Cost-effective Marketing Strategies for Businesses, Employees and Customers
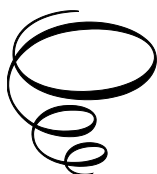
Cost-effective Marketing Strategies for Businesses, Employees and Customers

By

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Dedication

To my dearest son, Louis Prentice, your understanding, empathy, support and patience made the completion of this book possible.

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INTRODUCTION

IS MARKETING DECLINING?

"In many organizations, the corporate marketing function has lost budget, head count, influence, and confidence, resulting in strategic consequences that run deeper than many senior managers may realize. The question is not how to rebuild the marketing center, but how to disperse marketing competence across the organization." (Webster, Malter and Ganesan, 2005).

In the last few decades, marketing as an academic discipline, an organizational unit and a business phenomenon has been changing and evolving rapidly, resulting from expansive globalization, rapid advancement of technologies and changes of consumers' needs, wants, and demands. Marketing can be positioned as an indispensable business unit to promote the brand and products, and facilitate business transactions, as well as perceived as an expensive business practice with no return guaranteed. For instance, celebrity endorsement is an expensive marketing exercise to promote and position the brand, but this practice, may fail due to a range of factors associated with the celebrity such as his or her scandals and declining fame. Such unjustified expenses may lead to a declining role of marketing within the organisation.

Nearly two decades ago, Webster and colleagues conducted in-depth interviews with leading marketing executives and chief executive officers and highlighted four major sets of issues from these interviews. The issues are manifested in, inter alia, unclear function for marketing as a business unit, uncertain definition of marketing, inability to measure marketing productivity, over focus on sales and customer relationship management, limiting the role of marketing. One of the major challenges for marketing management is measuring marketing productivity as the costs and profits from marketing activities are unable to be measured, matched or justified. In view of this phenomenon, this book proposes costless marketing strategies with no expenses incurred on the organisation. The rationale for this proposal is discussed in the remainder of this chapter.

What is Marketing?

What is marketing? The answer to this question is overwhelmingly diverse. Laymen may refer to marketing as sales, promotion, advertising, discount, nonsense, exploitation, money digging tool and so on. Marketing executives or practitioners often define it partially based on their expertise or designated tasks such as advertising, direct marketing and public relations. Employees at different positions within the same firm may have completely different views on what marketing is. Chief executive officers (CEOs) may define it as, for example, "brand management plus sales" (cited from Webster et al., 2005, p. 36). Most chief marketing officer (CMOs) would take a tactical approach to marketing with a focus on short-term financial benefits. Very few of these senior executives or so-called marketing experts can provide a wholistic or accurate definition of marketing.

The diversity of marketing definitions makes no exception in the academic community. The definition of marketing has varied across industrial revolutions, contexts, the schools of thoughts from different academic groups (e.g., American Marketing Association - AMA, Nordic School of Marketing), disciplines, marketing gurus (e.g., Phillip Kotler, Christian Gronroos) or marketing professors' idiosyncratic beliefs. Among those, AMA is universally acknowledged as the authority of marketing in academia. Nevertheless, the definitions from AMA have been changed across time with different foci since its induction in 1935. The widely known four Ps (product, price, promotion, and place) were introduced in 1985, with a managerial focus on specific tasks, and marketing was defined as "*the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals*." A few adaptions between tactical and strategic approaches to defining marketing were made following the four Ps. The definitions from 2004 onwards are more focused on customer value, for instance, in 2004, marketing is defined as *"an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders"*.

Knowingly, the existing conceptualisations and definitions of marketing are inconclusive and evolving adaptively with industrial revolutions and technology advancements. This book is not intended to summarise the definitions or provide reviews on their nuances and differences, but to acknowledge the diversity and evolution of the concept, benefiting its

development and progress as an academic field, discipline and independent operational department within a corporation. Nonetheless, the changes of marketing definitions are manifested in the evolution of marketing.

Marketing Evolution

Along with the industry revolutions, marketing has evolved through four or five major stages or eras with a focus on production, sales, customers, society (and the fifth holistic era) respectively. Each stage has different focus, philosophies, mechanisms, tools, and techniques. The production orientation era lasted from 1860s to 1920s, and focused on mass production, followed by the sales orientation era when hard selling was the central marketing function from 1940s to 1960s. As a result of mass production, excessive products entailed tactical selling techniques for business viability. This selling focus may be the cause of a misleading perception of marketing and a confusion/mix-up between marketing and sales. When asking what marketing is in the first class of Introduction to Marketing, most marketing major freshmen, even sophomores or graduates would relate it to sales, particularly sales promotion and advertising. In this era, the focus of marketing is primarily on maximising return on investment and added economic value. The role of marketing is compromised.

