

Locus of control as a moderator of the effects of COVID-19 perceptions on job insecurity, psychosocial, organisational and job outcomes for MENA region hospitality employees

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Abstract

We develop and test an integrated model to understand how individual differences based on internal or external locus of control influence the effects of COVID-19 perceptions on job insecurity, anxiety, alienation, job satisfaction, customer orientation, organisational citizenship behaviour (OCB), and turnover intention among customer service employees within hospitality organisations in the Middle East and North African (MENA) region. The investigation utilises variance-based Structural Equation Modelling to evaluate a sample of 847 subject responses. We found that externally controlled employees are more likely to develop negative emotions resulting from pandemic-triggered job insecurity as well as poorer customer orientation and engagement in OCB due to worsened job satisfaction than those internally controlled. Wholistically, COVID-19 perceptions tend to indirectly hit externally controlled employees' anxiety, customer orientation and OCB more intensely than those with internal locus of control.

Keywords: Locus of control; COVID-19; job insecurity; psychosocial factors; job satisfaction; customer orientation; organisational citizenship behaviour; turnover intention; hospitality industry; MENA region.

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Introduction

The unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic has affected nearly all aspects of daily life, introducing panic and fear across the globe, subjecting healthcare systems to massive caseloads and the simultaneous need to innovate treatments to contain the deadly virus (Ibrahim et al. 2020). Consequently, this pandemic represents a critical challenge for many business leaders, entrepreneurs, and employees across nearly all industries and nations (Donthu and Gustafsson 2020). In addition, COVID-19 has imposed disruptions to the very nature of hospitality services, turning many hotels and lodging services into isolation centres for quarantined tourists who are vulnerable to COVID-19 infection (Rutynskyi and Kushniruk 2020).

In response to the pandemic, hospitality industry practices shifted quickly to provide physical distancing (The Khoa, Wang, and Guchait 2020). Furthermore, a growing number of businesses in this sector (e.g., hotels, airlines) have deployed robots with disinfecting ultraviolet light (Glusac 2020), which has further accelerated machine displacement over tasks customarily handled by humans since the birth of the fourth industrial revolution (Mahmoud 2021). In this regard, the drive to replace humans with robots is accelerating as firms struggle to avoid workplace infections of COVID-19 and to remain viable by cutting costs (Mahmoud 2021), causing a permanent loss of at least 42% of the jobs (Semuels 2020). Therefore, as service robots acquire strategic importance for service delivery systems within hospitality businesses (Choi et al. 2019), this is built at the expense of human capital (Mahmoud 2021), producing adverse effects on the psychological and well-being aspects (e.g., anxiety) as well as job attitudes (e.g., job insecurity, job satisfaction) and organisational outcomes (e.g., organisational citizenship behaviours, customer orientation, and turnover intentions) (Mahmoud et al. 2021) in the hospitality sector.

Our research focuses on how threats caused by COVID-19 can lead to surges in job insecurity and poor psychosocial responses among employees (Hamouche 2020). Thus, we anticipate that, as a function of COVID-19, there will be a deterioration of job attitudes and organisational behaviours in the workplace (Mahmoud et al. 2020). While this research does not address customer-related effects, we can surmise that hospitality workers will serve their clients less well, leading to a decrease in client satisfaction levels (Mahmoud et al. 2021). It follows that service deficits can have the ultimate effect of undermining the strategic flexibility of business competitive advantage (Sverke et al. 2019). Our contribution focuses on evaluating evidence about how the broad effects of COVID-19 perceptions are related to job insecurity, anxiety, alienation, job satisfaction, customer orientation, organisational citizenship behaviours, and turnover intentions amongst customer service employees working in hospitality organisations. The direct implications of our research apply to the MENA region. However, we also expect the implications to generalise to other regional contexts given the common use of contract and foreign labour in hospitality and other industries. The pertinence of the findings for European management is significant for the reason that many of the large hotel chains in the MENA regions originate from Europe, e.g. Accor, Best Western Premier, the IHG group. Our findings furnish data that could inform the preparation and management strategy of the thousands of European executives sent every year to the MENA as expatriate managers. This makes MENA hospitality a sizeable employer of European labour force. The research also has relevance for European management, given the high mobility of both labour and hospitality tourists between the two regions. In fact, many customers of MENA hospitality firms are European tourists, particularly from European countries pertaining to the Mediterranean geographical sphere, e.g., Italy, Portugal, Spain, Greece,

etc. At the same time, much of the workforce in Southern European hospitality industry have MENA national backgrounds (Hopfinger and Scharfenort 2020).

Additionally, we evaluate the role of employee self-efficacy perceptions through locus of control (Rotter 1966) to establish whether subjects with internal locus of control may be less likely to experience adverse effects from COVID-19 perceptions in our hypothesised model (Parent-Lamarche and Marchand 2019). We expect employees with external locus of control to experience more negative effects related to COVID-19 perception. Thus, this study evaluates whether an employee's locus of control can influence the hypothesised relationships and seeks to offer guidance for management.

The MENA region has been under economic strain and regional geopolitical conflicts and tensions for many years. Compounding these economic challenges is the ongoing COVID-19 crisis (OECD 2020). No prior crisis in modern history has caused as much destruction and damage to the hospitality sector as COVID-19 has (Sonmez et al. 2020).

This investigation's geographic location is significant, given that many MENA economies, besides the oil industry, largely rely on the tourism industry, particularly visitors from Europe (Luciani 2017; Hopfinger and Scharfenort 2020). Moreover, the sector has been deeply affected by the continuing COVID-19 crisis (Baum et al. 2020). Nevertheless, little research has been undertaken to understand these issues and how the response of workers may be moderated by employee locus of control. This research fills the knowledge gap in this area. Furthermore, the intent is to offer guidance so local managers and European expatriate executives can devise policies to reduce the negative impact of COVID-19 on hospitality workers.

