

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The good side of authoritarian leaders: leader in the eyes of the subordinates

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Abstract

Although subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership is viewed derogatively in the leadership literature, limited studies still claim that it can positively influence subordinate's performance. Drawing from the attribution theory, we hypothesize and demonstrate that subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership can have a positive, indirect effect on subordinate task performance through the subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive, but only when the subordinate's perception of leader's expert power is high. We found support for our hypothesized model using multisource data collected from 246 subordinates and 76 supervisors from 11 different private sector organizations in Pakistan.

Key words: Attribution theory; authoritarian leadership; expert power; subordinate attributions; subordinate performance

Introduction

Subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership has been defined as the subordinates' perceptions of 'leader's behaviour that asserts absolute authority and control over subordinates and demands unquestionable obedience from subordinates' (Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang, & Farh, 2004: 91). The extant literature has depicted this leadership style as ineffective, that is prone to failure (Gabriel, 2011; Harms, Wood, Landay, Lester, & Lester, 2018). The main reason being that authoritarian leaders give little respect to their subordinates' viewpoints which demotivates them and adversely impacts their performance (De Cremer, 2006; Zheng, Huang, Graham, Redman, & Hu, 2020). This deleterious image of authoritarian leaders has been reinforced by studies that have empirically found a negative influence of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership style on subordinate's performance (such as Aryee, Chen, Sun, & Debrah, 2007; Chan, Huang, Snape, & Lam, 2013; Cheng, Huang, & Chou, 2002a, 2002b; Chiang, Chen, Liu, Akutsu, & Wang, 2021; Liang, Ling, & Hsieh, 2007; Shen, Chou, & Schaubroeck, 2019).

A limited number of studies have reported a positive influence of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership on subordinate outcomes (e.g., Chen, Eberly, Chiang, Farh, & Cheng, 2014; Cheng & Jen, 2005; Gu, Hempel, & Yu, 2020; Tian & Sanchez, 2017; Wang & Guan, 2018; Zheng et al., 2020), hence questioning this detrimental image of authoritarian leaders. These conflicting research findings and the current research attention on non-Western cultures where authoritarian leaders are still predominant (Chiang et al., 2021; Harms et al., 2018; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Schuh, Zhang, & Tian, 2013; Shen, Chou, & Schaubroeck, 2019) call for a deeper investigation on the conditions under which authoritarian leaders influence subordinate's task performance (e.g., Chan et al., 2013; Gu, Wang, Liu, Song, & He, 2018; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Shen, Chou, & Schaubroeck, 2019). The studies that have focused on the

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impact of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership on subordinate performance have mainly investigated how and why authoritarian leaders instigate negative subordinate performance (Chan *et al.*, 2013; Harms *et al.*, 2018; Shen, Chou, & Schaubroeck, 2019; Zhang & Xie, 2017). This dearth of research on the positive impact of authoritarian leaders calls for further examination of the psychological mechanisms and cognitive states that translate the positive influence of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership on employee outcomes.

Furthermore, research that has examined the characteristics of the subordinates of the authoritarian leader in the analysis of the consequences of such a leader is quite sparse (e.g., Cheng & Jen, 2005; De Hoogh & Den Hartog, 2008; Harms *et al.*, 2018; Kiazad, Restubog, Zagenczyk, Kiewitz, & Tang, 2010; Kuschell & Newton, 1986). However, the followership approach to leadership states that followers are an integral part of the leadership process that determines the leader's influence on work outcomes (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, & Huang, 2018). As leadership behaviours, such as subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership, are a subjective evaluation by the subordinates (Brees, Martinko, & Harvey, 2016; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Tepper, Simon, & Park, 2017), subordinates of an authoritarian leader may differ in their attributions of the leader's controlling behaviour. Hence, based on the overarching framework of the attribution theory, the primary objective of our study is to take a subordinate-centred approach by examining the role that subordinates' attributions regarding their leader's motive play in advancing the authoritarian leader's impact on the task performance of subordinates.

The attribution theory states that when individuals develop causal attribution for others' behaviour, they adjust their own behaviour accordingly (Heider, 1958). The literature on negative leadership behaviours, mainly abusive supervision, has demonstrated that subordinates make attributions regarding their leader's motive underlying the abuse which has an impact on the subordinates' behaviour (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Martinko, Moss, Douglas, & Borkowski, 2007; Tepper, 2007). To the best of our knowledge, the literature on subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership has not investigated such an impact of subordinate attributions. Comprehending the role of subordinate attributions in the consequences of leadership behaviours is important as according to the attribution theory, subordinates do not respond to their leader's behaviour, but to the attributed motives behind that behaviour (Weiner, 1985). Consequently, we propose that if subordinates attribute their authoritarian leader's motive to performance promotion (i.e., enhancing the performance of subordinates), they will react positively to their leader's actions, thus improving their own task performance.

However, we further propose that on their own subordinates will not attribute their leader's controlling behaviour to a performance-driven motive. We investigate the moderating effect of subordinate's perception of leader's expert power in the relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive and its potential indirect effect in the relationship between subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive and subordinate's task performance. We suggest that subordinate's perception of their leader's expert power can be an important influencing factor in the attributions that subordinates make regarding their leader's motive. Leaders with relevant expertise are perceived as credible (Fedor, Rensvold, & Adams, 1992) and gain more acceptance from their subordinates (Mao, Chiang, Chen, Wu, & Wang, 2019). Thus, the expertise of an authoritarian leader may give the leader power in the eyes of the subordinates to dominate them. We postulate that when subordinates perceive an authoritarian leader to possess expert power, they will perceive their leader to be driven by the intent of performance promotion.