The modern era began in 1960s with a marketing orientation and a pull strategy that is focused on customers' needs and wants, rather than a push approach to imposing the firm's products on customers. This marketing-orientation era is prompted by the free-market concept and intensifying competition among businesses, organisations, and industries. In this customer-centred era, relationship marketing, service marketing and consumer behaviour etc. are introduced as independent subjects into the marketing discipline. Relationship marketing is focused on customer relationship management. From an operational perspective, marketing facilitates a flow of acquiring the right customers, establishing, and nurturing relationships with these customers with the intention to attract their repetitive patronage or loyalty behaviours. Data analysis and methodological rigour are key marketing activities for understanding customers and their consumption or purchase behaviours.

These relationship building and maintaining processes concur with the central focus of services marketing when the quality of tangible goods per se no longer has competitive advantage. Service is introduced as an independent product or complementary component of a core product. The quality of service becomes a key prerequisite of customer relationship with the firm or brand. These customer centric tactics and strategies entail

knowledge of consumers and insights into their perceptions, attitudes, intentions, and behaviours. Consequently, consumer behaviour stands out as an independent subject or academic area within the marketing discipline to complement relationship and services marketing. Meanwhile, the internal marketing concept emerged in the 1970s (Amonoo, 1975; Riley, 1972). This concept proposes that employees should be treated as internal customers equally as external customers.

Despite the different foci of these marketing subjects or areas, they share a high degree of commonality in their endeavours to acquire an optimal market share, and achieve customer loyalty and retention. Numerous research has been undertaken to provide evidence that customer satisfaction precedes customer loyalty and retention, that customer loyalty behaviours lead to competitive advantage and business growth, and that customer retention rate is related to business profitability. As a result, businesses tend to maximise their organisational resources to satisfy customers and attract their patronage and loyalty. The typical marketing approach to customer acquisition is aggressive marketing campaigns and sales promotions, whereas the approach to customer satisfaction and loyalty is delivering premium service and offering various loyalty programs in addition to proving quality tangible goods.

Customer acquisition tactics and strategies are evidently expensive and non-competitive, barely offering differentiation from those of competitors. Although it is widely cited as a key factor of customer satisfaction and retention, service quality is determined by customers' perception and experience. Every customer has different expectations and demands in different situations and times. The same service from the same or different provider can be perceived and evaluated differently. The complexity involving the interpersonal encounters between employees and customers and impersonal encounter without employees' presence affects service quality assessments and customer experience. In particular, in the case of customer participation in service production and delivery processes, their roles as co-producers and value co-creators complicate service quality perceptions and evaluations, hence the effect on their subsequent attitudes and behaviours.

Although loyalty programs are intended to attract customer retention, most of these programs are ineffective and have no optimal results. Active members tend to take advantage of the complimentary offerings and enjoy premium service without demonstrating genuine loyalty. Most of these members are involved in the loyalty programs of competitors. Their loyalty is volatile and spurious, dependent on the quantity and quality of complimentary offerings from different providers. Inactive members incur

excessive expenses to activate or maintain their memberships. The literature has discussed the retention strategies, loyalty programs and effectiveness extensively. Despite the overwhelming evidence of ineffective customer loyalty and retention strategies, researchers and practitioners unanimously propose that organisations should endeavour to provide premium service and attractive loyalty programs to satisfy customers' needs and wants and maximise their value perceptions given that these are the central foci of the marketing orientation philosophy. Even in this societal orientation era, when consumer wellbeing is the central practice of marketing, the recommended strategies are centred on organisation offerings and expensive intervention programs.

The marketing exercise in the customer/consumer-centric era requires organisational resources including employee training, promotion materials, complementary services, and tangible goods. These resources can be expensive and exhaustible. For instance, excessive demands from employees' emotional labour performance result in, inter alia, emotional exhaustion, poor performance, absenteeism, burnout, and high turnover. Complimentary offering to customers is an expensive exercise with no guaranteed outcomes such as customer engagement and loyalty behaviours. The promotion for social wellbeing and advocacy for individual behaviour change such as health-oriented diets and gambling exclusion are mostly politicised for a hidden partisanship and implicit political agenda. These observations and views lead to the aim of this book.

The Aims of this Book

Whilst acknowledging marketing as a process of facilitating exchanges of values, goods, and services among stakeholders is forever essential to business viability and profitability, this book aims to introduce cost effective marketing strategies that require minimal organisational resources to achieve business profitability. These strategies are approached from 1) the customer perspective, including personality traits and psychological factors; 2) the product perspective such as the natural attributes associated with the product, including product traits and origins; and 3) from technological perspective, for instance, the use of artificial intelligence. Customers in this book refer to both internal (employees) and external customers, since employees from an internal marketing perspective have long been regarded as customers employed by the organisation (Ahmed and Rafiq, 2003; Foreman and Money, 1995; Rafiq and Ahmed, 2000; Varey, 1995). For this book, the terms employees and internal customers are used interchangeably.

