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Does employee envy trigger the positive outcomes at workplace? A study of upward social comparison, envy and employee performance

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the outcomes of envy in the workplace and the moderating role of perceived organizational support. Data was collected from 270 employees of the telecom industry. The cross-sectional research was conducted, and the data was collected through survey questionnaires from employees hailing from private Telecom companies in Pakistan. Results showed that upward social comparison initiates benign and malicious envy which, in turn, affects employee performance. Benign envy results in enhancing the employee performance whereas malicious envy shows no relationship with employee performance. By paying attention to supporting the employees, malicious envy can enhance employee performance.

Keywords

social comparison, negative emotions, performance, organizational support

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Does Employee Envy Trigger the Positive Outcomes at Workplace? A Study of Upward Social Comparison, Envy and Employee Performance

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to investigate the outcomes of envy in the workplace and the moderating role of perceived organizational support. Data was collected from 270 employees of the telecom industry. The cross-sectional research was conducted, and the data was collected through survey questionnaires from employees hailing from private Telecom companies in Pakistan. Results showed that upward social comparison initiates benign and malicious envy which, in turn, affects employee performance. Benign envy results in enhancing the employee performance whereas malicious envy shows no relationship with employee performance. By paying attention to supporting the employees, malicious envy can enhance employee performance.

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Introduction

In the commercial arena, human skills are getting more attention and becoming more important for a organization's existence in pursuit of boosting and maximizing efficiency and productivity. At present, managers define the *human* to be not only a part of the production but also a psychosocial fact and reality. In humans, emotional and behavioral tendencies play a vital role. An organization's working environment cannot be free from behavioral and emotional factors. This prompted various industries to bring in the use of diverse human resource management methodologies to boost their employee's efficiency and performance based on human emotions.

In 1954, Festinger proposed a theory on the process and consequence of social comparison. He recognized the fact that individuals possess a fundamental need to compare their abilities and opinions with the abilities and opinions of others. Therefore, this drives everyone to understand the world around them and their position and reputation in that world by comparing themselves with others. Consequently, these comparisons influence the individual's behavior and performance, as envy may be triggered because of informal and formal opportunities that increases the possibility of social comparisons (Takahashi et al., 2009).

Feelings, emotions, and comprehensions are what makes humans so intriguing. All these aspects play a part in deciding the way of life for humans since different feelings, emotions, and comprehensions are what trigger behaviors (Hussain et al., 2017). In an organization, each employee has their own personality characteristics, emotions, norms, and values. While positive emotions among employees play an important role in organizational outcome such as higher motivation, organizational trust, and better performance (Denison, 1996); negative ones lead to envy, stress, burnout, and job leaving. Envy is an excruciating feeling illustrated as hostility or obnoxiousness, inferiority, and bitterness originated by having an understanding that other person or group possesses their desired achievement or outcome (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Parrott & Smith, 1993; Smith & Kim, 2007; Vecchio, 2005; Vecchio, 1995). Feeling envied in the workplace is usually perceived as an advantage of outperforming others (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004) but it triggers anxiety (Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2010; Salovey & Rodin, 1984; Thompson et al., 2015), decreases positive workplace attitudes (Vecchio, 2000), increases antisocial behavior (Vecchio, 2007), decreases job satisfaction, greater withdrawal, lower organization-based self-esteem, absenteeism, reduced commitment, and turnover intentions (Duffy & Shaw, 2000; Vecchio, 2005; Vecchio, 2000). However, some recent work has paid attention to the adaptive and positive outcomes associated with envy such as increased aspiration for learning, emulation of the better achievers, and motivation to be successful (van de Ven et al., 2009).

Also, organizations hold acts as a source of support for their employees when envy happens in the workplace. In that matter, perceived organizational support (POS) refers to perceptions of employees regarding their organizations, to the extent the organizations grasp the opportunity to appreciate employee's efforts in their workplace and are concerned about the well-being of employees (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This subsequently leads towards desired outcomes such as a high level of productivity at work (Oswald et al., 2015).

Most of the prior research (Parrott, 1990; Parrott & Smith, 1993; Smith, 2000; Smith & Kim, 2007) was about the negative impact of workplace envy, but recent literature suggested studying the mechanism of upward social comparisons through which envy can result in positive outcomes (Shu & Lazatkhan, 2017). Also, social comparison theory proposes that individuals look towards the superiors and then compare themselves for their self-improvement (Festinger, 1954). Along with that, recent literature has prompted marking the empirical difference between the malicious and benign characteristics of envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Tai et al., 2012; van de Ven et al., 2012) that results in positive and negative outcomes. As an example, benign envy resulted in positive outcomes as the individual strived to improve their performance through self-improvement, whereas in malicious envy, the individual attempted to lower the other person (Lange & Crusius, 2015; van de Ven et al., 2009).

The moderating aspect of POS has been showcased by various organizational relations by many scholars prior to this study. The moderating role of POS had been seen to decrease the adverse impacts of chronic pain (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2006) and work family conflicts (Witt & Carlson, 2006) on the performance of employees. Similarly, perceived organizational support had also been shown to support and increase the positive relationships of social skills (Hochwarter et al., 2006), helping behavior, and trust (Choi, 2006) with employee performance.

