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# Impact of psychological entitlement on engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety: the mediating role of envy

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## Abstract

Psychological entitlement has appeared as a significant topic for research in the field of management and Psychology. From the perspective of social comparison theory, the present study aimed to investigate the impact of psychological entitlement on engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety in the hotel industry. Furthermore, benign and malign envy were examined as an explanatory mechanism between psychological entitlement and its outcomes. Based on a three-wave time-lagged design, data were obtained from 242 employees working in the different hotels in Pakistan. We found that psychological entitlement's has no direct influence on hotel employees engagement in learning activities, and psychological anxiety. In addition, the indirect effect of psychological entitlement on both outcomes (engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety) was found significant through the mediating effect of benign and malign envy. The implications for research theory and practice are discussed.

**Keywords** Psychological entitlement, Engagement in learning activities, Psychological anxiety, Benign envy, Malign envy

## Introduction

The hospitality industry is facing sustainability issues due to the highly competitive and constantly changing environmental demands of customers from different cultures [1]. As the efficiency and productivity of any industry are linked to the performance of its employees, therefore, it makes the employee's role more vital to the success of the hospitality industry [2]. Employee perspective in comparison to the customer perspective is a relatively ignored area in the hospitality industry [3–6]. The selection and retention of talented employees are two of the long-standing issues for the hospitality industry [7, 8].

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For understanding and managing employees, personality is the dominant factor in helping this cause.

In recent times, research on trait psychological entitlement has attracted the attention of the researchers [9, 10]. Millennials also known as “GenMe” are entering into the workforce in large numbers with a high sense of psychological entitlement, which also magnifies the need for studies on psychological entitlement in organizations [11]. Psychological entitlement is the employee personality trait in which he/she considers himself distinct and believes that he/she deserves more and better treatment than others irrespective of efforts and output [12–15].

Despite consensus on the importance of psychological entitlement studies for organizations and repeated calls from researchers, the literature on psychological entitlement is very limited [9, 16, 17]. To fill this gap, the current study aims to investigate psychological entitlement as a stable individual characteristic along with its positive and negative outcomes by taking into account the gap in literature, misconceptions of managers, and inconsistencies about the nature of psychological entitlement. We conceive that psychologically entitled individuals may also engage in upward and downward comparisons. However, the literature is silent on the upward comparison of the psychologically entitled individual at the workplace.

The present study also addresses the important research question that “*what if the entitled individual face upward social comparison?*”. Apart from one study that states that upward comparison triggers the status-seeking account of entitled individuals, and it leads to envious emotions through different underlying mechanisms [18], the rest of the literature is silent on the upward comparison of entitled employees. The current study extends this stream of research by studying the upward comparison of psychologically entitled employees in the hotel industry, which stimulates their emotion in the form of malign and benign envy, which further results in positive and negative outcomes.

Envy is considered as one of the most powerful emotional factors that shape human behavior across a variety of disciplines, but its importance is undermined in terms of its utility [19]. The initial studies have taken envy in a purely negative and hostile construct [20], while the later have focused on its positive and negative dimensions, such as malign and benign [21]. Moreover, some researchers are still insisting on studying envy as a unifying concept [22]. In addition, the existing literature is still unclear about the outcomes of malign and benign envy. The studies are limited to the positive outcomes of benign envy and negative outcomes of malign envy [21, 23, 24], but the case is not always the same. We focus on a lesser-studied approach by suggesting that in addition to a positive outcome, benign envy might cause a negative outcome in the form of psychological anxiety.

Similarly, malign envy, is perceived as a negative phenomenon [25, 26] might yield a positive outcome, which is engagement in learning activities along with its negative outcome of psychological anxiety.

Therefore, In the light of existing theoretical research gaps and social comparison theory [27], this study attempt to develop logical linkages between psychological entitlement, engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety, through the underlying mechanism of benign and malign envy in the context of hotel industry. From the perspective of social comparison theory [27], it is stated that entitled employees can also engage in upward and downward comparison, and upward comparison will develop both types of envious emotions (i.e., benign and malign). Moreover, both types of envy will lead to unpleasant feelings and will motivate employees to learn more to bring them in order to restore their high self-esteem.

