



Managing hospitality employee cyberloafing: The role of empowering leadership

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ABSTRACT

The internet is widely used to facilitate internal operations and provide real-time services in the hospitality industry. However, hospitality employees can also use the internet for nonwork purposes during working hours, behavior which is known as cyberloafing. Given that cyberloafing is typically viewed as impeding productivity in the hospitality industry, it is increasingly necessary to predict and manage hospitality employees' cyberloafing. Can empowering leadership help manage such behavior? Drawing on conservation of resources theory, we expect that empowering leadership may have paradoxical effects on cyberloafing via two competing mechanisms. On the one hand, empowering leadership can increase cyberloafing by increasing role ambiguity; on the other hand, empowering leadership can reduce cyberloafing by increasing organization-based self-esteem (OBSE). Moreover, we expect that these two indirect relationships depend on hospitality employees' power distance. Based on two-wave data collected from 201 employee-coworker dyads in the hospitality industry, the results of regression analyses provide support for our predictions. Moreover, for employees with lower (versus higher) power distance, empowering leadership is more likely to elicit employee OBSE (versus role ambiguity) and thus reduce (versus increase) their cyberloafing. This study expands our knowledge regarding the antecedents of hospitality employee cyberloafing in the context of empowering leadership and provides new insights for practitioners regarding ways of managing hospitality employee cyberloafing based on the connection between empowering leadership and employee power distance.

1. Introduction

Increasing demands from sophisticated customers as well as growing needs for efficiency have caused hospitality sectors to become more reliant on the assistance of information and communication technologies in completing job tasks (e.g., dealing with customers' booking orders, service requests, and message inquiries as well as facilitating real-time communications with colleagues and customers; O'Connor and Murphy, 2004). However, the use of such technologies also provides employees with access to nonwork-related internet resources that may tempt them to engage in personal leisure activities, such as browsing shopping websites or sending and receiving personal e-mails (Demir and Melek, 2018). Such behaviors are termed "cyberloafing," which refers to the personal use of the internet by employees to perform nonwork-related activities during working hours (Lim, 2002). Previous

studies have suggested that cyberloafing may lead to harmful outcomes such as productivity losses (She and Li, 2022, in press), unpredictable legal liabilities (Mills et al., 2001), and potential information breaches for the organization (Hu et al., 2015). Unlike in the case of other sectors, the potential costs of cyberloafing (e.g., information breaches) might be fatal for enterprises in the hospitality sector that handle a considerable volume of customer transactions and personal information. The occurrence of data breaches in the hospitality sector heightens consumers' privacy concerns and harms organizations' reputations/public images (Chen and Jai, 2019). Thus, scholars have highlighted cyberloafing as a concern for management in the digital-transformed hospitality industry (Gonzalez et al., 2020; Mills et al., 2001). Unfortunately, empirical investigation of the causes of cyberloafing in the hospitality industry remains scarce, and such a research gap inevitably impedes the effective management of cyberloafing in the hospitality industry.

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Studies focusing on other sectors have explored the ways in which individual factors (e.g., big five personality traits, demographics, job attitudes, and self-control; Demir and Melek, 2018; Jia et al., 2013; Liberman et al., 2011; Lim and Chen, 2012; Vitak et al., 2011) and situational factors (e.g., job characteristics, work stressors, and organizational policies; Henle and Blanchard, 2008) impact cyberloafing. Beyond general investigations of the causes of cyberloafing, some other studies have aimed to uncover the mechanisms underlying cyberloafing and suggested that employees mainly engage in cyberloafing to detach themselves or escape from stressful jobs to replenish the resources that are consumed at the workplace (Andel et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2021, in press). In particular, the conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) has been used to explain the way in which resource depletion (e.g., emotional exhaustion, job stress, ego-depletion, Koay et al., 2018; Wagner et al., 2012) can trigger cyberloafing. In this stream of literature, some scholars have built on the leadership approach to explore the ways in which various types of leadership (e.g., abusive leadership, Agarwal and Avey, 2020; Lim et al., 2021) affect cyberloafing by draining employees' resources (e.g., by decreasing psychological capital or increasing job stress). However, our knowledge regarding the role of leadership in managing cyberloafing remains far from complete.

Can empowering leadership (which is defined as "a process of sharing power, and allocating autonomy and responsibilities to [employees] through implementing a series of leader behaviors" Cheong et al., 2019, p. 34) help manage cyberloafing? We focus on the predictive effect of empowering leadership on hospitality employee cyberloafing for three reasons. First, empowering leadership is more essential in the hospitality sector than in other sectors. Hospitality employees must constantly engage in face-to-face interactions with customers to deliver services and to ensure high service quality; thus, they are usually empowered to handle customer needs immediately rather than waiting for their leader to authorize their actions (Humborstad et al., 2008). Second, the implications of empowering leadership with respect to managing deviant behaviors are underdeveloped, which drives us to treat cyberloafing as a deviant and distal outcome. Studies of empowering leadership in hospitality sectors have mainly focused on the ways in which empowering leadership can promote positive behaviors (e.g., service quality, creative behaviors, proactive behaviors; see the literature review by Hoang et al. (2021)). Studies highlighting the negative outcomes of empowering leadership remain scarce (see Cheong et al., 2016; Lin et al., 2020; Zhou et al., 2018 for three exceptions to this general claim). To address these mixed findings, the present study maintains that the task of exploring how and when empowering leadership exerts an effect on cyberloafing is of particular importance.

Drawing on COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which has been widely used in the cyberloafing literature, the present study seeks to uncover the complex mechanisms underlying the effect of empowering leadership on hospitality employee cyberloafing. Specifically, we identify two opposing indirect connections between empowering leadership and cyberloafing: organization-based self-esteem (OBSE) and role ambiguity. Even if empowering leadership is largely viewed as triggering employee positive behavior (Cheong et al., 2019), some studies have begun to reach a new consensus regarding the double-edged effects of empowering leadership (Kim and Beehr, 2017; Li et al., 2022, in press). For instance, Cheong et al. (2016) proposed a dual-process model and suggested that empowering leadership may be viewed simultaneously as a type of enabling resource and a burdensome stressor. By combining this view with COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), which suggests that individuals are generically driven to protect their remaining resources and to acquire new resources, we infer that empowering leadership may, on the one hand, be viewed as a motivational factor with respect to increasing one's personal resources (OBSE) that can help employees stay focused at work and resist temptation to engage in cyberloafing; on the other hand, it may be viewed as a stressor that increases employee role ambiguity and consumes their personal resources, thereby triggers

cyberloafing behavior as a way of mitigating resource loss.