Pakistan is a developing country wherein knowledge and the affective system of HR practices are essential but the pace of adopting HRM practices is extremely slow (Bashir & Khattak, 2008; Ilyas & Mahmood, 2018). HRM is moving from evolution towards revolution and to gain competitive advantage, Pakistani organizations need to know about HRM intervention and what benefits can be reaped from them (Zamin Abbas et. al., 2011). In developing countries like Pakistan, people are rich in emotional sentiments due to the strong cultural influence of past experiences on future outcomes (Chaudhry et al., 2013). Previous research has established a linkage between social comparison, envy, perceived organizational support, and performance in developed countries. However, little evidence is known about workplace envy translating itself into enhanced work outcomes such as employee performance and whether POS decreases the impact of negative outcomes on employee performance in developing nations like Pakistan.

The purpose of this research was to investigate the outcomes of envy in the workplace and the moderating role of perceived organizational support. The objectives of the study were (a) to examine the relationship of upward social comparison and employee performance; (b) to test the mediating effect of envy on employee performance; and (c) discover the moderating impact of perceived organizational support between envy and employee performance

Literature Review

Social Comparison, Envy, Perceived Organizational Support and Employee Performance

Comparing one's own ability and accomplishment to others is a pervasive practice that serves an important function of self-evaluation. People give preference to comparing themselves with those whom they see similar to themselves (Pomery et al., 2012). Social comparison is the thinking process in which one compares oneself with another person based on some information (Wood, 1996). This also suggests that social comparison should have both affective and motivational consequences. People often compare themselves with others to analyze their thoughts, skills, and sentiments and consequently, they may know about their social rank and similarity-difference (Furnham & Brewin, 1988), thus increasing performance to shorten the gap.

Social comparison theory (Festinger, 1954) originally proposed that the individual looked towards superiors for their self-improvement and as a source inspiration in a unidirectional upward drive (Brennkmeijer et al., 2001; Collins, 1996; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997). Indeed, for some time, psychologists had a strong opinion that individuals who craved for improvement in themselves were highly inspired by successful people (Festinger, 1954). In 1996, Collins pointed out that the persons who were dieting were often seen making upward social comparisons by posting images of slimmer persons on their refrigerators. Those images not only served as a reminder of the person's current position, but also acted as an inspiration to perform better to attain the desired goals. Another study highlighted that college students felt more confident when they acknowledged the abilities of high performing students to themselves (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1993). It might be helpful to have a comparison with those who are doing well in a field. This may encourage people to strive for success, which will in turn lead to better performance.

According to Otley (1999), organizational performance is dependent on an individual's employee performance. The ability of the employee plays crucial part in high job performance (Hunter, 1984). Employees who drew inspiration from superior colleagues believed that the greater the

effort, the more they would be driven by self-improvement motives and the more skillfully they would be able to do their jobs (Collins, 1996; Lockwood & Kunda, 1997; Wood, 1989). That is why the person who has the tendency to be inspired by the success of another person may have the tendency to be more optimistic and certain about the chances of their success in the future (Butler, 2000). Thus, a strong positive effect accompanied with stronger intent to perform better is produced after the upward social comparison.

- **Hypothesis 1:** Upward social comparison has significant positive relationship with employee performance.

The feeling of envy is driven from upward social comparison (Smith, 2000). Early Greek philosophers thought of envy as pain experienced on account of another's good fortune (Tai et al., 2012). Considering this perspective, one can define envy as pain from unfavorable upward social comparisons. In the field of psychology, the pessimistic feelings in the workplace received increased consideration because of their significant effect on employees as well as on the organization (Erdil & Muceldili, 2014). In the workplace, employees contrast their advantages along with others: if there is a contrast between one and the other, the workers will be envious towards their colleagues (Erdil & Muceldili, 2014). According to recent studies, the emotions and feelings in the workplace—particularly the feeling of envy—has a significant effect on organizations as well as on the individuals (Braun et al., 2016; Smith & Kim, 2007; R. Vecchio, 2005; Vecchio, 1995, 2000).

Van de Ven et al. (2012) made the differentiation between benign envy and malicious envy. Malicious envy was linked with the behavioral strategies and motives of *pulling-down*, whereas benign envy was associated with promoting motivation levels for enhanced performance by focusing on the admiration and inspiration with the motive of *moving-up*, whereas no such effect exists in case of malicious envy (Lange & Crusius, 2015). When a person makes a comparison with someone whom they think are better than themselves (upward social comparison), it can lead either towards optimism and inspiration or towards resentment and contrastive emotional outcomes of envy (Lim & Yang, 2015; Smith, 2000).

The emotional experience of both aspects of envy (benign and malicious) begins with a social comparison in the self-relevant domain with another (Smith & Kim, 2007; Veiga et al., 2014). Just like benign envy, malicious envy is also an outcome of upward social comparison, but differs by producing the desire to pull down the better performing other, rather than a desire to pull oneself up (van de Ven et al., 2009). The individual, in the case of benign envy, wants to improve their self while comparing to others, whereas individuals in the case of malicious envy become envious after lowering the other person (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Tai et al., 2012; van de Ven et al., 2012).

