A Systematic Review of Moral Disengagement

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Abstract:

This article delves into the intricacies of the moral disengagement mechanism and explores the profound effects it can have on individuals and society as a whole. To begin with, a detailed definition of the moral disengagement mechanism were provided in this article, aiming to offer readers a clearer and more comprehensive understanding of what precisely constitutes this phenomenon. Furthermore, the article investigates the far-reaching implications of moral disengagement, highlighting how it can lead to a range of negative outcomes, including the perpetuation of harmful practices, the erosion of social norms, and the potential for widespread ethical misconduct. By thoroughly examining the definition and impact of the moral disengagement mechanism, this paper aims to shed light on a critical issue that affects not only individual behavior but also the moral fabric of society at large. Besides, three experiments were analysed and the final conclusions were drawn. At the same time, this paper really puts forward the limitations and shortcomings of the research methods in the three experimental contents, and puts forward suggestions for future related research. This study helps researchers to better study the influencing factors of moral disengagement mechanism, and provides effective guidance for subsequent research related to moral disengagement mechanism.

Keywords: Moral disengagement, social cognitive theory, cyberaggression,voice behavior.

1. Introduction

In the last decade, the study of morality has been growing rapidly. Morality is the core of the socialization process. Teaching children to distinguish between right and wrong, good and evil, is part of this process. Recently, social theorists and psychologists [1] have expanded the relevant research. These studies have focused on children and adolescents's adherence to moral knowledge and moral standards. Social cognitive theory is one of important theories that address the factors that influence the relationship between the setting of moral behavior and moral standards. Moral standards provide guidance for pre-

scribing ethical behavior, and self-evaluation reactions, similar to moral sentiments, provide motivation to act according to standards [2-4].

Moral disengagement is part of the study of ethics and belongs to cognitive theory. Moral disengagement is part of the conceptualized system of agency self-regulation in Bandura's theory of social cognition [5]. Moral disengagement is when a person's inner moral standards are derailed from one's behavior, leading to engaging in unethical things without feeling pain [6]. Many people behave in a way that is contrary to their standards. This contradiction often puts many researchers and practitioners in the field of psychology in a difficult position. Moral disengagement provides a reasonable explanation for the mismatch between moral standards and irrational behavior. Moral disengagement mechanisms can selectively disengage from internal controls in order to allow behavior that does not conform to an individual's own moral standards. Moral disengagement mechanisms can sever the link between immorality by reconstructing immoral behavior into acceptable behavior through justification [2].

2. Method

Google scholar was used to conducted extensive literature search. By entering the following related words (and their derivatives) were entered: moral disengagement, moral disengagement machanisms, cybergossip and cyberaggression. We found a lot of real case studies and identified some studies that could be added to it. This results in a more inclusive and comprehensive literature review. Studies were included if they met the following criteria: (1) containing empirical research data analysis, (2) participants meeting the objectives of the study, (3) reference models, and (4) analysis of moral disengagement and explanations of this behavior.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Cybergossip to Moral Disengagement for Cyberaggression

The investigators selected participants through non-probability sampling to ensure accessibility. A total of thirteen educational schools (eight rural and five urban) from the South of Spain were selected. The period this study included three-wave across 12 months. The online gossip was collected through the Cybergossip Questionnaire-Adolescent (CGQA) [7]. Cyberaggression was measured through the European Cyberbullying Intervention Project Questionnaire, ECIPQ [8]. Moral disengagement mechanisms were measured using the Moral Disengagement Scale. The entire survey process was conducted in the form of a paper questionnaire. The researchers informed students of the private nature of the test. and the answers to the questionnaire were anonymous and confidential. Each survey is 30 minutes long, with the second and third tests taking place six months and a year later, respectively. Following the cycle, the duration of each wave of data collection is three weeks.

Researchers confirmed that the longitudinal analysis found that cyber gossip was directly related to subsequent cyberaggression, and the moral disengagement mechanism played a transitional role in cyber gossip to cyberaggression [9]. The hypothesis that the mechanism of moral detachment may be the cause of the shift from cyber gossip to cyberattacks has only been partially confirmed in this experiment, so it cannot be completely certain.