Employees may interpret and react to empowering leadership in different ways. COR theory suggests that individuals' reactions to received or threatened resources largely depend on the value that they place on these resources, and such valuative interpretations usually vary across cultures (Halbesleben et al., 2014). The hospitality industry typically develops a culturally diverse workforce to provide service to customers from various countries, thus making it necessary to consider whether empowering leadership (or empowerment practice) is well suited to the cultural values of hospitality employees (Humborstad et al., 2008). Within the range of cultural values, we focus on the notion of power distance because this construct "deals with individuals' beliefs about power in organizations" and thus "has a more theoretically direct relationship to leadership reactions than other cultural values" (Kirkman et al., 2009, p. 745). Therefore, the present research considers hospitality employees' power distance (a cultural factor that shapes individual responses to leadership) as a reflection of their interpretation of empowering leadership (as a valuable resource or as a threat to their resources) and explores the moderating effect of this factor on the paradoxical implications of empowering leadership.

This study makes three contributions to the literature. First, it advances our knowledge of the role of leadership in managing employee cyberloafing by introducing an empowering leadership perspective. Although previous research has identified a wide variety of antecedents of cyberloafing, there is relative lack of research on empowering leadership. It is critical for research in the hospitality industry to adopt an empowering leadership perspective because hospitality employees have a fundamental need for empowerment at work to be able to satisfy customers' needs immediately; thus, many of these employees desire empowering leadership (Humborstad et al., 2008). By introducing an empowering leadership perspective, the present study offers a novel and relevant leadership lens to complement previous research on employee cyberloafing.

Second, while the positive effects of empowering leadership have been adequately explored in the context of the hospitality industry (Hoang et al., 2021), there is increasing concern that empowering leadership does not always lead to the expected productivity. Such leadership may be a mixed blessing with regard to hospitality employee cyberloafing. Hence, the present study sheds light on two opposing mechanisms (OBSE and role ambiguity) that underlie the relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing, thereby offering a more balanced and nuanced view of the role of empowering leadership in shaping hospitality employee cyberloafing.

Third, by incorporating cultural values into the paradoxical process that connects empowering leadership to hospitality employee cyberloafing, the present study expands our knowledge of the boundary conditions of empowering leadership in the hospitality industry and helps reconcile the mixed findings of previous research on empowering leadership. Specifically, we introduce the lens of power distance to reveal the ways in which the bright and dark sides of empowering leadership can complement each other and how they can be integrated into a comprehensive and contingent model. In so doing, we reveal the factors distinguishing situations in which empowering leadership reduces cyberloafing and those in which it unintentionally increases cyberloafing, thereby resolving previous debates regarding empowering leadership.

2. Theory and hypotheses

Given the widespread use of internet technology in the hospitality industry, cyberloafing has become an emerging phenomenon in contemporary hospitality organizations. Cyberloafing refers to "any voluntary act of employees using their [organizations'] Internet access during office hours to surf non-job-related websites for personal purposes and to check (including receiving and sending) personal e-mail as misuse of the internet" (Lim, 2002, p. 677). As reported by one survey,

approximately 90 % of employees browse entertainment websites during working hours, and 84 % send and receive nonwork-related e-mails during this time (Sharma and Gupta, 2004). When hospitality employees engage in cyberloafing, they might still be perceived as working diligently because they keep their eyes on a computer screen (as they would while working) (Lavoie and Pychyl, 2001). Therefore, cyberloafing is hidden to some degree; precisely because of this characteristic, such behavior has posed a serious threat to and caused enormous losses for organizational productivity. Studies have shown that 30–65 % of workday internet use in the U.S. is nonwork-related (Barlow et al., 2003), resulting in an annual productivity loss of \$54 billion to \$85 billion for U.S. organizations (Lim and Teo, 2005). Therefore, scholars and practitioners have become interested in ways of reducing cyberloafing in organizations.

Employees could be highly attracted to cyberloafing activities because there are abundant stimuli on the internet that could provide them with immediate gratification and enjoyment. Even if engaging in cyberloafing activities could be very interesting and enjoyable, thereby helping employees restore their positive emotions and replenish the resources consumed at work, in the long term, cyberloafing leads to procrastination with respect to scheduled work and harms individual performance (Wagner et al., 2012). Following this logic, previous studies have suggested that the state of employees' personal resources is an important antecedent of cyberloafing. On the one hand, resource-depleted employees are more inclined to engage in cyberloafing to restore their positive emotions and replenish consumed resources (Zhou et al., 2021; Wu et al., 2020). On the other hand, a positive state of resources is necessary for reducing cyberloafing because employees need rich self-regulation resources to resist the temptation to engage in cyberloafing and remain focused on their job tasks (Wagner et al., 2012). Considering the important role of resources in employee cyberloafing and the fact that leadership serves as a critical factor with respect to shaping employees' resource states (Stein et al., 2021), we build on COR theory to explain the effects of empowering leadership on cyberloafing, which have not previously been tested empirically.

COR theory posits that individuals strive to protect their current resources and acquire new resources (Halbesleben et al., 2014). COR theory relies on two principles: (a) the resource conservation principle, which suggests that employees who experience resource loss are motivated to conserve resources rather than investing resources because resource-depleted employees become trapped in a resource loss spiral and thus become defensive, taking steps to protect and conserve their resources; and (b) the resource acquisition principle, which suggests that the experience of gaining valuable resources encourages employees to mobilize and invest their resources to achieve their personal goals and gain new valuable resources, leading to a resource gain spiral. In accordance with COR theory, we would like to examine the double-edged effects of empowering leadership on cyberloafing by examining the ways in which empowering leadership is simultaneously related to both resource conservation and resource acquisition processes for hospitality employees and, in turn, influences their subsequent cyberloafing.

2.1. The two faces of empowering leadership: a COR theory perspective

As a key approach to leadership, empowering leadership entails encouraging employee initiative, motivating employees to set work goals, and delegating power to employees who, in turn, can make decisions and complete their work without direct oversight or interference (Pearce and Sims, 2002). A large number of studies have proven that higher levels of empowering leadership result in more desirable outcomes, such as higher follower job satisfaction, psychological empowerment and intrinsic work motivation (for a review, see Cheong et al., 2019). Despite the dominant view adopted by previous research, i.e., that empowering leadership is mostly beneficial, several scholars have drawn attention to the potential drawbacks of empowering leadership

(Forrest, 2000; Wilkinson, 1998), such as more employee errors (Conger and Kanungo, 1988), lower performance by teams during the early stage of such leadership (Lorinkova et al., 2013), and increased role overload (Magni and Maruping, 2013).

To reconcile these mixed results regarding the effects of empowering leadership, Cheong et al. (2016) called for scholars to integrate both the positive and the negative aspects of empowering leadership. Specifically, Cheong et al. (2016) applied empowerment theory, cost of autonomy theory, and role theory to infer the indirect effects of empowering leadership on employees' job performance via the processes of enabling (e.g., increased self-efficacy) and burdening (e.g., increased job-induced tension). The work of Cheong et al. (2016) is insightful, as it provides a comprehensive understanding of the double-edged effects of empowering leadership; however, these authors employed multiple theories to examine the dual-process model, and to some extent, this approach has blurred the theoretical explanation of the double-edged effects of empowering leadership. Moreover, Cheong et al. (2016) did not identify the boundary conditions of the dual-process model of empowering leadership. The present study uses COR theory as an overarching theoretical framework to explore the double-edged effects of empowering leadership on hospitality employee cyberloafing, with power distance serving as a boundary condition of these effects. Specifically, empowering leadership, on the one hand, decreases hospitality employee cyberloafing by providing employees with valuable resources that can be mobilized to increase their personal resources, such as OBSE; on the other hand, it increases hospitality employee cyberloafing by blurring their job responsibilities and thus causing role ambiguity that can consume hospitality employees' resources.