This study aims to make three meaningful contributions to the scholarly literature on subordinate's perceptions of authoritarian leadership. The first main contribution of this study is to challenge this prevalent detrimental view of authoritarian leaders (Huang, Xu, Chiu, Lam, & Farh, 2015) by theoretically articulating and empirically testing the psychological mechanism in the positive relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and

subordinate task performance. The second theoretical contribution of this study is that it takes on a subordinate-centred perspective by examining the subordinate's attributions of their leader's motive in linking authoritarian leadership with subordinate's performance. This should provide a more comprehensive understanding of how authoritarian leaders shape subordinate outcomes through subordinates' own perceptions about their leader's motive. Thirdly, our study emphasizes on the influence of a positive characteristic of authoritarian leaders, that is, their perceived expert power. Even the research on the antecedents of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership has not explored the influence of a positive characteristic of the authoritarian leader on follower outcomes (Harms et al., 2018).

Theoretical background and hypothesis development

Subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate task performance

An authoritarian leader is perceived by subordinates to exert absolute control over them with the expectation of complete conformity from them, promising rewards for compliance while threatening to punish them for non-compliance (Farh & Cheng, 2000; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008; Schaubroeck, Shen, & Chong, 2017). Such a leader stresses personal dominance over subordinates, provides all the information and makes unilateral decisions regarding policies and procedures (Aryee et al., 2007; Tsui, Wang, Xin, Zhang, & Fu, 2004). Such behaviours assure the leader's control over the direction of the subordinates and over desired outcomes and resources (Schuh, Zhang, & Tian, 2013).

Empirical research has already found this leadership style to be negatively related to job performance and organizational citizenship behaviour (Aryee et al., 2007; Chan et al., 2013; Cheng, Huang, & Chou, 2002a; 2002b; Chiang et al., 2021; Liang, Ling, & Hsieh, 2007; Wang, Liu, & Liu, 2019). A meta-analysis by Foels, Driskell, Mullen, and Salas (2000) shows that, in general, the followers of authoritarian leaders are less satisfied, thus reiterating the predominant view that authoritarian leaders fail to motivate subordinates (De Cremer, 2006).

However, some empirical evidence suggests that authoritarian leaders may be effective, in certain circumstances. Subordinates with a high orientation towards authority, identified with and complied with their authoritarian leader (Cheng et al., 2004). The study by Cheng and Jen (2005) found that authoritarian leaders with high managerial competence had a positive effect on subordinates' job performance. Authoritarian leaders even outperformed transformational leaders for organizations operating in harsh economic environments (Huang et al., 2015). Another study by Wang and Guan (2018) demonstrated the positive impact of authoritarian leadership on subordinates' performance through subordinates' learning goal orientation. Authoritarian leaders have been found to deter employees from engaging in deviant behaviours by sending them clear signals potential punishments for non-compliance (Zheng et al., 2020). Hence, based on these limited empirical findings on the positive side of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership, and the assertion of certain scholars that the impact of this leadership style on subordinate performance is likely to be impacted by a number of moderators (Bass & Bass, 2009), we therefore aim to explore this relationship through the attributions of subordinates.

Attribution theory

The attribution theory states that individuals make causal justifications for the behaviours of others around them in their social environment and based on these justifications they adjust their behaviours (Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012; Martinko & Mackey, 2019). Fritz Heider (1958) stated that attributions are causal ascriptions that are the result of fundamental cognitive processes by which individuals ascertain cause and effect. Kelley (1967) and Weiner (1985) further developed the work of Heider (1958) by adding the dimensions on which attributions are made, and they all established that attributions made regarding the motive behind an actor's behaviour mediates the

pathway between the behaviour and the observer's response. Hence, individuals make sense of other's behaviour through their perceptions of other's motives (Hewett, Shantz, Mundy, & Alfes, 2018; Thomas & Pondy, 1977). They attempt to seek out information that would convey the intent behind the behaviour of others (Allen & Rush, 1998). Thus, according to this theory subordinates have an innate intent to understand the causes behind their leader's behaviours and these attributions act as a trigger in influencing their own reactions to the leader's behaviour (Dasborough & Ashkanasy, 2002).

Tepper (2007) argued that subordinates' reaction to negative leadership behaviours might differ based on their attributed motive of supervisor's mistreatment. Leaders may mistreat subordinates either with the purpose of promoting their performance or with the purpose of harming subordinates (Tepper, 2007). Aycan (2006) stated that the underlying motive of authoritarian leader's controlling behaviour could be that of promoting their subordinates' welfare. Past studies have also indicated that the same behaviour can prompt positive or negative reactions of individuals depending on what they assume the underlying intention of the behaviour to be (Eastman, 1994; Grant, Parker, & Collins, 2009). Studies have found that paranoid and sinister attributional tendencies define reactions to abusive supervisory behaviour (Bowling & Michel, 2011; Chan & McAllister, 2014). If negative attributional tendencies of employees define their reactions to negative leaders, by the same logic positive attributions should also influence subordinates' reactions to such a leader. Liu, Liao, and Loi (2012) found that when subordinates attributed the motive behind the behaviour of their abusive supervisor to cause injury to them rather than improve their performance, their creativity level became low.

Subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive

Drawing on the numerous empirical findings on the detrimental influence of authoritarian leaders on individual attitudes and behaviours, we posit that on their own authoritarian leaders would not incite positive subordinate attributions. Subordinates would not attribute the motive behind the controlling behaviour of their leader to promote their performance as in general subordinates do not like highly dominant leaders (Van Vugt, 2006). The leadership literature has indicated a negative impact of such a controlling leadership on the attitudes and behaviours of subordinates, such as reduced trust in their leaders (Chen, Eberly, et al., 2014; Chen, Jing, & Lee, 2014), lower self-esteem (Chan et al., 2013), lower organization-based self-efficacy (Chan et al., 2013) and reduced job satisfaction of subordinates (Smither, 1993). The impersonal rules and procedures imposed by authoritarian leaders limit the subordinates' autonomy (Bowen, Ledford, & Nathan, 1991), voice (e.g., Li & Sun, 2015; Zhang, Huai, & Xie, 2015) and allows minimal discretion for the subordinates to work independently and autonomously. This complete dependency on the leader to define their roles and the high hierarchical distance between the authoritarian leader and subordinates means that the subordinates do not get clarity regarding their work responsibilities and roles (Zhang & Xie, 2017). Authoritarian leaders might even provoke strong negative emotions in subordinates such as anger and fear towards their leader (Farh, Cheng, Chou, & Chu, 2014; Pellegrini & Scandura, 2008). Hence, based on the previous research on subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership, this study suggests that due to the lack of autonomy given by the authoritarian leader, the leader's complete disregard for subordinates' concerns and the subordinates' distrust of the leader, subordinates will not perceive the motive behind such a commanding style of leadership to be of their performance improvement. Therefore, we expect a negative influence of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership on subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive.

Hypothesis 1. Subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership will be negatively related to subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive

Subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive and subordinate task performance

According to the attribution theory, the attributions that individuals make ultimately shape their emotional and behavioural responses (Weiner, 1985). Hence, instead of responding to the behaviour itself, the individuals actually respond to the attributed motives behind the behaviour (Ferris, Bhawuk, Fedor, & Judge, 1995). This study thus, suggests that subordinates are the observers that make attributions regarding the intentionality behind their authoritarian leader's behaviour. These attributions then play a critical role in determining their reactions to their leader's actions (Dienesch & Liden, 1986; Martinko & Gardner, 1987; Martinko, Harvey, & Dasborough, 2011). For example, the study by Sue-Chan, Chen, and Lam (2011) demonstrated that the attributions that subordinates made regarding the motives behind their supervisor's coaching of them influenced the performance of the subordinates. Similarly, Xing, Sun, Jepsen, and Zhang (2021) found that when subordinates attributed the motive of their supervisor's negative feedback to their performance enhancement, the subordinates were more motivated to learn. The literature on abusive supervision, a detrimental leadership behaviour, states that the consequences of abusive supervision differ depending on its attributed motive (Kim, Atwater, Latheef, & Zheng, 2019; Liu, Liao, & Loi, 2012). Therefore, drawing on the past empirical research on subordinate attributions, this study postulates that when subordinates attribute their leader's behaviour to be driven by the motive of promoting their performance, the subordinates will react positively to their leader's actions, hence enhancing their own task performance.

Hypothesis 2. Subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive will be positively related to subordinate's task performance

Moderating role of subordinate's perception of leader's expert power

Power has been defined as the potential of an individual to exercise influence over others to change their behaviour, intentions, attitudes or emotions (Aguinis, Simonsen, & Pierce, 1998). Although a number of power typologies exist, perhaps the most influential is that of French, Raven, and Cartwright's (1959) delineation of power sources. French et al. (1959) have identified five types of interpersonal power that individuals may possess: reward, coercive, legitimate, referent and expert. There are two elements of this power typology that are relevant to our paper. First, legitimate, reward and coercive powers are considered to be three sources of position power, i.e., power sanctioned by the organization or by the leader's hierarchical position, while referent and expert power are sources of personal power that stem from the leader's own individual attributes (French et al., 1959). Hence, power is not just constrained to the formal position of the individual in the organization that dictates the control of resources and pay raises but may also be derived from one's personal sources such as expertise. Secondly, we recognize that these personal sources of power may be a perception of the target and thus are subject to their interpretation.

Subordinate's perception of leader's expert power is defined as power 'based on the perception that other has some knowledge or expertise' (French et al., 1959: 163). It refers to the subordinate's belief that the leader has extensive knowledge and expertise in his/her field (French et al., 1959; Yukl & Falbe, 1991). According to past research leader's expert power plays an essential role in subordinates' evaluation of and impression formation of their leaders (Chen, Jing, et al., 2014; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2006; Yuan, Zhang, & Tu, 2018). Leaders who are perceived to be experts are more likely to be accepted as effective leaders and thus have greater leverage in influencing the perceptions and behaviours of their subordinates as compared to leaders who are not perceived as experts (Hollander, 1978; Podsakoff, Todor, & Schuler, 1983). Such leaders gain the trust (Mayer, Davis, & Schoorman, 1995) and support (Price & Garland, 1981) of their subordinates. The subordinates of a competent leader feel more psychologically safe and thus perform better (Mao et al., 2019). According to research, perceived dominance of individuals has been found to result in positive social outcomes only for those individuals who are perceived

to be competent (Chen, Jing, et al., 2014). Leaders with technical and creative problem-solving skills gain credibility in the eyes of the subordinates which enhances the leaders' influence (Mumford, Scott, Gaddis, & Strange, 2002). Consequently, subordinates who perceive their leader to be an expert will be more motivated and willing to accept the influence from their leader (Justis, Kedia, & Stephens, 1978). Drawing from the past empirical findings, a leader's expert power shapes the judgements of subordinates regarding the leader's effectiveness.

The leader's managerial competencies have been found to moderate the positive relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and job effectiveness (Cheng & Jen, 2005); however, the questions still remain unanswered regarding why the perceived competencies of the authoritarian leader improve job effectiveness of subordinates and what is the role of the subordinates in this process. Our paper aims to answer these questions by clarifying the specific mechanism through which this effect takes place.

