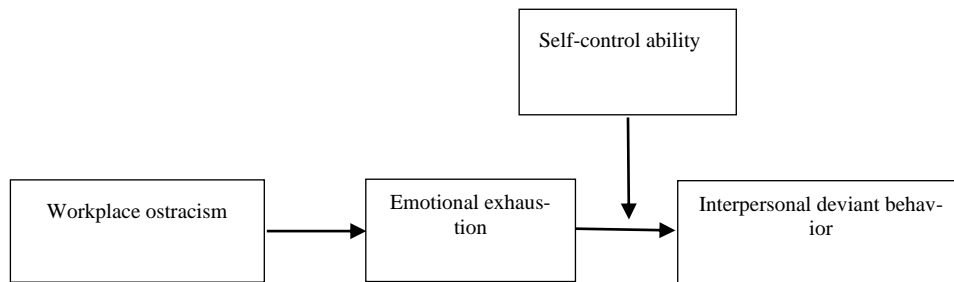


Figure 1. Research model

## 2. Theoretical basis and research hypothesis

### 2.1 Workplace ostracism and Interpersonal deviant behavior

Most conceptual definitions of workplace ostracism are from the perspective of the excluded. The formal definition made by Ferris and other scholars for the first time is widely recognized by the academic community. They argued that workplace ostracism is the degree of exclusion or neglect by others that employees perceive in the workplace [9] and that this exclusion is entirely subjective and perceived by the victim. Workplace ostracism, in more cases, is manifested in indirect ways [10], including being shunned, not being taken care of, and having their needs ignored [11]. In addition, influenced by traditional Chinese collectivist culture, employees desire close and harmonious interpersonal relationships, and thus such adverse effects may be amplified when they suffer from ostracism [10]. According to social exchange theory, the behaviour of individuals is usually based on the principle of reciprocity [12], which emphasizes trust and fairness among individuals. Ostracism in the workplace can cause interpersonal barriers by inflicting provocative and indifferent behaviours on the excluded, thus undermining the principle of equal reciprocity [13] and leading employees to adopt retaliatory deviant behaviours. When employees experience isolation or ostracism in the organization, their basic

need for belonging has not been effectively meeting [14], and the organization is unable to provide employees with good interpersonal relationships [15], resulting in a lower psychological contract between the organization and the individual [16]. Employees will induce interpersonal deviant behaviour to protect themselves or retaliate against others. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H1: Workplace ostracism positively affects employees' interpersonal deviant behaviour.

## **2.2 The mediating effect of emotional exhaustion**

Workplace ostracism is an interpersonal stressor that threatens cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources [2]. When members of the organization reject employees, they not only lack support from colleagues or superiors but also lose their emotional connection with others [17]. This lack of emotional resources can lead to tension and anxiety, resulting in emotional exhaustion [18]. Information technology has changed the traditional way of human resource management. Telecommuting and online work have made the emotional connection between employees weaker and the possibility of emotional exhaustion will be greater. According to the conservation of resource theory, individuals facing emotional exhaustion will try to preserve available resources by adjusting their work and interpersonal behaviours to minimize personal losses [19]. The uncomfortable experience caused by emotional exhaustion leads employees to enter a state of fatigue and reduces their personal cognitive, psychological, and emotional resources. It is difficult for them to manage their personal and interpersonal relationships and needs within the organization [2], and it is more likely to increase the probability of interpersonal deviant behaviour. On the other hand, based on dissatisfaction with the exhaustion of their resources caused by this ostracism, employees may resort to retaliatory behaviours to release this pressure to recover the resources. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed in this study:

H2a: Workplace ostracism positively affects emotional exhaustion.

H2b: Emotional exhaustion positively affects employees' interpersonal deviant behaviour.

Workplace ostracism leaves employees in a poor state and generates a range of negative emotions that continuously deplete emotional resources and lead to emotional exhaustion. Employees will expend more energy in dealing with negative emotions [5], avoiding and getting rid of ostracism out of self-protection, which triggers interpersonal deviant behaviour [20]. In summary, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H2: Emotional exhaustion mediates the relationship between workplace ostracism and employees' interpersonal deviant behaviour.

## **2.3 The moderating effect of self-control ability**

Self-control is the ability of an individual to take specific actions to consciously control words and activities in the right direction to achieve goals when they are hindered in accomplishing set goals [21]. Employees' self-control ability can effectively adjust existing emotional states to control or change personal behaviour [22]. Employees with a low level of self-control have a more robust perception of workplace ostracism. They will be more likely to engage in impulsive defiance or retaliation and then induce interpersonal deviant behaviour when they are consistently affected by emotional exhaustion [23]. In contrast, employees with a high level of self-control are the opposite. According to the self-control resource theory, when employees

have abundant self-control resources that can provide energy support for various psychological control activities [24], they can alleviate the adverse effects of emotional exhaustion to some extent [10]. In summary, this study proposes the following hypothesis:

H3: Self-control ability has a negative moderating effect between emotional exhaustion and employees' interpersonal deviant behaviour. That is, the higher the level of self-control ability, the weaker the positive impact of employees' emotional exhaustion on interpersonal deviant behaviour.