- **Hypothesis 2:** Upward social comparison has significant positive relationship with benign envy.
- **Hypothesis 3:** Upward social comparison has significant positive relationship with malicious envy.

According to strategic interference theory (Buss, 1989; Haselton et al., 2005; Hill & Buss, 2006), envy is an agonizing feeling, but it also assists in improving the performance of employees. Duffy et al. (2012), in a field study, indicated that more constructive efforts were shown by envious job

applicants by applying more for internships. Similarly, experimental studies demonstrated that after experiencing envy, students had a desire to study more and actually performed better on a task designed to measure intelligence and creativity (van de Ven et al., 2012).

Employees can react emotionally to incidents and scenarios that take place with them at work and this reaction affects their job performance and satisfaction (Glomb et al., 2002). Envy molds an employee's behavior and it is reasonably inferred that in feelings of benign envy, employees possess a likelihood to show attitudes and behavioral changes resulting in a higher level of performance (Galliani & Vianello, 2012).

Most of the earlier research (Demirtas et al., 2017; Duffy et al., 2012; Erdil & Muceldili, 2014; Gino & Pierce, 2009; Khan et al., 2017; Lim & Yang, 2015; Smith & Kim, 2007; Tai et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2015) were about the negative impacts of envy, but some later studies indicated that envy could arouse inspiration and motivation in people which could lead them to perform better (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). A plethora of scholars possess a more ratified opinion on envy, explaining it as benign and admiring (van de Ven et al., 2009) free of ill-will (Smith & Kim, 2007). Le (2015) states that malicious envy will cause decreased motivation and culminate in performance decrement.

- **Hypothesis 4:** Benign envy has significant positive effects on employee performance.
- **Hypothesis 5:** Malicious envy has significant negative effects on employee performance.

Social comparisons are crucial for the occurrence of envy, as humans through social comparison frequently evaluate themselves (Vecchio, 2005; Vecchio, 1995). Envy can arouse inspiration and motivate persons which can lead them to perform better. For instance, recent evidence supported and showed that job performance can be enhanced by promoting envy (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004).

Within an organization, employees actively compare their skills with their colleague's in an upward social way (Brown et al., 2007). A few research studies raised the question of whether envy can be an *impetus for advancement* (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Dineen et al., 2017; Lange & Crusius, 2015; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). As expected, an initial corroboration points out that envy ultimately plays a pivotal role in amplifying an employee's success, as operationalized by job performance (Barrick et al., 2002; Ferris et al., 2013). To attain the goals of achieving what others possess, an envious employee works harder and, thus, it can be reasonably inferred that his work motivation will improve and he will be more open to learn from envied targets (van de Ven et al., 2009).

Sterling, Ven and Smith (2016) established that benign envy is related to an increased effort, whereas malicious envy is analogous with increased acts of aberrance. Likewise, malicious envy can also result from adverse social comparisons such as upward social comparison (Tesser, 1991; Vecchio, 2000), which might decrease their tendency to take part in performance-enhancing activities (Smith & Kim, 2007). Social comparison has been demonstrated to result in both positive and negative mood states such as envy (Gibbons & Gerrard, 1989) that results in performance improvement and performance decrement (Buunk et al., 1990; Wills, 1981).

- **Hypothesis 6:** Benign envy mediates the relationship between upward social comparison and employee performance.
- **Hypothesis 7:** Malicious envy mediates the relationship between upward social comparison and employee performance.

POS is the perception of employees about how much their organization care about their welfare, their contribution for the organization, and the fulfillment of their emotional and social requirements at work (Eisenberger et al., 1986). Some employees may require extra support more than other employees. For example, police officers who required extra esteem, approval, affiliation, and emotional support when the POS was high, arrested more people for incorrect driving and issued more speeding tickets to people (Lynch et al., 1999). Similarly, POS has effects on several work-related outcomes such as stress levels on employees; that is, when POS is high, stress is generally perceived as low and when POS is low, stress is generally to be perceived in high intensity (Robblee, 1998).

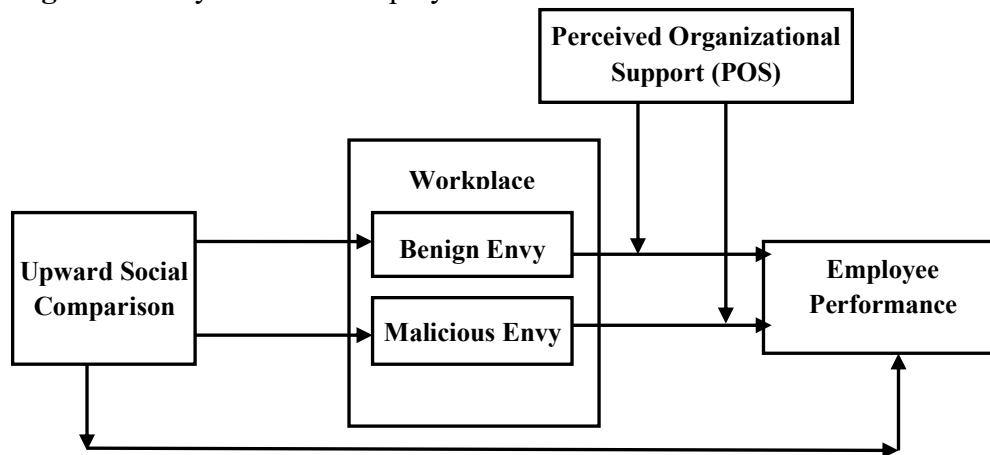
POS is much like the supportive feelings from friends and family (Cobb, 1976). Employees, after receiving support from organizations, respond with different approach including commitment, organizational citizenship behavior, and increased performance (Eisenberger et al., 1986, 1990; Shore & Wayne, 1993). It is essential for POS to be high for so that when employees feel their organization supports them, they are likely to return the appreciation by showing good performance in the workplace (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Thus, such explanations enlighten and supports POS's direct affect on various work-related outcomes.