The organisational benefits in this book are multidimensional, including financial and non-financial (e.g., employee wellbeing and mental health) outcomes. In the case of employees or internal customers, the financial outcomes refer to organisational resilience and employee performance which are key determinants of organisational performance. Employees' wellbeing in this book includes mental health and burnout. These outcomes are the centre of discussion in this book as employees' mental health and wellbeing are related to organisational wellbeing and performance. In the case of customers, the financial outcomes refer to customer loyalty and retention. The wellbeing refers to customers' mental health and subjective wellbeing. While they are not directly associated with business profitability, these wellbeing outcomes have implications for organisational resilience and sustainability.

The Structure of this Book

Consistent with the foregoing discussion, this book begins with addressing employee wellbeing and performance, followed by customer wellbeing and loyalty with non-organisational factors. For employees, this book discusses how employees' personal traits and volitional activities such as knowledge sharing, and performance can shape their wellbeing including mental health, cynicism and burnout; and how employee wellbeing and performance can affect organisational wellbeing. Consequently, Chapters 2 to 3 focus on the influence of employee personal traits on wellbeing and performance; Chapters 4 and 5 discuss how employee performance and knowledge sharing can address employee mental health and burnout. Chapter 6 approaches from organisational health perspective to discuss how employee wellbeing affects organisational wellbeing/resilience.

Moving from employees/internal customers, the remainder of this book is focused on external customers. Chapters 7 – 9 discuss how customers' mindfulness, self-determination, and volitional engagement are related to customer relationships with business organisations. Chapter 10 addresses how social motive may drive consumer engagement and wellbeing. Moving from customer psychological antecedents, Chapter 11 discusses how product traits influence consumer purchase. The book concludes with the recent pandemic panic buying phenomenon and examines how external forces (neither marketing nor consumer minds) drive consumer buying behaviour. Each chapter is accompanied with one or more empirical studies in different contexts including airlines, artificial intelligence, online brand community, luxury brands, organic food and the COVID-19 virus.

The rationale for this structure is consistent with Heskett et al.' (1994) service profit chain model. The chain model indicates that employee attitudes and behaviours influence those of customers, which lead to organisational benefits. The structure of this book therefore begins with addressing employees' wellbeing and performance, followed by discussing customers wellbeing and loyalty from a non-organisational resource perspective. The antecedents, mediators and outcomes included in each chapter for employees and customers are shown in Figures 1 and 2.
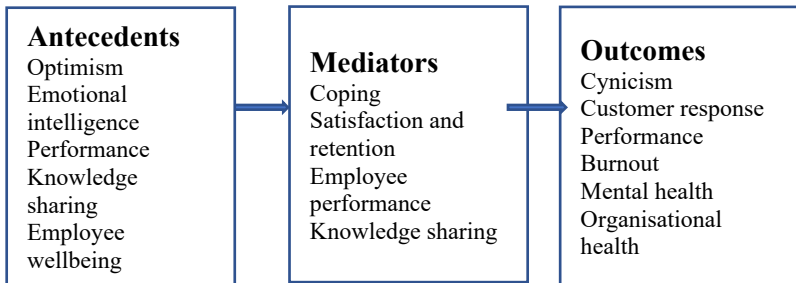
Antecedents
Optimism
Emotional intelligence
Performance
Knowledge sharing
Employee wellbeing

Mediators
Coping
Satisfaction and retention
Employee performance
Knowledge sharing

Outcomes
Cynicism
Customer response
Performance
Burnout
Mental health
Organisational health

Figure 1: The factors discussed in employee-related models (Chapters 2 – 7).

Antecedents
Mindfulness
Self-determination
Volitional engagement
Social motives
Product traits
External forces

Mediators
Relationship quality
Product attachment
Consumer engagement
Quality perception

Outcomes
Customer loyalty
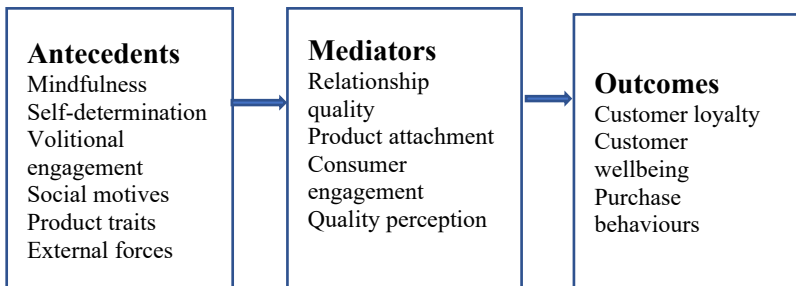Customer wellbeing
Purchase behaviours

Figure 2: The factors discussed in customer-related models (Chapters 8 – 12).