Based on the attribution theory, we argue that subordinates' perception of expert power means subordinates perceive their authoritarian leader to possess control over a valued resource, i.e., his/her technical expertise, knowledge and skills. When the subordinates of an authoritarian leader perceive their leader to possess expert power, the leader gains acceptance and credibility in their eyes. This implies that when they believe that their authoritarian leader has the expertise to monitor their performance and get the job done, they may willingly accept the rules and procedures imposed by their leader (Aycan, 2006). Thus, possession of expert power creates a positive image of the authoritarian leader and gains the respect of subordinates. These positive perceptions regarding their leader will result in subordinates making positive attributions regarding the motive behind their authoritarian leader's behaviour. This study postulates that the subordinates will attribute the motive of their authoritarian leader with high expert power to be performance enhancement.

Hypothesis 3. Subordinate's perception of leader's expert power will moderate the relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive such that the relationship will be positive only when subordinate's perception of leader's expert power is high rather than low.

Leadership research has demonstrated the positive impact of expert power on organizational performance (Rahim, 2009; Rahim, Antonioni, & Psenicka, 2001). Leaders with technical expertise can effectively structure tasks and monitor the performance of subordinates (Byun, Dai, Lee, & Kang, 2017; Fiorelli, 1988; Mumford et al., 2002). Most leadership-related literature posits that a leader's expertise is an important predictor of leadership effectiveness and organizational and subordinate outcomes (Artz, Goodall, & Oswald, 2017; Connelly, Gilbert, Zaccaro, Threlfall, Marks, & Mumford, 2000; Hollander, 1992; House & Baetz, 1979; Mumford et al., 2002; Podsakoff, Todor, & Schuler, 1983). Hence, we speculate an indirect moderating effect of the subordinate's perception of leader's expert power on subordinate's task performance.

Hypothesis 4. An indirect positive relationship between subordinates' perceptions of authoritarian leadership and their task performance (through subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive) will be significant when leader's expert power is high rather than low (Figure 1).

Method

Sample and procedure

The research team designed and disseminated field surveys to full-time subordinates and supervisors working in 11 different private sector organizations in Lahore, Pakistan. The research team used convenience sampling to select the organizations based on personal and professional

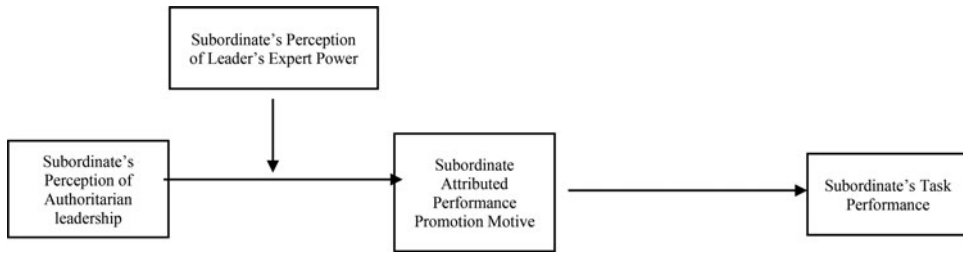


Figure 1. Theoretical model.

contacts. The majority of the respondents, approximately 75%, belonged to the service sector (banks, software houses, media firms, distributors) with the rest (25%) belonging to the textile and retail sector. English is well understood in Pakistan at all levels of white collar office workers and past studies have conducted surveys in English as well that have been published in mainstream journals (such as Abbas, Raja, Darr, & Bouckenooghe, 2014; Khan, Moss, Quratulain, & Hameed, 2016). It is also the medium of instruction in all higher educational institutes of Pakistan. We therefore administered our questionnaires in the English language.

The team first approached key contacts in the private organizations who were positioned in their top-management and were keen in assisting in the study. These key contacts then referred the team to the direct supervisors in different departments of their organizations. The team then contacted 98 direct supervisors and requested them to fill out the job performance questionnaires for a random sample of their subordinates. Before consenting to participate, the respondents were provided with a cover letter detailing the study's objectives and assuring them of the strictest confidentiality. The letter also stated that their participation in the survey was voluntary.

Of these 98 supervisors, a total of 76 supervisors filled out these questionnaires, representing a response rate of 77%. Some supervisors filled out the questionnaires and returned to one of the authors immediately while others took a few days to fill them out. All the supervisors placed their questionnaires in sealed envelopes and returned them to one of the authors. The survey forms of both the supervisor and his/her direct reports were identically numbered so that they could be matched.

Once the supervisors submitted their questionnaires, the research team then independently approached the subordinates of these supervisors and asked them to fill out the subordinate survey containing the scales of authoritarian leadership style, subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive, leader's expert power, legitimate power, coercive power, reward power and referent power. The same procedure was followed with the subordinates. The respondents were provided with a cover letter elaborating the study objectives, emphasizing strict anonymity of the respondents and that participation is completely voluntary. As the subordinate questionnaires were long, a few days were given to subordinates to fill out the surveys which were then collected by one of the authors. The subordinates placed their questionnaires in sealed envelopes and returned them to one of the authors. To ensure complete confidentiality, subordinates were given the option to hand over the sealed envelopes to the authors off-site. We distributed surveys to 360 employees, of which 246 employees completed the surveys which rendered a response rate of 68%.

The supervisors and subordinates were also asked to provide their demographic information as well. The average age of the subordinates surveyed was 30.42 years ($SD = 6.16$). Their average tenure with their supervisor was 2.69 years ($SD = 2.61$) and their average tenure with their organization was 4.50 years ($SD = 4.22$). The average age of the supervisors was 36.58 years ($SD = 6.58$). The average tenure of the supervisors with their supervisor was 4.70 years ($SD = 3.56$) and their average tenure with the organization was 6.61 years ($SD = 4.94$).

