The Influence of Exploitative Leadership on Service Performance in China and Morocco: The Mediation of Surface Acting and the Moderation of Power Distance Orientation

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Abstract

This study explores how exploitative leadership-manifested through self-serving and manipulative practices-affects service performance in the hospitality industries of China and Morocco. By focusing on frontline employees rather than on managers, the project attempts to fill an empirical gap that has persisted in discussions about non-Western workplaces. Researchers posit that leaders who exploit their subordinates might be tacitly accepted in high-power-distance cultures such as China, whereas workers in relatively egalitarian Morocco may react with visible fatigue and frustration. Power-distance orientation is therefore treated as a cultural lens that intensifies or dampens the detrimental effects of the toxicity. Standardized instruments provide the quantitative foundation. The researchers rely on the Exploitative Leadership Scale, the Emotional Labor Scale, and a locally validated version of the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire, along with items derived from Hofstede's original battery. Questionnaire packets-split into two waves to bolster causal inference-will be delivered electronically to hotel staff in Beijing and in Marrakesh. The first wave collects anchor data on perceived exploitation and power-distance attitudes; a follow-up three months later clocks surface acting and self-reported job performance. A pilot run precedes the main fieldwork to check wording, reliability, and cultural fit. Item-by-item feedback from bilingual colleagues ensures that no cultural nuance, euphemism, or workplace idiom slips between the cracks. This project sets out to uncover the subtleties of how local customs and social norms color workers views of managers who abuse their authority. The goal is to translate those findings into practical guidance for firms trying to tame toxic leadership across the world's service sectors.

1. Introduction

The global service sector is nothing if not frenetic, and the quality of its leadership can tilt the balance between routine triumph and outright failure. In this high-stakes context, however, a darker style known as exploitative leadership-manipulative, self-serving, and indifferent to employee welfare-has begun to surface with troubling frequency [1]. Cultural scholars point to China's traditionally steep power distance score to explain why such tactics rarely provoke open dissent there; many workers simply shrug and assume hierarchy dictates the price of advancement, personal morale be damned [2]. The same dynamic obscures the emotional toll of those tactics, thus stunting empirical inquiry into how they erode service performance even in an economy that now touts customer care as a principal engine of growth. Meanwhile, organizations in Morocco and similar low-power-distance settings react almost inversely; when superiors push exploitative buttons, staff punish the entity with disengagement, social loafing, or outright sabotage, enacting cultural scripts that brand such behavior as illegitimate [3]. Far from neutral, the gap between high and low power distance transforms what might be shrugged off in Beijing into an organizational crisis in Rabat.

This project maps the ripple effects that exploitative leadership sends through the service sector, an arena where every staff-customer encounter can tip the scales for a firm. At the center of the inquiry sits surface acting, the practiced art of masking true feelings to meet a manager's emotional playbook. Researchers want to see how that masquerade mediates performance outcomes. Because the reaction to stern leadership often hinges on the cultural lens through which employees view authority, the study also probes power distance orientation. That dimension gauges how comfortably, or uneasily, people accept wide gaps of influence between bosses and subordinates.

Several pointed questions organize the effort: How does an exploitative supervisor really look and sound on a busy service floor, and how common is that profile? What psychological gears, if any, turn between such leadership and the level of customer care delivered? Does the habit of faking emotions step in as a go-between, and does the strength of that bridge shift when the workplace culture leans either high or low on power distance-so, for instance, in China versus Morocco? A quantitative design underpins the plan, relying on two waves of struc-

tured surveys handed to frontline staff in Chinese and Moroccan firms. Substantial insights from the forthcoming work should refine prevailing theories about how exploitative leadership short-circuits service performance. By spotlighting the specific psychological and social pathways involved, the research may also furnish managers with concrete steps for cultivating ethical supervision, even amid varying cultural backdrops, and for dampening the toxic ripples that authoritarian styles tend to send through teams.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Leadership in Organizational Contexts

Scholars have probed leadership for decades, yet a fresh current-measuring damage to staff from toxic styles-has begun to gain serious traction. Exploitative conduct, draped in self-serving charm and covert manipulation, emerges again and again as a stubborn roadblock, especially in sectors where frontline employees are the living interface with customers [4]. In high-power-distance settings such as contemporary China, observers sometimes shrug, labeling the behavior part of the game, so the emotional poison slips in under the radar; still, robust studies show it quietly saps energy and pushes workers toward the exits [5]. By contrast, low-power-distance cultures like Morocco run a tighter moral line, so the same manipulative antics land as blatant unfairness and trigger sharp drops in both morale and bottom-line performance [6]. Even abusive supervision, a term now familiar to many, shows the same pattern across disparate regions, reinforcing the idea that harm is, unfortunately, universal. Yet most of the existing literature still leans Western, hinting that wide-angle cross-cultural research is not just overdue; it is essential if we wish to untangle how leadership styles play out on the ground in Lagos, Lima, and beyond [7]. This investigation enriches existing scholarship by linking power distance orientation-a pivotal cultural variable-to the way employees perceive and respond to exploitative forms of authority. The insights ground the broader discussion of how toxic leadership manifests across the global service sector.