The hospitality sector holds significant importance in the growing economy of Pakistan. Empirical evidence reveals that employees in this sector are more prone to anxiety and stress [28]. Past studies have examined stress related behaviors in different sectors such as health and banking [29, 30], however, the specific relationship of psychological entitlement on individual engagements in learning activities in psychological anxiety remains unexplored. This study aims to fill this gap and will contribute to the existing field of knowledge by exploring the relationship of psychological entitlement on individual engagements in learning activities in psychological anxiety through the mediating role of envy in hotel industry of Pakistan.

## **Theoretical background and hypothesis development**

### **Psychological entitlement and engagement in learning activities**

Getting admiration is the primary concern of psychologically entitled individuals [31], while comparing themselves with others, they engage themselves in self-regulatory mechanisms that are aimed to make them better than others [32]. In other words, psychologically entitled employees are more likely to engage in learning new skills and abilities to decrease the discrepancy between their skills and the skills of others with whom they are comparing themselves [27].

Likewise, employee engagement in learning activities is discretionary behavior in nature, in which employees are engaged in ongoing learning at a job apart from the formal on the job training [33]. McLellan and Jackson [34] found a significant relationship between personality and self-regulated learning, but literature on one of the important personality trait of psychological entitlement and its relationship with learning is scant.

Psychologically entitled employees actively take part in all the activities that can increase their public images in social interactions, such as attention-seeking, credit taking, glory, praise, appreciation, or high-status partners [18, 35]. Bufardi and Campbell [36] state that psychologically entitled employees will exert more effort on self-promotion; their self-regulation can also be in the form of engagement in learning activities to expand their area of expertise. These employees' wants attention in all social relations, their self-esteem and confidence level are also high. They are more prone to sharpen their saw by gaining new knowledge and skills to stay in the competition. On the base of the above discussion the following hypothesis is proposed;

*H1* Psychological entitlement is positively associated with engagement in the learning activities of employees.

#### **Psychological entitlement and psychological anxiety**

Psychological anxiety is an individual unpleasant feelings characterized by worrying thoughts for instance; rumination, guilt, and frustrations, such feelings ultimately affect the physical health of employees [37, 38]. Due to long-term effects and pervasiveness of anxiety over a large number of people, studying perpetrators of anxiety appeared as an important area of concern for researchers [39]. The pertinent literature reveals a positive association between Psychology entitlement and anxiety [13]. Balyan, Tok [40] found a direct and significant impact of personality on the level and type of anxiety. Priesemuth and Taylor [14] also found that those employees who have high sense psychological entitlement feels more depressive mood states in case of unfavorable situation and are more likely to engage in antisocial behaviors in the organization. Entitled individuals are usually dissatisfied with the outcomes they receive in exchange relationships and consider that they are judged unfairly [14, 41].

The organization cannot meet all the expectations of the entitled employees. Hence, entitled employees feel distressed due to their unmet desires [12]. The social comparison theory [27], also suggested that entitled employees continuously compare themselves with others. This comparison ignites their feeling that their organization is not giving them more rewards and benefits which they deserve as a result of which they experience negative feelings like stress and anxiety [13, 42–44]. Thus, the social comparison paradigm and the discussion of psychological entitlement and anxiety lead us to postulate the following hypothesis:

*H2* Psychological entitlement is positively associated with the psychological anxiety of employees.

#### **Mediating role of benign envy**

##### ***Psychological entitlement and benign envy***

Until now, researchers have been suggesting that psychologically entitled individuals experience malign envy if they see their counterparts having more financial resources, higher status, achievements, or possessions as they cannot see others progressing [45–47]. However, contemporary research has started to identify the positive side of envy, known as “benign envy, which means the feeling of admiration and emulation for those who are better in something than the envier [19, 48].

Psychologically entitled employees want to see themselves superior compared to others [49], and are more likely to experience benign envy because of social comparison, which is an inner desire to get what others, have [50]. Envious emotions have a direct correlation with social comparisons, so entitled employees are more likely to experience envious emotions about others, which can be benign in order to revisit self-development. Thus, we proposed the following hypothesis;

*H3a* Psychological entitlement is positively associated with the benign envy of employees.