Therefore, one can propose that POS also moderates the relationship of benign envy and malicious envy with individual employee performance such that the higher the POS, the stronger the relationship between benign envy and performance of employee becomes. Similarly, the higher the POS, the weaker the relationship between employees' performance and malicious envy.

- **Hypothesis 8:** POS moderates the relationship between benign envy and employee performance such that when POS is high, it strengthens the relationship between benign envy and employee performance and vice versa.
- **Hypothesis 9:** POS moderates the relationship between malicious envy and employee performance such that when POS is high, it weakens the relationship between malicious envy and employee performance and vice versa.

This study examined and analyzed the effect of upward social comparison on employee's performance, investigated the mediating role of benign and malicious envy between upward social comparison and employee performance and asked if POS moderates the relationship of benign and malicious envy with employee performance.

Figure 1. Envy Effect on Employee Performance Model



Methods

IRB approval was obtained prior to conducting the survey (see Appendix A) from the Ethics Review Committee of Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto Institute of Science and Technology, Islamabad. The survey consisted of cross-sectional data that was collected from employees hailing from four private Telecom companies of Pakistan providing services such as Global System for Mobile Communications, Code Division Multiple Access, Long Term Evolution. Demographics and descriptive statistics were performed and relationships between variables were tested to find the mediating role of envy (benign envy and malicious envy) between the relationship of upward social comparison and employee performance. The moderating role of the moderator which was POS was also examined between envy (benign and malicious) and employee performance.

Population and Sample

A total of 350 questionnaires, using convenience sampling, were distributed with a cover letter. This ensured the respondents that the data was only to be used for academic purposes. Out of the total 350 questionnaires, only 280 were returned (77 % response rate) while 70 remained non-responsive. However, a total of 10 questionnaires were also returned unfilled and were thus ignored. This left a total of 270 survey questionnaires completely filled and returned.

Among the employees who responded, the sample was comprised of 60% male and 40 % female. The majority of respondents were between the age of 31-40 years (51%), then 41-50 years (22%); fewer were between the age group of 20-30 years (20%), and 50 years and above (7%). Twenty-five percent of the respondents had a bachelor's degree (14 years education), 45% had earned a master's degree (16 years education), 24% of the respondents were MS/M.Phil qualified, and 6% were holding PhD degrees.

Data Analysis

Demographic, descriptive, correlation, reliability, and the regression analysis tests were performed to analyze the relationship between the variables of the research model. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the evaluation of data.

Table 1: Demographic Statistics

Description	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percentage
Gender			
Male	163	60.4	60.4
Female	107	39.6	39.6
Total	270	100.0	100.0
Age			
20-30	54	20.0	20.0
30-40	137	50.7	50.7
40-50	60	22.2	22.2
50-60	19	7.0	7.0
Total	270	100.0	100.0
Qualification			
Bachelors	68	25.2	25.2
Masters	121	44.8	44.8
MS/M.Phil	66	24.4	24.4
PhD	15	5.6	5.6
Total	270	100.0	100.0
Status			
Officer	102	37.8	37.8
Executive	79	29.3	29.3
Manager	60	22.2	22.2
Senior Manager & Above	29	10.7	10.7
Total	270	100.0	100.0
Experience			
1-5	66	24.4	24.4
6-10	124	45.9	45.9
11-15	50	18.5	18.5
16 & Above	30	11.1	11.1
Total	270	100.0	100.0

Sources of Instrumentation

All scale items were adopted and a self-reported survey was used with a Likert scale ranging from 1 *strongly disagree* to 5 *strongly agree*.

Upward Social Comparison

To assess upward social comparison, a six-item scale was adopted from (Van der Zee et al., 2000). Sample items included *I realize that it is possible to improve* and *It is threatening to notice that I am doing not so well*. Cronbach's alpha value for this construct was .847.

Workplace Envy

A ten-item scale was adopted from Lange and Crusius (2015), which was reduced to six items as four items were affecting the reliability of the scale at the pilot test level. Sample items of benign envy included *When I envy others, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future* and *If I notice that another person is better than me, I try to improve myself*. The Cronbach's alpha value for the benign envy construct was .809. Sample items of malicious envy included *I wish that superior people lose their advantage* and *I feel ill will towards people I envy*. The Cronbach's alpha value for the malicious envy construct was .814.

