



## An Empirical Research on the Antecedents of Psychological Ownership: Wise Leadership and the Crab Syndrome

### *Psikolojik Sahiplenmenin Öncülleri Üzerine Ampirik Bir Araştırma: Bilge Liderlik ve Yengeç Sendromu*

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#### Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine the effects of wise leadership and the crab syndrome, which are new concepts in the literature, on psychological ownership within the scope of the conservation of resources theory. For this purpose, a quantitative method was followed in the study. The study is significant since it was conducted to reveal the antecedents of psychological ownership at the level of individuals and leaders. The sample of the research is the participants working in the banking sector. The questionnaire method was used as the data collection technique, and the items of the dependent variables took place before the independent variables in the questionnaire form to minimize the common method variance error. The analysis of the data was carried out in two stages such as preliminary data analysis and hypothesis testing. While descriptive statistics were included in the preliminary data analysis, research hypotheses were tested using the two-step process of the Structural Equation Model (SEM) in hypothesis testing. In the obtained findings, it was observed that wise leadership predicted psychological ownership positively, and crab syndrome negatively. Within the scope of the conservation of resources theory, the results were discussed, and the recommendations and limitations of the research were stated.

**Keywords:** Conservation of resources theory, psychological ownership, wise leadership, crab syndrome

**Paper Type:** Research

#### Öz

Bu araştırmanın amacı, alan yazında yeni kavramlar olan bilge liderlik ile yengeç sendromunun psikolojik sahiplenme üzerindeki etkisini kaynakları koruma teorisine dayandırarak incelemektir. Bu amaç doğrultusunda çalışmada nicel bir yöntem izlenmiştir. Çalışma, psikolojik sahiplenmenin birey ve lider düzeyindeki öncüllerini ortaya koymak açısından önem taşımaktadır. Araştırmanın örneklemini, bankacılık sektöründe çalışan katılımcılardır. Veri toplama tekniği olarak anket yöntemi kullanılmış ve ortak metod varyans hatasını minimize etmek için anket formunda bağımlı değişkenlerin maddeleri, bağımsız değişkenlerden önce yer almıştır. Verilerin analizi, ön veri analizi ve hipotez testi olmak üzere iki aşamada gerçekleştirilmiştir. Ön veri analizinde, tanımlayıcı istatistiklere yer verilmiş, hipotez testinde ise Yapısal Eşitlik Modeli (SEM)'nin iki adımlı süreci kullanılarak araştırma hipotezleri test edilmiştir. Elde edilen bulgularda, bilge liderliğin psikolojik sahiplenmeyi pozitif, yengeç sendromunun ise negatif yordadığı gözlenmiştir. Kaynakları koruma teorisi kapsamında sonuçlar tartışılmış ve araştırmanın önerileri ile kısıtları belirtilmiştir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Kaynakları koruma teorisi, psikolojik sahiplenme, bilge liderlik, yengeç sendromu

**Makale Türü:** Araştırma

#### Introduction

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The use of all resources owned by an individual or organization can be explained by the conservation of resources theory. This theory refers to the efforts to protect and increase existing resources to reach the goal (Hobfoll et al., 2018: 104). On the other hand, losing or the possibility of losing resources leads to stress. Stress can cause aggressive behaviors with the impulse of self-defense, as well as it can push the individual to display irrational attitudes and behaviors focused on self-preservation (Rothbard, 2001: 660). Motivation, leadership, and environment are key agents in the expenditure of resources in the organization (Bedawy, 2015: 160). At this point, it is necessary to protect resources, in other words, to create suitable conditions that will affect the motivation and experience of employees (Owens et al., 2016). Conservation of resources theory instructs to solve the research question, in terms of revealing the relation among leadership, personality traits, and psychological ownership.

Psychological ownership (PO) is “a cognitive and emotional process that leads an individual to a goal” (Pierce et al., 2003). It is the total beliefs and thoughts that cause a sense of “belonging” as an inborn trait. Psychological ownership can occur for material or moral elements (Pierce et al., 2001). According to the conservation of resources theory, all resources associated with the goal are valuable. Psychological ownership can ensure the conservation and increase of resources (Mehmood et al., 2021). Besides the emotions felt in the face of gain and loss, the value given to the goal is also taken into account (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). In addition to making rational choices, decisions are also naturally made based on emotions. Psychological ownership manifests itself in attitudes and behaviors. In this case, more effort can be made to reach the resources. The stress caused by the loss of resources can also create a line of defense and lead to non-rational behavior.