##### ***Benign envy and engagement in learning activities***

Benign envy is nonmalicious as it is characterized by the feeling of improving one's condition [48]. In benign envy, the focus is not on bringing the targeted object down, but on developing oneself [46]. Past literature on envy suggests that those employees who experience benign envy not only try to improve their condition but also develop constructive reactions in response to their inferiority [51, 52]. They do so by taking part in learning activities as it acts as a tool to helps them in decreasing the discrepancy between them and envied individuals [53, 54]. Hence, it is convincing to say that psychological entitlement will lead to benign envy because of the social comparison, and such envious thoughts will act as a motivation to engage in learning activities at the workplace in order to reduce the feeling of inferiority. Thus, based on the above literature, we posit the following;

*H3b* Benign envy is positively associated with engagement in the learning activities of employees.

*H3c* Benign envy mediates the relationship between psychological entitlement and engagement in learning activities.

##### ***Benign envy and psychological anxiety***

Benign envy frustrate the envier as he/she face emotional pain because of a threat to their self-esteem, which is the fundamental need of humans, and more of the entitled [55, 56]. Employees high in psychological entitlement

have the belief that they are entitled to more as compared to others. They also have the desire to compare their abilities and opinions with others [27]. As stated earlier, entitled individuals have a sense of self-esteem; when this self-esteem is threaten because of social comparison, it leads to envious emotions and such emotions cause anxiety. Social comparison acts as a reality check for entitled individuals as they realize that others are superior in something, and this causes psychological anxiety through benign envy. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H4a* Benign envy is positively associated with the psychological anxiety of employees.

*H4b* Benign envy mediates the relationship between psychological entitlement and Psychological anxiety.

#### **Mediating role of malign envy**

##### ***Psychological entitlement and malign envy***

Twenge and Campbell [57] study reveals that Millennials are joining organizations with a high sense of psychological entitlement. Social comparison theory states that people compare themselves with others objectively and subjectively based on appearance, possessions, and other skills [27]. Therefore, it is safe to say that psychologically entitled employees compare themselves with others at work in terms of all objective and subjective measures. Psychologically entitled employees have an unrealistic belief that they deserve better than others [9, 15]. Smith and Kim [20] explain malign envy as an unpleasant and painful feeling triggering inferiority, resentment, and hostility resulting from social comparison. Schoeck [51] stated that envious feelings are present at the core of man's life in social settings. We conceived that, when they find themselves inferior in status, success and financial benefits because of social comparison, then they would start to feel envious, which can be malicious. Hence, the current study proposes the following hypothesis:

*H5a* Psychological entitlement is positively associated with the malign envy of employees.

##### ***Malign envy and engagement in learning activities***

Malign envy is a painful feeling of inferiority regarding possessions, achievements, status, or quality in which the individual wishes that the other person also lost all those things, which he lacks. This intense feeling can lead the individual to go extra miles in order to get what he lacks [48, 58]. A little stream of research on envy also suggests that both types of envy can motivate a person for self-improvement [26, 59]. The social comparison theory [27], also articulates that when an individual experiences a discrepancy regarding opinions or abilities then he is more

likely to change himself for removing the discrepancy. In other words, when psychologically entitled employees feel malign envy after realizing that others are better than them, then they start striving to get the status they want [18]. Thus on the basis of the above discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed:

*H5b* Malign envy is positively associated with engagement in the learning activities of employees.

*H5c* Malign envy mediates the relationship between psychological entitlement and engagement in learning activities.

##### ***Malign envy and psychological anxiety***

Malign envy results in high absenteeism among employees with a decline in commitment and increased intentions for turnover and antisocial behaviors [60–62]. Malign envy is an intense emotion of anger and resentment, and it leads to involvement in unethical behaviors, poor mental health, and life dissatisfaction [18, 24]. The feeling that one's lacks something than others is excruciating, as it makes one feel inferior, and it is due to this inferiority that employees start to experience psychological anxiety. Psychologically entitled employees have pride that they deserve the best in everything no matter what. Entitled individuals, just like everyone else, have a strong desire to compare their abilities and opinions with others [27]. When these individuals are involved in social comparison, then they realize that they lack many things that others have. This social comparison triggers the feelings of malign envy in entitled individuals, which is a burning desire to take away those abilities from others, which the individual lacks [18]. Malign envy is very uncomfortable feeling, as it is the realization that an individual lacks what others have. This feeling of inferiority causes stress and psychological anxiety among employees. Figure 1 explains the study framework and hypotheses relationships. Thus, we proposed the following hypotheses:

*H6a* Malign envy is positively associated with the psychological anxiety of employees.