2.1.1. Empowering leadership reduces cyberloafing by increasing OBSE

As posited by COR theory, having critical resources helps employees obtain more valuable resources (via a process of resource acquisition) (Hobfoll, 1989). Accordingly, empowering leadership reduces hospitality employee cyberloafing by providing resources to employees that can allow them to develop high OBSE as a valuable personal resource. OBSE refers to "the perceived self-value that individuals have of themselves as organizational members acting within an organizational context" (Pierce et al., 1989, p. 625). Xanthopoulou et al. (2009) noted that OBSE reflects employees' positive evaluations of their own ability to control work situations and address job demands.

Empowering leadership provides employees with valuable resources such as a sense of competence, power, and job autonomy in the work environment, all of which help increase hospitality employees' OBSE. First, empowering leaders express confidence in employees' high performance potential and help them recognize their contributions to organizational goals (Ahearne et al., 2005). These leadership behaviors convey a positive signal to employees indicating that they are competent members of the organization (Sharma and Kirkman, 2015), thus increasing employees' feelings of self-competence and boosting their sense of self-worth in the organization (i.e., their OBSE). Second, empowering leaders share their power with employees by involving them in the decision-making process and ensuring that employees' opinions are heard by leaders, discussed with leaders, and potentially adopted (Arnold et al., 2000). Consequently, employees feel empowered in the organization and concomitantly boost their OBSE. Finally, empowering leaders provide employees with job autonomy, allowing them to determine their work goals and the ways in which these goals are to be achieved on their own (i.e., without unnecessary monitoring by the leader) (Schilpzand et al., 2018). Accordingly, employees believe that they can control the content and pace of their work; this sense of control leads to enhanced OBSE.

OBSE reflects one's true value to and abilities as part of an organization and is thus reflected in positive feelings of self-worth that are firmly anchored and secure. Previous research has demonstrated that OBSE is positively associated with perceptions of control over one's work environment, psychological adjustment, well-being indices, work

engagement, work effort, and intrinsic work motivations (Gardner, 2020; Mauno et al., 2006, 2007; Pierce and Gardner, 2004) and negatively associated with deviant behavior, counterproductive work behavior, and perceptions of email stress (Chung and Yang, 2017; Ferris et al., 2009; Hair et al., 2007). These findings suggest that employees with higher levels of OBSE feel more resourceful, which helps them remain focused (rather than becoming distracted by cyberloafing activities) during working hours. Moreover, due to their identities as members of the organization, employees with high OBSE exhibit a strong will to achieve high job performance and engage in more behaviors that benefit the organization (Pierce et al., 1989). To enact such a will, employees with high OBSE focus more on organization- and job-related activities and are less likely to become tempted or distracted by job-unrelated activities (e.g., cyberloafing). In contrast, employees with low OBSE do not believe that participation in organizational- and job-related activities is an effective way of boosting their sense of self-worth. Thus, based on such a belief, employees with low OBSE are less likely to direct their attention fully to job-related activities; instead, they may participate in more nonjob-related activities such as cyberloafing. Overall, the increased personal resources associated with OBSE derived from empowering leadership cause employees to remain focused and reduce cyberloafing.

Hypothesis 1. Empowering leadership is positively related to OBSE.

Hypothesis 2. Empowering leadership is negatively and indirectly related to hospitality employee cyberloafing via increased OBSE.

2.1.2. Empowering leadership increases cyberloafing by increasing role ambiguity

COR theory suggests that stress occurs in the workplace when key resources are threatened with loss or when there is a failure to obtain key resources following significant effort, which motivates individuals to conserve resources rather than investing resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Accordingly, we infer that empowering leadership leads to role stress for hospitality employees because it threatens their job resources (e.g., role clarity) and frustrates their need to obtain key resources; in such a stressful condition, employees are motivated to conserve their resources (i.e., to stop investing resources in carrying out their tasks) and thus engage in cyberloafing. To capture such a process of stress that bridges the gap between empowering leadership and cyberloafing (resource conservation), we focus on role ambiguity, which refers to “the degree to which clear information is lacking regarding the expectations associated with the role” (Van Sell et al., 1981, p. 44). Role ambiguity is conceptualized as a type of role stress and has been shown to be related to negative states such as anxiety or tension at work (Örtqvist and Wincent, 2006).

Empowering leadership may increase role ambiguity for two reasons. First, role stress can result from threats to resources, such as the increased latitude regarding job assignments and responsibilities offered by empowering leaders (Cheong et al., 2016). For instance, in addition to motivating employees to complete their core tasks, empowering leaders involve employees in the decision-making process, which causes employees to become cognitively distracted from their core tasks and thus to encounter more interference (Langfred and Moye, 2004). Such a condition can challenge and interfere with employees’ previously constructed formal role perceptions, ultimately generating ambiguous feelings regarding their roles. Second, employees must usually obtain key resources from their leaders, such as by clarifying common goals or coordinating job arrangements within the team; however, such needs may be frustrated by empowering leadership. That is, employees receiving such empowerment may not obtain key resources such as role clarity and job coordination and may thereby experience role stress. For instance, when employees are empowered to engage in self-management, they may not fully understand the common goal toward which they should be working (Kearney et al., 2019). That is, empowering leadership increases employees’ self-management by

allocating power to them, which leads to unclear perceptions of the team’s common goal and the associated role expectations. Furthermore, by promoting the autonomy of employees, empowering leaders also run the risk of exacerbating coordination problems that can increase uncertainty regarding the boundaries between employees’ own job responsibilities and those of their coworkers; this uncertainty ultimately increases employee role ambiguity (Chen et al., 2011).

According to COR theory, role stress subjects employees to a spiral that constrains them with respect to obtaining new resources; instead, they become defensive as a means of conserving their limited resources (Hobfoll, 1989). We infer that role ambiguity is a stressful state that not only consumes employees’ resources but also prevents them from obtaining new resources, thereby driving employees to engage in cyberloafing as an avoidance strategy to protect themselves from further resource loss. Role ambiguity is viewed as a kind of hindrance stressor that damages employees’ valuable resources and does not offer any resources to mitigate future resource consumption and loss (Zhang et al., 2018). That is, role ambiguity consumes employees’ resources but fails to offer new resources to employees. In turn, employees adopt defensive strategies to prevent further resource loss when confronted with role ambiguity (Zhou et al., 2021, in press). Cyberloafing is a very effective defensive withdrawal strategy due to its convenience and concealed nature (Askew et al., 2012). Nonwork-related use of the internet can help employees temporarily detach themselves from job demands, thus helping them conserve their limited resources. Overall, empowering leaders increase the role ambiguity experienced by their employees, thereby triggering employee cyberloafing as a defensive action aimed at conserving resources. Thus, we posit the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3. Empowering leadership is positively related to role ambiguity.