The threat of losing resources can cause cognitive experience that triggers anxiety and stress (Chen, 2010). Crab syndrome (CS) is a phenomenon that directs the individual to develop defensive behavioral strategies against the possibility of not achieving goals such as success, status, and acceptance (Tagle, 2021). It describes actions that require the highest utilization of resources (Miller, 2019). CS is a negative work behavior that ignores organizational norms (Pegues, 2018), intimidates individuals working with high performance, and prevents organizational competition (Üzüm and Özdemir, 2020). Crab syndrome contains the motivation to achieve personal gains. It is argued that Crab syndrome creates a feeling of 'envy' (Caples, 2016), jealousy, and hatred (Lith, 2017). Efforts are made to overshadow the motivations and successes of people who are perceived as more successful than themselves (Pegues, 2018; Ozdemir and Uzum, 2019). In line with the statements, it can be said that crab syndrome also enables that individual has an emotional experience.

The production and sharing of knowledge add great value to the sustainability of today's organizations (Davenport and Prusak, 1998; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011: 58). Therefore, the use and sharing of knowledge are at the center of strategic management. Wisdom includes ethical behaviors, as well as increasing profitability through processes such as decision-making, participation, and guidance (Rooney et al., 2010). Wise leadership which takes the value added to enterprises one step ahead can be defined as “the ability to find the right answers on the road to the common interest, a virtuous habit that illuminates the path taken” (Hamaya and Oya, 2013). As understood from the definition, wise leadership takes care to realize the effort to create economic and social value together. It can be claimed that this effort of wise leadership works with a structure that supports the conservation and increase of resources.

According to Thomas (2017: 6), a wise leader has advanced emotional intelligence and technical skills, as well as the conceptual ability and systematic thinking capacity. These features encourage the leader to act for the benefit of everyone (Vanharanta et al., 2021: 324). Nonaka and Takeuchi (2011), constituting the theoretical structure of wise leadership, state that leaders who make ethical judgments, communicate effectively, share knowledge, make correct predictions, and teach by means of examples, are wise leaders. Therefore, wise leaders play a significant role in the process of disseminating, using, and reconstituting knowledge.

## 1. Literature Review and Hypotheses

Wise leadership can be viewed by the theory of knowledge creation and transfer (Martín-de-Castro and Montoro-Sánchez, 2013: 126; Nonaka et al., 2006). The wise leader shares the knowledge. Thanks to this qualification, not only senior managers but also mid-level managers can be wise leaders (Vera and Crossan, 2004; Chen and Huang, 2009: 112). And thus, wise leadership differs from strategic leadership.

While the leader encourages the creation of knowledge (Chen and Huang, 2009: 111), she/he also motivates and guides her/his subordinates at the same time (Ding et al., 2019: 310). The fact that the leader shares knowledge is interpreted as virtuous behavior, and it pleases the employees. A wise leader pursues favor (MacIntyre, 1999) and attempts to increase resources. Therefore, it is thought that it will increase the sense of ownership.

There are also research studies focusing on wise leadership's close ties to creativity (Nanoka et al., 2006), knowledge management, and innovation development (Ding et al., 2019), besides research studies trying to put wise leadership in a theoretical perspective (Nonaka and Takeuchi, 2011). It should be noted that there are not many studies examining wise leadership in the national literature, and there is a compilation study by Taş and Alparslan (2020).