*H6b* Malign envy mediates the relationship between psychological entitlement and psychological anxiety.

#### **Methods**

This study employed a time lag approach for data collection. A Questionnaire was adopted, and distributed among respondents. Each questionnaire comprised of demographics information and structured questions about the variables under study. Five points Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to agree strongly was used.

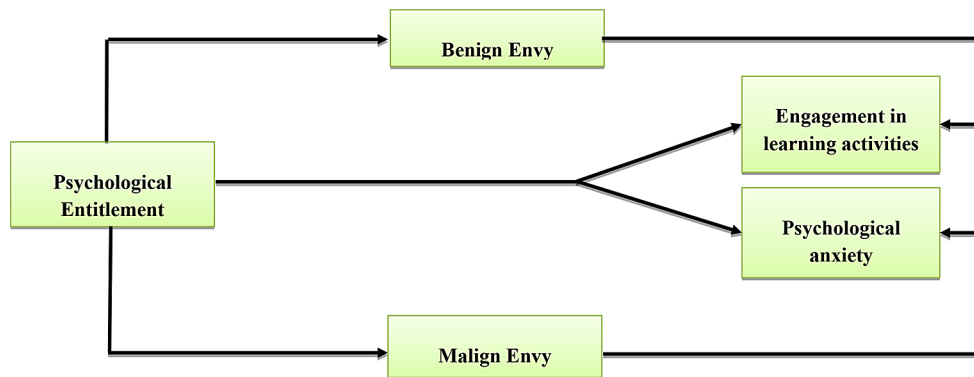


Fig. 1 Proposed research model

Table 1 Confirmatory factor analysis and alternative measurement models

Model	$\chi^2$	Df	$\chi^2 / df$	$\Delta \chi^2$ <sup>a</sup>	$\Delta df$	CFI	IFI	TLI	RMSEA
<b>Hypothesized Measurement Model (5 Factor Model)</b>	<b>714.72</b>	<b>617</b>	<b>1.158</b>			<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.94</b>	<b>0.02</b>
Alternate Model 1: Combined " Psychological Anxiety and Engagement in Learning Activities " (4 Factor Model)	1066.26	621	1.717	351.54	4	0.75	0.76	0.74	0.05
Alternate Model 2: Combined " Benign and Malign Envy " (4 Factor Model)	878.02	621	1.414	163.30	4	0.86	0.86	0.85	0.04
Alternate Model 3: Combined " Benign and Malign Envy " and then combined "Psychological Anxiety and Engagement in Learning Activities " (3 Factor Model)	1230.09	624	1.971	515.37	7	0.67	0.67	0.64	0.06
Alternate Model 4: Combined " Benign, Malign Envy, Psychological Anxiety, Engagement in Learning Activities " (2 Factor Model)	1393.82	626	2.227	679.10	9	0.58	0.59	0.55	0.07
Alternate Model 5: "All items Combined " (1 Factor Model)	1591.75	627	2.539	877.03	10	0.47	0.48	0.44	0.08

Note: n=242; <sup>a</sup> Values are differences of each of the alternative measurement models with the hypothesized model

**Industrial setting**

The unit of analysis for the present study was middle-level managers working in the different (4 and 5 stars hotels of Islamabad Pakistan such as Islamabad Marriot Hotel, Islamabad Serena hotel, Chalet Islamabad, Ramada Islamabad, Best western Islamabad, Hotel Margalla, Hospitality Inn, Sheraz hotel, Habibi hotel, Sheraton Hotel, and Pearl continental hotel Islamabad. The authors in person visited the hotels discussed the purpose of study. They assured the hotel managers about the confidentiality of their responses and the data was collected from the employees with the permission of concerned managers of the hotels.

**Sampling and procedure**

By following convenient sampling method, the respondents through time lagged survey research design. The data was collected in three-time waves by distributing questionnaires along with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Time lags studies are commonly used for data collection processes to reduce common method bias and temporal effect, and this approach is preferred in similar nature studies [6, 63]. At the first wave of the study, 400 middle-level managers were requested to report their trait psychological entitlement, 311 usable responses were received back. After three weeks, those 311 managers were contacted

again to report their both types of envious emotions i.e. benign, malignant, and 271 responded back. For the third wave of data collection, the questionnaires measuring the psychological anxiety and engagement in learning activities of employees were distributed among those 271 managers who have provided data for the first two time lags, and 242 responses completed in all manners were received. The duration between different time lags was three weeks. Out of the initially distributed 400 questionnaires, only 242 correctly filled questionnaires were considered for testing the hypothesized model of the study. The overall response rate was recorded by 60.5%.