Hypothesis 4. Empowering leadership is positively and indirectly related to hospitality employee cyberloafing via increased role ambiguity.

2.2. The moderating role of hospitality employees’ power distance

COR theory suggests that individuals’ reactions to received or threatened resources largely depend on the value that they place on these resources, which varies across different cultures (Halbesleben et al., 2014). To explore the cultural variation associated with interpretations of empowering leadership as a valuable resource or as a threat to resources, we examine power distance as a moderator in the relationships between empowering leadership and subsequent OBSE or role ambiguity. Power distance refers to “the extent to which a society accepts the fact that power in institutions and organizations is distributed unequally” (Hofstede, 1980, p. 45). Recently, this notion has begun to be examined as a cultural value at the individual level. Employee power distance captures the extent to which the employee accepts the legitimacy of the unequal distribution of power in an organization (Hofstede, 1980), particularly with respect to the employee’s “preference regarding the degree to which the leader’s directives should be respected and shown deference” (Cole et al., 2013, p. 963). Employees with high power distance believe that an unequal distribution of power and status differences is acceptable and appropriate (Peng et al., 2021). Thus, they are more willing to work in accordance with their leader’s directives, but they are less willing to accept the power shared by an empowering leader. Consequently, employees with high power distance are less likely to view empowering leadership as a valuable resource and may even become distressed by such leadership. In contrast, employees with a low power distance tend to expect equal power distributions in organizations (Farh et al., 2007). Such employees enjoy equal power sharing; in turn, they are willing to value and exercise the discretionary power granted by their leaders.

2.2.1. Power distance weakens the relationships between empowering leadership and OBSE

Employees with higher levels of power distance agree with status differences (i.e., they believe that leaders' power and status should be higher than those of employees) and tend to believe that their leaders have the ability to make the correct decision and do not need to consult their subordinates (Farh et al., 2007; Kirkman et al., 2009). Empowering leadership, such as the delegation of authority to employees and the promotion of employees' self-direction (i.e., working without supervision) (Arnold et al., 2000; Pearce and Sims Jr, 2002), is not well suited to the preferences and expectations of employees with higher levels of power distance. These employees are less likely to value, embrace, and enjoy interactions with empowering leaders; thus, they do not view empowering leadership as an opportunity to obtain more valuable resources. Given that employees with higher levels of high power distance are less likely to view empowering leadership as a valuable resource, the beneficial effect of empowering leadership on OBSE is less pronounced for these employees.

In contrast, employees with lower levels of power distance strongly expect more delegation, status granting and job autonomy because they believe that leaders and employees should be assigned equal power and the responsibility to contribute their unique values to the organization (Cole et al., 2013). Empowering leadership, which includes the sharing of power with employees (Arnold et al., 2000; 2005), is more consistent with the expectation of employees with lower levels of power distance. As such, these employees respond more positively to empowering leadership, viewing such leadership as an opportunity to make their voices heard and enjoying the resulting autonomy. This condition is conducive to enhancing their perceptions of OBSE. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 5. Power distance negatively moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee OBSE such that this relationship is stronger for employees with lower (rather than higher) levels of power distance.

2.2.2. Power distance strengthens the relationships between empowering leadership and role ambiguity

Employees with higher levels of power distance believe that power imbalances in leader-employee dyads are reasonable and thus that they should be inferior to leaders in terms of status (Lam and Xu, 2019). Such employees show more deference to leaders' authority and prefer to conform to a set of directives provided by the leader when fulfilling their roles and solving problems. Accordingly, employees with higher levels of power distance may devalue empowering leadership, which frustrates their need for directives. When leaders grant these employees more autonomy and less supervision, these employees may feel as if there is a lack of clear directives and adequate information provided by leaders (Wang and Lee, 2009) and thus have a strong perception of role ambiguity. Moreover, employees with higher levels of power distance take their leader's evaluations more seriously. However, the independent actions (i.e., acting without clear orders) induced by empowering leadership reinforce these employees' concerns regarding whether such independent actions are contrary to leaders' expectations and can lead to negative evaluations from leaders, thereby increasing employees' perceptions of role ambiguity. In conclusion, given that employees with higher levels of power distance view empowering leadership as an undesirable stressor, the effects of empowering leadership on role ambiguity are stronger for employees with high levels of power distance.

In contrast, employees with lower levels of power distance usually believe that leaders and employees are equally important contributors to organizations and thus that leaders should share power with employees (Farh et al., 2007). Such employees tend to accept power sharing from their leaders as well as the associated increased job responsibilities. Even if empowering leadership may lead to role ambiguity, this harmful effect is less pronounced for employees with lower levels of power

distance because such employees have positive attitudes regarding empowerment and interpret it as an opportunity to take active control over their own work schedules, which can mitigate the perceptions of role ambiguity induced by empowering leadership. Thus, we posit the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 6. Power distance positively moderates the relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee role ambiguity such that this relationship is stronger for employees with higher (rather than lower) levels of power distance.

Integrating these two mediators between empowering leadership and cyberloafing (Hypotheses 1 through 4) with the moderator (power distance) (Hypotheses 5 to 6), this study further proposes two moderated mediation hypotheses. On the one hand, given that the relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee OBSE is stronger (versus weaker) for employees with lower (versus higher) power distance, we believe that the indirect negative relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing via increased OBSE is also stronger (versus weaker) for hospitality employees with lower (versus higher) power distance. Specifically, for hospitality employees with lower levels of power distance, empowering leadership is interpreted as a valuable resource because it can satisfy the desire of such employees for delegation and autonomy (e.g., Wong and Giessner, 2018). This situation enables these employees to enhance their OBSE by voluntarily embracing leaders' empowerment. In turn, to act in accordance with their enhanced OBSE and reinforce their sense of self-worth (a valuable benefit of organizational membership), these employees contribute their efforts to the organization and thus reduce their cyberloafing.

On the other hand, given that the relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee role ambiguity is stronger (versus weaker) for employees with higher (versus lower) levels of power distance, the indirect positive relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing via increased role ambiguity is also stronger (versus weaker) for hospitality employees with higher (versus lower) levels of power distance. Hospitality employees with higher levels of power distance interpret leader empowerment as the potential loss of resources/information; for instance, the increased job responsibilities associated with empowering leadership can interfere with employees' perceptions of their formal roles. As such, these employees experience a feeling of role ambiguity and thus engaging in cyberloafing to conserve their resources. Thus, we posit the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 7. Power distance negatively moderates the indirect relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing via hospitality employees' OBSE such that this indirect relationship is stronger for employees with lower (rather than higher) levels of power distance.

Hypothesis 8. Power distance positively moderates the indirect relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing via hospitality employees' role ambiguity such that this indirect relationship is stronger for employees with higher (rather than lower) levels of power distance.