The rest of this article is organised into three main sections. The first section examines the literature that addresses the precarity of jobs and psychosocial issues affecting employees in the hospitality sector. This first section also provides some background to the COVID-19 pandemic and forwards the hypotheses. The second section presents the methods, including participant recruitment, data collection and analysis methods. The third section discusses the study findings in relation to the extant literature. The article finally draws conclusions that summarise the key findings, offers practical implications, discusses the research limitations, and suggests directions for future investigations.

Literature review and theoretical framework:

Locus of control

The enormity of the threat posed by COVID-19 to employees prompted us to contemplate if there might be any mitigating factors based on individual differences, and we sought to explore if certain individuals could better navigate the shifting terrain and personal response to the pandemic. To account for this and to see if specific dispositional orientations might moderate the model's results, we focused on the idea of perceived control over external events, given that COVID-19 represents a macro factor that will undoubtedly trigger thinking about how to counteract its potential adverse effects. Thus, we selected locus of control as a potential explanatory disposition to understand how employees might react when they view the world as either controlled by external or internal factors. Rotter (1966) termed this 'locus of control', which holds that employees will differ on the extent to which they view rewards, punishments, or other events in their lives as caused by their own actions or by factors beyond their control. Individuals with an orientation to internal locus of

control are likely to view themselves as more able to manage external situations based on their ability, experience, or self-efficacy. Conversely, we might predict that the model effects would be more pronounced if the individual's orientation was external locus of control (Keim et al. 2014). A meta-analysis of locus of control at work found that locus of control positively predicts job satisfaction and work performance (Ng, Sorensen, and Eby 2006). Job insecurity research beginning with suppositions from Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984), has also highlighted the moderating effect of internal locus of control on job insecurity.

Moreover, meta-analytic studies such as that conducted by Cheng et al. (2013) have shown that locus of control moderates psychosocial reactions. Additionally, hospitality workers occupy positions that give them little autonomy over their work activities due to the routinised nature of the work and often excessively controlling supervision. Our expectation, therefore, is that locus of control internals will have more muted psychosocial reactions than externals. We take this dispositional perspective into the formulation of each of our model's subsequent hypotheses.

The hospitality industry tests positive: COVID-19 perceptions and job insecurity

Hospitality sector workers have precarious employment not only because they are frontline and at risk of exposure, but they also face obsolescence due to employers quickly introducing labour saving tools and robotics (Rydzik and Kissoon 2021). In the case of workers in the sector, compensation, working conditions, and employer support have not traditionally been generous. Such support has been even more scarce for flexible workers (Abendroth and den Dulk 2011). A similar lack of organisational interest in work-life balance seems to exist generally in emerging economies, including the MENA region, where hospitality workers are commonly exposed to

prolonged or irregular hours of work with little or no social protection (Salvador and Cossani 2020). The consequences of such flexibility for working conditions are harmful as they engender widespread ‘mental overcharge’ and lead to stress and associated pathologies (Guerrero 2003). In emerging economies, more generally, workers seem to accept working conditions imposed upon them by employers as inevitable (Akanji 2012), particularly with the lack of institutional and social safety nets to reduce job insecurity and exploitation. Even in the West, including Europe (see Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, Prouska, and Beauregard 2017; Hobson, Fahlen, and Takacs 2011), the *capabilities approach* (Sen 1999 [1985]) offers a theoretical basis for the adverse ramifications that global crisis (e.g., pandemics) can have on work-life balance (Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, Prouska, and Beauregard 2017).

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global hospitality industry lost an estimated 100 million jobs (Statista 2020). Therefore, COVID-19 has exacerbated job insecurity perceptions in the hospitality sector by introducing more anxiety as redundancies have become a feature of the pandemic economy (Pierce et al. 2020). We, therefore, formulate the following hypothesis:

H1: Locus of control moderates the positive relationship between COVID-19 perceptions and job insecurity, such that this relationship is stronger for external than for internal locus of control.

Job insecurity and psychosocial factors

There is extensive literature examining the relationship between job insecurity and associated psychosocial correlates such as anxiety and alienation. See, for example, meta-analysis and research (Cheng and Chan 2008; Mahmoud et al. 2020). Numerous theoretical explanations

suggest why job insecurity (concern about losing one's job) causes negative psychosocial responses. Most prominent is the conservation of resources stress theory (Hobfoll 1989) and psychological contract breach (Rousseau 1995). The conservation of resources stress model (Hobfoll 1989) suggests that the perception of having a job at risk (job insecurity) is debilitating emotionally as it strains the employee's personal ability to counteract the threat of job loss largely because there are so many unknowns outside of one's personal control, thus negatively affecting one's psychosocial well-being. A second theoretical underpinning of the relationship is the informal psychological contract between employees and employers. This is an exchange-based explanation of attachment to work in which employee performance is rewarded with implicit guarantees of job security and material and non-material rewards (Rousseau 1995). A threat to one's job represents a substantial breach of the psychological contract and is detrimental to an employee's livelihood, connection to meaningful work, social aspects of work, and indirect problems outside of work with family and social relations.

The hospitality industry, we anticipate, is an appropriate context to study these relationships. Employees in this industry perform critical roles that determine customer satisfaction; hence they contribute to firm competitive advantage and profitability. However, hospitality workers occupy one of the most unstable positions in the labour market owing to their lack of contractual or union safeguards, and they must perform demanding jobs with risks to physical and mental well-being due to low job security, variable and long hours (Kearsey 2020). That instability has been postulated as an immersive reality in the hospitality industry (Ncube and Oni 2020). Moreover, the industry has been characterised as a high strain sector not only due to the precariousness of roles but also because workers have limited autonomy to adapt, hence causing further negative implications for well-being (Ariza-Montes et al. 2018). The inherently

stressful nature of hospitality work has now the added burden of reporting to the front lines, where exposure to COVID-19 is an additional source of stress and health risk.