**Sample characteristics**

Among the 242 respondents, 65% were male, and 35% were females, and 92% were between 18 and 41 years of age group. 93% of respondents were educated to bachelor level. 54% of respondents had an average experience of 1 to 5 years, while 26% had an experience of 6 to 10 years. All of the respondents have at least intermediate education status, and they have no issue in understanding the English language used in questionnaires. Furthermore, translation assistance was also provided to the respondents, where it was considered necessary in order to understand the survey instrument correctly.



**Scale measurements**

A questionnaire was adopted from previous sources to measure the variables under study. Age, gender, education, and experience were used as control variables. These variables data were collected for controlling purposes after testing their impact on ANOVA results.

The response of the individual regarding psychological entitlement was measured through self-reported nine items scale adopted from Campbell, Bonacci [64]. The sample item is “I deserve more things in my life.” Out of nine items, one item was dropped in confirmatory factor analysis due to lower loading. That item was cultural specific “If I were on the Titanic, I would deserve to be on the *first* lifeboat!” and all employees of Pakistan have not sufficient information about the Titanic story. After dropping this 1 item, the scale was found reliable with Cronbach Alpha 0.78.

The self-reported scale developed by Lange and Crusius [21] was adopted to measure the benign and malign envy of employees. The scale consists of 10 items, five items for each type of envy. The sample item for benign envy includes “I strive to reach other people’s superior achievements.” The five items scale for benign envy was found reliable with Cronbach alpha 0.71. The sample item for malign envy includes “If other people have something that I want for myself, I wish to take it away from them.” The five items scale measuring malign envy was also found reliable with Cronbach alpha 0.71.

In order to measure employee engagement in learning activities, eight items scale developed by Bezuijen, van Dam [65] was adopted and the sample item includes “I am working to extend my knowledge and skills.” The scale was found reliable in the present study with Cronbach alpha 0.77.

Lehrer and Woolfolk [37] 11 items self-reported scale of psychological anxiety was adopted. The sample item is “I cannot get some thoughts out of my mind.” The scale was found reliable with Cronbach alpha 0.82.

**Factor analysis (time 2 and time 3)**

For establishing discriminant validity, we perform confirmatory factor analysis for those variables for which data was collected at the same time lag from the same respondents. Two factors model fitness results for malign and benign envy were found best fit, with values ( $\chi^2 = 63.38$ ,

$df=34$ ; CFI=0.97, GFI=0.95, TLII=0.94, RMSEA=0.06) than a single factor model of combining both types of envy ( $\chi^2 = 356.7$ ,  $df=35$ , CFI=0.67, GFI=0.72, TLI=0.66, RMSEA=0.19). Two factor model for psychological anxiety and engagement in learning activities also provides better fit indices with ( $\chi^2 = 296$ ,  $df=136$ , CFI=0.92, GFI=0.90, TLI=0.90, RMSEA=0.07) than one-factor model by combining psychological anxiety and engagement in learning activities with ( $\chi^2 = 509$ ,  $df=137$ , CFI=0.81, GFI=0.79, TLI=0.76, RMSEA=0.10). These results of model fit indices justify that respondents have adequately understood the time two and time three variables separately.

**Results**

After performing ANOVA, Gender, age, experience, and qualification were also found in an insignificant relationship with both dependent variables psychological anxiety and engagement in learning activities and mediators benign and malign envy. Hence, they were excluded from further analysis.

**Confirmatory factor analysis**

Table 1 reflects the results of Confirmatory factor analysis of the full measurement model. Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to check the fitness of hypothesized five factors model including psychological entitlement, benign envy, malign envy, engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety. As values in Table 2 reflects that five factors model is adequately fit with ( $\chi^2 = 714.72$ ,  $df=617$ ,  $\chi^2/df=1.158$ ; CFI=0.94, IFI=0.94, TLI=0.94, RMSEA=0.02) hence provide strong support for the hypothesized model. Alternative models were tested against the hypothesized five factors model. Alternative four factors, three-factor, two factor and one-factor models yield worse fit results in comparison to the hypothesized five-factor model (See Table 1). Hence, the collected data justifies the five-factor model due to its best fit values.