Our theoretical model is presented in Fig. 1.

3. Method

3.1. Participants and procedure

We recruited full-time employees (the focal participants) from three hospitality organizations owned by a private, comprehensive service business group located in south China. These organizations represent a well-known travel brand that occupies a leading position in the hospitality industry in Guangdong Province. Our targeted participants

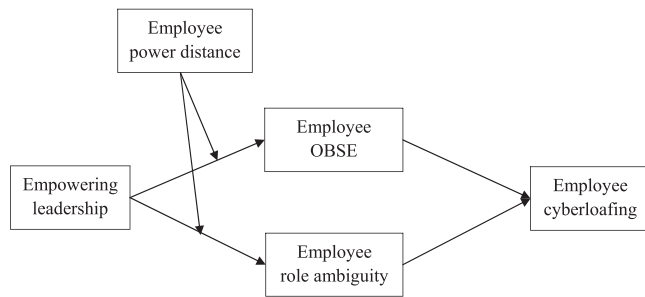


Fig. 1. Theoretical model.

(survey respondents) are subordinates/lower-level staff, such as front desk receptionists, clerks, and call-center employees, whose work requires the use of the internet. The participants were selected via convenience sampling (Dörnyei, 2007), which is widely used in the hospitality management literature (e.g., Choi et al., 2016; Koc and Boz, 2020; Mo Kwon et al., 2013).

The data collection was conducted in spring 2021. First, we requested a name list of employees from the human resource department, based on which we contacted the employees, explained our research purpose to them, verified their job-related information (e.g., access to the internet) and solicited their willingness to participate in our research. Those who agreed to participate in our research served as the focal participants. Subsequently, we drew on the name list once again to recruit a coworker of the focal participant randomly to serve as an additional source of data. The coworker sample was required to satisfy the criteria of working/sitting nearby the focal participant and being able to observe the focal participant's work behaviors.

Surveys were conducted at two time points that were separated by a period of two months. To match the focal employees' data with those of their coworkers, each participant was provided with a unique identifier number. To allow the participants to express themselves candidly and thus improve the accuracy of their responses, the survey was conducted anonymously, and the participants were informed that the information they provided when completing the survey was completely confidential and used solely for academic research. At the first time point (T1), we invited 310 focal participants to report their perceptions of empowering leadership, their power distance orientations, and their demographic information, such as their gender, level of education, age, and tenure. We obtained responses from 273 employees, for a response rate of 88.06%. At the second time point (T2), we invited focal participants who completed the T1 survey to report their OBSE and role ambiguity; we also invited their coworkers to report the cyberloafing of the focal participants. We obtained 201 dyadic responses, for a response rate of 73.63%.

In the employee sample, 38.8% of participants were male, and 61.2% were female; 55.2% had college-level education (associate's degree) or below, 42.3% held bachelor's degrees, and 2.5% had master's degrees or above; the average age was 26.03 years ($SD = 6.77$), the average tenure with leader was 3.06 years ($SD = 5.26$), and the average organizational tenure was 3.06 years ($SD = 5.26$). In the coworker sample, 39.3% of participants were male, and 60.7% were female; the average age was 26.38 years ($SD = 5.76$), the average organizational tenure was 3.00 years ($SD = 4.22$), and the average tenure with the leader was 2.50 years ($SD = 3.19$).

3.2. Measures

All measures (in Chinese) were rated on a five-point scale with answers ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) unless indicated otherwise.

3.2.1. Empowering leadership

We measured hospitality employees' perceptions of empowering leadership using the six-item scale developed by Pearce and Sims Jr (2002). This scale (a) has been applied to hospitality employees by a recent empirical study that reported high reliability for the scale (e.g., Zhou et al., 2018) and (b) was the shortest scale of empowering leadership (to the best of our knowledge) and so could mitigate test fatigue. Sample items included "My supervisor encourages me to search for solutions without supervision" and "My supervisor urges me to take on responsibilities on my own." In this study, Cronbach's α for this scale was .94.

3.2.2. Cyberloafing

We measured coworker-rated cyberloafing (two dimensions: browsing websites and e-mail) using the scale developed by Lim and Teo (2005) (1 = never, 5 = frequently). This scale has recently been validated for use with respect to samples of hospitality employees (Khawaja et al., 2022; Reizer et al., 2022). Participants indicated how often they engaged in cyberloafing during their working hours. Sample items of websites that could be browsed included "entertainment related websites," and sample items related to e-mail included "sending nonwork-related e-mail." In this study, Cronbach's α for this scale was .89.

3.2.3. OBSE

We measured hospitality employees' OBSE using the seven-item scale employed by Liang et al. (2012), which is an abbreviated Chinese version of the OBSE scale developed by Pierce et al. (1989). Several empirical studies have applied the OBSE scale used by Liang et al. (2012) to investigate hospitality employees and reported the high reliability of this scale (e.g., Huang and Kwok, 2021; Sun et al., 2021). Sample items included "I am valuable at work" and "I count around here." In this study, Cronbach's α for this scale was .93.

3.2.4. Role ambiguity

We measured employee role ambiguity using the six-item scale developed by Rizzo et al. (1970), which has been validated by a number of studies of hospitality employees (e.g., Grobelna et al., 2015; Yan et al., 2021). Sample items included "I feel that I do not have a clear explanation of what has to be done" and "I feel that I do not know exactly what is expected of me." In this study, Cronbach's α for this scale was .94.

3.2.5. Power distance

We measured power distance using an eight-item scale used by Kirkman et al. (2009), which is an adapted version of the scale developed by Earley and Erez (1997). Sample items included "Leaders should be able to make the right decisions without consulting with others" and "Once a leader makes a decision, people working for the organization should not question it." In this study, Cronbach's α for this scale was .81.

3.2.6. Controls

According to the suggestions of previous research on cyberloafing (Jia et al., 2013; Lim and Chen, 2012; Vitak et al., 2011), employees' frequency of cyberloafing may vary by gender (0 = male, 1 = female), age (years old), level of education (0 = associate degree or below, 1 = bachelor's degree, 2 = master's degree), and dyadic tenure (in years). These variables were controlled for in this study. When using the internet, male, younger, and poorly educated employees are more likely to violate norms and thus use the internet on the job for personal purposes (e.g., Everton et al., 2005; Jia et al., 2013; Vitak et al., 2011), while female, older, and well-educated employees are more likely to comply with the expected organizational norms (e.g., Morris and Venkatesh, 2000).

3.3. Analytic approach

In this study, descriptive statistics were generated and a correlation analysis of the main variables was conducted using SPSS 22.0 software, and a confirmatory factor analysis was conducted using Mplus 7.0 software to test the discriminant validity of the variables. For hypothesis testing, a path analysis was conducted using the Process 3.3 plug-in for SPSS 22.0, and the bias-corrected 95 % confidence interval (CI) for indirect effects was estimated using the bootstrapping method (bootstrap sample = 5000).