Measures

Responses for all variables were assessed using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree and 5 = strongly agree ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The scale of subordinate's task performance was assessed using a 5-point Likert scale but used separate labels ranging from 1 (unacceptable) to 5 (outstanding).

Subordinate's perceptions of authoritarian leadership style

Subordinates reported their immediate supervisor's leadership style using the nine-item scale developed by Cheng *et al.* (2004). An example item reads: 'My supervisor exercises strict discipline over subordinates'. This scale has been used in various studies such as Kiazad *et al.* (2010) and Aryee *et al.* (2007) and has a reliability coefficient of .85.

Subordinate's perception of leader's expert power

Subordinates reported on their supervisor's expert power using the four-item scale by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). An example of an item is 'My Supervisor can give good technical suggestions'. The reliability coefficient of the scale was .94.

Subordinate's perception of leader's legitimate power

Subordinates reported on their leader's legitimate power using the four-item scale by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). An example of an item is 'My Supervisor can make me feel that I have commitments to meet'. The reliability coefficient of the scale was .70.

Subordinate's perception of leader's coercive power

Subordinates reported on their supervisor's coercive power using the four-item scale by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). An example of an item is 'My Supervisor can give me undesirable job assignments'. The reliability coefficient of the scale was .70.

Subordinate's perception of leader's reward power

Subordinates reported on their supervisor's reward power using the four-item scale by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). An example of an item is 'My Supervisor can provide me with special benefits'. The reliability coefficient of the scale was .72.

Subordinate's perception of leader's referent power

Subordinates reported on their supervisor's referent power using the four-item scale by Hinkin and Schriesheim (1989). An example of an item is 'My Supervisor can make me feel important'. The reliability coefficient of the scale was .82.

Subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive

Subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive was reported by subordinates on their supervisors using the scale developed by Liu, Liao, and Loi (2012) that contains five items. An example of an item is 'My supervisor desires to stimulate me to meet my performance goals'. The reliability coefficient of this scale is .82.

Subordinate's task performance

The supervisors filled a four-item measure of subordinates' task performance developed by Liden, Wayne, and Stilwell (1993). Sample items include 'My subordinate is superior to other subordinates that I've supervised before' and 'Rate the overall level of performance that you observe for this subordinate'. This scale has been used in studies by Tepper, Moss, & Duffy (2011) and Khan *et al.* (2016) and has a reliability coefficient of .86.

Control variables

In line with previous research on subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and follower outcomes (Chan et al., 2013; Chen, Eberly, et al., 2014; Wu, Huang, & Chan, 2012) we controlled for several subordinate and supervisor demographics such as gender, age, tenure with the supervisor and tenure with the organization because these variables tend to directly influence leadership behaviours, their perceptions and subordinate performance (Bass, Avolio, & Atwater, 1996; Bauer & Green, 1996; Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & Van Engen, 2003; Maslyn & Uhl-Bien, 2001). Measures of these demographic variables were self-reported by the subordinates and their supervisors. Gender was dummy coded (0 = female, 1 = male). We also controlled for leader's legitimate power, coercive power and reward power as job performance of subordinates refers to their required duties and responsibilities and the powers stemming from their supervisor's position are likely to influence how the subordinates perform. Leader's referent power is another power that stems from the leader's personal attributes and refers to the attraction and identification of the subordinate with the leader which may also influence the performance of the subordinates.

Results

Before starting our hypothesis testing, we conducted confirmatory factor analysis to assess the factor structure and discriminant validity of our four main constructs – subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership, subordinate's perception of leader's expert power, subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive and subordinate's task performance. In order to measure the fit of our measurement model we used Mplus software version 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012). Once the confirmatory factor analysis was completed, we tested the hypotheses using Mplus software version 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012).

Confirmatory factor analysis

Although we used different data sources (i.e., subordinates and supervisors) to measure the predictor and criterion variables, we still conducted a series of confirmatory factor analyses to examine the discriminant validity of the measurement scales assessed through the same source. We used the MPlus software (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012) to assess the measurement model. The confirmatory factor analyses showed that as compared to alternative measurement models, our hypothesized measurement model achieved a good model fit (RMSEA = .05, SRMR = .05, CFI = .96, TFI = .94). The results of these analyses are presented in Table 1.

Descriptive statistics and correlations

We then calculated the descriptive statistics that is their means, standard deviations, Pearson's correlation coefficients and internal consistency reliability estimates of the study variables which are shown in Table 2. We adopted a .70 cut-off value for the internal consistency reliability estimates (Bland & Altman, 1997; DeVellis, 2012). In terms of the correlations, subordinates' performance positively correlated with both leader's expert power ($r = .35, p < .01$) and with subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive ($r = .85, p < .01$). Moreover, subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive was positively correlated with leader's expert power ($r = .24, p < .01$). These findings provide preliminary evidence to support our hypotheses.