The sequence of the chapters is as follows:

- Optimising coping strategies for minimising employee cynicism
- Shaping employees and customers with employee personality traits
- Managing emotional labour with emotional intelligence
- Maximising performance for less burnout
- Sharing knowledge for employee wellbeing
- A hierarchical relationship of organisational health

- Customers' mindful relationships with the firm
- Customers' self-determined relationships with the firm
- Customers' volitional engagement for organisational performance
- Engaging with the brand for wellbeing
- Product traits-driven purchase
- Non-marketing-driven purchase

Conclusion

This chapter provides the rationale for this book by discussing marketing conceptualisations, highlighting the development and trends of marketing as an organisational practice and an academic discipline. This discussion leads to the aim of this book by proposing non-organisational factors as cost-effective marketing strategies to achieve organisational benefits. The strategies are targeted at both internal (employees) and external customers. The factors are approached from personal traits, volitional activities, and technologies. These benefits are operationalised into financial and non-financial outcomes. The structure of this book is provided in line with the logic of the service profit chain model proposed by Heskett and colleagues in 1990s.

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CHAPTER ONE

OPTIMISING COPING STRATEGIES
FOR MINIMISING EMPLOYEE CYNICISM

Abstract

Employee cynicism in the work context has a range of negative implications for the organisation. In practice, organisational resources and support have been sought to address employee cynicism. This chapter approaches from an employee perspective and proposes how personality traits can shape employees' coping strategies to minimise cynicism. Drawing on conservation of resources and expectancy theories, this chapter discusses how an individual trait (optimism) affects employee coping strategies which shape employee cynicism. An empirical study through online survey was conducted with employees working at Australia. The results show that optimistic employees are better at coping with the adverse circumstances and are less cynical. However, the study also shows that those who cope better tend to be more cynical. The partial moderation effect of training implies that organisational support is important, but employees' job attitude is better self-managed with their own optimism. Discussion and implications of the research findings are provided for the relevant researchers and practitioners.

Keywords: employees; optimism, coping; cynicism; internal marketing

Understanding Cynicism

In the organisational context, cynicism is a negative emotion and reaction by employees that comprises of displeasure and despair about an organisation (Ozler et al., 2011). Dean el al. (1998) defined organisational cynicism as a state in which workers look down on the management of their organisation, accuse administrators and managers of being selfish, demean their colleagues and have enormously undesirable attitudes toward their organisation. Moreover, cynicism has been referred to as a dimension of

burnout, which is considered as a psychological strain resulting from chronic stress at work (Maslach and Jackson, 1981). Higher employee cynicism has been found to raise burnout (Johnson and O'Leary-Kelly, 2003).

Cynicism relates to a range of work consequences such as job engagement, satisfaction and performance (Arslan, 2018). Employee cynicism signifies distrust and frustration with the management of the organisation, and has a negative impact on job performance. Researchers (e.g., Kökalan, 2019) have maintained that cynicism decreases organisational efficiency and productivity and could have detrimental effects on organisational profitability. Identifying factors that may address employee cynicism may minimise the negative consequences and further damage resulting from this sustained pandemic.

Proposing a Link Between Optimism and Cynicism

Whilst organisational support is important to minimise these damages from employees' cynical work attitudes, self-managing such negativity can be conducive to both employees and organisations. Optimism, as an inherent aspect of human nature and beneficial psychological characteristic, may be an optimal tool for employees to self-manage their negative work attitudes and performance. Optimism is a personality element which mirrors the degree to which individuals hold widespread positive outlooks and hopes regarding their futures (Carver, Scheier, and Segerstrom, 2010). Optimism is related to enhanced psychological acclimatization to stressors that range in extremity from an event as simple as starting college to working at a site of a major accident (Dougall et al., 2001).

Optimism is a personality feature which signals the degree to which individuals possess widespread positive expectancies about their future (Carver, Scheier, and Segerstrom, 2010). Carver and Scheier (2014) argued that optimism is associated with hope, well-being and motivation. Consequently, optimists are less prone to burnout. Indeed, Malagón-Aguilera (2020) investigated the relationship between optimism and burnout among nurses and found that greater optimism leads to lower levels of burnout. Rothmann and Essenko (2007) examined the relationship between optimism and burnout among 334 support staff members of a higher education institution in South Africa and found that optimism has a direct impact on exhaustion and cynicism. Chang et al. (2000) also showed that optimism was considerably associated with job burnout. Hence, the following hypothesis is offered:

H1: Optimism is negatively related to cynicism.