4. Results

4.1. Measurement model

To test the structural validity and discriminant validity of the variables included in the theoretical model (i.e., empowering leadership, employee cyberloafing, OBSE, role ambiguity, and power distance), we conducted confirmatory factor analyses (Mathieu and Farr, 1991). The five-factor model fit the data well ($\chi^2 = 577.64$, $df = 367$, $RMSEA = 0.05$, $SRMR = 0.05$, $CFI = 0.94$, $TLI = 0.93$), thus indicating the good structural validity of the four variables. In addition, the fit indices of the five-factor model were better than those of any of the four-factor models ($\Delta\chi^2s \geq 92.44$, $\Delta dfs = 4$, $ps < 0.001$), thus indicating the good discriminant validity of the five variables.

4.2. Descriptive statistics and correlations

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and correlations. Empowering leadership was positively correlated with employee OBSE ($r = 0.22$, $p < .01$) and role ambiguity ($r = 0.18$, $p < .05$). Employee OBSE was negatively correlated with employee cyberloafing ($r = -0.20$, $p < .01$). Employee role ambiguity was positively correlated with employee cyberloafing ($r = 0.22$, $p < .01$).

4.3. Hypothesis testing

Table 2 presents the results of the regression analyses.

The results of Model 1 (including OBSE as the dependent variable) showed that empowering leadership was significantly and positively related to employee OBSE ($b = 0.22$, $p < .01$). The results of Model 1 (including cyberloafing as the dependent variable) indicated that employee OBSE was significantly and negatively related to employee cyberloafing ($b = -0.27$, $p < .01$). The indirect effect of empowering leadership on employee cyberloafing via OBSE was -0.06 , 95 % CI = $[-0.14, -0.004]$, which excluded 0. Hence, employee OBSE played a mediating role in the relationship between empowering leadership and employee cyberloafing, thereby supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2.

The results of Model 1 (including role ambiguity as the dependent variable) showed that empowering leadership was significantly and

positively related to employee role ambiguity ($b = 0.20$, $p < .01$). The results of Model 1 (including cyberloafing as the dependent variable) indicated that employee role ambiguity was significantly and negatively related to employee cyberloafing ($b = 0.30$, $p < .01$). The indirect effect of empowering leadership on employee cyberloafing via role ambiguity was 0.06 , 95 % CI = $[0.001, .16]$, which excluded 0. Hence, employee role ambiguity played a mediating role in the relationship between empowering leadership and employee cyberloafing, thereby supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4.

The results of Model 2 (including OBSE as the dependent variable) showed that the interaction between employee power distance and empowering leadership was significantly and negatively related to employee OBSE ($b = -0.16$, $p < .001$). As shown in Fig. 2a, the positive relationship between empowering leadership and employee OBSE was significant ($b = 0.29$, $p < .001$) when employee power distance was lower but not significant ($b = -0.03$, $p = .49$) when employee power distance was higher. Therefore, Hypothesis 5 was supported.

The results of Model 2 (including role ambiguity as the dependent variable) showed that the interaction between employee power distance and empowering leadership was significantly and positively related to employee role ambiguity ($b = 0.13$, $p < .01$). As shown in Fig. 2b, the positive relationship between empowering leadership and employee role ambiguity was significant ($b = 0.24$, $p < .001$) when employee power distance was higher but not significant ($b = -0.01$, $p = .79$) when employee power distance was lower. Therefore, Hypothesis 6 was supported.

Using the path difference analysis approach (Edwards and Lambert, 2007), we tested the moderated mediation effect. The results shown in Table 3 indicate that the indirect relationship between empowering leadership and employee cyberloafing via employee OBSE was -0.07 (95 % CI = $[-0.14, -0.003]$) and 0.01 (95 % CI = $[-0.01, .05]$) when employee power distance was higher and lower, respectively, and that the difference between the two cases was 0.08 , 95 % CI = $[0.003, .18]$. Hence, Hypothesis 7 was supported.

The indirect relationship between empowering leadership and employee cyberloafing via employee role ambiguity was 0.07 (95 % CI = $[0.01, .15]$) and -0.00 (95 % CI = $[-0.05, .04]$) when employee power distance was higher and lower, respectively, and the difference between the two cases was 0.07 , 95 % CI = $[0.004, .17]$. Hence, Hypothesis 8 was supported.

5. Discussion

This study explored the indirect relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing via two opposing mechanisms (employee OBSE and role ambiguity) depending on employee power distance. Our survey study identified paradoxical effects of empowering leadership on hospitality employee cyberloafing. On the one hand, we found that empowering leadership increased employee OBSE, which in turn reduced employee cyberloafing when

Table 1
Descriptive statistics and correlations.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Gender									
2. Education	0.02								
3. Age	-0.06	-0.11							
4. Dyadic tenure	-0.11	-0.12	0.74**						
5. Empowering leadership	-.15*	0.07	-0.12	-0.11	(0.90)				
6. OBSE	-0.04	0.12	0.05	0.07	0.22**	(0.92)			
7. Role ambiguity	0.09	0.06	-0.02	-0.08	0.18*	-0.07	(0.94)		
8. Cyberloafing	-0.01	0.06	-0.13	-0.12	-0.03	-0.20**	0.22**	(0.90)	
9. Power distance	-0.13	0.08	0.09	0.03	-0.11	-0.01	-0.04	0.01	(0.88)
Mean	0.61	0.47	26.03	2.09	3.68	3.73	2.67	2.40	2.89
Standard deviance	0.49	0.55	6.77	2.78	0.56	0.54	0.60	0.84	0.52

Note. $N = 201$. The values presented on the diagonal are Cronbach's α .

*** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$.

Table 2
Results of regression analyses.

	OBSE				Role ambiguity				Cyberloafing			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2		Model 1		Model 2	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	2.78***	0.33	3.66***	0.19	1.64***	0.37	2.33***	0.22	3.35***	0.63	2.97***	0.58
Controls												
Gender	0.01	0.08	-0.05	0.08	0.14	0.09	0.18	0.09	-0.09	0.12	-0.07	0.12
Education	0.12	0.07	0.12	0.07	0.04	0.08	0.04	0.08	0.09	0.11	0.08	0.11
Age	0.00	0.01	-0.00	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Dyadic tenure	0.02	0.02	0.03	0.02	-0.03	0.02	-0.03	0.02	-0.00	0.03	-0.00	0.03
Independent variable												
Empowering leadership	.22**	0.07	0.13***	0.04	0.20**	0.08	0.11	0.04	-0.09	0.11	-0.05	0.06
Moderator												
Power distance			0.02	0.04			-0.02	0.04			0.01	0.06
Interaction			-0.16***	0.04			0.13**	0.04			0.03	0.07
Mediator												
OBSE									-0.27*	0.11	-0.26*	0.12
Role ambiguity									0.30**	0.10	0.29**	0.10
<i>R</i> ²	.07		0.15		0.05		0.09		0.06		0.07	
ΔR^2	.07		0.08		0.05		0.04		0.06		0.01	

Note. *N* = 201, Interaction = Empowering leadership × Power distance. The mediation model included Model 1, and the moderated mediation model included Model 2. *** *p* < .001, ** *p* < .01, * *p* < .05.