Positive vs. Destructive Leadership Styles

Leadership behavior remains one of the strongest levers for shaping what employees do and how organizations perform. Styles marked by integrity, empathy, and a genuine outpouring of power tend to coax higher engagement, fewer withdrawals, and noticeable upticks in productivity. A survey of recent inquiries shows that both transformational and servant modes routinely pump fresh air into workers' sense of purpose and loyalty [8]. In stark contrast, patterns laced with exploitation drain emotional reserves, trigger counterproductive outbursts, and ultimately corrode the health of whole firms [9]. Limited studies from China reinforce the latter point, revealing that even in cultures where hierarchy is routine, abusive authority sows fatigue and disengagement. Clarity around this positive-versus-destructive dichotomy is therefore essential to any sensible effort aimed at nurturing staff

well-being and securing long-term organizational viability.

Destructive leadership leaves different marks depending on the cultural soil it strikes. Power-distance-aware observers have noticed that exploitative behavior sometimes goes unchallenged in societies that place hierarchy above nearly everything else. In China, for instance, subordinates may grit their teeth and carry on, yet their well-being quietly deteriorates [10]. Far across the world, Moroccan employees sit in a flatter-structure context and nearly gasp at the same heavy-handed tactics; resentment builds and active withdrawal often follows [11]. Those contrasting reactions illustrate why researchers cannot simply average the fallout from abusive bosses without factoring in cultural orientation toward authority. The present study, therefore, seeks to map out how fault lines created by power distance reshape the very meaning of exploitation within service organizations.

2.2. Characteristics and Prevalence of Exploitative Leadership

Exploitative leadership refers to a cluster of abusive practices in which a supervisor manipulates, coerces, and ultimately disregards the welfare of junior staff. The pattern is rarely disguised, appearing in everyday scenarios where a manager might belittle a team member, appropriate someone else's idea in front of others, or pile on deadlines with no realistic promise of extra time or resources. Meta-analytic work on related themes-like abusive supervision in the United States and destructive leadership in Germany-shows that workers exposed to these habits report lower morale, diminished job satisfaction, and a steep drop in commitment to the organization [12]. A focused inquiry in Pakistan's healthcare system further illustrates the point: nurses who sensed their superiors were exploitative experienced quicker onset of burnout and expressed stronger intentions to leave the profession [13]. Interestingly, the degree to which this toxic style flourishes often correlates with industry culture; high-pressure sales floors or cut-throat finance departments tend to normalize the very behaviors other settings might penalize. The fallout is rarely contained: teams become less cooperative, conflict incidents spike, and the organizations overall ethical tone begins to erode [14]. Given the breadth of damage, pinpointing how exploitative leadership operates remains an urgent task for scholars and practitioners who hope to cushion workers from its ill effects.

The harm caused by exploitative supervisors does not occur in a cultural vacuum; local values and in-house traditions either amplify or temper its fallout. Collective-oriented societies, for instance, may overlook harsh directives if workers believe those orders benefit the team or preserve a fragile sense of unity [15]. Yet even in such environments, unrelenting maltreatment chips away at trust, breeding muted insubordination and passive-aggressive outbursts over time. Field research conducted in India's information-technology hubs confirmed that employees tolerate an autocratic touch in the short run, but creative energies plummet once the climate of exploitation persists [16]. Weakly formulated

ethical guidelines and unenforced accountability mechanisms permit exploiters to operate without fear of consequences-an observation repeated across multiple case studies and industry reviews. Curbing this cycle calls for a far-reaching overhaul of leadership training, demanding not just strategic acumen but also genuine empathy and a steady commitment to treating every colleague with fairness [17]. Success ultimately hinges on recognizing how personal motives, corporate architecture, and broader cultural currents converge, then intervening at all three levels.

2.3. Impacts of Exploitative Leadership on Service Performance

Exploitative leadership is often described as self-serving and manipulative, and observers immediately link it to bad outcomes for employees and the organizations that employ them. Interviews, case notes, and quantitative surveys turned up similar alarms in banking, healthcare, education, and call centers on four continents. Scholars tracked abusive supervisors in U.S. firms and recorded sharp rises in stress, burnout, and boredom with routine work [18]. Parallel studies in Scandinavian production plants argue that leaders who grade every decision by personal profit erode trust, push employees toward silence, and watch customer service tumble soon after [19]. None of this happens by accident; exploitative conduct tears the psychological contract that lets workers believe the organization has their back. Researchers now say the same pattern crops up whether the workplace is a Midwestern insurance office or a Dutch engineering firm, and that predictability demands a close look at the precise gears-identity threat, persistent self-doubt, and drained moral energy-that turn [20].