Hypothesis testing

As each subordinate's data were nested within a supervisory unit along with other subordinates, we first examined the proportions of within- and between-unit variance for the dependent

Table 1. Results of confirmatory factor analyses

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	RMSEA	SRMR	CFI	TLI
Hypothesized four-factor	321.49	203	.05	.05	.96	.94
Three-factor (merged EP and SMOT)	795.61	206	.11	.13	.77	.75
Two-factor (merged EP, SMOT and Perf)	1255.05	208	.14	.11	.61	.56
Single-factor (merged AL, EP, SMOT and Perf)	1870.86	209	.18	.17	.37	.31

Note: *n* = 246; AL, subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership; EP, subordinate's perception of leader's expert power; SMOT, subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive; Perf, subordinate task performance; GFI, goodness of fit index; SRMR, standardized root mean squared residual; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square of approximation; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index.

variable by computing intraclass correlation indexes before hypothesis testing. A null model with subordinate task performance as the outcomes variable revealed that 21.5% ($p < .05$) of the variance resided at the supervisory level thus encouraging the use of a multilevel analysis. When subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive was the outcome, the null model test revealed that 15% ($p < .05$) of the variance resided at the supervisory level. We tested the hypotheses using Mplus software version 7.0 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012). Due to the nested nature of the data we employed the 'Type = Twolevel' Mplus syntax and Supervisor ID as the cluster variable. The β coefficients, standard errors and confidence intervals are presented in Table 3. None of the control variables were significant. All measures, excluding the control variables and the dependent variable, were grand mean-centred. Hypothesis 1 specified a negative relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive. This hypothesis was supported ($\beta = -.43$, $p < .05$). Hypothesis 2 specified a positive relationship between subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive and subordinate task performance. This hypothesis was supported ($\beta = .63$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 3 which specified the moderating role of leader's expert power was supported as the interaction between leader's expert power and subordinate perception of authoritarian leadership was significant ($\beta = .95$, $p < .01$). Hypothesis 4 specified the indirect positive effect of leader's expert power in the relationship between subordinate perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance through subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive. This hypothesis was supported as the 95% biased corrected confidence interval (CI) of the indirect effect of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership on subordinate performance through subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive excludes zero at the high value of leader's expert power (Table 4).

We also conducted a simple slope analysis of the significant interaction to better understand the nature of the moderating effect by using the (mean \pm 1SD) criterion recommendations by Aiken, West, and Reno (1991). The results of this analysis are shown in Figure 2. The figure shows that at higher values of leader's expert power, when subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership increases, the subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive also increases. Thus, subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership is only positively related to subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive at higher values only when leader's expert power is high. This analysis supports our hypothesis 3.

Discussion

The results of our paper advance the knowledge on the psychological mechanisms underlying the positive relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate's task performance. The first contribution of this paper is that it extends the research on subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership as contrary to the predominant deleterious image of authoritarian leaders, this study highlights the positive side of these leaders. Hence, our study adds to an under-researched area of authoritarian leadership.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations and correlations among all variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
1 Organization type	3.11	1.62	-																	
2 Subordinate's age	30.40	6.16	-.35**	-																
3 Subordinate's gender	.89	.13	-.04	.12	-															
4 Subordinate's tenure with supervisor	2.69	2.61	-.11	.36**	.14*	-														
5 Subordinate's tenure with organization	4.50	4.23	-.29**	.63**	.04	.58**	-													
6 Supervisor's age	36.58	6.58	-.33**	.42**	.06	.27**	.37**	-												
7 Supervisor's gender	.94	.23	.05	.00	.14*	.01	-.06	.00	-											
8 Supervisor's tenure with supervisor	4.70	3.56	-.13*	.06	.17**	.47**	.13*	.17*	.18**	-										
9 Supervisor's tenure with organization	6.61	4.94	-.29**	.26**	-.11	.36**	.29**	.51**	-.05	.53**	-									
10 Leader's coercive power	3.14	1.00	.05	.12	.09	.00	.05	.21**	-.03	.03	.04	(.70)								
11 Leader's legitimate power	2.12	.72	.04	.00	.05	.03	.00	.12	.02	-.04	.02	.13*	(.70)							
12 Leader's reward power	3.57	.85	-.30	.04	.03	.08	.02	.05	.13*	.05	.09	-.15	-.23	(.72)						
13 Leader's referent power	3.86	.64	.16*	.06	.06	.01	.03	.01	.08	-.02	.03	.14*	-.38**	.90**	(.82)					
14 Subordinate's performance	3.34	.70	.04	.01	-.08	-.08	-.07	-.21	.08	-.15	-.09	-.02	-.09	.08	.12	(.86)				
15 Authoritarian leadership	3.19	.75	.09	-.16	.09	-.03	-.10	-.15	.01	-.03	-.04	-.10	-.03	.06	.05	.12*	(.85)			
16 Subordinate's perception of leader's expert power	3.24	1.11	-.06	-.05	-.04	-.02	-.02	-.07	.00	-.02	.05	.02	-.04	.11	.14*	.35**	.06	(.94)		
17 Subordinate attributed motive	3.58	.72	-.07	.04	.05	.06	.01	.09	.11	.08	.04	-.08	-.08	-.05	.06	.55**	.12*	.24**	(.82)	

Note: n = 246; *p < .05, **p < .01 (two-tailed). αs reliability coefficients are given on diagonals in parentheses.