Empirical evidence offered by Faragher et al.'s (2013) meta-analysis indicates that work facets such as job satisfaction are strongly affected by anxiety and other mental health issues. The associations are considerably larger than effects among any other aspects of mental well-being. For theoretical and empirical reasons, job insecurity presents a facet of work-life that is particularly threatening to employees' mental health, and our expectation is that job insecurity will be strongly associated with adverse psychosocial outcomes (Sora et al. 2013). Expectancy theory, moreover, suggests that workers will compare previous work conditions with current developments (e.g., Hünefeld, Gerstenberg, and Hüffmeier 2019; Feather and Rauter 2004; Guarnaccia et al. 2016; Vujičić et al. 2014; Urbanaviciute et al. 2015). Hence, we hypothesise that:

H2: Locus of control moderates the positive relationship between job insecurity and anxiety such that this relationship is stronger for externals than for internals.

H3: Locus of control moderates the positive relationship between job insecurity and alienation such that this relationship is stronger for externals than for internals.

H4: Locus of control moderates the positive relationship between anxiety and alienation such that this relationship is stronger for externals than for internals.

Psychosocial factors and job satisfaction

Imagining what it is like to have a job that makes an individual anxious and alienated is to fathom the extraordinary challenge of performing well while not knowing if one has a job in the future.

From an attitudinal standpoint, the literature has shown how an individual's emotional states negatively influence job satisfaction, one of the most important employee attachment attitudes to their employers (Cheng and Chan 2008; Mahmoud et al. 2020). In a meta-analysis of 500 studies associating health and job satisfaction, Faragher, Cass, and Cooper (2013) concluded there is a solid relationship between job satisfaction and both mental and physical health. Furthermore, Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt's seminal theory article on job insecurity (1984) noted that job insecurity has long been recognised in the management literature as a negative predictor of employee satisfaction. In this paper, we regard job satisfaction as a global attitude towards the job and define it as the fulfilment or satisfying emotional state that results from the positive appraisal of job experiences on the part of the employee (Chang, Chiu, and Chen 2010).

Hospitality industry employees, as noted earlier, face strains and demands that are endemic and difficult to avoid. The work is characterised by limited job security, physical risk, and limited control or autonomy while offering almost no significant work-life balance benefits (Kusluvan et al. 2010). Based on theoretical reasons and empirical evidence (e.g., Cheng and Chan 2008; Kusluvan et al. 2010; Chatrakul Na Ayudhya, Prouska, and Beauregard 2017; Mahmoud et al. 2020), we anticipate that psychosocial factors will negatively predict job satisfaction. For both stress-based reasons and those of psychological contract breach, employees with negative psychosocial reactions to job insecurity are likely to have lower levels of job satisfaction, hence:

H5: Locus of control moderates the negative relationship between anxiety and job satisfaction such that this relationship is stronger for externals than for internals.

H6: Locus of control moderates the negative relationship between alienation and job satisfaction such that this relationship is stronger for externals than for internals.

Job Satisfaction and customer orientation

The hospitality industry is dependent on employees who understand and serve customers properly. Given the crisis circumstances prompted by the COVID-19 pandemic, we have reasoned and cited evidence that the negative impact on global economies and the labour markets have been profound. In this context, the prospect of greater individual job insecurity is likely to negatively affect several work dimensions, including employee job satisfaction. Moreover, the erosion of employee attachment to their firm should further predict negative performance effects such as reduced customer orientation. Earlier research that examined the effects of job insecurity on customer orientation (Reisel, Chia, and Maloles Iii 2005) found negative relationships for key account management behaviours: job insecure employees performed worse on customer performance, effectiveness with customers, adaptability to changing competitive conditions, and corporate esprit de corps. In addition, Mahmoud et al. (2020) found a strong positive association between overall motivation and customer orientation amongst customer service workers.

Moreover, Brown et al.'s (2002) study emphasised the importance of direct service providers being oriented to deliver high-quality service. Finally, in a hospitality setting, Choi and Joung (2017) found that job satisfaction exerts a positive and direct impact on customer orientation. With this evidence and our previously hypothesised expectations, we anticipate that job satisfaction will be positively related to customer orientation; thus, we hypothesise the following:

H7: Locus of control moderates the positive relationship between job satisfaction and customer orientation such that this relationship is stronger for internals than for externals.

Job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour

Building on prior empirical research that has found positive effects of job satisfaction on organisational citizenship behaviour, we expect a similar pattern in the hospitality industry context in MENA countries (Mahmoud et al. 2020). Specifically, organisational citizenship behaviours are critical employee behaviours that contribute to the overall firm performance in the service industry because they represent extra roles, not technically required job tasks. Though organisational citizenship behaviours are not directly rewarded via a compensation system, they are recognised to contribute to the organisation's effective functioning (Organ, 1988). Moreover, Social Exchange Theory (Organ 1988) suggests that job satisfaction contributes to organisational effectiveness by enhancing employees' engagement in organisational citizenship behaviours. Further, previous research has evidenced the positive effects of job satisfaction on organisational citizenship behaviours amongst hospitality employees (e.g., Araslı and Baradarani 2014); hence, we propose:

H8: Locus of control moderates the positive relationship between job satisfaction and organisational citizenship behaviour such that this relationship is stronger for internals than for externals.