**Descriptive statistics**

Table 2 represents mean values, Standard deviation, reliability, and inter-correlation between all the variables of the study. The correlation between both mediators is moderate, which reduces the chances of

**Table 2** Means, standard deviations, correlations, and reliabilities for main variables of interest in the study

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Psychological entitlement (T1)	3.4	0.64	<b>(0.78)</b>				
2. Benign envy (T2)	3.6	0.75	0.25**	<b>(0.71)</b>			
3. Malign envy (T2)	3.5	0.70	0.24**	0.26**	<b>(0.71)</b>		
4. Engagement in learning activities (T3)	3.5	0.68	0.22**	0.38**	0.30**	<b>(0.77)</b>	
5. Psychological anxiety (T3)	3.2	0.66	0.19**	0.23**	0.21**	0.11	<b>(0.82)</b>

Note. N=242; Alpha reliabilities presented in parenthesis. \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 3** Regression analysis results

**a. Direct path coefficients of the hypothesized model**

Direct paths	Coefficient	SE	t
Psychological Entitlement → Engagement in Learning Activities	0.10	0.06	1.6
Psychological Entitlement → Psychological Anxiety	0.12	0.07	1.8
Psychological Entitlement → Benign Envy	0.29**	0.07	4.0
Benign Envy → Engagement in Learning Activities	0.28**	0.06	5.0
Benign Envy → Psychological Anxiety	0.14*	0.06	2.5
Psychological Entitlement → Malign Envy	0.26**	0.06	3.7
Malign Envy → Engagement in Learning Activities	0.20**	0.05	3.2
Malign Envy → Psychological Anxiety	0.13*	0.06	2.1

**b. Indirect path coefficients of the hypothesized model**

Indirect paths	Bootstrapping		BC 95% CI	
	Indirect effect	Boot SE	Lower limit	Upper limit
Psychological Entitlement → Benign Envy → Engagement in Learning Activities	0.08	0.03	0.04	0.15
Psychological Entitlement → Benign Envy → Psychological Anxiety	0.04	0.02	0.01	0.09
Psychological Entitlement → Malign Envy → Engagement in Learning Activities	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.10
Psychological Entitlement → Malign Envy → Psychological Anxiety	0.03	0.01	0.01	0.07

Note: n=242; Bootstrap sample size=5000, BC 95% CI=Bias corrected confidence Intervals \* $p < .05$  \*\* $p < .01$

multi-collinearity. The independent variable psychological entitlement was found significantly correlated with benign envy ( $r=.25, p < .01$ ), and malign envy ( $r=.24, p < .01$ ). Psychological entitlement was found in a significant correlation with both outcomes employees engagement in learning activities ( $r=.22, p < .01$ ) and psychological anxiety ( $r=.19, p < .05$ ). Both types of envy malign and benign were also found significantly correlated with one another with value ( $r=.26, p < .01$ ). The correlation of benign envy was found significant with employee engagement in learning activities ( $r=.38, p < .01$ ) and psychological anxiety ( $r=.23, p < .01$ ). Malign envy was also found significantly correlated with employee engagement in learning activities ( $r=.30, p < .01$ ) and psychological anxiety ( $r=.21, p < .01$ ). While the correlation of employees engagement in learning activities with psychological anxiety was found insignificant ( $r=.113, p > .05$ ).

**Regression and mediation analysis**

We conducted the regression analysis for direct and indirect effects by employing Preacher and Hayes (2004) mediation macros. Model 4 of Preacher and Hayes (2004) was utilized to test the parallel mediation effect of independent variables on both dependent variables. Table 3a reflects the results of the direct impact of the independent variable on dependent variables and mediators, and the direct impact of mediators on dependent variables. Table 3b reflects the indirect effects of the results of mediation analysis. As it is hypothesized in H1, that psychological entitlement has a positive impact on the engagement of employees in learning activities. However, contrary to the expectations, the results of the present study do not support the H1 of the study with ( $\beta=0.10,$

$p > .05$ ). H2 was also not supported by the results of the present study, and the impact of psychological entitlement on psychological anxiety was found insignificant with ( $\beta=0.12, p > .05$ ). Hence, H1 and H2 about the direct effect of the independent variable on both dependent variables were rejected.