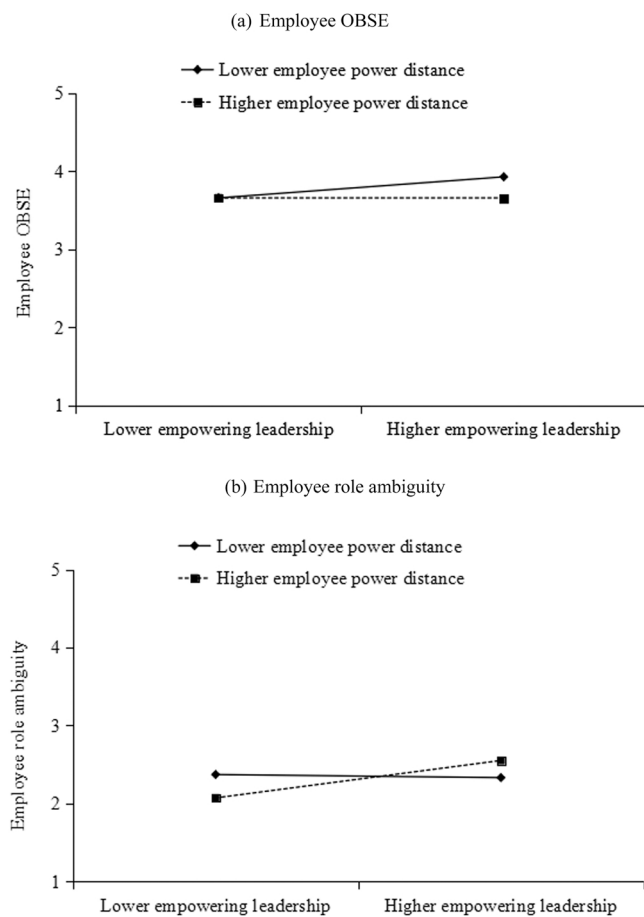


Fig. 2. Simple slope.

employee power distance was lower. On the other hand, empowering leadership increased employee role ambiguity, which in turn increased employee cyberloafing when employee power distance was higher.

5.1. Theoretical implications

First, by identifying empowering leadership as a critical (yet

Table 3
Moderated mediation analysis.

	Empowering leadership → OBSE → Cyberloafing		
	Indirect effect	SE	95 % CI
Lower power distance (-1 SD)	-0.07*	0.03	[-0.14, -0.003]
Higher power distance (+1 SD)	0.01	0.02	[-0.01, 0.05]
Difference	0.08*	0.04	[0.003, 0.18]
Empowering leadership → Role ambiguity → Cyberloafing			
	Indirect effect	SE	95 % CI
Lower power distance (-1 SD)	-0.00	0.02	[-0.05, 0.04]
Higher power distance (+1 SD)	0.07*	0.03	[0.01, 0.15]
Difference	0.07*	0.04	[0.004, 0.17]

Note. *N* = 201, bootstrap sample = 5000.
* *p* < .05.

overlooked) antecedent of hospitality employee cyberloafing, this study extends the literature on cyberloafing and provides an initial empirical test of the causes of cyberloafing in the hospitality industry. Although prior research has explored various personal and contextual antecedents of cyberloafing (e.g., personality, self-control, stressors, and policies; Mercado et al., 2017), we know relatively little about the role of leadership in managing hospitality employee cyberloafing. In line with COR theory, some scholars have found that abusive leadership provokes more cyberloafing by draining employees' resources (e.g., decreasing psychological capital, increasing job stress; Agarwal and Avey, 2020; Lim et al., 2021). To advance this research stream, we focus on empowering leadership, which has been viewed as an important and beneficial leadership style for hospitality and tourism management, to examine how it may be viewed simultaneously as a valuable resource and a burdening stressor, ultimately causing paradoxical effects on cyberloafing. These findings corroborate Zhu et al.'s (2021) finding, which suggests that leadership (e.g., responsible leadership) may have double-edged effects on employees' resource states, subsequently leading to different levels of cyberloafing.

Second, the present study extends the studies of empowering leadership in hospitality and tourism management (Hoang et al., 2021). Considering that employee empowerment has long been viewed as especially important for improving service quality in the hospitality industry (Klidas et al., 2007), most previous studies have focused predominantly on revealing the positive outcomes of empowering leadership in hospitality sectors (e.g., high service quality, Aryee et al., 2019; voice behaviors, Raub and Robert, 2013; creative behaviors, Hon,

2013). Supplementing this stream of studies, the present study treats cyberloafing as a counterproductive outcome and highlights the role of empowering leadership in managing the negative behaviors of hospitality employees. Furthermore, by examining the relationship between empowering leadership and cyberloafing, we hope to provide a new lens through which to build leadership competency models for successful digital transformation in the hospitality industry. Specifically, we suggest that a more nuanced model on leadership competency to handle challenges brought by internet usage should not only consider leaders' ability to enhance employees' skills, knowledge, technology acceptance and innovation (Busulwa et al., 2022) but also focus on the role of leadership (e.g., empowering leadership) in managing and preventing deviant internet behaviors (e.g., cyberloafing). Finally, going beyond the traditional wisdom that solely treats employee empowerment as a valuable tool for successful hospitality and tourism management, the present study provides an initial examination of the potentially paradoxical effects of empowering leadership in hospitality sectors (e.g., increasing both OBSE and role ambiguity), to which other sectors have been alerted (Wong and Giessner, 2018; Cheong et al., 2016). We hope that these findings inspire researchers to consider carefully the implications of empowerment in hospitality sectors and implement empowerment practices more judiciously.

Third, this study utilizes COR theory to identify the mediating role of hospitality employee OBSE and role ambiguity in the relationship between empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing, thereby facilitating our understanding of the underlying mechanisms between the paradoxical effects of empowering leadership on hospitality employee cyberloafing. Specifically, employees' OBSE and role ambiguity translate the paradoxical effects of empowering leadership into effects on hospitality employee cyberloafing. This finding, on the one hand, echoes the view of Pierce and Gardner (2004) that the information conveyed by significant others (e.g., leaders) affects employee OBSE and supports the prevailing argument regarding the relationship between OBSE and reduced deviant behaviors (Ferris et al., 2009). On the other hand, it also provides a more fine-grained understanding of the burdening facet of empowering leadership. Instead of generally assuming that empowering leadership increases job stress (Cheong et al., 2016) and emotional exhaustion (Li et al., 2022) for employees, we suggest that empowering leadership is undesirable because leader empowerment, to some extent, symbolizes leaders abdicating their duties (Wong and Giessner, 2018), which causes an absence of leader direction and coaching that ultimately increases role ambiguity and subsequent cyberloafing.