Job satisfaction and turnover intentions

Mindful of the hospitality industry as the context of the present investigation, the notion that a broad global pandemic has introduced crisis levels of disorder into global economic, labour, political, and health systems, we can easily imagine that this constellation of impacts is greatly affecting attachment attitudes such as job satisfaction. Not only have we seen this play out in terms of raw job losses around the world, but undoubtedly this presages the substantial increase of job insecurity across larger classes of employees. Supported by both well-established theories (e.g.,

social exchange) as well as many empirical investigations (e.g., Hellman 1997), job satisfaction among employees in the hospitality industry is a significant indicator of intention to remain with the firm (Amin et al., 2017) and we expect that the validity of this relationship will persist and be more empirically evidenced amongst hospitality workers during the current pandemic. Hence our hypothesis is:

H9: Locus of control moderates the negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intentions such that this relationship is stronger for internals than for externals.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Materials and Methods

The current study investigated the hospitality sector's customer service workforce in the MENA, a twenty-country region covering the Middle East and North Africa. A surveyor team took on the data collection process, which commenced in April and ended early in October 2020. The survey participants were recruited through LinkedIn (a professional social network). LinkedIn search filters were set to locate the study subjects. Criteria utilised included the country name, job role, and hospitality sub-sectors, e.g., restaurants, food & beverages, airlines, leisure, travel & tourism, events services, etc. LinkedIn is a professional networking platform where job seekers can share their skills, qualifications, work experience, and any other professional-related information with

other premium services like training short courses. It enables employers or recruiters to post job ads and search for prospective candidates. We chose LinkedIn to recruit our sample because it is considered the world's largest professional network, with 722+ million members in more than 200 countries and territories worldwide. Our search for customer service employees working in the MENA region's hospitality sectors returned about 203,000 results. Recent research in business psychology has used such a sampling procedure (e.g., Dettmers and Biemelt 2018). Having filtered the search results, the surveyors selected one case for every two counts. All the participants were made familiar with the aim and methods of the investigation. They were advised that they could raise issues about the study, ask questions or leave the survey at any point. A part of the questionnaire was a consent to take part in the survey. Considering that the survey was carried out online, the signatures of the participants were not acquired. Responses to the survey were anonymous, and all participants were instructed that their responses would be confidential. The ten-minute questionnaire was made available in both Arabic and English. The surveyors approached the participants either through direct messaging if the participant was a 1st level user (i.e., an already connection of the surveyor) or via a note message with a connection request for a second (i.e., those having shared connection with the surveyor) and 3rd level users (i.e., those not sharing any connections with the surveyor). Over the period of data collection, nearly four thousand participants were contacted. Participation in the survey was voluntary, anonymous, and without formal compensation. However, those invited to participate in this study were offered the chance to enter a draw to win a USD 50 Netflix gift card. Furthermore, those interested would be emailed a copy of the article alongside a layman summary upon publication. However, for consideration, a participant would voluntarily provide their email address before submitting their

response. As a result of that procedure, our study returned 847 responses (response rate = 21%) used in the analyses. No responses with missing data were found.

COVID-19 perceptions were assessed using a three-item scale that was designed for this investigation. We employed previously validated scales described in the work of Francis and Barling (2005) to measure job insecurity, Hamilton (1959) to measure anxiety, Lang (1985) and Banai and Reisel (2007) to measure alienation, Judge, Scott, and Ilies (2006) to measure job satisfaction, Brown et al. (2002) to measure customer orientation, Van Dyne, Graham, and Dienesch (1994) to measure organisational citizenship behaviours, Mobley, Horner, and Hollingsworth (1978) to measure turnover intentions and finally Spector (1988) to measure work locus of control. A 5-point Likert scale was adopted to score the responses to those measures. For the purposes of assessing its moderating role in the path model, locus of control was converted into a dummy variable where people with external locus of control were coded as (0) and those with internal locus of control as (1). Appendix 1 shows the items of the used measures.

A variety of indicators were adopted to assess the validity and reliability of measures. We examined the theoretical model utilising a variance-based or Partial Least Square structural equation modelling approach (PLS-SEM) via SmartPLS 3 (Ringle, Wende, and Becker 2015). PLS-SEM has obtained more academic favourability when testing predictive models (Mahmoud et al. 2021). Also, most data are expected to violate the criterion of multivariate normality (Mahmoud et al. 2021); therefore, the PLS-SEM approach has been recognised as a feasible option for empirical investigations where data are sensitive to non-normality matters (Hair et al. 2017). We conducted a path evaluation followed by multigroup analysis (MGA), building on standardised betas (β : for direct effects), unstandardised betas (B: for indirect effects) and the matching t-values by using bootstrapping, Q^2 for predictive relevance, and Cohen's f^2 to ascertain effect sizes where

$f^2 \geq 0.02$, $f^2 \geq 0.15$ and $f^2 \geq 0.35$ epitomise small, medium and large effect sizes, respectively. Besides, the standard root mean square residual (SRMR) was used to evaluate the model fit to the data.

Results

Measures' validity and reliability

We computed the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio of Correlations (HTMT) and found values of less than .9, implying a satisfactory level of discriminant validity for all measures (Hair et al. 2019). All the constructs had average variance extracted (AVEs) higher than 0.5, composite reliability scores (CRs) between .765 and .915, satisfying the convergent validity and reliability criteria for all measures (Hair et al. 2019). Variance Inflation Factor values (VIFs) were less than 5, offering evidence that collinearity is not a crucial issue (Hair et al. 2019).

Common method bias

Before moving on to the path and multigroup analyses, we ran Common-Method Bias (CMB) tests, which are required when using perceptual, self-report measures from a single survey. The inner variance inflation factors (VIFs) values were all less than 3.3. Consequently, we concluded that there were no multicollinearity or CMB issues found (Kock 2015).