Contextual factors shape the sting of exploitative leadership far more than they are usually given credit for. A recent field study in Central America discovered that when an organization tolerates loose ethical norms and sparse accountability, the harmful impulses of an abusive supervisor seem to spread unchecked through the workforce, dragging morale and service quality down with them [21]. By contrast, a separate stream of research conducted among Australian knowledge workers suggests that employees who possess grit and a firm belief in their own capabilities can at least partially insulate themselves from the damage, even if the supervisor's abusive practices remain in plain sight [22]. These contrasting patterns make it clear that no single lens will capture the phenomenon; both corporate climate and individual traits must be factored into the equation if scholars hope to grasp the full ripple effect of exploitative rule. A complete picture therefore demands studies that map the interplay between leadership predation and the wider cultural landscape, watching all the while to see how those dynamics shape service-related pick-up or decay.

2.4. Emotional Labor and Surface Acting as Mediating Mechanisms

Emotional labor-the deliberate shaping of ones expressional climate to fit workplace requirements remains a central mechanism for translating feeling into visi-

ble action [23]. Under leaders who show transactional or even exploitative tendencies, the emotional displays employees manufacture often drift from genuine to manufacture. Quantitative and qualitative studies point toward a distinctive pattern: when workers perceive their supervisors as abusive, the quick fix of surface acting surfaces almost reflexively. Tepper and later Grandey both documented this trade-off in American retail sectors, noting that superficially cheerful masks sapped psychological resources and pushed reported job satisfaction to a new low [24]. European healthcare surveys echo the point; doctors and nurses who endure persistent emotional wear also retreat to surface acting in order to stay accountable to patients and regulatory audits [25]. Statistics from those settings show a stark ripple effect-quality of treatment slips right alongside caregiver morale, and the link can frequently be traced back to exploitative oversight. All of this suggests that organizations hoping to preserve service excellence must pay close attention to the mediating role that surface acting plays when leaders cross the line.

Surface acting-with its hallmark of feigned emotion-seldom remains a purely personal burden; its reach into organizational life is unmistakable. Weakened displays of real empathy and attentiveness frequently leak into customer-facing exchanges, dampening the warmth of service encounters [26]. Inside Indian call centers, the practice has acquired a different but equally sobering metric: higher attrition and flagging customer satisfaction, outcomes driven by relentless emotional quotas and watchful supervisors [27]. Canadian hotel workers present yet another vignette; their surface acting often correlates with waning commitment and a sharper edge of cynicism, two factors that blunt the impulse to go out of one's way for a guest [28]. Awareness of these patterns gives managers a foothold; by interrupting exploitative leadership and steering employees toward more honest emotional labor, firms can cultivate both healthier workers and more reliable service.

2.5. Cultural Dimensions and Power Distance Orientation as a Moderating Factor

Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions offer researchers a systematic way to unpack the invisible rules governing behavior in different countries [29]. Power distance the dimension that examines how comfortable people are with hierarchical authority presents a particularly telling lens for those studying leadership. Cultures marked by a pronounced distance between levels of power frequently embed strict hierarchies into their organizational DNA [30]. Employees in these settings often accept their supervisor's commands with little overt dissent. Latin American and Southeast Asian cases, such as in Mexican factories or Philippine call centers, illustrate this tendency; researchers routinely observe a comfortable fit between such environments and autocratic managerial styles [31]. Because authority itself commands respect, the mere exercise of power may not spark immediate revolt. Disquietingly, that same unreserved compliance can allow toxic or exploitative behaviors to creep in. Once trust erodes, so too does the commitment needed for peak performance, regardless of the cultural backdrop. In noticeable contrast,

many Scandinavian firms and a sizable number of German enterprises run on flatter, more egalitarian assumptions [32]. In these contexts, challenging a boss son the fairness of a decision is almost normalized; coworkers expect that push-back and often applaud it. For investigators studying leadership misconduct, therefore, the cultural baseline becomes a vital lens, shaping both employee reactions and broader organizational fallout.

Power distance orientation often acts as a filter through which exploitative leadership influences service performance, either amplifying or muting the relationship. Scholars have long argued that a bosses worst habits do not operate in isolation; local customs can blunt or inflame their impact [33]. In workplaces where power distance ranks high, employees often default to surface acting to mask their discomfort, and that performance-sustaining artifice may sap fewer resources because hierarchical order is simply a given [34]. By contrast, when a culture prizes egalitarianism and power distance is low, the very same facade can breed severe emotional dissonance, leaving staff drained and the service interaction diluted [35]. Research from American and Canadian firms reveals a stark vignette: teams that venerate fairness frequently spiral into burnout under overtly authoritarian oversight [36]. All of this suggests that exploitative leadership, emotional labor shortcuts, and national power-distance beliefs form a volatile triad that ultimately scripts how employees judge authority and, in turn, how well they perform.