Combined with H2 and H3 proposed above, this paper hypothesizes that employees with a high level of self-control can effectively handle their emotional exhaustion and buffer its impact on negative personal behaviours, thus reducing the frequency of interpersonal deviant behaviours. Therefore, the following hypotheses are proposed in this study:

H4: Self-control negatively moderates the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion. That is, the higher the employee's level of self-control ability, the weaker the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion on the relationship between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviant behaviour.

### 3. method

#### 3.1 Research sample

This study conducted a questionnaire survey on employees of enterprises. A total of 294 questionnaires were distributed, and 271 questionnaires were returned, with a return rate of 92%. After eliminating the invalid questionnaires with the same questions, 213 valid questionnaires were obtained, and the effective rate of the questionnaire was 79%. The demographic characteristics of the sample are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic characteristics of the sample (N=213)

Variables	Items	Percentage
Gender	Male	38.03%
	Female	61.97%
Age	22 years old and below	9.39%
	22-25 years old	25.35%
	26-30 years old	39.91%
	31-35 years old	10.80%
	35 years old and above	14.55%
Education level	High school and below	10.33%
	College	17.84%
	Bachelor	61.03%
	Master	8.45%
	Doctor	2.35%

Working year	Less than 1 year	23.00%
	1-3 years	29.11%
	4-6 years	25.35%
	7 years and above	22.54%

### 3.2 Variable measurement

The variables involved in the study have developed more mature scales abroad and are widely used in relevant empirical studies. Therefore, all variables were measured using a 5-point Likert scale using foreign mature scales.

**Workplace ostracism.** The study uses the Workplace Ostracism Scale developed by Ferris, D.L., Brown, D.J., Berry, J.W., & Lian, H. (2008) [9], which contains 10 question items. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is 0.958.

**Emotional exhaustion.** The Emotional Exhaustion Scale used in this study is selected from Maslach, C., Jackson, S.E., & Leiter, M.P.'s (1997) [25] revised Emotional Exhaustion subscale of the Job Burnout Scale, which has five question items. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale is 0.863.

**Self-control ability.** The Self-control Scale developed by Tangney, J.P., Baumeister, R.F., & Boone, A.L. (2004) [26] uses seven question items. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient of this scale is 0.933.

**Interpersonal deviant Behavior.** The Interpersonal Deviant Behavior subscale of the Workplace Deviant Behavior Scale developed by Bennett, R.J., & Robinson, S.L. (2000) [27] is used, with seven question items. In this study, Cronbach's alpha coefficient for this scale is 0.915.

**Control variables.** Due to the differences in employees' gender, age, working years, and education level, their attitudes and tolerance for ostracism differ. Therefore, these four variables are treated as control variables in this paper.

## 4. Data analysis and results

### 4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

For the 213 valid questionnaire data collected, this study conducts confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 28 to test the discriminant validity among four variables: workplace ostracism, emotional exhaustion, self-control ability, and interpersonal deviant behaviour, and the results are shown in Table 2. Comparing the one-factor model, two-factor model and three-factor model, the results show that the four-factor model fits better ( $\chi^2/df=1.610$ , TLI=0.949, CFI=0.953, RMSEA=0.054, SRMR=0.0465). The factors have better discriminant validity among them.

Table 2 Confirmatory factor analysis results (N=213)

Model	$\chi^2/df$	TLI	CFI	RMSEA	SRMR
Four-factor model	1.610	0.949	0.953	0.054	0.0465
Three-factor model <sup>a</sup>	2.192	0.900	0.908	0.075	0.0586
Three-factor model <sup>b</sup>	4.413	0.713	0.736	0.127	0.1518
Three-factor model <sup>c</sup>	4.414	0.713	0.736	0.127	0.1523
Two-factor model	4.982	0.665	0.690	0.137	0.1565
One-factor model	5.854	0.592	0.621	0.151	0.1619

#### 4.2 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis

In this study, descriptive statistics and correlation analysis are conducted by SPSS 22, and the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients between variables are shown in Table 3. Workplace ostracism is significantly and positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ( $r=0.603$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and with employee interpersonal deviant behaviour ( $r=0.717$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). Emotional exhaustion is significantly and positively correlated with interpersonal deviant behaviour ( $r=0.508$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). There are negative but non-significant relationships between self-control and workplace ostracism ( $r=-0.056$ ), emotional exhaustion ( $r=-0.039$ ), and interpersonal deviant behaviour ( $r=-0.052$ ), suggesting preliminary support for the hypotheses of this study.