Sample description

Using SPSS version 26, most of our sample (see Table 1) were male (57%), millennial (46%), educated to a university degree (40%), single (54%), and with external locus of control (58%). Appendix 2 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables under investigation clustered into locus

of control groups. It suggests that those with an external locus of control reported higher levels of COVID- 19 perceptions, job insecurity, alienation, anxiety and turnover intentions and lower scores on job satisfaction, customer orientation, and OCB.

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Path analysis and multigroup analysis

Given the reflective nature of the latent variables in our model (Mahmoud et al. 2021), we performed Consistent-PLS Algorithm, followed by Consistent PLS Bootstrapping run at 5,000 sub-samples (Preacher and Hayes 2008) in order to analyse the hypothesised path model. Moreover, to assess the path model invariance across the two groups of locus of control (i.e., internal vs external), a multigroup analysis (MGA) is intended to be run. However, before that, we need to ensure that measurement invariance is established as a prerequisite to MGA (Henseler et al. 2016).

According to Henseler et al. (2016), running group comparisons through PLS-SEM can be ‘misleading’ unless the invariance of their measures is confirmed. As suggested by Henseler et al. (2016), this prerequisite can be accomplished by using the “Measurement Invariance of the Composite Models” (MICOM) technique. Therefore, before running any multigroup analyses (in our case: with no data pooling), both configural invariance and compositional invariance need to be verified (Henseler et al. 2016; Hair et al. 2019). Since we employ a PLS-SEM approach, the

measurement configural invariance is, by default, achieved (Hair et al. 2019). Following that, we ran a permutation test. All the constructs have their “Permutation P-values” greater than 0.05; thus, we accept the null hypothesis meaning that the original correlations of these constructs are non-substantially different from 1. This result offers supporting evidence for compositional invariance, implying a feasible multigroup analysis (Hair et al. 2019).

Testing the direct effects (see Table 2), COVID-19 perceptions are found to positively predict job insecurity ($\beta = .364, P < .001, f^2 > .15, P < .001$) that in turn positively predicts anxiety ($\beta = .533, P < .001, f^2 > .35, P < .001$) and alienation ($\beta = .456, P < .001, f^2 > .35, P < .001$). Anxiety positively predicts alienation ($\beta = .465, P < .001, f^2 > .35, P < .001$). Alienation is found to be the only psychosocial factor that significantly exerts a real worsening direct negative effect on job satisfaction ($\beta = -.582, P < .001, f^2 > .35, P < .001$). Besides, job satisfaction is found to positively predict customer orientation ($\beta = .354, P < .001, f^2 > .15, P < .001$) and organisational citizenship behaviour ($\beta = .704, P < .001, f^2 > .35, P < .001$) and lower the chances for the development of turnover intentions ($\beta = -.474, P < .001, f^2 > .15, P < .001$).

INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

All the indirect effects/mediations are found significant. Interestingly, COVID-19 perceptions affect all the variables in the model, either directly as in the case of job insecurity or indirectly for the remaining ones. Thus, it can be concluded that COVID-19 perceptions indirectly affect the levels of anxiety ($B = .196, SD = .027, P < .001$), alienation ($B = .26, SD = .032, P < .001$) and turnover intentions ($B = .072, SD = .014, P < .001$). Further, COVID-19 perceptions contribute to the deterioration of job satisfaction ($B = -.152, SD = .022, P < .001$), customer

orientation ($B = -.055$, $SD = .01$, $P < .001$) and organisational citizenship behaviour ($B = -.107$, $SD = .016$, $P < .001$). Table 3 shows all the total indirect effects in the model whilst Appendix 3 demonstrates the specific indirect effects where the full list of mediators for an indirect effect is detailed.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

Moving onto MGA, t-values associated with the multiple comparisons and reported in the parametric tests are analysed. Overall, all paths remain significant for both groups of locus of control (at a significance level of .001). However, we discover that the paths: job insecurity \implies anxiety, anxiety \implies alienation, job satisfaction \implies customer orientation and job satisfaction \implies organisational citizenship behaviour are significantly non-equivalent between the two groups. In other words, looking at Figure 2 and Table 4, the results reveal that customer service employees with external locus of control are more vulnerable to anxiety as consequence of COVID-19-triggered job insecurity (H2: $\beta_{\text{int.}} = .265 < \beta_{\text{ext.}} = .574$, $t_{\text{ext. vs int.}} = 5.705$, $P < .001$), and hence the resulting alienation from this anxiety (H4: $\beta_{\text{int.}} = .301 < \beta_{\text{ext.}} = .421$, $t_{\text{ext. vs int.}} = 1.970$, $P < .05$) than those with internal locus of control. Besides, employees with external locus of control tend to develop more intense declines in customer orientation (H7: $\beta_{\text{int.}} = .468 > \beta_{\text{ext.}} = .211$, $t_{\text{ext. vs int.}} = 4.160$, $P < .001$) and organisational citizenship behaviour (H8: $\beta_{\text{int.}} = .703 > \beta_{\text{ext.}} = .513$, $t_{\text{ext. vs int.}} = 4.241$, $P < .001$) due to plummets in job satisfaction during pandemic time. Therefore, we judge H2, H4, H7 and H8 as supported, and H1, H3, H5, H6 and H9 as unsupported.

In terms of COVID-19 perception indirect effects invariance, our results show that for the participants with external locus of control in this study, COVID-19 perceptions tend to indirectly hit anxiety ($B_{\text{int.}} = .123 < B_{\text{ext.}} = .227, t_{\text{ext. vs int.}} = 2.108, P < .05$), customer orientation ($B_{\text{int.}} = |-.032| < B_{\text{ext.}} = |-.078|, t_{\text{ext. vs int.}} = 2.375, P < .05$) and OCB ($B_{\text{int.}} = |-.242| < B_{\text{ext.}} = |-.362|, t_{\text{ext. vs int.}} = 2.716, P < .01$) more intensely than those with internal locus of control.