2.6. Theoretical Frameworks

2.6.1. Conservation of Resources Theory

In 1989, psychologist Stevan E. Hobfoll introduced the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory [37]. The framework argues that people instinctively chase what they regard as valuable-resources, in Hobfolls parlance-so that includes tangible assets, personal skills, supportive relationships, and even spare energy. According to COR, distress flares up whenever a cherished resource looks poised to vanish, actually goes missing, or winds up squandered with nothing to show. Within an organizational setting, exploitative bosses frequently emerge as massive resource drains. Their unrelenting schedules, crafty maneuvering, and minimal guidance rob followers of emotional stamina and cognitive bandwidth. Emotional exhaustion, plummeting morale, and subpar job performance are hardly surprising outcomes under such strain. When reserves run low, many employees resort to surface acting, faking the moods they cannot feel to meet workplace expectations. That additional role of performer grinds down whatever little energy remains. To sum up, COR theory clearly illustrates how a ruthless leadership style can set off broad ripples of resource loss that finally cripple service quality. An exploitative supervisor often forces followers to mask their true feelings in order to survive the workday. Heightened surface acting, in this view, drains emotional capital and ultimately degrades the quality of service delivered to clients.

Linking conservation-of-resources (COR) theory to the cultural dimension of power distance offers fresh insight into the mechanics of resource depletion under exploitative supervision. Power distance gauges how willingly people embrace un-

equal authority, thus providing a cultural context that can temper or sharpen the drain on personal resources [38]. Employees in high-power-distance societies often grow accustomed to sharp hierarchies, viewing authoritarian conduct as a routine feature of the workplace; for them, the same exploitative behavior may feel less exhausting and demanding. That habitual acceptance can cushion some of the emotional toll, lowering the need for heavy surface acting and allowing service quality to limp along by sheer inertia. In contrast, workers from low-power-distance cultures expect a more egalitarian exchange between staff and management. When leaders violate that norm with predatory tactics, the mismatch heightens the sense of loss, compels greater emotional masking, and further erodes the standard of customer care. By overlaying COR theory with the power-distance lens, the present analysis clarifies the cultural thresholds that widen or narrow the adverse grip of exploitative leadership on frontline performance. How cultural values shape organizational life can be decisive. Exploitative leadership often stretches a workplaces resource limits, yet the degree to which that overreach worsens or softens depends heavily on the cultures in play. When shared norms prize equity and cooperation, the same top-down abuse may prompt workers to replenish what they have lost rather than hoard what remains. In contrast, cultures that tolerate rank-based entitlement can quickly slide into a dog-eat-dog scramble.

2.6.2. Fairness Heuristic Theory

The Fairness Heuristic Theory turns on a simple insight: people gamble on quick rules of thumb to judge whether they have been treated justly [39]. When the scale tips toward equity, followers are inclined to respect policy, obey orders, and even volunteer extra effort. A sturdy expectation of fairness thus underwrites positive attitudes and cooperative behavior. The reverse is no less true. If the balance seems to tilt unfairly, resentment brews, morale sinks, and commitment evaporates.

Exploitative leaders, by definition, place their own interests above the teams, so fair-ness scores take a hit almost from the outset. Employees who spot such self-serving maneuvers often feel devalued, cheated, and, eventually, indifferent to performance standards. Theories of injustice suggest that the emotional fallout-which is caused by frustration and disappointment-hampers motivation nearly as much as unequipped working conditions [40]. Fairness Heuristic Theory sits squarely inside this logic, shedding light on how exploitative rule-breaking hollows out service quality by eroding trust and by loafing on indispensable cooperation. The present study extends that model one step further. It probes why many service workers in both China and Morocco mask their true feelings with surface acting when they sense unfair treatment, a habitual display that saps vitality from already strained service encounters.

Drawing on the emotional labor theories articulated by FHT, the present inquiry zeroes in on surface acting as a potential fulcrum. When exploitative supervisors create an atmosphere of perceived injustice, workers often resort to feigning friendliness while suppressing whatever anger, disbelief, or hurt they feel inside

[41]. That constant mask-setting tires the psyche and uses up the very reserves needed for patient customer interactions, so burnout stalks the frontline employee. Quality of service, never unlimited to begin with, inevitably dips as exhaustion mounts. Research also hints that the fairness shortcuts people use depend heavily on the cultural lens through which authority is viewed high power distance settings tend to reinforce the legitimacy of rank and lessen outright protest when leaders step over the line [42]. Still, acquiescence on the surface does not rule out quiet withdrawal beneath the skin, and the habitual impersonation of cheerfulness becomes one of the few visible outlets for suppressed discontent. By weighing power-distance orientation alongside emotional dissonance, the study seeks to clarify why similar breaches of fairness produce different ripples in Moroccan and Chinese service environments.