Table 3. MPlus results (coefficients and their standard errors)

Variable	Outcome variable					
	Subordinate attributed motive			Subordinate task performance		
	Estimate	SE	95% CI	Estimate	SE	95% CI
Organization type	-.10	.03	(-.07 to .08)	.03	.02	(-.04 to .13)
Subordinate's gender	.01	.02	(-.10 to .14)	-.07	.06	(-.11 to .05)
Subordinate's tenure with supervisor	.06	.02	(-.06 to .04)	-.02	.08	(-.17 to .13)
Subordinate's tenure with organization	-.05	.01	(-.04 to .13)	-.04	.07	(.19-.12)
Subordinate's age	.09	.01	(-.13 to .20)	.08	.07	(-.06 to .22)
Supervisor's gender	.14*	.21	(.18-.29)	-.03	.18	(-.37 to .32)
Supervisor's tenure with supervisor	.07	.02	(-.09 to .21)	-.40	.23	(-.80 to -.01)
Supervisor's tenure with organization	.05	.01	(-.20 to .03)	.07	.20	(-.4 to .52)
Supervisor's age	-.17*	.01	(-.01 to .05)	-.37	.21	(-.77 to .04)
Leader's legitimate power	-.09	.07	(-.21 to .11)	-.02	.06	(-.12 to .09)
Leader's coercive power	.01	.05	(-.10 to .31)	.05	.05	(-.02 to .19)
Leader's reward power	-.10	.06	(-.11 to .08)	.12	.07	(-.01 to .25)
Leader's referent power	.05	.02	(-.16 to .24)	-.02	.06	(-.15 to .12)
Leader's expert power	.24**	.06	(.12-.36)	.19**	.05	(.09-.30)
Authoritarian leadership	-.43*	.17	(-.78 to -.09)	.03	.05	(-.08 to .13)
Authoritarian leadership × leader's expert power	.95**	.29	(.38-1.53)			
Subordinate-attributed motive				.63**	.04	(.55-.72)
R ²	.10**	.04		.42**	.05	

Note: n = 246; CI, confidence interval; *p < .05, **p < .01 (two-tailed). Organization type was coded 1 = consumer goods distribution, 2 = banks, 3 = software, 4 = media, 5 = textile.

Table 4. Conditional indirect effects of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership on subordinate performance through SMOT at values of EP

EP	Estimate	SE	Est/SE	p value	LLCI	ULCI
-1.10	-.05	.04	-1.09	.27	-.14	.04
.00	.04	.03	1.35	.18	-.02	.11
1.10	.14	.05	3.12	.00	.05	.23

EP, leader's expert power; LLCI, lower limit confidence interval; ULCI, upper limit confidence interval.

Not just the consequences of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership, but even the antecedents of such a leadership that have been explored have mainly been negative (Harms et al., 2018). For instance, studies have found such leaders to be more conniving (Maner, 2017) and have a self-interest (Collins, 2009). Research has also explored the Big Five personality traits

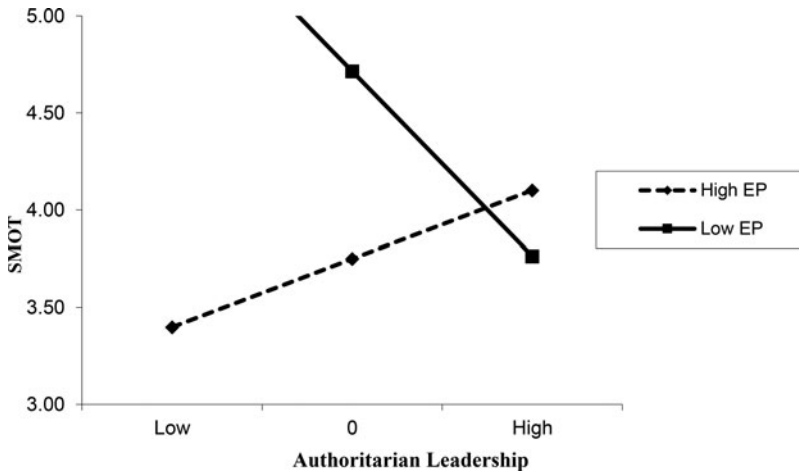


Figure 2. Moderating effect of leader's expert power (EP) on the relationship of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive (SMOT).

along with this leadership style and have found authoritarian leaders to be high on neuroticism and low on agreeableness (Cheng, Tracy, & Henrich, 2010; Kaiser & Hogan, 2011; Redeker, De Vries, Rouckhout, Vermeren, & De Fruyt, 2014). Therefore, the second contribution of our study is that contrary to past research, this paper has theorized and found that if subordinates perceive their authoritarian leader to possess a positive characteristic that is expert power, they will be stimulated to improve their performance.

The third contribution of this paper is that it emphasizes the attributions and perceptions of the subordinates as the key to achieving positive consequences under an authoritarian leader. Research on subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership that has examined the characteristics of the subordinates of the authoritarian leader in the analysis of the consequences of this leadership style is quite sparse (Harms et al., 2018). The few studies that have included subordinates in the analysis of the consequences of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership have not examined this relationship with the perspective of the attributions of the subordinates. However, scholars argue that the examination of the consequences of leadership behaviours needs to consider the characteristics of both the leaders and subordinates as while subordinates take directions from their leaders, leaders also react to and are enabled by their subordinates (Harms et al., 2018; Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Thoroughgood, Sawyer, Lunsford, & Padilla, 2016). The followership approach to leadership states that unlike the traditional approach of leadership literature investigating the follower's attitudes and motivations as outcomes of the leader's behaviour, followers need to be viewed as the active agents in the leadership process (Carsten, Uhl-Bien, & Huang, 2018). The model theorized and tested by our study examines the subordinates as an integral part of the leadership process. The performance of the subordinates is contingent on their own perceptions and attributions of the authoritarian leader's motive.

Studies have shown that leadership may vary across cultures (Farth, Leong, & Law, 1998; Smith & Peterson, 2002; Westwood, 1997). The fourth key contribution of this study is that it has been conducted in Pakistan, a country characterized by a high power distance culture (Hofstede, 2001), that is more likely to produce authoritarian leaders because followers have been socialized to comply obediently to authority (Luthans, Peterson, & Ibrayeva, 1998). GLOBE studies of leadership collected data from different regions on the preference for an authoritarian leader, and Southern Asia was the third highest region to prefer such a leader (Harms et al., 2018). However, to our knowledge, no study till date has explored the outcomes of authoritarian leadership in Pakistan.