H3a of the study was about the positive impact of psychological entitlement on benign envy and was found significant ( $\beta=0.29, p < .01$ ). H3b states that Benign envy is positively related to engagement in learning activities were also found significant with values ( $\beta=0.28, p < .01$ ). H3c about the indirect effect of psychological entitlement on engagement in learning activities through benign envy was found significant with (Indirect effect=0.08) the upper and lower limits confidence interval 0.15 and 0.04 respectively, having no zero between them. Therefore, H3a, H3b, and H3c were accepted by getting strong support from the results of the present study.

The present study also supports H4a with the significant impact of benign envy on psychological anxiety with ( $\beta=0.14, p < .05$ ). The indirect effect of psychological entitlement on psychological anxiety through the mediation of benign envy was also found significant (Indirect effect=0.04), with upper and lower limit confidence intervals 0.09 and 0.01, and there is no zero between them. Hence H4b also got full support from the results of the present study.

H5a states that psychological entitlement had a positive impact on malign envy and was accepted with ( $\beta=0.26, p < .01$ ). H5b also got full support from the results of the current study with a significant impact of malign envy on engagement in learning activities ( $\beta=0.20, p < .01$ ). H5c was about the indirect effect of psychological entitlement on engagement in learning activities through malign

envy. It was also found significant (Indirect effect=0.05) with upper and lower limits confidence intervals 0.10 and 0.02, as there is no zero between them so, the results of the study fully support H5c.

Results also supported the impact of malign envy on psychological anxiety ( $\beta=0.13, p<.05$ ), lead to the acceptance of H6a. H6b was about the mediating role malign envy between psychological entitlement and psychological anxiety and was accepted with (Indirect effect=0.03); because there is no zero between upper and lower limits of confidence intervals 0.07 and 0.01, Hence H6b is accepted.

## Discussion

The current study aimed to check how and why psychological entitlement leads to positive and negative outcomes in hotel employees. Based on social comparison theory, this study contributes to the literature by proposing and empirically testing engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety as an outcome of psychological entitlement. Furthermore, benign and malign envy is considered a possible explanatory mechanism in the proposed relationships.

Contrary to our expectations, the results of the present study do not support our hypothesis 1 about the relationship between psychological entitlement and engagement in learning activities. This means that psychological entitlement is not directly effecting engagement in the learning and psychological anxiety of employees unless some other factors are not involved in explaining these relationships. These findings are consistent with previous studies, which states that psychological entitlement and its outcomes are subject to some underlying emotional and motivational states that explain these relationships [12, 18]. Previous literature is also silent about the direct relationship of psychological entitlement with self-development and learning activities. In addition, Harvey and Martinko [66] stated that the entitlement of employees has a significant relation with self-serving attribution, and such attributions are essential to consider in understanding the outcomes of entitlement. Therefore, entitled employees do not engage themselves in learning activities until they feel such learning will help them in serving their inflated self.

Hypothesis 2, of our study reveals that the psychological entitlement of hotel employees is related to psychological anxiety, as they are not satisfied with their present state. However, contrary to the expectations, there was no direct relation found between psychological entitlement and psychological anxiety. Smith, Sherry [67] from the Meta-analysis concluded that there is a strong relationship between narcissism and perfectionism and entitlement share its characteristics with narcissism. Therefore, psychologically entitled employees have a

strong tendency towards perfectionism, and they do not want to express their level of anxiety in front of others. This may be the possible reason for the insignificant relationship between psychological entitlement and psychological anxiety.

Similarly, the results of the study proved the relationship of psychological entitlement with both types of envious emotions. Our study findings are consistent with the previous studies [18, 23]. As discussed in the literature both types of benign and malign envy have different dynamics [21, 23]. Benign envy leads to self-development, and it works as a motivational factor for moving upward. Our study results also support this notion by finding a significant association between benign envy and engagement in learning activities. Envious emotions are the stressful feelings of inferiority [21], and the results of the current study proved a significant association of benign envy and psychological anxiety. Our results also confirmed the mediation of benign envy between psychological entitlement and its outcomes psychological anxiety and engagement in learning activities. The explanatory mechanism of benign envy towards engagement in learning activities similar to the previous studies findings [18, 66]. In addition, the indirect effect of entitlement on psychological anxiety through benign envy was in line with the argument of [68], who found that social comparison of an individual lead them to envious emotions and such emotions, leads to employee burn-out. The relationship of malign envy with psychological anxiety was found significant and these results are in line with the previous finding on malign envy that considers malign envy as negative and stressful feelings [23].