It is significant for individuals or organizations to preserve resources as much as to increase them. The loss of resources can cause negative affect, as well as a motivation that cannot be tolerated to lose. This motivation creates behaviors that prevent resource losses. Moreover, the loss of resources will cause a decrease in the quality of life (Halbesleben et al., 2014). The effort to get rid of this negative effect can also negatively affect the other side. The effect of resource loss on business behavior is also the subject of investigation. Wheeler et al. (2013) investigated the attitude of individuals toward work, work performance, and negative behaviors toward other employees. Resource refers to "what is valued by the individual, accessing what is valued is resource gain, losing what is valuable is resource loss" (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018). When the resource loss at the same rate was compared with the resource gain, it was seen that the loss of resources could have a greater impact than the return of resource gain (Halbesleben and Buckley, 2004). As a consequence of the research studies, it was determined that the psychological consequences of resource loss are depression and stress (Kessler et al., 1988; Melamed et al., 2006). Stress can cause individuals to start defending themselves. When an individual loses or faces the risk of losing her/his resources such as salary, position, promotion, or bonus, she/he may act with a more defensive motive, looking for any opportunity that may come her/his way (Hobfoll, 2001). At this point, behaviors towards sharing or obtaining resources indicate the crab syndrome.

All of the behaviors, focusing on promotion by violating organizational norms and rules and reducing the quality of the working environment, are realized by the effect of crab syndrome (Pegues, 2018). Crab syndrome focuses on the protection of resources, however, it also causes organizational outputs that can be qualified as negative by centering the competition between individuals (Miller, 2019). Crab syndrome contains a motivation that does not want personal resources to be protected but shared. Psychological ownership aims to protect both personal and organizational resources.

The relationship between locus of control, leadership styles, deviant workplace behaviors, and psychological ownership aiming at preserving the resources was also examined (Igbaakaa, 2019). Job satisfaction, intention to stay in business, deviance, organizational citizenship behavior, and leadership, which are related to the concept, were investigated by Avey et al. (2009). Butt and Atif (2015) state that justice is the antecedent of PO. Mehmood et al. (2021) particularly mentioned the mediating role of ownership in the relationship between distributive justice and embeddedness.

Although the existence of various studies on the antecedents and consequences of PO in the national literature attracts attention, there are a limited number of studies examining leadership as the antecedent of PO. For instance, ethical leadership (Özcan and Özdemir, 2022), servant leadership (Aslan, 2020), paternalistic leadership (Bekmezci and Yıldız, 2019), and participative leadership (Bülbül, 2019) have positive impacts on PO. It is assumed that wise leadership would affirm PO, based on the support of the conservation of resources theory and the positive impact of positive leadership characteristics on PO. On the other hand, there is only a limited number of studies examining personality-based PO. Köksal (2019) stated that a proactive personality positively affected PO.

Chi and Han (2008) found that profit sharing and participation in decision-making were positively correlated to psychological ownership, and justice had a full mediator role in this relationship. When it is considered that knowledge sharing increases psychological ownership, it can be assumed that wise leadership will also positively affect psychological ownership.

A resource is a factor that has value for individuals. Efforts to achieve what is valued may be associated with the conservation of resources theory. The research model was developed in line with behavioral strategies that ensure the protection of resources. In this research study, the impacts of PL, which has not been studied much in the national literature, and CS (Üzüm and Özdemir, 2022; Özkan et al., 2022; Üzüm et al., 2022a; Üzüm et al., 2022b), which has rare examples in the international literature and has just begun to be researched in the national literature, on PO are investigated. At this point, it is aimed to fill the deficiency in the literature, and thus, it is possible to determine the degree and direction of the relations as antecedent-consequent. The hypotheses formed for the purpose of the research are shown below:

**H<sub>1</sub>:** Wise leadership is positively related to psychological ownership.

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Crab syndrome is negatively related to psychological ownership.

## 2. Method

In the research, a quantitative approach was followed in order to determine the effects and the relations between wise leadership, the crab syndrome, and psychological ownership. The Ethics committee decision dated 11.02.2022 and numbered 2022/02 was taken from Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University in order to carry out the research.

### 2.1. Research Population and Sample

The universe of the research consists of 248 (N) employees working in the banking sector of Çanakkale province, and the sample comprises the participants selected by convenience sampling method in these banks.

The data collection tools used in the research consist of four parts. According to Podsakoff et al. (2003), the items of the dependent variables should be included before the independent variables in order to minimize the common method variance in the research. In line with this suggestion, there is the psychological ownership scale in the first part of the questionnaire, there are the wise leadership and the crab syndrome scale in the second part, and the last part, there is the information form, in which demographic information is asked. Study data were collected online between February 14 and March 18, 2022, after interviewing bank managers and obtaining permission for research.