Finally, by validating the moderating role of employee power distance, this study contributes to an in-depth understanding of the circumstances under which empowering leadership increases OBSE or role ambiguity and impacts subsequent cyberloafing. Beyond recognizing the value of empowerment, scholars have also posited that empowerment practices in the hospitality industry are more congruent with a low power-distance culture that expects and desires equal power sharing (Humborstad et al., 2008). However, when discussing cross-cultural concerns about empowerment implementation in hospitality sectors, previous studies have primarily inspected the assumption that empowerment practices are less positive (in increasing job satisfaction and psychological empowerment, Hui et al., 2004; Raub and Robert, 2013) for a high power-distance country while overlooking the potentially detrimental consequences of empowering leadership for high power-distance employees, who generically do not welcome too much empowerment. Therefore, the present study contributes to the stream of literature by uncovering higher role ambiguity as a detrimental consequence of coupling an empowering leader with an employee with a high power distance (versus a low power distance). This finding echoes Humborstad and Kuvaas' s (2013) finding that unexpected and unwelcomed leader empowerment may lead to higher role ambiguity for employees. Furthermore, instead of generally phrasing empowering leadership as being more positive for employees with a low power

distance (Hui et al., 2004), the present study enriches our understanding of the positive facet of empowering leadership by proving that empowering leadership may be viewed as a valuable resource to help employees gain additional personal resources, such as OBSE.

5.2. Practical implications

Our findings provide several implications for management practices in hospitality organizations. First, leaders should bear in mind that empowering leadership may have double-edged effects on employees, thereby empowering employees to strategically avoid the potentially adverse effects of delegation (e.g., empowering leadership increases role ambiguity and leads to more cyberloafing). Different from other sectors, when dealing with customer needs independently, hospitality employees may encounter more complicated and stressful work situations because service scenarios are usually unpredictable (e.g., overly demanding and unreasonable service requests). Leaders need to provide clear directions to support employees in reducing role ambiguity when they encounter overly demanding situations. For example, Boukis et al. (2020) suggested that when facing overly high job demands (e.g., customer incivility), hospitality employees are more likely to become confused and engage in withdrawal behaviors if they perceive that leaders have abdicated their duties and require employees to solve the problems independently. Therefore, instead of treating empowering leadership as a panacea in triggering positive outcomes, leaders should be attentive to employees who are experiencing feelings of confusion and ambiguity. They should actively respond to those employees and decisively issue directive orders when witnessing that hospitality employees are burdened with overly demanding and ambiguous job responsibilities.

Second, given that empowering leadership affects cyberloafing indirectly through OBSE and role ambiguity, we advise hospitality organizations to improve hospitality employees' OBSE and reduce their role ambiguity to effectively manage cyberloafing. To improve OBSE, hospitality organizations could establish a feedback system through which constructive and useful opinions can be recognized by the organization. In this system, hospitality employees whose ideas or opinions have made significant contributions to the organization should be rewarded, including material incentives such as bonuses and free travel and nonmonetary incentives such as honorary titles and public recognition. In doing so, hospitality organizations can enhance employees' perception of self-worth in the context of the organization, thus helping develop their OBSE. To reduce role ambiguity, hospitality organizations should provide more valuable resources to assist hospitality employees in working independently. For example, organizations can build a customer-oriented culture to help employees feel self-assured in working without leader supervision. Hospitality organizations can also help employees understand the organizational vision through education to increase goal clarity and reduce role ambiguity (Kearney et al., 2019). Furthermore, hospitality organizations can provide additional information in a timely manner (e.g., customer feedback) to help employees clarify the evaluative consequences of their independent actions, thus reducing role ambiguity.

Finally, hospitality leaders should not exhibit empowering leadership toward all employees. Instead, empowering leadership is effective for hospitality employees with a low rather than high power distance. Previous studies have suggested that empowerment implementation should be congruent with the cultural background of tourism destinations. Beyond inferring whether empowering leadership is congruent/incongruent with a specific country (Hui et al., 2004; Fock et al., 2013; Humborstad et al., 2008), we suggest that hospitality organizations need to realize that each employee may have different levels of power distance and interpret empowering leadership differently (Wong and Giessner, 2018). Therefore, we recommend more refined management practices; for example, organizations/leaders can measure hospitality employees' power distance. They can provide autonomy to hospitality

employees with a lower power distance and involve them in the decision-making process. For hospitality employees with a higher power distance, empowering leadership violates their preferences, making them feel uncomfortable. Hence, leaders should consider withholding empowering leadership when working with hospitality employees with a higher power distance to avoid arduous but fruitless actions.

5.3. Limitations and directions for future research

Three limitations are noteworthy. First, although we used a multi-wave, multisource (time-lagged) design, we could not draw strong causal conclusions because the data were not experimental. However, the present results are not skewed or influenced by common method variance because empowering leadership and hospitality employee cyberloafing were rated by different sources. In addition, the quadratic and interaction effects (empowering leadership \times power distance) cannot be artifacts influenced by common method variance (Siemsen et al., 2010). Nonetheless, we suggest that future research should adopt a different approach (e.g., an experimental design) to test the causal relations more rigorously.

Second, this study was conducted in a single (collectivistic) culture; hence, we cannot infer the generalizability of our results to other cultures. However, we believe that our findings should be generalizable to individualistic cultures. For example, prior studies in both collectivistic and individualistic cultures have supported the critical role of empowering leadership in shaping employee behaviors (Arnold et al., 2000; Chen et al., 2011). We encourage researchers to explore whether our findings can be replicated across various cultures.

Third, we focused only on power distance as a moderator between empowering leadership and subsequent OBSE and role ambiguity; other cultural value orientations may also exert an impact on these relationships. For example, as another type of cultural value, uncertainty avoidance refers to “the extent to which members of an organization or society strive to avoid uncertainty by relying on established social norms, rituals, and bureaucratic practices” (House et al., 2004, p. 11). When leaders authorize employees with autonomy and discretionary power, leaders’ clear directions and coaching may be absent, and clear responsibilities and behavioral norms will become blurred. It is possible that individuals with lower uncertainty avoidance may enjoy autonomy and discretion at work, thus increasing OBSE. Employees with higher uncertainty avoidance may prefer clearer instruction in their jobs. Their stronger need to reduce uncertainty would make them less tolerant of empowering leaders, who usually do not convey clear orders. Thus, we recommend that scholars extend the research framework by examining uncertainty avoidance as a new moderator.

6. Conclusion

Drawing on COR theory, this study found that empowering leadership has paradoxical effects on hospitality employee cyberloafing. For employees with lower power distance, empowering leadership reduces their cyberloafing by increasing their OBSE. However, for employees with higher power distance, empowering leadership increases their cyberloafing by increasing their role ambiguity. Thus, the use of empowering leadership to manage cyberloafing is particularly effective for hospitality employees with lower power distance because such leadership is aligned with the preferences of these employees. Overall, this study expands existing knowledge regarding the antecedents of hospitality employee cyberloafing from the perspective of empowering leadership and provides insights for practitioners regarding effective and wise ways of managing hospitality employee cyberloafing.

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Conflict of interest

Jian Peng, Qi Nie, and Xiao Chen declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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