Perceived Organizational Support

An eight-item scale was adopted from Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002). Sample items included *The organization values my contribution to its well-being* and *The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work*. The Cronbach’s alpha value for his construct was .647.

Employee Performance

A thirteen-item scale was adopted from Koopmans et al. (2014). Sample items included *I always kept in mind the work result I needed to achieve* and *I take on challenging tasks when these are available*. Cronbach’s alpha value for this construct was .830.

Results

Table 2 showed the Pearson’s Product Moment Correlation results. The results revealed that upward social comparison was positively correlated with benign envy ($r = .59, p < .01$), malicious envy ($r = .32, p < .01$), perceived organizational support ($r = .54, p < .01$), and employee performance ($r = .59, p < .01$). The results further revealed that benign envy was positively correlated with perceived organizational support ($r = .51, p < .01$) and employee performance ($r = .56, p < .01$). Whereas, malicious envy was also positively but weakly associated with employee performance ($r = .25, p < .01$).

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1.Upward social comparison	3.65	0.77	1				
2.Benign envy	3.87	0.82	.59**	1			
3.Malicious envy	3.20	0.91	.32**	.27**	1		
4. Perceived organizational support	3.83	0.53	.54**	.51**	.43**	1	
5.Employee performance	3.79	0.59	.66**	.56**	.25**	.50**	1

Note. ** $p < .01$

A regression analysis, specifically PROCESS analysis mediation effect procedure was followed (Hayes, 2018), and results were shown in Table 3. The relationship between upward social comparison and employee performance was positive and significant $b = .397, t(267) = 9.445, p < .001$. It showed that upward social comparison was positively and significantly related to employee performance. So, hypothesis H1 was accepted.

Table 3: Mediation Analysis of Benign Envy

Variable	b	SE	t	p	LLCI	ULCI	R ²	F
Outcome variable = Benign envy (BE)								
Upward social comparison (USC)	.631	.051	12.17	.000	.529	.733	.356	148.2
Outcome Variable = Employee performance (EP)								
BE	.186	.039	4.686	.000	.108	.264		
USC	.397	.042	9.445	.000	.314	.480	.488	127.3
Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects								
Total effect of USC on EP	.515	.035	14.69	.000	.446	.584	.446	215.8
Direct effect of USC on EP	.397	.042	9.445	.000	.314	.480		
Indirect effect of USC on EP via mediator BE	.117	.027			.066	.172		

Note. LLCI = Lower Level of Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level of Confidence Interval

Also, Table 3 showed that the relationship between upward social comparison and benign envy was positive and significant $b = .631$, $t(268) = 12.17$, $p < .001$. It showed that upward social comparison was positively and significantly related to benign envy. So, hypothesis H2 was accepted. The relationship of benign envy with employee performance was positive and significant $b = .186$, $t(267) = 4.686$, $p < .001$. So, hypothesis H4 was accepted.

A Sobel Theory Test was conducted, and results were shown in Table 4. The relationship of upward social comparison with employee performance via mediator benign envy was positive and significant, $b = .118$ and the values of Sobel test (normal theory test) for mediator benign envy ($z = 4.36$, $p < .001$) showed that the indirect impact of upward social comparison on employee performance via mediator benign envy was positive and significant. Thus, hypothesis H6 was accepted.

Table 4: Sobel Theory Test

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect effect of USC on EP via BE	.118	.027	4.361	.000	.066	.172

Note. USC = Upward social comparison; EP = employee performance; BE = Benign envy; LLCI = Lower Level of Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level of Confidence Interval

PROCESS analysis mediation effect procedure was followed to test mediation of malicious envy and results were shown in Table 5. The relationship of upward social comparison with malicious envy was significant and positive $b = .383$, $t(267) = 5.607$, $p < .001$ so hypothesis H3 was accepted. The malicious envy relationship with employee performance was insignificant $b = .026$, $t(268) = .855$, $p > .05$. Thus, the results indicated that malicious envy was neither positively nor significantly related to employee performance resulting in rejection of hypothesis H5.

Table 5: Mediation Analysis of Malicious Envy

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
Outcome Variable = Malicious envy (ME)								
Upward social comparison (USC)	.383	.068	5.607	.000	.249	.518	.105	31.43
Outcome Variable = Employee performance (EP)								
ME	.026	.313	0.855	.393	-.034	.088		
USC	.504	.037	13.61	.000	.431	.577	.447	108.1
Total, Direct, and Indirect Effects								
Total effect of USC on EP	.515	.035	14.69	.000	.446	.584	.446	215.8
Direct effect of USC on EP	.504	.037	13.61	.000	.431	.577		
Indirect effect of USC on EP via mediator ME	.010	.012			-.012	.035		

A Sobel Theory Test was conducted, and results were shown in Table 6. The relationship of upward social comparison with employee performance via mediator malicious envy was insignificant, $b = .010$ and the values of Sobel test for mediator malicious envy, $z = .832$, $p > .05$ showed the indirect impact of upward social comparison on employee performance via mediator malicious envy which was neither negative nor significant. So, hypothesis H7 was rejected.