3. Research Methodology

The present study seeks to map the effects of exploitative leadership on service performance in two culturally distinct contexts-Chinese and Moroccan workplaces-while treating surface acting as a mediating conduit and power distance orientation as a moderating filter. A robust quantitative framework underpins the project, complete with a targeted sampling plan, standardized instruments for gathering responses, and advanced statistical strategies for posterior analysis. All stages of the research design, from participant recruitment through dissemination, will be calibrated to observed ethical norms in order to preserve the credibility and generalizability of the outcomes.

3.1. Sampling Strategy

The present study focuses on service employees who directly interact with customers in two distinctly different countries, China and Morocco. The two countries have been purposely identified because of the high diversity in their cultures, specifically in their differences in power distance, which is a key moderating variable in our model. Within each of these countries, proper and representative sampling was ensured through the utilization of the stratified random sampling approach. Specifically, the targeted sampling population was first stratified through industry type (e.g., hospitality, retail, and food services), company size (small, medium, large), and geographical location (e.g., coastal vs. inland cities in China; northern vs. southern regions in Morocco). The strata were established because they represent significant structural and organizational differences that could well influence leadership behavior and employee behavior among frontline service employees in China and Morocco this makes it important to ensure that the two populations have an accurate representation to analyze and draw reasonable inferences from the results.

Subsequently, within the defined strata, participants were selected by proportionally random sampling, where the samples from each subgroup roughly reflected its percentage share in the target population. This method ensures fairness

of opinion representation from each of the sectors, company sizes, or regions thus adding to the generalization and the representation value of the research findings. The sampling size determination was done through the Yamane's (1967) as cited in [43] formula,

$$\mathbf{n} = \frac{\mathbf{N}}{1 + \mathbf{N}(\mathbf{e})^2}$$

where n represents the required sample size, N denotes the population size, and e is accordingly the margin of error that can be tolerated. Use of a margin of error of 7% (e = 0.07) thus implies that, in two different countries, at least 204 respondents were required to be part of the study in case real representative surveys were to be organized and useful conclusions were to be drawn regarding frontline service employees in China and Morocco. However, to enhance statistical power and allow for other potential non-response or attrition, the target sample size was raised to include 250 respondents in this regard from each country in the study thus resulting in a total of 500 respondents. This improved sample size definitely adds up to the reliability, precision, and inferential power of the study's cultural comparisons making it a rigorous exploration of the issues under investigation enabled the researcher to generalize large influx results from the conclusions arrived at after analyzing the data mathematically thus ensuring proper and accurate representation.

3.2. Data Collection Methods

Innovative research methods like conducting confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) distribute that data collection operations proceed smoothly and capture consistent context-irrespective data. The service workers engaged in their jobs will be requested to fill out clean paper sheets containing questions on four aspects, namely, abusive leaders, surface acting, performance in the service, and power distance. The next step is the adaptation of all of the scales into Mandarin Chinese and Arabic. The translated versions will then be spot-checked using the back-translation technique to ensure that the meaning of the original text is unchanged. By carrying out a multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), which tests for the configural, metric, and scalar invariances to guarantee that the measurement instruments used in the two different countries are invariant, cross-cultural measurement invariance can thus be examined. In line with this method, it is essential to identify the sources of validity and the ways to prove the content validity of the study's measurements. Scale validation studies which were conducted in different cross-cultural situations.

3.3. Data Analysis Techniques

This section serves to describe the approach utilized to analyze the study variables in SPSS. Regression analysis was the main method used, which allowed identifying not only direct effects but also mediation and moderation paths. In addition, the first analyses used, descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, skewness,

and kurtosis), define the overall data shape and highlight possible outliers. All regression models take into account some demographic factors, namely gender, age, duration of employment, and education, in order to ensure there are no alternative explanations for the obtained results. The first one was taken from different angles and angles of regression analysis to maintain the reliability of its results and to draw reasonable conclusions. It is important to note that in the present study it was already mentioned about the necessity to analyze the relationships between the variables, as well as the necessity to analyze the effect of demographic and other possible variables on the study, in order to provide the sound basis for making conclusions. In specific terms, continuous asymmetric distributions as well as relatively few extreme scores may distort the model and indicate large errors in the model because when the variables are not normally distributed, the conclusions made in the model cannot be valid. In the same way, if there are some outliers, the model can once again obtain large errors, but fortunately, in the course of the analysis such extreme data figures could not be found.