Table 3 Descriptive statistical results and correlation coefficients (N=213)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1							
2. Age	-0.122	1						
3. Education level	0.086	-0.172*	1					
4. Working year	-0.104	0.677**	-0.225**	1				
5. Workplace ostracism	-0.113	-0.028	0.081	-0.118	1			
6. Emotional exhaustion	0.019	-0.135*	0.107	-0.178**	0.603**	1		
7. Self-control ability	0.039	-0.021	0.082	-0.074	-0.056	-0.039	1	
8. Interpersonal deviant behavior	-0.115	-0.039	0.009	-0.027	0.717**	0.508**	-0.052	1
Mean	1.620	2.960	2.750	2.470	2.229	2.774	3.976	1.745
Standard deviation	0.487	1.151	0.842	1.080	1.048	0.953	0.927	0.791

Note: \* indicates  $p<0.05$ , \*\* indicates  $p<0.01$

### 4.3 Hypothesis testing

#### 4.3.1 Main and mediating effects

In this study, SPSS 22 is used to test the direct and mediating effects, and the results are shown in Table 4. In the test of the main effect, the regression results of model 4 indicate that workplace ostracism significantly and positively affects interpersonal deviant behaviour ( $\beta=0.550$ ,  $p<0.01$ ), and H1 is supported.

This study tests the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion, controlling for demographic variables. The results of model 2 suggest that workplace ostracism significantly and positively affects emotional exhaustion ( $\beta=0.547$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). H2a is supported. Model 5 shows that emotional exhaustion greatly and positively affects interpersonal deviant behaviour ( $\beta=0.432$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and H2b is supported. From model 6, when workplace ostracism and emotional exhaustion are added to the regression equation, emotional exhaustion still has a significant positive effect on interpersonal deviant behaviour ( $\beta=0.108$ ,  $p<0.05$ ). However, the regression coefficient of workplace ostracism on interpersonal deviant behaviour decreases from 0.550 to 0.491 ( $p<0.01$ ), indicating that emotional exhaustion partially mediates between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviant behaviour. H2 is supported.

#### 4.3.2 Moderating effect

In this study, the moderating effect of self-control ability is tested by SPSS 22. Emotional exhaustion and self-control ability are standardized, respectively, and the product term is constructed and then put into the regression equation. The regression analysis results are shown in Table 4. Model 8 shows that the interaction term of emotional exhaustion and self-control ability significantly negatively affects interpersonal deviant behaviour ( $\beta=-0.091$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), which indicates that self-control ability has a negative moderating effect on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and interpersonal deviant behaviour. So H3 is supported. The graph of the moderating effect of self-control ability on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and interpersonal deviant behaviour is plotted, utilizing one standard deviation above the mean and one standard deviation below the mean, respectively. As shown in Fig. 2, the positive effect of emotional exhaustion on interpersonal deviant behaviour will be weaker when self-control ability is at a higher level, further supporting H3.

Table 4 Regression analysis results (N=213)

Variables	Emotional exhaustion		Interpersonal deviant behavior					
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Gender	-0.010	0.138	-0.198	-0.049	-0.194*	-0.064	-0.193*	-0.199*
Age	-0.021	-0.064	-0.034	-0.077	-0.024	-0.070	-0.024	-0.019
Education level	0.080	0.034	0.009	-0.037	-0.025	-0.040	-0.024	-0.033
Working year	-0.128	-0.035	-0.003	0.090	0.052	0.094	0.051	0.046
Workplace ostracism		0.547**		0.550**		0.491**		
Emotional exhaustion					0.432**	0.108*	0.431**	0.420**
Self-control							-0.017	-0.006

ability								
Interaction term								-0.091*
R <sup>2</sup>	0.037	0.384	0.016	0.527	0.278	0.537	0.278	0.292
ΔR <sup>2</sup>	0.037	0.348	0.016	0.511	0.261	0.010	0.262	0.014
F	1.976	25.857**	0.849	46.094**	15.902**	39.872**	13.213**	12.065**

Note: \* indicates p<0.05, \*\* indicates p<0.01

### 4.3.3 Moderated mediating effect

The moderated mediating effect is examined using the SPSS macro program PROCESS. This study distinguishes the impact of emotional exhaustion between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviant behaviour at a high and low level of self-control by increasing one standard deviation and decreasing one standard deviation, respectively. The results are shown in Table 5. The mediating effect size of emotional exhaustion is 0.011 when at a higher level of self-control ability and 0.099 at a lower level, with a difference between groups of -0.088. It indicates that the higher the level of self-control ability, the weaker the indirect effect of workplace ostracism through emotional exhaustion leading to interpersonal deviant behaviour. H4 is supported.