Table 6: Sobel Theory Test

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect effect of USC on EP via ME	.010	.012	.832	.405	-.012	.035

Note. USC = Upward social comparison; EP = Employee performance; ME = Malicious envy; LLCI = Lower Level of Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level of Confidence Interval

For the moderation analysis of perceived organizational support (benign envy), PROCESS analysis moderation effect procedure was followed (Hayes, 2018). Table 7 shows the insignificance of interaction term Benign Envy (BE) * POS; $b = .045, t(266) = .582, p > .05$, which demonstrated the moderating impact of perceived organizational support between the relationship of benign envy with employee performance, which was neither positive nor significant. Therefore, hypothesis H8 was rejected.

Table 7: Moderation Analysis of Perceived Organizational Support: Benign Envy

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
Outcome Variable = Employee Performance (EP)								
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	.339	.063	5.365	.000	.214	.463		
Benign Envy (BE)	.303	.039	7.666	.000	.225	.381		
int 1 (BE * POS)	.045	.077	0.582	.560	-.107	.198	.381	64.32

Note. LLCI = Lower Level of Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level of Confidence Interval

For the moderation analysis of perceived organizational support (malicious envy), PROCESS moderation effect procedure was followed (Hayes, 2018). Table 8 showed the relationship of malicious envy and employee performance when moderate perceived organizational support was positive and significant; $b = .201, t(266) = 2.725, p < .01$ showed that the addition of the interaction $R^2 = .021, F(3,266) = 7.4301, p < .01$, was a significant change to the model.

Table 8: Moderation Analysis of Perceived Organizational Support: Malicious Envy

Variable	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI	<i>R</i> ²	<i>F</i>
Outcome Variable = Employee Performance (EP)								
Perceived Organizational Support (POS)	.605	.065	9.273	.000	.477	.734		
Malicious Envy (ME)	.000	.039	-0.000	.997	-.078	.078		
int 1 (ME * POS)	.201	.073	2.725	.006	.055	.346	.280	40.47

Note. LLCI = Lower Level of Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level of Confidence Interval

For the conditional effect of malicious envy on employee performance values of perceived organizational support, PROCESS conditional formatting effect procedure was followed (Hayes, 2018). Table 9 showed that for low perceived organizational support malicious envy partially and negatively predicts employee performance $b = -.106, t(266) = -1.699, p < 0.1$, as malicious envy increases employee performance decreases. At average perceived organizational support, malicious envy does not predict employee performance, but at high9 perceived organizational support, malicious envy $b = .106, t(266) = 2.242, p < .05$ predicts employee performance positively, as when malicious envy increases employee performance also increases. Thus, moderating impact of POS was significant such that when POS increases, the negative relationship of malicious envy with employee performance decreases.

Table 9: Conditional Effect of Malicious Envy on Employee Performance Values of Perceived Organizational Support (Moderator)

<i>Mod</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
-0.530	-0.106	.062	-1.699	.090	-.230	.016
0.000	0.000	.039	-0.000	.999	-.078	.078
0.530	0.106	.047	2.242	.025	.013	.200

Note. LLCI = Lower Level of Confidence Interval; ULCI = Upper Level of Confidence Interval

To test the Hypotheses 9, Johnson-Neyman Technique was used. Table 10 showed that when mean value of POS was; $M = 3.15$, $b = -.149$, $t(266) = -2.054$, $p < .05$, the relationship between malicious envy and employee performance was negative and significant. As the mean value of POS increases; $M = 4.336$, $b = .091$, $t(266) = 1.969$, $p < .05$, the malicious envy relationship with employee performance becomes significantly positive. Similarly, it becomes more positive with the highest value of POS $M = 4.74$, $b = .175$, $t(266) = 2.579$, $p < .01$.

Thus, the results showed that when moderator POS increases, the negative relationship of malicious envy with employee performance decreases, which means perceived organizational support negatively and significantly moderates their relationship, so hypothesis H9 was accepted.

Table 10: Moderation Analysis (Johnson-Neyman Technique)

Variable	Value	% Below	% Above		
J-N Significance	-.677	13.33%	86.66%		
	.503	79.62%	20.37%		
Moderator value	<i>b</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	LLCI	ULCI
-1.208	-.257	-2.389	.017	-.469	-.045
-1.102	-.236	-2.346	.019	-.434	-.038
-0.995	-.214	-2.294	.022	-.398	-.030
-0.889	-.192	-2.231	.026	-.362	-.022
-0.783	-.171	-2.153	.032	-.327	-.014
-0.677	-.149	-2.054	.040	-.292	-.006
-0.602	-.134	-1.969	.050	-.268	.000
-0.570	-.127	-1.928	.054	-.258	.002
-0.464	-.106	-1.766	.078	-.224	.012
-0.358	-.084	-1.553	.121	-.191	.022
-0.252	-.062	-1.276	.203	-.159	.034
-0.145	-.041	-0.917	.360	-.129	.047
-0.039	-.019	-0.467	.640	-.100	.062
0.066	.002	0.058	.953	-.075	.079
0.172	.024	0.617	.537	-.052	.100
0.279	.045	1.146	.252	-.032	.124
0.385	.067	1.592	.112	-.015	.150
0.491	.088	1.936	.053	-.001	.179
0.503	.091	1.969	.050	.000	.182
0.597	.110	2.187	.029	.011	.210
0.704	.132	2.365	.018	.022	.242
0.810	.153	2.491	.013	.032	.275
0.916	.175	2.579	.010	.041	.309

Discussion

The result of this study highlights the conventional view of envy does not only mean a harmful and unpleasant sentiment or emotion, but it also provides a positive view of envy which can ultimately trigger positivity in the workplace, supporting findings of other scholars (Smith & Kim, 2007; van de Ven et al., 2009; Veiga et al., 2014). The finding corroborates those scholars who

described that the person with envy tries to self-improve by leveling up (Duffy et al., 2012; Lange & Crusius, 2015; Tai et al., 2012; van de Ven et al., 2009).