Understanding Coping

Coping is defined as "cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984, p. 141). Coping strategies are "efforts to regulate emotions, behaviours, cognitions, psychophysiology, and environmental aspects in response to the stress of everyday events" (Morales-Rodriguez and Perez-Marmol, 2019, p. 2). According to Carver et al. (1989), the extent to which a particular coping strategy is successful is contingent upon whether a person identifies the circumstance as being threatening or not. Several researchers state that the most highly researched coping strategies include task-oriented coping, emotion-oriented coping, and avoidance-oriented coping (e.g., Smith et al., 2015). Task-oriented coping refers to strategies in which those involved in a stressful situation try to acquire solutions to the problem causing them anguish (i.e., active coping, and planning). Emotion-oriented coping involves seeking social support for emotional and instrumental reasons and positive reinterpretation and growth. Avoidance-oriented coping strategy on the other hand, denotes disengaged coping (e.g., behavioural and mental disengagement) with the goal to disregard, evade, or renounce from the stressor and its effects.

Some studies have advocated that coping skills are an imperative defensive element in negative consequences (e.g., Martínez et al., 2020). Coping has been referred to as an explanation why optimism is associated with better adjustments to stressors. Different stressors may elicit individuals' different types of coping. For instance, the COVID-19 virus poses a major health risk for individuals and their families and could even result in death. Some individuals may perceive the virus and the preventive measures around it as signs of uncertainty and as disruptions to their daily habits, which may result in emotion-oriented coping. Others, however, may perceive such measures as a chance to devote more time to themselves and to their family, therefore, they choose task-oriented coping. Consistent with the recommendation by Smith et al. (2015) and Cohan, Jang and Stein (2006), this chapter opts for the three-dimension of coping for discussion.

Proposing a link between optimism, coping and cynicism

Appropriate coping strategy may influence work attitudes (e.g., cynicism) and behaviours (Scheier and Carver, 1992), whilst optimism has been widely discussed as an inherent factor of coping strategies (Solberg Nes and Segerstrom, 2006; Vizoso, Arias-Gundin and Rodriguez, 2019).

Optimistic employees may proactively seek coping strategies to manage the undesirable status quo which may lead to positive job attitudes (e.g. less cynical and more constructive). In other words, the option of a coping strategy may be fundamentally reliant on personal traits (aka, optimism) (Jovančević and Milićević, 2020). This view posits that the level of employees' cynicism may be a result of the level of their optimism and choice of coping strategies.

Carver and Scheier (2002) reasons that expectancy-value theory underlie optimism. Based on this theory, individuals attempt to match their behaviours with what they view as pleasing and advantageous, and they stay away from what they consider as unattractive. Another conceptual component in this theory is expectancy. When individuals are certain and convinced about a specific outcome, they will be determined to reach their goals regardless of any hardship or difficulty they face. Therefore, optimists are more likely to make use of task-oriented coping strategies to solve the task at hand. Whereas, if people lack self-assurance, then they will not take any action and will be more likely to push difficulties away and use avoidance coping strategies such as wishful thinking.

Solberg Nes and Segerstrom (2006) conducted a metanalytic review to investigate the relationship between optimism and coping strategies and found that optimists modify their coping strategies to meet the imminent stresses. They also observed that optimism was positively related with approach coping or task-oriented strategies seeking to eradicate, lower, or cope with stressors or emotions, and negatively linked with avoidance coping strategies aiming at ignoring, avoiding, or retracting from stressors. Strutton and Lumpkin (1993) also investigated the relationship between optimism and coping strategies. Using a sample of salespeople, and confirmed that optimists were more likely to use task oriented coping strategies, while pessimists tended to employ more emotion-focused coping strategies.

Many researchers have correlated problem solving and task oriented coping strategies with decreased burnout (e.g., Shin et al., 2014; Martínez et al., 2020). Several researchers have also established that avoidance-focused coping like wishful thinking is linked to negative after-effects like anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction (e.g., Garcia-Aroyo and Osca, 2019). Comparably, some researchers have concluded that the utilization of avoidance coping strategies is associated with increased burnout (Ghanizadeh and Royaei, 2015). Di Monte et al. (2020) examined the relationship between psychological features and burnout among Italian GPs during the COVID 19 emergency and concluded that employing task-oriented coping strategies, rather than emotional coping strategies, seems to

guard against burnout. Some emotion-focused strategies, however, like seeking social support, has been found to have a negative correlation burnout. A few studies tested the mediational pathway between optimism and coping strategies and better adjustment and did find encouraging confirmation. For example, Brissette, Scheier, and Carver (2002) conducted a study on a sample of college students and found that optimism was correlated with higher usage of task-oriented coping, which was linked to lesser increases in depressive signs in the students. Consistent with the previous discussion, we would expect coping to intervene the effect of optimism on cynicism during times of COVID 19 and we offer the following hypothesis:

> **H2**: Coping strategies, (a. task, b. emotion and c. avoidance-oriented coping) play a significant mediation role in the relationship between optimism and cynicism.