Finally, with SRMR equivalent to $.041 < .08$, we decide that our hypothetical model is an excellent fit for our data. Q^2 values of all the predictors are larger than 0, which suggests ample predictive relevance. Additionally, R^2 values for job insecurity (.134), anxiety (.284), alienation (.653), job satisfaction (.342), customer orientation (.130), organisational citizenship behaviours (.497), and turnover intentions (.224) were all higher than zero, suggesting that our model possesses substantial predictive accuracy.

INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic is the most serious global health crisis in more than 100 years. The purpose of the present research was to examine effects associated with the crisis in a specific swath of essential hospitality workers residing in the 20-country MENA region. Our objective was to learn, first off, if these workers' sense of personal control (viewed through locus of control) might

reveal individual dispositions that point to a more effective response to the crisis. In other words, if you believe you have control over aspects of the crisis, do you have, relatively, a less intense perception about job insecurity and psychosocial responses, hence better job satisfaction and better organisational outcomes and intentions? Our model examined how workers' locus of control moderates the effects of COVID-19 perception onto organisational outcomes through job insecurity, two psychosocial factors (i.e., anxiety and alienation) and job satisfaction. Our expectation going into the research was that the COVID-19 crisis is one of the worst types of conditions to face the hospitality industry and that it poses a direct threat to employees and, indirectly, to organisational competitive advantage. We grounded this supposition in empirical evidence and theoretical bases such as stress and work-life balance theory and the psychological contract, as well as job insecurity theory and research. Coming in, we understood that a similar crisis, like the disruption of wartime conditions, is positively associated with perceptions of job insecurity, and crisis portends negative organisational effects (Sora et al. 2013; Mahmoud and Reisel 2015). Yet, very few shocks have precedent to compare to what the world is experiencing from the pandemic, and as scholars, we wanted to shed light on the effects of this historical event in real-time. We targeted hospitality industry workers because they continue to report to traditional workplaces such as restaurants and hotels and are less likely to work remotely via the internet (Gössling, Scott, and Hall 2020). While our study took place in MENA, an understudied setting occupies a significant part of the Mediterranean region, which also contains several Southern European countries and labour force (e.g., Greece, Italy), thus rendering this study relevant to European management practices. We felt it is important to ascertain the extent to which the effects of COVID-19 might be mitigated by employee locus of control. That is, can employees who see

themselves in control of their situation moderate the anticipated effects of COVID-19 on personal reactions and organisational behaviour.

We know that hospitality workers, by virtue of their frontline status and significant role in customer satisfaction, play a major part in firm competitive advantage and profitability (Baydoun, Rose, and Emperado 2001). Yet, hospitality workers, despite their critical roles, are overworked, face irregular schedules, have limited training and upward career opportunities (Yousaf et al. 2019). Added to this, hospitality workers face the grim demands of serving while exposing themselves to the grave risk associated with contracting a deadly virus. In examining hospitality workers, our task was to understand the substantial additional burdens carried in this labour sector to determine how they are experiencing the psychosocial, attitudinal, and behavioural aspects of the crisis. In doing so, we seek to provide guidance to management about how to best adapt and avoid negative outcomes such as increased turnover intention. Thus, this research introduces a new dimension to firms interested in responding to COVID-19 and safeguarding employee well-being, attitudes, and behaviours that affect profitability.

We formulated nine hypotheses and tested a model of the effects of COVID-19 on job insecurity, psychosocial reactions, job satisfaction, organisational citizenship behaviour, and turnover intention. All nine hypotheses formulated theory-based directional predictions about the moderating role of locus of control. Using partial least square structural equation modelling to conduct path and multigroup analysis, we found full support for four hypotheses (H2, H4, H7, and H8), The four of the other five hypotheses were partially supported in that the main variables (i.e., independent and dependent) were significantly related but were not moderated by locus of control (H1, H3, H6, and H9). Only H5 was nonsignificant in that none of the indirect effects of the model was explained by the relationship between anxiety and job satisfaction.

What we learned is exciting and adds to the literature on job insecurity in the hospitality industry in several unique ways. The body of evidence on job insecurity has shown repeatedly that employees can perceive their job is at risk for bona fide reasons such as economic or industry shocks, organisational restructuring, deterioration in managerial rapport with employees, changes to resources, and other factors related to dispositions or employee demographics (Gössling, Scott, and Hall 2020). The evidence we analysed provides, for the first time, that a global health crisis can be included as a predictor of job insecurity, regardless of the degree of locus of control (H1), and how resultant job insecurity perceptions are related to negative employee emotional, attitudinal, and behavioural reactions. In short, COVID-19 is detrimental for employees and, by inference, to organisational competitive advantage. The model that we tested showed evidence of how the effects of COVID-19 are channelled via mediating pathways, influencing psychosocial reactions, attitudes, and work behaviours. We found that independently measured COVID-19 perceptions directly and positively predict job insecurity, indirectly and positively predict psychosocial factors and turnover intentions, and indirectly and negatively predict job satisfaction, customer orientation and OCB. Thus, we add to the literature on the effect of the crisis on employees' job attitudes, emotions, and organisational outcomes, meaning that employees view the health crisis as a threat to their jobs, triggering negative emotions and worsened job attitudes and organisational outcomes among MENA hospitality employees. This finding further supports the expectations of the adverse effects of COVID-19 on hospitality workers and corroborates previous research results where COVID-19 effects were not independently measured (e.g., Sonmez et al. 2020; Jiang and Wen 2020). Besides, our research is consistent with the negative conditions of the hospitality industry identified by previous research. They enumerate various troubling parts of hospitality work that are common across countries and continents, including

chronic job insecurity, temporary contract status, lack of union affiliation, all contributing to low levels of job satisfaction. Additionally, the hospitality industry places physical strains on workers due to manual aspects of the work, long hours, and adverse health consequences. We further contribute to this perspective by adding the crisis of COVID-19 to the already negative conditions of work in the hospitality industry.