The language of the online world is easy to amplify and interpret, and it is common for young people to use the internet. There seems to be a fine line between cybergossip and harmful bullying that young people can easily cross through moral disengagement. Rumors on the internet can lead to a lack of moral sensitivity among young people, leading them to attack their peers for cyberattacks without guilt [10].

This study has limitations. This study covers a one-year period, so follow-up studies can be designed with longer time intervals, which may bring the results closer to reality and be highly persuasive and predictive. Besides, this experiment was conducted on a self- report basis. It may be influenced by factors such as reaction bias or social convenience. Therefore, follow-up studies can be conducted using multiple sources of information or qualitative research. And cross-cultural studies should be considered, as cultural varables can also contribute to biased results.

3.2 Influence of Moral Disengagement on Voice Behavior

Ethical leader refers to the act of leading personal behavior and properly regulating interpersonal relationships, and finally passing this behavior on to their followers through two-way communication [11]. As influential leaders, they generally possess characteristics such as honesty, integrity, and use influential ethical decision-making.

Ethical leadership can influence employees' voice behavior through a variety of mechanisms. One of the aims of this study is to expand the research on the relationship between ethical leadership and employee voice behavior by introducing emotional commitment. Emotional commitment is an emotional factor that can lead to persistence in action even in the face of conflicting motivations or attitudes [12, 13].

Moral disengagement is a key personality trait of employees related to moral and unethical behavior. Moral detachment is when a person provides a justification for immoral and unfair behavior without feeling upset. This study hypothesizes that moral disengagement moderates the relationship between ethical leadership and employee emotional commitment and voice behavior.

In this study, a series of measures were taken using random sampling. The researchers had a sample of 600 employees. The entire data collection was conducted in the form of questionnaires, which were anonymous and confidential, emphasizing that participants were voluntary. To avoid demographic influences, the researchers controlled for factors such as age, gender, education level, position, length of tenure, and department size. All variables are distinguished by coding.

The research shows that, firstly, this study expands the impact of ethical leadership on employee voice behavior. Second, employees' moral detachment plays an extremely important role in enhancing or weakening the perception of ethical leadership expectations. Employees with low moral detachment are more likely to develop psychological comfort or empathy when they perceive the ethical behavior of their leaders. Therefore, when the degree of moral disengagement of employees is low, the emotional commitment of leaders' ethical behavior has a more significant impact. Conversely, when employees have a high level of moral disengagement, it is extremely difficult for leaders to promote their emotional commitment to the organization. Third, researchers have enriched the theory of active behavior. The researchers found that the shift from emotional commitment to out-of-role behavior (voice behavior) depends on individual characteristics, especially moral disengagement. Therefore, an individual's moral detachment behavior may explain the conditions under which emotional commitment affects voice behavior. A plenty of evidence suggests that the degree of emotional detachment of individuals leads to the degree to which emotional commitment mediates the relationship between ethical leadership and voice.

This study also has some limitations. First, the sample selection of this study limited the generalizability of the findings. Researchers should use different countries with differen cultures or backgrounds for sample selection. Second, this study collected data from only one set of participants and used participants' perception data. Future research could take a multi-layered approach to analyze the impact of ethical leadership on employee voice behavior. Third, it is difficult to measure the effect of different control times on the results of the study because the researchers use the same time control variables to seek consistency. Subsequent experiments can better control the impact on the results of the study by using control variables at different times. Finally, the study looked at only mediation model. Other mechanisms can also help explain the relationship between ethical leadership and employees. Future research could expand to explore other mechanisms.

3.3 Moral Disengagement Mechanisms in Primary School

An important relevant factor in aggressive behavior in children and adolescents is moral detachment [14]. One of the acts of aggression among students is school violence. Psychological forms of violent bullying are most common in most countries. This study mainly analyzes the moral disengagement mechanism used by participants in school violence in a primary school.

The study was conducted with students at a primary school in Italy. A total of 113 participants, aged 8-11, were recruited for grades 3, 4 and 5. With the authorization and consent of teachers and parents and the knowledge of students, the researchers used an anonymous and confidential method to test the students for 50 minutes [15].