Empirical Study

Method

Sample

Data was collected from working professionals in Australia. The prospective respondents must be aged over 18 years old and employed during the data collection. Virtual snowball sampling was employed to access hidden populations. Virtual snowball sampling was deemed to be the most suitable method to approach the prospective respondents. This method has the merit to access to "hard to reach" population and expands the sample size (Benfield and Szlemko, 2006). This sampling technique is respondent-driven and based on participants' social network and interpretational relations; therefore, has the advantage of generating more respondents with similar backgrounds (Heckathorn, 2011).

Measure

All items were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from, from 1 indicating strongly disagree to 5 indicating strongly agree. *Optimism* was measured by adapting from Dember et al. (1989) to assess employee hopefulness and confidence about the future or good things. An example of this measure was "In uncertain times, I usually expect the best". The Cronbach alpha for this scale was .84.

The *coping strategy* was adapted from Endler and Parker (1994), consisting of three dimensions: *task-oriented, emotion-oriented, and avoidance-oriented-coping*. Task-oriented coping had four items, indicating active coping and planning strategies, for example "I took additional action to try to get rid of the problem". Emotion-oriented coping measures how employees sought social support for emotional reasons, for example "I talked to someone about how I felt". Avoidance-oriented coping scale had four items to assess employee behaviour disengagement with an example as "I gave up the attempt to get what I wanted". All these three scales demonstrate adequate scale consistency with Cronbach's alpha above 0.80.

The *cynicism* scale was adapted from Richardsen and Astrid (2006) to measure how respondents felt about their work and the significance of their work. An example of this scale was "I had become less enthusiastic about my work". The Cronbach alpha for this scale is 0.92. *The training* measure was adapted from Vinodkumar and Bhasi (2011) to assess the perception of the respondents on staff training during the pandemic. An example of this scale was "My company gave comprehensive training to the employees in working during the pandemic". The Cronbach alpha for this scale is 0.93.

Data Collection Procedure

A pilot-test was conducted prior to the survey. As a result, minor changes were made to ensure appropriate response time and the clarity of wording. Data was collected online through Qualtrics in Australia. The online survey also had advantages of lower cost, and flexible design of the questionnaire, as well as providing convenience for respondents. Qualtrics platform was used to design the online questionnaire with user-friendly features for respondents. Respondents were assured of an anonymous survey and allowed to complete or terminate the survey at their own discretion.

After two months of data collection, about 700 usable responses were generated for data analysis. The majority of respondents were female (63.2%). About 26% were from the age group of 26-35 (26.7%) many working in the healthcare industry (15.4%). More than half of respondents had university degrees or higher (37.2% for bachelor's degree and 16.3% for post-graduate).

Common Method Variance

A variety of preventative measures were used in research design to minimize common method variance (Podsakoff et al., 2003). First, existing

scales which were reported with sound reliabilities and validities were used to measure the study variables. Second, a pilot test was conducted to ensure clarity, conciseness and accuracy of the questionnaire. Third, the survey was deidentified or anonymous.

Several ex-post statistical remedies were undertaken to assess common method bias including Harman's single factor test, partial correlation procedure, and controlling for the effects of an unmeasured latent methods factor (Podsakoff et al., 2003). First, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) was conducted, and the results show six distinct variables (optimism, task-oriented coping, emotion-oriented coping, avoidance-oriented coping, cynicism and training). The results from EFA by constraining all measurements into one factor revealed 27.39% of the variance. Second, the inclusion of the marker variable (panic buying) did not alter the postulated relationships and significance of these relationships. The last procedure was to control for the effect of an unmeasured latent factor and compare the item loadings with and without adding an unmeasured latent methods factor. This procedure resulted in some adjustments in the measurement model. Finally, the diagnosis of multicollinearity using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) demonstrated no issue of multicollinearity, as all VIFs were below 3.0 (Neter et al., 1985).