The result authenticates a significant impact of upward social comparison on envy. The results also acknowledge that the social comparisons are essential for the occurrence of envy, as people can use social comparisons to evaluate and juxtapose themselves with others (Vecchio, 2005; Vecchio, 2007). According to (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Smith, 2000; Takahashi et al., 2009), an upward social comparison can trigger envy automatically which consequently influences behavioral changes. A plethora of previous studies (Lange & Crusius, 2015; Tai et al., 2012; van de Ven et al., 2009) indicated that within the case of benign envy, the individual with envy tries to self-enhance his performance by improving and leveling up. Benign envy has been discovered as a pivotal factor (Cohen-Charash, 2009; van de Ven et al., 2009) for a positive increase in job performance (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004), and a revitalized motivation in work (Cohen-Charash, 2009). Prior studies (Tai et al., 2012; van de Ven et al., 2009) emphasize that benign envy has a tendency of helping the individual achieve his accomplishments and helps an individual to carry out productive efforts that ultimately improves the individual's status and position. Even though authors have stated (Hill & Buss, 2006; Tai et al., 2012) envy can often be associated with being a painful feeling, it can also function as a model for improving an individual's performance. Previous studies conducted on the relationship between envy and performance indicated that envy plays an important role in motivating individuals to perform better at workplaces. This is backed up and further supported by evidence showing that benign envy increases and boosts job performance (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). This evidence supports the study results.

The effects of upward social comparison on malicious envy were tested and results showcased that an upward social comparison does indeed have a positive and significant relationship with malicious envy. It is also supported by prior studies that malicious envy can be activated and enhanced by upward social comparison. According to van de Ven et al. (2009), malicious envy is also the result of upward comparison just like benign envy. Precursory research (Kish-Gephart et al., 2009; Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2007; Smith, 2000) state that when a person makes a comparison with someone whom they idolize as their role model, they tend to lead towards having a feeling of resentment, thus instigating a negative emotional outcome of envy. According to Cohen-Charash & Mueller (2007) and Vecchio (2007), malicious envy can eventually enhance extreme levels of aggression towards the envied parties and this can even lead to the envious person sabotaging the envied party. Other precedent studies (Cohen-Charash & Mueller, 2007; Dineen et al., 2017; Smith & Kim, 2007; van de Ven et al., 2009) revealed that instead of increasing focus on self-improvement, envious people trapped within malicious envy believe they do not have the ability to accomplish or reach the standards of their target. Thus, instead of self-improvement, they focus on plotting attempts that could tarnish the envied person's image, accolades, and life. The results of this study show that malicious envy does not mediate the relationship of upward social comparison with the performance of the employee.

The moderating effects of perceived organizational support were tested on benign envy in relation to employee performance. Results revealed that it does not moderate the relationship, but a positive relationship coexists between benign envy and perceived organizational support. This was also supported by previous research of a linear relationship existing between perceived organizational support and employee performance (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2008), but it is not necessary for

perceived organizational support to cause the performance of an employee to either increase or decrease (Kumaresh & Krishnan, 2014). Interestingly, when perceived organizational support was tested between malicious envy and employee performance, the results showed that POS moderates the relationship of malicious envy and employee performance both negatively and significantly. When POS was high, it weakened the negative relationship of malicious envy with employee performance, which was also supported by previous research showing perceived organizational support helps reduce and minimize the negative effects of work-family conflict (Witt & Carlson, 2006) and chronic pain (Byrne & Hochwarter, 2006) on employee performance, which further justified the results of the study.

Conclusion

The continuous process of social comparison drives a feeling of constant self-evaluation among employees. This can raise either negative or positive emotions in the employees or even a combination of both the emotions simultaneously, in response to the perceived success of others. Envy and jealousy are persistent and recurring reactions due to the inherent competitiveness of the organizational life and are also very common in work settings.

An essential commitment of our work is the presentation of a theoretical model that discloses how envy affects employee performance. Our model shows that, while envy may alter performance negatively, causing the envious harm, it can also be converted positively into promoting advancement in employment performance. While past studies exhibit that workplace envy may prompt damage to one's colleague, much less research has demonstrated and analyzed envy's positive outcomes. We advance the literature that perceives that envy may produce positive results (Cohen-Charash, 2009; Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004; van de Ven et al., 2012) and promote further studies in this field of research.