In our second and third hypotheses, we further anticipated and tested for locus of control moderating effects on psychosocial reactions to job insecurity: anxiety and alienation. What we found is that job insecurity positively and directly predicts anxiety and alienation; however, the moderating effects were only fully supported for hypothesis 2. Employees' anxiety levels are high, perhaps because they do not know what they can do to counteract their situation and find themselves alone and lacking purpose, which is consistent with their sense of alienation. This result is in accord with recent studies indicating that anxiety and alienation are often found in job insecure employees (e.g., Shin and Hur 2020), including those in the hospitality industry in the MENA region (e.g., Zaki and Al-Romeedy 2018). As a result, prior research on negative well-being advocates for more refined human resources responses to hospitality workers' needs (Kusluvan et al. 2010). Our findings echo this view and suggest that employers do more to signal concerns for employee well-being. We also looked at the moderating role of locus of control concerning the relationship between anxiety and alienation (H4), and this hypothesis was fully supported. While we did not test for timing effects given the single sample in our data, we can suggest that there appears to be an effect that occurs through anxiety. This may be related to the notion that stressful events create initial reactions such as anxiety and that passes to alienation as employees, especially for those with external locus of control, seem to be less likely to find appropriate responses to the stressor.

Hypotheses 5 and 6 looked at the moderating role of locus of control concerning the relationships between psychosocial variables anxiety and job satisfaction (H5) and alienation and job satisfaction (H6). Anxiety did not prove to be associated with job satisfaction for both externals and internals, but alienation was significantly and negatively associated with job satisfaction, but invariant between the externals and internals. This result matches those observed in earlier studies concerning hospitality workers (e.g., Kong et al. 2018). We learned that alienation from the purpose of work is a strong predictor of lower job satisfaction regardless of the type of locus of control.

Our next three hypotheses looked at the effects of job satisfaction on three organisational outcomes: customer orientation (H7), organisational citizenship behaviours (H8), and turnover intention (H9). These findings were fully supported for hypotheses 7 and 8 but partially supported for hypothesis 9. Our data did not support the non-equivalency between the externals and internals concerning the relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention, meaning job satisfaction lessens turnover intentions similarly between the externals and internals (H9). While the direct relationships have been previously reported for customer orientation (e.g., Choi and Joung 2017), the moderated link between job satisfaction and customer orientation is novel and first of its kind. In terms of what we learned about the hospitality industry, we anticipated that job satisfaction would be positively related to customer orientation and that this relationship would be stronger among the internals than the externals (H7). Prior research (Brown et al. 2002; Reisel, Chia, and Maloles Iii 2005) examined the critical importance of employees who directly serve customers. Brown et al. (2002, p. 110) called customer orientation “an individual-level construct that we believe is central to a service organisation’s ability to be market-oriented.” Similarly, Reisel, Chia, and Maloles Iii (2005) examined the KAM framework, which identifies both internal

and external dimensions that model the process of serving key customers. The model includes customer performance and customer effectiveness as well as internal activities of the firm that include adaptiveness to changing competitive conditions and esprit de corps. The findings, here again, support the importance of job satisfaction as a predictor of customer orientation, however, our study offers an original contribution here concerning the strength of the relationship at the presence of locus of control as a moderator that our results suggested that the relationship is stronger amongst the internals than the externals (H7).

In Hypotheses 8, we again see the invariance between the external and internal concerning the importance of job satisfaction in predicting organisational citizenship behaviours, which are important discretionary behaviours that support organisational functioning. In this case, hospitality workers who are satisfied are more likely to engage in the performance of organisational citizenship behaviours, and such probability is considerably higher amongst the internals compared to the externals. This is particularly relevant to human resources management practices that should avoid neglecting factors that contribute to job satisfaction.

Our 9th hypothesis addresses the employee's plans for turnover intention. Prior research has found a negative association between job satisfaction and intention to quit in the service industry (e.g., Aydogdu and Asikgil 2011) and hospitality (e.g., Kim and Jogaratnam 2010). What we saw here again is that satisfied employees report a negative intention to quit, confirming our expectations among hospitality workers. Our novel contribution here is that we found this significant and strong relationship to be invariant between the externals and internals (H9). Moreover, we found that for externally controlled workers, COVID-19 perception's cascading effects boost anxiety and alienation levels and hit customer orientation and OCB more intensely among the externals than the internals.

The fundamental focus of this research has been the employee response to the pandemic. We examined individual differences via locus of control to see if certain hospitality workers with internal or external locus of control might have better or worse responses and behaviours related to the pandemic. Our results showed that locus of control does, in fact, significantly moderate four of the hypothesised relationships (e.g., Xiao, Wu, and Liao 2018). That is an interesting qualification within the present research which came from our moderator analysis comparing effects for hospitality industry workers with internal versus external locus of control. In addition, we learned that the effects of COVID-19 are more severe for workers who view the world as externally controlled as opposed to internally controlled. That is, hospitality workers with a greater sense of self-efficacy and control over their work situation are less prone to the negative effects of COVID-19 perceptions on the variables in our model. The inclusion of locus of control is grounded in our desire to see what happens during a pandemic to employee attitudes and behaviours. Prior research has pointed to a moderating influence of locus of control with respect to job insecurity perceptions, yet this is not entirely clear in the context of COVID-19. In other words, not all correlates of job insecurity are equal. Our presumption is that COVID-19 represents a type of dramatic condition on a macro-level that is not typical of correlates such as supervisor support which are much more proximal and, potentially, addressable by employees/employers. We sought to offer guidance to employees and management about responding to COVID-19, given that its scope is daunting and potentially too debilitating to employees to muster resources to counteract its threats. That is why the notion of internal locus of control becomes interesting. Our evidence suggests that COVID-19 has more manageable effects for individuals with a high internal locus of control and represents a contribution of the research in practical and theoretical terms.