## Theoretical implications

This study offers several theoretical contributions. First, it is a response to several calls on comparatively ignored personality trait i.e., psychological entitlement [9, 16]. Second, the novel contribution of the present study is to check the upward comparison of trait psychological entitlement, which has been largely overlooked in previous studies [18]. Third, the present study explored the positive outcomes of psychological entitlement in the form engagement in learning by clearing managerial misconceptions about psychological entitlement as a negative trait [69]. Fourth, the current study has a novel contribution by identifying the positive outcome of malign envy and the negative outcome of benign envy. As stated earlier that millennial are entering into every sector with high sense of psychological entitlement, entitlement studies in hospitality sector are scant and some researcher is of the view that employee perspective in hospitality sector is ignored area [3, 4].



### Practical implications

This study offers several practical implications for the manager in the hospitality industry. First, in this era of competition, employees are the core competitive advantage of any organization. As mentioned before, millennials are entering into each industry in large numbers with a high sense of grandiosity and entitlement. Managers are facing problems with managing such employees [69]. For effective management of employees, employee personality is the vital factor in which practitioners need to be more vigilant. Different personality tests and interviews should be design to hire employees with manageable expectations. However, it is not possible to ignore psychologically entitled employees at the workplace their expectations need to be address and managed effectively. This study explored some of the motivational factors that can benefit the manger in understanding the dynamic of entitled personalities. The managers should employ such practices that satisfy the need for such employees like empowerment, compensation, and skill enhancement competition.

Furthermore, proper counseling and training exercises should be arrange in order to manage the expectation of entitled employees. The stressful feelings of entitled employees should be managed through social support from organizational management. The engagement in learning should be promote throughout the organization for bringing innovation and creative ways of doing organizational activities more effectively. The managers should create healthy workplace environment that can help to boost employees performance without risking their mental health. Organization should arrange awareness training related to stress and anxiety regularly for its employees. The results of the current study will also assist the researchers and organization to identify the elements that negatively affect employees mental health.

### Limitations and future research directions

This study also has some limitations. First, the data of the present study was collected from the middle-level managers; future studies should consider the top-level and lower-level employees. Second, the design of the study was time-lagged, not pure longitudinal, in future data can be collected in long time lags in order to refine the mediation effects of both types of envy. Three, the present study has focused only on one positive outcome i.e., engagement in learning activities. Future studies should consider more positive outcomes with psychological entitlement and envy as these are somehow overlooked in the previous literature. Four, the present study has used a convenience sampling technique for data collection purposes. Future studies should consider the probability sampling approach to verify these findings. The present study is based on the Asian context. Future

studies should consider the cross-cultural approach to see the variation in findings across cultures.

### Conclusion

To sum up, this study explored the positive and negative outcomes of psychological entitlement through the indirect effect of benign and malign envy. The direct effect of psychological entitlement on both outcomes (engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety) was found insignificant. However, the effect of psychological entitlement on both engagement in learning activities and psychological anxiety through the explanatory mechanism of envious emotions was supported by the results of the present study. These findings contribute to theory and practice. The researchers should explore more antecedents and outcomes of psychological entitlement in order to help practitioners in the hospitality industry to manage employees effectively at the workplace.

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### Author contributions

The first author (M.I) and the second author (M.M) equally contributed to writing the original draft, the conceptualization, data collection, formal analysis, and methodology. (T.F) and (S.I) helps in data collection, and formal analysis and reviewed the paper (A.S.B) provided resources and administered the project. (M.Z.Y) reviewed and edited the paper. All the contributed authors approved the submitted version.

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### Data availability

The datasets used and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

### Declarations

#### Ethics approval and consent to participate

The studies involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the departmental Ethics Approval Committee of department of Psychology Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan. It is certified, that proposal procedure and methodology of this research obey the guidelines/rules and regulations of the Helsinki Declaration and the ethics set forth by the institution. Further, informed consent was obtained from all the participants.

#### Consent for publication

Not applicable.

#### Competing interests

The authors declare no competing interests.

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