Findings and Discussion

Addressing the Relationship Between Optimism and Cynicism

To address the first hypothesis between optimism and cynicism, the results from the empirical study show that optimism does have a negative effect on cynicism (ß= -.20, p < .001). This finding implies that optimistic employees can lessen the harmful consequences of work stressors that lead to burnout and cynicism. The results of this study confirm the belief that optimism is associated with psychological well-being (Carver and Scheier, 2014), indicating that optimism can act as a personality protector against cynicism, supporting the expectancy-value theory (Scheier and Carver, 1985; Segerstrom et al., 2017). Optimistic individuals are positive and anticipate good results with a positive look on adverse circumstances. As a result, they are more likely to effectively manage stress.

Addressing the Link Between Optimism, Coping and Cynicism

This chapter proposes a mediation relationship between optimism, coping and cynicism. To test the mediation role of coping, bootstrapping

with the 5000 samples was performed. The results partially support the hypotheses with a significant mediation effect of task-oriented coping (ß= .05, p < .001) and emotion-oriented coping (ß= .04, p < .001), in the relationship between optimism and cynicism. However, there is no significant mediation effect of avoidance-oriented coping (ß= -.04, p > .05) in the relationship between optimism and cynicism (see Table 1).

Table 1. Results for Hypotheses 1 and 2

Paths	β	Standard error
Direct effect		
Optimism → Cynicism	-.20***	.07
Optimism → Task-oriented coping	.21***	.04
Optimism → Emotion-oriented coping	.17***	.05
Optimism → Avoidance-oriented coping	-.06	.05
Task-oriented coping →Cynicism	.24***	.05
Emotion-oriented coping→ Cynicism	.25***	.04
Avoidance-oriented coping →Cynicism	.57***	.03
Indirect effect		
Optimism → Task-oriented coping →Cynicism	.05***	.01
Optimism → Emotion-oriented coping →Cynicism	.04***	.01
Optimism → Avoidance-oriented coping →Cynicism	-.04	.03

These findings indicate that optimistic employees were more likely to use task- and emotion-oriented strategies, and as such were better able to overcome difficulties and setbacks and to eradicate causes of stress and as a result did not become cynical. On the other hand, the employees who denied having difficulties and disapproved of themselves were more prone to develop cynical attitude. Emotion-oriented coping strategy might have an adaptive utility in stressful conditions. The study shows that not only increasing optimism across an organisation but also providing employees with interventions to increase the use of more effective task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping styles may be protective against cynicism, and improve employees' well-being along with organisational benefits in stressful circumstance such as the Covid-19 pandemic (Howlett et al., 2015). Consequently, task- and emotion-oriented coping may be considered a psychological resource that shields employees from developing cynicism

whereas, avoidance-oriented coping could signify an impediment when having any stressors and as such may result in burnout and cynicism.

This finding is consistent with Rothman's (2004) research which showed that emotional exhaustion has a negative correlation with reappraisal coping strategy. As per Scheier, Weintraub, and Carver (1986), reappraisal coping strategy promotes problem solving and as such they categorized it as task oriented coping strategy. Martínez et al. (2020) and Garland et al. (2011) also showed that problem focused strategies could improve mental health and minimize stress. As task-oriented coping strategies have also been shown to have a negative correlation with optimism, it is likely that those who use these strategies are likely to be pessimists. As advocated by Carver et al. (1989), individuals experiencing stress could have several motives and explanations for selecting emotion-oriented coping strategies such as seeking emotional support and to use it against the stressor. In addition, Ano and Vasconcelles (2005) specified that such a coping strategy was associated negatively with desperateness and undesirable emotion. As such, individuals who use an emotion-oriented coping strategy are less hopeless and have fewer negative emotions. This is consistent with Di Monte et al.'s (2020) findings that some emotion-focused strategies like seeking social support are negatively associated with burnout.

For avoidance-oriented coping, no significant mediation effect has been found for the relationship between optimism and cynicism. The results were coherent with those in Van der Colff and Rothmann (2009) that those employing avoidance-oriented coping t are likely to bare more intense emotional exhaustion. In summary, approach-oriented and emotion-oriented coping predict low cynicism and are likely to be used by more optimistic individuals; whilst avoidance-oriented coping predicts higher level of cynicism and are likely to be used by less optimistic people. These distinctions are coherent with the theoretical basis for optimism, in which positive beliefs for what is forthcoming cause higher levels of engagement and determination instead of disconnection and despair.

Implications

Theoretical Implications

Theoretically, the study deepens our understanding of the expectancy-value theory (Scheier and Carver, 1985; Segerstrom et al., 2017) and contributes to mental health research and organisational studies. Most burnout research has concentrated on several organisational variables that can produce burnout in employees (e.g., Chang 2012). Established burnout

research, however, assumes that people are unreceptive and reactive, and focuses on the impact of settings, environments and circumstances on individuals' behaviour. Thus, preceding research on burnout has to some extent overlooked to investigate how personal characteristics can constructively impact employee cynicism. Researchers have not vigorously tested a practical framework that could accelerate the progress of interventions to avoid and inhibit burnout and cynicism. This study offered a novel concept of a mediation and moderation association between optimism, coping strategies, and cynicism and training in line with the status quo of the pandemic.