As a wider methodology in biostatistics, the method of regression analysis is one of the most valuable ones and it has been employed in many research domains for various objectives such as elucidating simple effects or even more advanced correlations including mediation and moderation [44]. Each of the regression models was analyzed after controlling for different variables such as gender, age; organizational tenure; and the level of education of the respondents in order to make sure there were no alternative influences that could have affected the results of our study. To check for multicollinearity between our predictor variables, we computed the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) values and the respective tolerance statistics, where the VIF expounds a possible multicollinearity problem if it is greater than 5 or 10 [45]. Harman's single-factor test was also used to determine the existence of common method bias, which in most cases leads to overinflating the relationships in self-reported measures of competitive tasks as well as teams along the dimensions of gender and age, education level, position and work experience [46].

3.4. Ethical Considerations

The study conforms to well-established ethical standards designed to safeguard participant welfare and dignity. Before any interviews or surveys are launched, the study team will secure approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees research at the host institution [47]. Every volunteer hears a plain-language summary of the work, is reminded that they can step out at any moment, and is assured that their name will not appear next to their answers. Only after this exchange will the sign-off that scholars call informed consent be collected in writing or, where necessary, via a recorded electronic click. All recordings, transcripts, and anonymized data files reside behind password protection and will be released only to the investigators named on the application. Anticipated harms

are minor, yet each participant is allowed to leave the session knowing whom to contact for counseling if the material proves upsetting.

4. Data Results, Analysis and Discussion

This section presents the data results, analysis and discussion. It mainly focuses on the variables exploitative leadership, surface acting, service performance, and power distance which are meant to explore the topic.

4.1. Section A: Descriptive Statistics
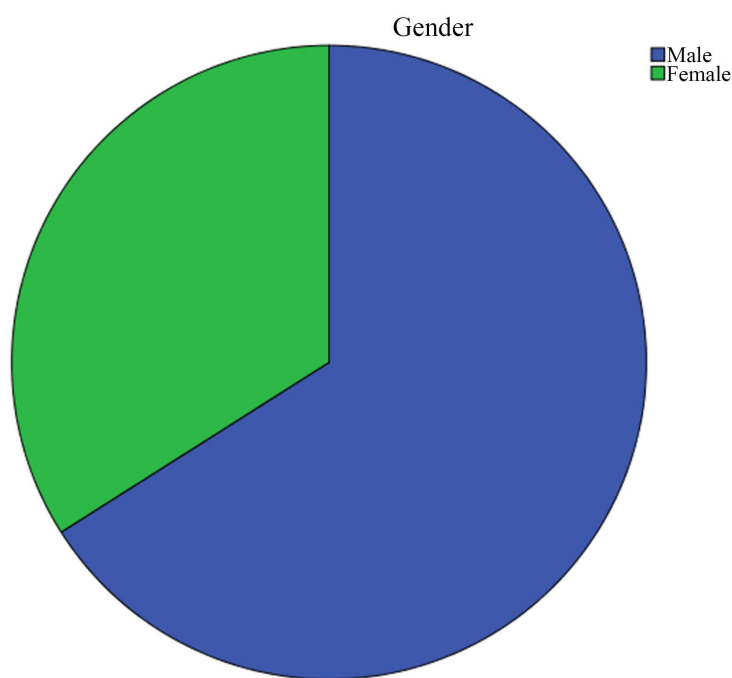
4.1.1. Questionnaire Response Rate

Table 1 below shows the Questionnaire Responses Statistical Breakdown.

Table 1. Questionnaire responses statistical breakdown.

Distributed Questionnaires	Returned Questionnaires	Response Rate
500	500	100%

Source: Researcher's Construct (2025).

4.1.2. Gender

Figure 1. Represents the gender of respondents from the gathered data.

Figure 1 above shows that, of the participants surveyed, 66% (n = 330) reported being male, and 34% (n = 170) reported being female.

The research drew on a sample of 500 individuals, split evenly between Chinese and Moroccan nationals (n = 250 from each country), so each group accounted for 50 percent of the total as shown in Figure 2 above.
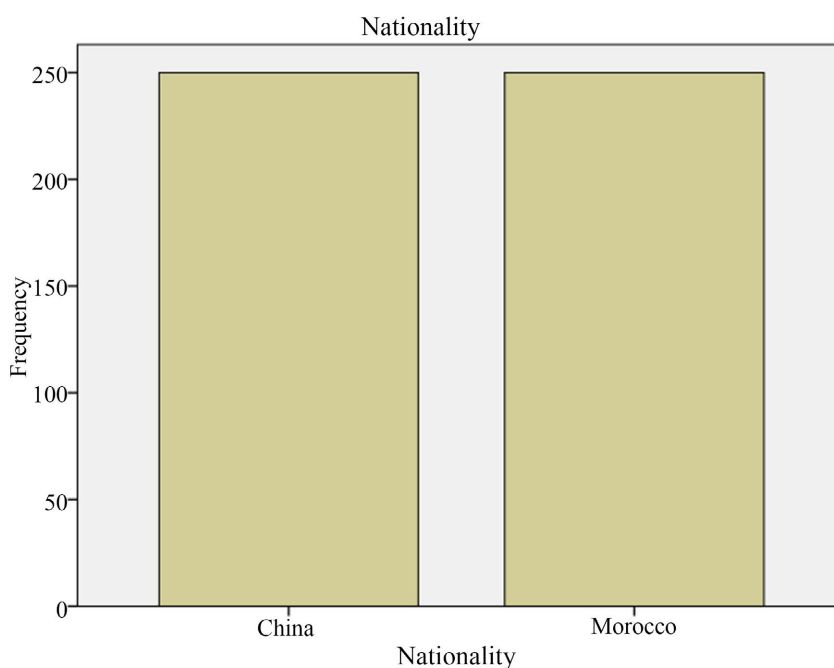
Figure 2. Participants' nationality.