As a consequence of the preliminary evaluation, it was observed that 185 data were suitable for analysis. It is seen that the sample size (n=185) is sufficient when taking into consideration the condition of ten times the number of items (Hair et al., 2010). The participants consist of the employees of whom 62% were female, 38% were male, 71% were married, 29% were single, 30% had an associate degree, 58% had an undergraduate degree, and 12% had a postgraduate degree.

## 2.2. Measurement Tools

All of the scales used in the research were graded by considering a five-point Likert.

**Psychological Ownership:** The six-item scale of Brown et al. (2014) was used to measure the perception of psychological ownership. The scale was adapted to Turkish for this study. While the translation was being done, international methods were taken as reference, and the translation-back translation method was used by the authors of the study, Turkish and English language experts, and field experts (Brislin, 1980).

**Wise Leadership:** The six-statement wise leadership scale developed by Ding et al. (2019) was used in the research. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Üzüm et al. (2022b).

**Crab Syndrome:** The crab syndrome scale, developed by Üzüm and Özdemir (2020) and consisting of five items, was used.

## 3. Findings

Data analysis in this study was carried out in two stages, and these are preliminary data analysis and hypothesis testing. In the preliminary data analysis, there are descriptive statistics, normality, correlation, and reliability values. The two-step process of the Structural Equation Model (SEM) was used in hypothesis testing (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). In the first step, the measurement model was calculated. The measurement model estimates the acceptability of the scales by determining how each of the underlying indicators and errors fits the model. In the second step, the structural model was calculated. The structural model evaluates the overall relation between structures by summarizing the details of how each structure fits into the model (Byrne, 2010).

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, normality, and correlation values

Variable	Mean	S. D.	Skewness	Kurtosis	1	2	3
1. Wise Leadership	3.49	1.10	-.689	-.558	(.97)		
2. Crab Syndrome	2.37	1.01	.437	-.679	-.69**	(.95)	
3. Psychological Ownership	3.40	1.09	-.730	-.378	.77**	-.75**	(.98)

Note: n=185; \*\*p<.01; Cronbach's alpha values are shown in parenthesis.

The average of the scales used in the study is between 2.37-3.49, as seen in Table 1. According to the skewness and kurtosis values, the distribution of the dataset is normal (Kline, 2015). When considering the correlation values, it was detected that wise leadership, psychological ownership and crab syndrome ( $r=-.69$ ,  $p<.01$ ;  $r=-.75$ ,  $p<.01$ , respectively) were in a negative and significant relation while wise leadership and psychological ownership ( $r=.77$ ,  $p<.01$ ) were in a positive and significant relationship. According to this result, significant correlations between studied variables can be considered primary evidence to support the research hypotheses. The fact that Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) coefficients are between .95 and .98 indicates that the scales have sufficient reliability (DeVellis, 2003).

### 3.1. Measurement Model

Primary-level confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used in the research since the structures in the measurement model were unidimensional.

As a result of CFA, it was observed that some fit indices were within acceptable limits (SRMR=.02; TLI=.91; CFI=.93; NFI=.91) while some fit indices were not within acceptable limits ( $\chi^2/df=4.39$ ; RMSEA=.13). Therefore, correction indices were examined and it was decided to form covariance between the error terms of the scales in order to increase the cohesion in the factor structure. Moreover, the 3rd item of the wise leadership scale was removed from the model. It was seen that the measurement model was in accord with the data after the corrections ( $\chi^2/df=2.78$ ; RMSEA=.09; SRMR=.03; TLI=.95; CFI=.96; NFI=.95) (MacCallum et al., 1996; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003).

Convergent and divergent validity were also calculated in the research, as well as structural validity. The CR (Composite Reliability) values of the scales vary between .95 and .98. The fact that AVE (Average Variance Extracted) values are greater than .50, and CR values are higher than AVE are shown in Table 2. These results reveal that convergent validity of the scales has been achieved (CR>.70; AVE>.50; CR>AVE). The fact that the AVE values of the scales are higher than the MSV (Maximum Shared Squared Variance) and ASV (Average Shared Squared Variance) values (AVE>MSV; AVE>ASV) means that the scales have discriminant validity (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988; Malhotra and Dash, 2011).