The optimism and coping strategies constructs were chosen because they aid in sustaining an individual's constructive outlook when they come across high degrees of stress or challenging working conditions. The framework of this study tested how individual traits (optimism) and organizational support (training) affect employee coping strategies and cynicism. Subsequently, the study adds to organizational studies and mental health research by approaching the antecedents of cynicism from a combination of organizational and individual factors. The results show that optimistic employees are better at coping with the pandemic and are less cynical. The partial moderation effect of training implies that while organisational support is important, employees' job attitude is better self-managed with their own optimism.

The findings of this study in relation to coping and optimism are also in line with the theory of conservation of resources (COR). Since task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping and optimism were negatively associated with cynicism, these coping strategies and optimism may possibly be the personal reserves and means for handling stressful circumstances. In this regard, earlier research established that refining attitudes and aptitudes can help individuals better handle stress and reduce emotional exhaustion (e.g., Bonneville-Roussy et al., 2017). In agreement, Chang et al. (2000) indicated that job burnout might be decreased as optimism in employees is increased. Additionally, individuals who use task and emotion-oriented coping positively decode stressful situations like COVID 19 and tend to resolve problems and difficulties, minimising the likely emotional impact and counteracting the progress of cynicism.

Practical Implications

The current study has practical implications for HR practitioners and managers. The results of this study can offer data from which to create interventions that could help enhance personal coping skills. Specifically,

interventions planned to increase problem-oriented coping and develop social support could comprise of encouraging employees to be more optimistic or hiring employees that have a high level of optimism. An increase in optimism may have significant inferences for how employees respond to stressful or demanding circumstances as it has been shown that an optimistic personality influences success in organisations and leads to the choice of better coping strategies and less cynicism. Therefore, HR professional should design staffing strategies that are targeted at hiring employees who are more optimistic and provide support for employees with higher levels of optimism.

In general, employees who use problem-oriented coping, are likely to improve their sense of accomplishment, and who use emotion-oriented-coping could improve better work-life balance and their well-being. The findings of this study advocate that improvement of task-oriented and emotion-oriented coping skills could lead to a reduction in burnout and cynicism. During the stressful Covid-19 situation, creating a good atmosphere for employees, building trust and thereby increasing their feeling of optimism, would have a positive outcome for the organisation and the mental health of employees (Koçoğlu, 2014). Furthermore, managers should consider offering an effective program that could improve employees' coping skills. For example, Kravits et al. (2010) proposed a psycho-educational approach to educate nurses on how to respond to stress and the different coping option and found that nurses that completed this program had lower stress levels that those that did not participate in it.

For mental health consultants, the significance of good mental health needs to be stressed by ensuring that individuals recognise their potential, and work in a productive manner while coping with stress, it is crucial to have strategies that are targeted at supporting mental health and inhibiting mental disorders at work to emphasize on stress management plans. The study suggests that the optimal strategies to minimise employees' negative job attitudes and behaviours should be approached from employees' personal attributes. Indeed, personality has long been proven to be a valid predictor of job performance. the effort should be dedicated to recruitment of personnel with positive personal traits that can be conductive to organisational performance.

Conclusions

Encountering adverse environment and unforeseeable changes are inevitable in the organisational setting. Although adjusting to change is essential for organisations and employees, this adaptation may provoke

certain employee attitudes such as cynicism. Cynicism has been of notable concern to organisational consequences, such as employees' well-being, their performance, satisfaction with the job and turnover. This study drew on expectancy-value and COR theories and investigated the relationships between cynicism, coping strategies, and optimism, as well as examining the moderating role of training in these relationships. The research findings show that optimism is negatively related to cynicism, both task-oriented coping and emotion-oriented coping mediated the relationship between cynicism and optimism. Interestingly, training moderated the relationship between optimism and avoidance-oriented coping, and between avoidance oriented-coping and cynicism but did not change the other coping strategies.

This research has a few limitations to be acknowledged. Firstly, the study used a cross-sectional design and as such interpreting the causal relationships established in this study must be cautioned. Second, this study collected data from one country (Australia), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Third, this study uses self-report measures, consequently, the data may be susceptible to common method bias. Future studies should use longitudinal designs to determine the causal relationships between optimism, coping and cynicism. Furthermore, data collected from employees and managers may provide better insights into the proposed relationships.

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