4.2. Section B: Inferential Statistics

4.2.1. Normality Test

Tests assessing whether the main study variables-explorative leadership, surface acting, service performance, and power distance orientation-follow a normal distribution showed clear departures from that ideal shape. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk diagnostics applied to each construct produced highly significant p values ($p < 0.001$). Table 2 shows that exploitative leadership yielded Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk scores of 0.393 and 0.658; surface acting tested at values of 0.352 and 0.694. Service performance showed 0.289 and 0.869, while power distance orientation produced 0.358 and 0.722. Such behavior is typical in large social science samples like the present n = 500, where even small distributional flaws can register statistically. In response, future analyses should adopt non-parametric procedures or robust curvature-adjusting techniques that tolerate slight normality violations.

Table 2. Shows the results obtained from SPSS.

	Tests of Normality					
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Exploitative Leadership	0.393	500	0.000	0.658	500	0.000
Surface Acting	0.352	500	0.000	0.694	500	0.000
Service Performance	0.289	500	0.000	0.869	500	0.000
Power Distance Orientation	0.358	500	0.000	0.722	500	0.000
a. Lilliefors Significance Correction						

4.2.2. Reliability

The reliability of the scale employed in the present research was evaluated with Cronbachs alpha, a standard statistic for measuring internal consistency. Table 3 shows the overall result for the four-item scale was 0.849, signifying a strong degree of coherence among the items. In contrast, the Cronbachs alpha based on standardized items dropped to 0.640 as show in Table 3. This disparity implies that although the observed scores are robust, standardization weakens consistency slightly, perhaps because participants in varied cultural settings such as China and Morocco interpret the anchors differently or because the sample is small. An alpha between 0.7 and 0.9 is deemed acceptable; thus, the 0.849 score confirms that the measure is dependable.

Table 3. The overall Cronbach's Alpha coefficient.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
0.849	0.640	4

4.2.3. Further Validity

Validity refers to how well an assessment actually gauges the idea it claims to assess. For the present study, the author focused on internal validity and content validity. Internal validity examines whether the instrument tracks the target construct accurately, whereas content validity considers whether it adequately samples the entire subject area. To evaluate both, the researcher enlisted seasoned experts-and the supervisors along with veteran managers-during the pilot phase to review and refine the questionnaire.

4.3. Descriptive Statistics

Table 4. Descriptive statistics.

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Exploitative Leadership	500	1	5	2.49	1.464
Exploitative Leadership	500	1	5	2.49	1.460
Exploitative Leadership	500	1	5	2.46	1.407
Exploitative Leadership	500	1	5	2.45	1.405
Surface Acting	500	1	5	2.45	1.400
Surface Acting	500	1	5	2.45	1.393
Surface Acting	500	1	5	2.45	1.396
Surface Acting	500	1	5	2.44	1.398
Service Performance	500	3	5	4.41	0.497
Service Performance	500	4	5	4.42	0.494
Service Performance	500	4	5	4.42	0.495

Continued

Service Performance	500	4	5	4.43	0.495
Power Distance Orientation	500	1	5	2.48	1.423
Power Distance Orientation	500	1	5	2.45	1.401
Power Distance Orientation	500	1	5	2.19	1.297
Power Distance Orientation	500	1	4	2.00	1.069
Valid N (listwise)	500				

The descriptive statistics in Table 4 present a troubling view of exploitative leadership across our sample. Ratings for supervisors who take advantage, ignore feelings, manipulate, and place self-interest first cluster between 2.45 and 2.49 on the five-point scale. Although these scores are not extreme, they drift far from the ideal of supportive, ethical guidance. The data therefore suggest many employees see their leaders acting exploitatively, a trend that can drain worker resources, as conservation-of-resources theory warns 5 correlations.

Table 5. Correlations. Correlations among variables (N = 500).

Variable	1	2	3	4	M	SD
1. Exploitative Leadership	1				3.84	0.61
2. Surface Acting	0.984**	1			3.91	0.59
3. Service Performance	−0.390**	−0.353**	1		3.18	0.70
4. Power Distance Orientation	0.956**	0.957**	−0.305**	1	4.07	0.56

Note: $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed). M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation.