Table 2. Results of the measurement

Variable	Item	Factor Load	CR	AVE	MSV	ASV
Wise Leadership	PL1	.95	.96	.85	.61	.55
	PL2	.95***				
	PL4	.90***				
	PL5	.90***				
	PL6	.87***				
	PL6	.87***				
Crab Syndrome	CS1	.88	.95	.81	.57	.53
	CS2	.95***				
	CS3	.96***				
	CS4	.95***				
	CS5	.71***				
Psychological Ownership	PO1	.89	.98	.92	.61	.58
	PO2	.94***				
	PO3	.95***				
	PO4	.98***				
	PO5	.98***				
	PO6	.96***				

Note: CR=Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted; MSV=Maximum Squared Variance; ASV=Average Shared Square Variance.

### 3.2. Structural Model

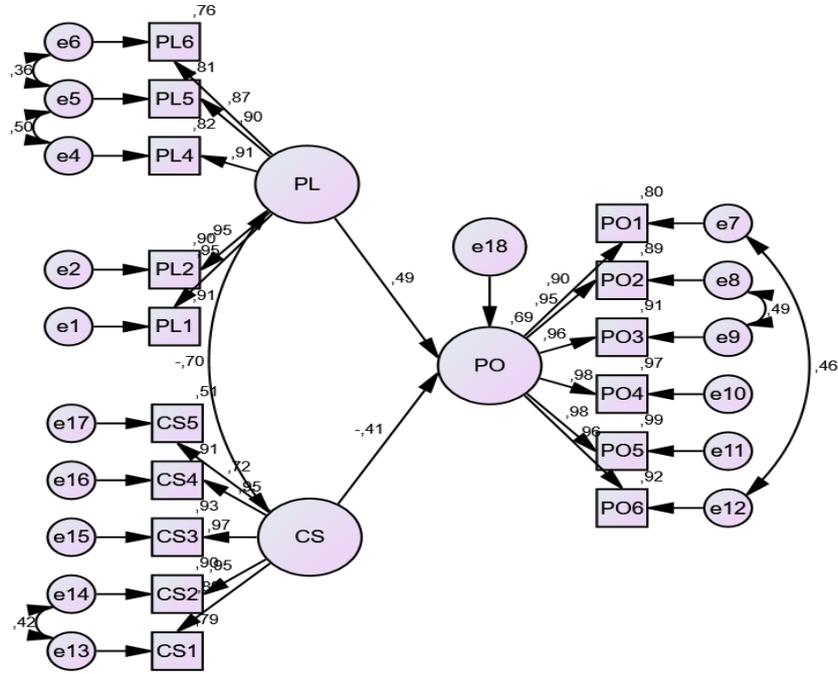
Research hypotheses were tested via SEM, and model fit indices were determined to be at an acceptable level ( $\chi^2/df=2.78$ ; RMSEA=.09; SRMR=.03; TLI=.95; CFI=.96; NFI=.95). According to the results, it was determined that the path coefficients from wise leadership and the crab syndrome to psychological ownership had significant impacts ( $\beta=.49$ ,  $t=7.454$ ,  $p<.001$ ;  $\beta=-.40$ ,  $t=-6.189$ ,  $p<.001$  respectively). This finding confirms hypotheses 1 and 2 of the research.

Table 3. Results of the research

Hypotheses	$\beta$	Standard Error	t-value	p-value	R <sup>2</sup>	Result
PL → PO	.49	0.06	7.45	.001***	.68	Acpt.
CS → PO	-.40	0.06	-6.18	.001***		Acpt.

Note: \*\*\* p<.001; PL= Wise Leadership; CS=Crab Syndrome; PO=Psychological Ownership; Coefficients are standardized ( $\beta$ ).

Figure 1. Model and path coefficients



## Discussion

It should be expressed that the focus of competition in today's organizations and working conditions is the resources available. In the light of the conservation of resources theory, this research aims to examine the wise leadership that will ensure individual development and organizational competition, and psychological ownership as a result of the crab syndrome, which prioritizes individual competition.