Limitations and future research directions

The contributions and findings of our paper come with certain limitations and future research directions as well. First of all, although we used different sources (subordinates and supervisors) to obtain data on predictor and criterion variables, we cannot completely rule out the common method bias. Conducting Harman's one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) however revealed that a single factor did not emerge from the factor analyses and four distinct constructs were obtained, suggesting that common method bias may not be a threat in our data. We also found low correlations among our main variables which again suggest that this bias was not a major concern.

A second limitation of our paper is that although our primary objective was to comprehend the underlying mechanisms in the relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate's performance, the cross-sectional nature of our data does not allow for the test of causality between our dependent and independent variables. Future research should therefore focus on generalizing the results by a longitudinal study.

A promising avenue for future research seems to lie in testing our theoretical model with different subordinate characteristics in a moderating role to examine their influence on subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive. For instance, the need for leadership has been found to enhance the positive effects of transformational leadership (De Vries, Roe, & Taillieu, 1999). Future studies can extend this present model by considering the impact of subordinate's need for leadership on subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive under an authoritarian leader. Brees, Martinko, and Harvey (2016) assert that the perceptions of negative leadership behaviours should take into account characteristics of subordinates such as their negative affectivity, traits, anger, hostile attribution styles and entitlement. Subordinates with low organization-based self-esteem are also more likely to perceive higher levels of authoritarian leadership as abusive (Kiazad *et al.*, 2010) and subordinates with low self-uncertainty have also been found to be more supportive of an authoritarian leader (Rast, Hogg, & Giessner, 2013). The study by Wang and Guan (2018) found that subordinate's learning goal orientation mediated the positive relationship between subordinates' perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate performance. Another study by Xing *et al.* (2021) demonstrated that subordinates with high core self-evaluation attributed the negative feedback of their leader to the motive of performance enhancement. This just shows that when it comes to the perception of authoritarian leadership and its consequences, future research needs to explore the characteristics of subordinates that trigger positive attributions in them regarding their authoritarian leaders.

As our model emphasizes the perceptions and attributions of subordinates in the impact of subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership on subordinate task performance, future studies should examine the moderating role of the other personal source of power, referent power of the leader in the relationship between subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership and subordinate-attributed performance promotion motive. As referent power involves leader's personal attractiveness that elicits a desire in the subordinates to be approved by the leader (Kim, Park, & Park, 2020), authoritarian leaders who are perceived to possess referent power may trigger positive subordinate attributions regarding their underlying motive. Another variable that can be included in this model is the subordinate's perception of respect. As authoritarian leaders do not give consideration to the concerns and opinions of their subordinates, future studies can assess respect as perceived by subordinates as a mediator in this model to investigate which characteristics of the authoritarian leader enhance subordinate's perception of respect as derived from the leader.

Another promising avenue for future research would be exploring subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership from the leader's perspective. Leadership research states that leaders differ in their perceptions of the most effective paths of meeting organizational goals (Neubert, Kacmar, Carlson, Chonko, & Roberts, 2008; Watkins, Fehr, & He, 2019; Zheng *et al.*, 2020). The study by Zheng *et al.* (2020) found that subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership was able to deter subordinates from engaging in deviant behaviours. This means that some leaders

may hold the lay belief that authoritarian leadership is an effective mode of ensuring that subordinates meet performance expectations. Hence, they may consciously use a controlling style of leadership with an instrumental motive. Apart from holding instrumental beliefs, when subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership interacts with benevolent leadership, it positively impacts the affective trust of subordinates (Tian & Sanchez, 2017). Thus, if an authoritarian leader is also demonstrating benevolence, it will trigger positive subordinate attributions.

Finally, future studies should test the present model with a contextual variable, which has also not been researched adequately with this style of leadership (Harms et al., 2018). Thoroughgood, Tate, Sawyer, and Jacobs (2012) argue that the perception and outcomes of negative leadership behaviours may vary depending on the social, cultural and occupational contexts. Some studies have found this type of leadership to be effective in certain contexts such as in harsh economic environment (Huang et al., 2015), when faced with internal conflict (De Hoogh, Greer, & Den Hartog, 2015) or high threat environments (Nielsen, Skogstad, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2016). The high power distance culture in Southern Asia already socializes people into believing in the legitimacy of a strong vertical hierarchy (Padilla, Hogan, & Kaiser, 2007; Wang & Guan, 2018), thus there is a higher possibility for subordinates in this region to hold positive attributions regarding their leader's motives.

Managerial implications

The results of our study bear interesting managerial implications. The results of our study demonstrate that focusing largely on participative leaders and viewing authoritarian leaders pejoratively means that organizations might be losing out on effective leaders who despite being authoritarian might still be able to stimulate higher performance from subordinates. The attributions that subordinates make regarding the intentions of their authoritarian leaders may be positive if subordinates perceive their leaders to possess other positive characteristics and capabilities. Thus, leaders with a dominating style may still be respected by subordinates if they have achieved success in their fields and are perceived as technical experts. When designing leadership training programmes, organizations need to consider the context in which they are operating and the characteristics of their subordinates. However, organizations need to take caution as authoritarian leaders are prone to turn abusive (Harms et al., 2018). Research has already found subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership to be associated with abusive supervision (Aryee et al., 2007; Kiazad et al., 2010).

Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that authoritarian leaders may have a functional value in achieving subordinate performance. Hence, this study extends research on subordinate's perception of authoritarian leadership as it theorized and found that subordinates may attribute the authoritarian leader's motive to pushing them to attain performance goals, which in turn will positively influence their performance.

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