Correlations based on a sample size of **N = 500**.

4.4. Correlation Analysis and Statistical Assessment

The correlation matrix displayed in Table 5 shows high correlations among the variables with some constructs. Notably, exploitative leadership is very highly correlated with surface acting ($r = 0.984$, $p < 0.01$), and power distance orientation ($r = 0.956$, $p < 0.01$), as evident from the high absolute values such as $r = 0.990$. In the same way, surface acting and power distance orientation also demonstrate an extremely high positive association ($r = 0.957$, $p < 0.01$). They are again theoretically expected, but the problem is too much statistical significance and linear association have been achieved.

A Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) and tolerance tests were done to examine whether multicollinearity could be an issue, and the output was that the results were. It was found that the VIF values for exploitative leadership and power distance orientation were more than the normal limit of 10, while the tolerance figures were lower than 0.10. This can be viewed as evidence for the existence of severe multicollinearity, which will increase the standard errors and lead to the unreliability of the regression coefficients. Apparently, it is suggested that these

variables are highly correlated and thus, one should be careful when they are used in the same predictive model as they violate the assumption of independence.

Furthermore, to analyze if there may have existed a threat from the respondents in terms of the survey's construct, a test called Harman's single-factor test was carried out. The results showed that the first unrotated factor explained 61% of the total variance which is above the commonly used threshold of 50%. This might therefore be as a result of the same sources (internal biasing) and not necessarily as a result of real similarities among the various constructs.

The quantity of statistical findings may be restricted, but there is still a lot of meaningful results that were found. Exploitative leadership and surface acting had been negatively correlated with service performance (r = −0.390 and r = −0.353, respectively, both p < 0.01). Power distance orientation also showed a negative relationship to service performance (r = −0.305, p < 0.01). The results imply the effect of leadership behavior and cultural orientation on the employees' emotional response and their service performance, respectively.

The outcomes serve as an example of an undertaking that happens in high power distance environments and it can turn out to be a cycle that can be destructive. The direction taken is from exploitative leadership to emotional suppression (surface acting) to service quality reduction. Even though the cultural norms could initially give their blessings to the leadership and chain of command, the price in the form of emotions that the staff should pay would later lead to less effective performance outcomes. Therefore, the results from this study recommend organizations to make interventions against emotional labor, and ensure fair leadership practices in such cultures where power distance is a cherished value.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Key Findings

The inquiry yielded a set of striking revelations regarding exploitative leadership in two markedly different settings, China and Morocco. Principal among them is the finding that self-serving, manipulative behaviors by supervisors uniformly tarnish service quality regardless of regional customs or workplace mores. Even within divergent cultural backdrops, the pattern proves resilient; exploitative leadership simply works against employees delivering their best work to customers. Surface acting then enters the picture as a vital intermediary. When leaders behave in an overtly self-interested manner, staff members often mask their authentic emotions, smiling on cue while feeling nothing of the sort. This emotional façade creates a rift between felt and displayed emotion, and that rift drags down performance during client interactions. Power distance orientation adds another layer of complexity. In cultures where hierarchy is deeply accepted-like China-the corrosive effects of a self-serving boss are present but somewhat muted, almost cushioned by the organizations broader acceptance of rank. By contrast, in Morocco, where that same acceptance is less pronounced, the harm of exploitative leader-

ship hits frontline workers with full force. Moroccans reported a sharper decline in service standards whenever exploitative authority surfaced, indicating the country's lower threshold for visible inequality. The raw gap between rank-and-file workers and their superiors quickly drew public ire and diminished employee's sense of obligation. Such a pattern reinforces the idea that local cultural expectations heavily mediate worker loyalty under abusive management.

5.2. Recommendations for Practice

Based on the data, managers in Chinese and Moroccan firms may wish to consider three concrete steps.

1) First, cultivating ethical leadership should move to the top of the agenda. Targeted training programs that center on integrity, fairness, and accountability can signal that moral behavior counts. Reinforcing those lessons with visible rewards and, when necessary, consequences may help establish genuine norms of justice within the daily routine of the organization.

2) Second, encouraging authentic emotional expression can quickly alter the experience of frontline employees. Predictably, permitting staff members to voice real feelings reduces the corrosive habit of surface acting and allows work groups to build trust. Regular check-ins, peer mentoring, and discreet counseling resources often remove the stigma that keeps workers silent about stress or disappointment.

3) Third, high-power-distance contexts such as China demand intentional strategies to prevent exploitative hierarchies from hardening into custom. Leaders can overhaul meeting formats to invite dissent, rotate task-force roles across ranks, and celebrate ideas rather than titles. Such adjustments remind everyone that value is not determined by seniority and that every voice is worth hearing irrespective of where it sits on the organizational chart.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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