Studies have shown that in school violence, both boys and girls alternate with moral disengagement mechanisms. There is no age or gender difference between the perpetrator and the victim. The researchers predicted that the attacker would use a moral disengagement mechanism, often lacking empathy, no real guilt, and therefore appearing in a state of coldness. At the same time, attackers often try to defend themselves as a way to increase their sense of self-identity and thus make them more self-centered [16, 17]. The findings show that the fact is that victims feel less morally detached than attackers. Because they have a stronger sense of personal moral responsibility in situations of school violence. Also, the researchers found that moral values mediate judgments about school violence. Moral disengagement makes some actions appear to be moral. This leads to a lack of correlation between reasoning and ethical behavior

This study is less informative. The number of participants was small and their age group was single. In addition, researchers need to consider other influencing factors, such as factors such as participants' emotions, cognition, consciousness, and behavior. For instance, the emotional state of the participants at the time of the study can significantly influence their responses and behaviors. Similarly, their cognitive abilities and processes play a crucial role in how they perceive questions, process information, and make decisions. By considering these various factors, researchers can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between different elements and how they contribute to the overall results of their investiga-

tions.Researchers need to consider a combination of these variables in their research. Researchers also need to take into account that participants in different countries have different cultures. More cross-cultural studies should be conducted. Finally, researchers need to take into account the influence of people close to them, such as their parents or teachers. Researchers should take into account factors such as the participant's family situation, whether they had childhood trauma, whether the teacher bullied the student, or other behaviors. This is because participants' responses to bullying and victimization situations may be influenced by the actions of parents or teachers. Therefore, the participants' reactions may lead to the researchers' misjudgment of the moral disengagement strategy.

4. Future Directions

Based on these three empirical studies, the follow-up research on the mechanism of moral disengagement can focus on the control of participant variables. First of all, when it comes to data collection, researchers need to consider more variables such as gender, age, personality, conscious behavior, etc. Researchers should maximize the amount of data possible. Researchers can increase the authenticity and credibility of experiments by increasing the number of participants. Second, combining the above three studies, researchers need to pay attention to the cultural differences of the participants. Cultural differences in participants from different countries may lead to bias in the results of the study. Researchers may come to different conclusions because of cultural differences among participants. Therefore, researchers should select participants from different countries to conduct their studies. In addition, in the second experiment, the researchers focused on only one mediating model that influenced the relationship between ethical leaders and employees. In similar studies in the future, researchers could expand the use of more mediation models. Finally, the investigation cycle of the experiment needs to be properly arranged. The time can't be too long and not too short. The investigation period should be reasonably arranged according to the content and objectives of the experiment. For example, the first study on the mechanism of moral disengagement from online gossip to cyberaggression should be conducted over a period of more than one year. Longer studies can help researchers get closer to real results.

5. Conclusion

Based on the findings presented in the three aforementioned experimental papers, the implications of the moral disengagement mechanism encompass several key areas.

Firstly, the papers highlight the significant impact of moral disengagement on the progression from mere online gossip to the full-blown spread of online rumors. This suggests that when individuals disengage from their moral standards, they are more likely to contribute to the dissemination of potentially harmful and false information. Secondly, the research delves into the interplay between employees' moral disengagement and the emotional commitment displayed by ethical leaders within an organizational context. This indicates that the moral compass of employees can be influenced by the ethical stance and emotional investment of their leaders, underscoring the importance of ethical leadership in fostering a morally conscious workplace. Thirdly, the degree of moral detachment between the perpetrator and the victim in cases of school violence is examined, shedding light on the psychological distance that can exist in such distressing scenarios. This detachment can exacerbate the severity and frequency of violent incidents, as the moral barriers that typically inhibit such behavior are weakened or removed. Furthermore, these papers offer valuable advice and guidance for future research methodologies concerning ethical detachment, emphasizing the need to employ strategies that minimize the risk of researcher bias in their conclusions. It is crucial that researchers remain vigilant and objective to ensure the integrity of their findings. The papers also underscore the potential dangers of individuals' moral disengagement, as it can lead to a variety of avoidable and detrimental outcomes. Consequently, it is imperative that professionals from various sectors, including educators, policymakers, and business leaders, remain vigilant and attentive to the phenomenon of moral disengagement. Psychologists, in particular, are tasked with the ongoing exploration of the underlying factors that contribute to moral disengagement, as well as the continuous pursuit of effective interventions and solutions to mitigate its adverse effects on society.

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