The research offers further contributions to the study and research of psychology in context to envy. Firstly, we are aware that there is some empirical evidence for the existence of two types of envy in western cultures (Lange & Crusius, 2015; van de Ven et al., 2009) and there is also debate about whether the two types are discrete. It can also be reasonably inferred that these two types are different behavioral phenotypes of the same underlying genotype which is envy (Tai et al., 2012).

Although feelings of envy experienced by employees are temporary in nature, these emotions have an adverse influential effect on an employee's performance if neglected by their supervisors. The managers need to understand the dynamics of envy in workplaces to manage the feelings of envy effectively which will prevent undesired outcomes. In the case of malicious envy, managers should emphasize setting up systems which benefit all employees fairly and create a supportive environment, such that an outcome of destructive envy is minimized and positive factors are developed in workplaces. As envy is an inherent feeling or emotion in today's competitive environment, the company's management should try to create ideal organizational cultures that supports employees promote feelings of upward social comparison. This can, in turn, evoke negative emotions (i.e., envy) among employees but lead towards positive outcomes in the workplace.

Theoretical Implications

This study expands our understanding about the role of upward social comparison to the context of envy–performance by showing the influence of benign envy and malicious envy to employee performance. Envy can be evoked when the employees perceive that others have what they desire. Consequently, these social comparisons may either motivate them to improve their social position or they may try to damage the envied target’s position. Despite no relationship found between malicious envy and employee performance, a significant moderating effect of perceived organizational support was found which would facilitate those with envy to improve constructively their performance in the workplace.

Practical Implications

From a practical perspective, this study’s findings suggested that instead of treating envy as a destructive and toxic emotion, envy has a positive side as well and can be a triggered for employees to enhance their performance to full potential. Organizations should recognize envy’s functional potential and focus on how to utilize envy wisely so that it plays a constructive role in enhancing performance. In addition, by providing support to those with envy organizations can directly help them in promoting their performance at workplace.

Limitation and Future studies

Although the research has achieved most of its objectives, there were some unavoidable limitations. The study was cross sectional and the sample size was not very large to ensure the generalizability of the results. Future studies must conduct comparative analysis between private and public sector regarding the implementation of practices that promote upward social comparison and their impact on employee performance. Additionally, this model can also be tested with new moderators such as self-motivation, emotional intelligence, optimism, neuroticism, supervisor support, and environmental condition. Impact of benign and malicious envy can also be tested on different organizational outcomes such as employee creativity, employee engagement, and job satisfaction.

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Appendix A

Survey Questionnaire

This research study explores the areas of phenomenon of upward social comparison and envy in the workplace in the telecom sector of Rawalpindi & Islamabad. All information provided by you will be handled with extreme caution and confidentiality. Kindly fill in all details as per instructions given. We appreciate your time and support.

Please give your answer by putting a tick (√) in the appropriate box.

Demographics				
Gender	MALE		FEMALE	
Age	20-30	31-40	41-50	50 & Above
Qualification	Bachelor	Masters	MS/M.Phil	PHD
Status	Officer	Executive	Manager	Senior Manager & Above
Experience in Organization	1-5	6-10	11-15	16 & Above

#	Construct/Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	<u>Upward Social Comparison</u>					
1	When I meet others who are experiencing less problems than me, it makes me happy realizing that it is possible for me to improve.					
2	When I meet others who are experiencing less problems than me, it pleases me realizing that I can make things get better.					
3	When I meet others who are experiencing less problems than me, it gives me good hope that I too can improve my situation.					
4	When I think about others who are doing better than I am, It is threatening to notice that I am doing not so well. ®					
5	When I think about others who are doing better than I am, I feel frustrated about my own situation. ®					
6	When I think about others who are doing better than I am, I feel depressed realizing that I am not so well off. ®					
	<u>Benign Envy</u>					
7	When I envy others, I focus on how I can become equally successful in the future.					
8	Envyng others motivates me to accomplish my goals.					
9	If someone has superior qualities, achievements, or possessions, I try to attain them for myself.					
	<u>Malicious Envy</u>					
10	I wish that superior people lose their advantage.					
11	If other people have something that I want for myself, I wish to take it away from them.					
12	Envious feelings cause me to dislike the other person.					
	<u>Perceived Organizational Support</u>					
13	The organization values my contribution to its well-being.					
14	The organization fails to appreciate any extra effort from me.					
15	The organization would ignore any complaint from me.					
16	The organization really cares about my well-being.					
17	Even if I did the best job possible, the organization would fail to notice.					
18	The organization cares about my general satisfaction at work.					
19	The organization shows very little concern for me.					
20	The organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work.					

#	Construct/Statement	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Neutral (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)
	<u>Employee Performance</u>					
21	I am able to plan my work so that I finished it on time.					
22	I always kept in mind the work result I needed to achieve.					
23	I am able to distinguish main issues from side issues.					
24	I am able to carry out my work well with minimal time and effort.					
25	I plan my work optimally.					
26	On my own initiative, I start new tasks when my old tasks are completed.					
27	I take on challenging tasks when these are available.					
28	I take on extra responsibilities.					
29	I continually sought new challenges in my work.					
30	I actively participate in meetings and/or consultations.					
31	I work on keeping my job-related knowledge up-to-date.					
32	I work on keeping my work skills up-to-date.					
33	I come up with creative solutions for new problems.					