In this research, the conceptual structure of the variables, in which wise leadership and the crab syndrome are the antecedents and psychological ownership is the result, were theorized, and analyzed by the model. It was observed that the conservation of resources theory could explain psychological ownership (Mehmood et al., 2021), crab syndrome (Üzüm and Özkan, 2022), and the relationship between leadership behaviors (Özkan et al., 2023), and employee attitudes and behaviors. The results show that the psychological ownership model containing two antecedents has an acceptable degree of goodness-of-fit (MacCallum et al., 1996; Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003). The designed structure has also been proven to be valid and reliable.

It is seen that the personality traits for the protection of resources have a positive relation with negative work behaviors (Penny et al., 2011). At this point, it has been determined that the personality of the crab syndrome has a negative impact on psychological ownership, which can be expressed as positive work behavior. Behavior is an unstable function that is

influenced by the environment and personality (Ghorpade et al., 2007). Even though crab syndrome focuses on the protection of resources, it also causes organizational outputs that can be described as negative by centering the competition between individuals (Miller, 2019). In this study, although it is seen that crab syndrome mitigates the positive attitudes and behaviors of employees (Özkan et al., 2022), the result of the study supports the views of Miller (2019) and complies with the findings of Özkan et al. (2022). The fact that crab syndrome reduces psychological ownership supports H<sub>2</sub>.

Chi and Han (2008) found that profit sharing and participation in decision-making were positively correlated to psychological ownership, and justice had a full mediator role in this relationship. Furthermore, the result of the research shows that wise leadership increases psychological ownership (H<sub>1</sub>). The relation of psychological ownership with a locus of control, leadership styles, and deviant workplace behaviors was also examined, and it was determined that leadership styles were not related to psychological ownership (Igbaakaa, 2019). Although the result of this research study on the relationship between leadership and PO does not comply with the findings of Igbaakaa (2019), it supports the results of studies that asserted that positive leadership behaviors were the antecedents of PO which positively affected PO (Aslan, 2020; Bekmezci and Yıldız, 2019; Bülbül, 2019; Özcan and Özdemir, 2022).

### **Conclusion and Suggestions**

In the research, it was confirmed once again that leadership behaviors for the conservation of resources are positive reinforcers (Ding et al., 2019: 310; MacIntyre, 1999). The research findings offer valuable implications for management and human resources. It can be said that wise leadership affirms ownership and it creates an opportunity for increasing resources on behalf of the employee and the organization.

When employees feel precious, thanks to leaders' sharing information with them, they develop attitudes and behaviors that contribute positively to the realization of organizational goals (Nazir et al., 2019). The leader's positively perceived behaviors (Jung and Yoo, 2018) strengthen psychological ownership. Psychological ownership will ensure that employees give positive outcomes like a reduction in job embeddedness, work engagement, and burnout (Su and Ng, 2019).

Stress occurred, due to sharing resources, and the threat of losing resources negatively affects psychological ownership (Ladan et al., 2017). At this point, it is possible to express that personality also alters the direction of organizational behavior outputs. Organizations can spread wise leadership behaviors to the entire organization in order to reduce the effect of crab syndrome, which is a personality trait.

It is thought that the set of values and beliefs created by the leader will encourage employees to positive behaviors. It is recommended that human resources management arrange practices and procedures to support employees in the competitive attitude of protecting resources, defense strategies, and coping with stress.

It is considered that the crab syndrome may be seen less frequently in collectivist cultures where fit is significant, while psychological ownership may get higher scores. The relations of related variables with culture may be examined.

Wise leadership was measured by employee perception in the research. It is recommended that future research be carried out, in the context of multisource. And thus, the concept of wise leadership from the eyes of the leaders is dealt with.

It is also recommended that the number of research studies on the concepts of wise leadership and crab syndrome, which have many aspects to be explored in the literature, be increased. The research deals with the variables related to Turkish cultural values. The behavior

of the leader towards her/his subordinates can be used as an important power in order to motivate the employee in Turkish culture where power distance is important.

It was been seen that wise leadership and crab syndrome behaviors with the desire to protect resources are the antecedents of psychological ownership. Other factors related to psychological ownership were not included in the research. Control, moderator, or mediator variables can be included in the modeling within the limitations of the research. This research contributes to the literature regarding the variables taken into consideration. The researches have to be continued to make much more generalizations in the findings.

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