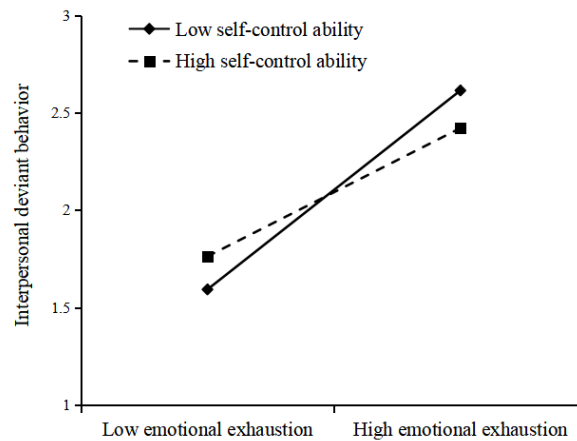


Figure 2. The moderating effect of self-control ability on the relationship between emotional exhaustion and interpersonal deviant behaviour

Table 5 Moderated mediating effect analysis results

Moderating variable (self-control ability)	Workplace ostracism→Emotional exhaustion→Interpersonal deviant behavior		
	Effect size	95% LCL	95% UCL
High level	0.011	-0.056	0.067
Low level	0.099	0.043	0.153
Difference	-0.088	-0.099	-0.086



## 5. Conclusions

The results of the data analysis proved that all six hypotheses were valid. Workplace ostracism significantly positively affects employees' interpersonal deviant behaviour, and workplace ostracism influences interpersonal deviant behaviour through the mediating effect of emotional exhaustion. At the same time, employees' self-control ability has a negative moderating effect between workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviant behaviour, i.e., the higher the level of self-control ability, the weaker the positive relationship between emotional exhaustion due to workplace ostracism and interpersonal deviant behaviour.

The study has two innovative points. Firstly, based on the conservation of resource theory perspective, this study introduces emotional exhaustion as the mediating variable to explore the underlying mechanisms of workplace ostracism on interpersonal deviant behaviour. It enriches the understanding of the process of workplace ostracism and expands the relevant theoretical research perspectives and fields. In the context of Chinese collectivist culture, individuals emphasize maintaining close and harmonious social relationships and organizational members prefer indirect and covert interpersonal "abuse" to maintain harmony [28]. The study is more instructive for effective business management of enterprises with various risk hazards in China's wave of big data. Secondly, this study introduces self-control ability moderating variables and creatively explores the combination of workplace ostracism, self-control ability and interpersonal deviant behaviour, responding to the academic call to focus on employee business and mindfulness in the era of digital intelligence transformation.

## 6. Discussion

Workplace ostracism has now become widespread and insidious, jeopardizing the close relationship between organizational members and between organizational members and the whole organization, thus affecting the achievement of individual and organizational goals [5]. As one of the embodiments of information technology, big data has become a means of continuous innovation for enterprises with the deep integration and development of traditional industries. Big data plus management can effectively prevent and control negative behaviours in the workplace. In practice, enterprises can build big data intelligent platforms and develop and establish personnel behaviour analysis systems, transforming employee behaviour into quantifiable standard data. It can provide early warning, monitoring and predicting dangerous behaviour based on personnel data and add employee negative behaviour cases into the information base in time to achieve precise prevention and control. The application of big data provides a scientific basis for managers' behaviour decisions. In daily management, enterprises and leaders sincerely practice the concept of people-oriented, create a harmonious, free and democratic organizational environment, and enhance the centripetal force and cohesion of teams and organizations.

The present study still has the following research limitations. Firstly, the variables involved in the study are measured using scales developed by foreign scholars. However, there are differences between Eastern and Western cultures in terms of collectivism, individualism, and power distance. Future research can use scales developed based on Chinese culture to conduct further localization research. Secondly, the questionnaires used are filled out from the victims'

perspective. However, it has been demonstrated that the excluder also consumes psychological and cognitive resources when performing exclusionary behaviours, thus negatively affecting individual behaviour [29]. Therefore, in the future, a multifaceted analysis of the influence mechanism of workplace ostracism on employees' interpersonal deviant behaviours from the perpetrator's perspective can be considered. Finally, the study suggests some management insights for extensive data-based enterprise management. Negative behaviour risk warning models can be established in the future.

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