Practical Implications

The takeaways and implications for management are noteworthy. First, our sample of hospitality industry workers in the 20-country MENA region suggests that employees who directly serve customers will have heightened job insecurity because of COVID-19. As shown in many other empirical studies, this will negatively affect the well-being, attitudes, and behaviours of employees. Second, since we have provided evidence that COVID-19 is positively related to job insecurity, we can suggest that employers might focus on those initiatives that are inside of their control. This is true even as COVID-19 is threatening to employees and to organisational purpose. Yet, the evidence produced here suggests that employees with internal locus of control are better able to manage the crisis in terms of their mental health resilience, overall attitudes, and behaviours. Third, given the promise of this finding, we suggest that management can partially address the negative effects of COVID-19 on employees by clearly communicating compliance with governmental health policy and providing, to the extent possible, supervisory support to workers directly at risk of contracting COVID-19. Moreover, as recommended by Bangwal and Tiwari (2019), who considered environmental factors that influence job satisfaction and subsequent turnover intention, we too suggest an important role of management which should offer resources such as masks, sanitiser, and other direct firm-level supports, including supervisory support, to address employee satisfaction given the added burdens introduced by the spread of COVID-19.

It is hard to overstate the scale of the threat of COVID-19 to worker health and job security, so this is the time for employers to clearly communicate their plans for their safety and job security. Another important finding relates to the moderating effect of locus of control. We wanted to see if dispositions might change the anticipated effects. Our expectation was that employees with

external locus of control would respond poorly to the shock of the pandemic, and that is precisely what we learned. This means that employees who begin with lower self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to shape external events are going to react poorly to a crisis such as COVID-19. Therefore, external locus of control raises serious challenges to management to ameliorate employee reactions to COVID-19 since locus of control is dispositional rather than attitudinal and hard to change. We suggest that human resources recruitment policy should consider self-efficacy attitudes in hiring decisions as individuals with higher internal locus of control better navigated the threat of COVID-19 than their external locus of control counterparts.

Limitations and Future Directions

There are several limitations of the current research. First, the sample is broad, but it is constrained to only the MENA block of 20 countries. According to Kabasakal et al. (2012), the general societal practices of the MENA region have been reported to score high on power distance (i.e., the extent to which society members expect and accept the disproportionate distribution of power) and in-group collectivism (i.e., the extent to which individuals express pride, cohesiveness, and loyalty in their families or organisations). Therefore, future researchers may seek to replicate this work in other global regions or run cross-cultural investigations of our model to determine how our results could differ in other cultures. Second, we focused our research on hospitality industry workers who are more directly impacted than remote or virtual workers about whom we do not generalise. These limitations mean that further research to broaden the country sample and categories of job types is warranted. Third, we followed a cross-sectional design to test our model, so it is ill-equipped to provide evidence for causal relationships. Therefore, future research will be needed to collect longitudinal data to understand the true effects and causal relationships better. However, according to Tharenou, Donohue, and Cooper (2007), findings generated from a cross-sectional

study can still be interpretable and valid if a robust theoretical basis is adopted; further, cross-sectional design for data collection has received an endorsement for scholarly investigations in wartime-like contexts (e.g., COVID-19) and other settings of extreme environments. This study was limited by the absence of demographic variables in estimation, mainly because of the model complexity, hence the need for much larger samples to test variances resulting from demographic traits. Therefore, future researchers might also turn their attention to additional moderators such as personality dimensions and demographic differences beyond locus of control to better understand constraints and conditions that might facilitate practical guidance to managers in the field. An interesting area of investigation for future research may also involve an examination of the work-life balance of MENA workers, given the pressure to deliver more with less to keep the organisations afloat. Many countries in the MENA region (e.g., Lebanon, Morocco, Israel, Syria, etc.) and the European Union (e.g., France, Italy, Portugal, Spain, etc.) are parts of the Mediterranean region, and they share many cultural norms and values such as eating habits (Lacatusu et al. 2019). Plus, it has been argued that the hospitality sector's employment precarity is prevalent worldwide (Robinson et al. 2019), including Europe (e.g., McKay et al. 2012; Kearsey 2020) with a workforce of high heterogeneity (Bolton et al. 2018) and job insecurity even amongst people holding permanent jobs in this industry (McNamara, Bohle, and Quinlan 2011) — offering our results significant relevance to European management scholarship and practice. Thus, given the types of workers studied in this research, we surmise that similar effects would apply throughout regions such as the European Union, given the heavy reliance on variable labour in the hospitality industry and other industries (Wood 2020). For instance, owing to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, many European labour migrants in hospitality have lost their jobs in the host country and returned home, in some instances forcibly —leading to more pressure on job

markets and intense competition in areas of return with resident workers (ILO 2021). The intertwining complexities between Southern European and MENA markets imply that future studies of this nature may benefit from a comparative approach.

Conclusion

This research offers preliminary evidence that hospitality employees' locus of control moderates their emotional and attitudinal reactions amidst the ongoing pandemic-time crisis. It has tested a model of psychosocial, attitudinal, and behavioural correlates of job insecurity among hospitality industry workers in the MENA region. Our evidence is among the first to examine the moderating role of locus of control on the effects of the global pandemic as it is unfolding. The findings reveal how detrimental the effects of COVID-19 are on job insecurity perceptions, employee psychosocial reactions, and related organisational behaviours. This pattern of evidence is most pronounced among workers with external locus of control.

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Figure 1: Theoretical model

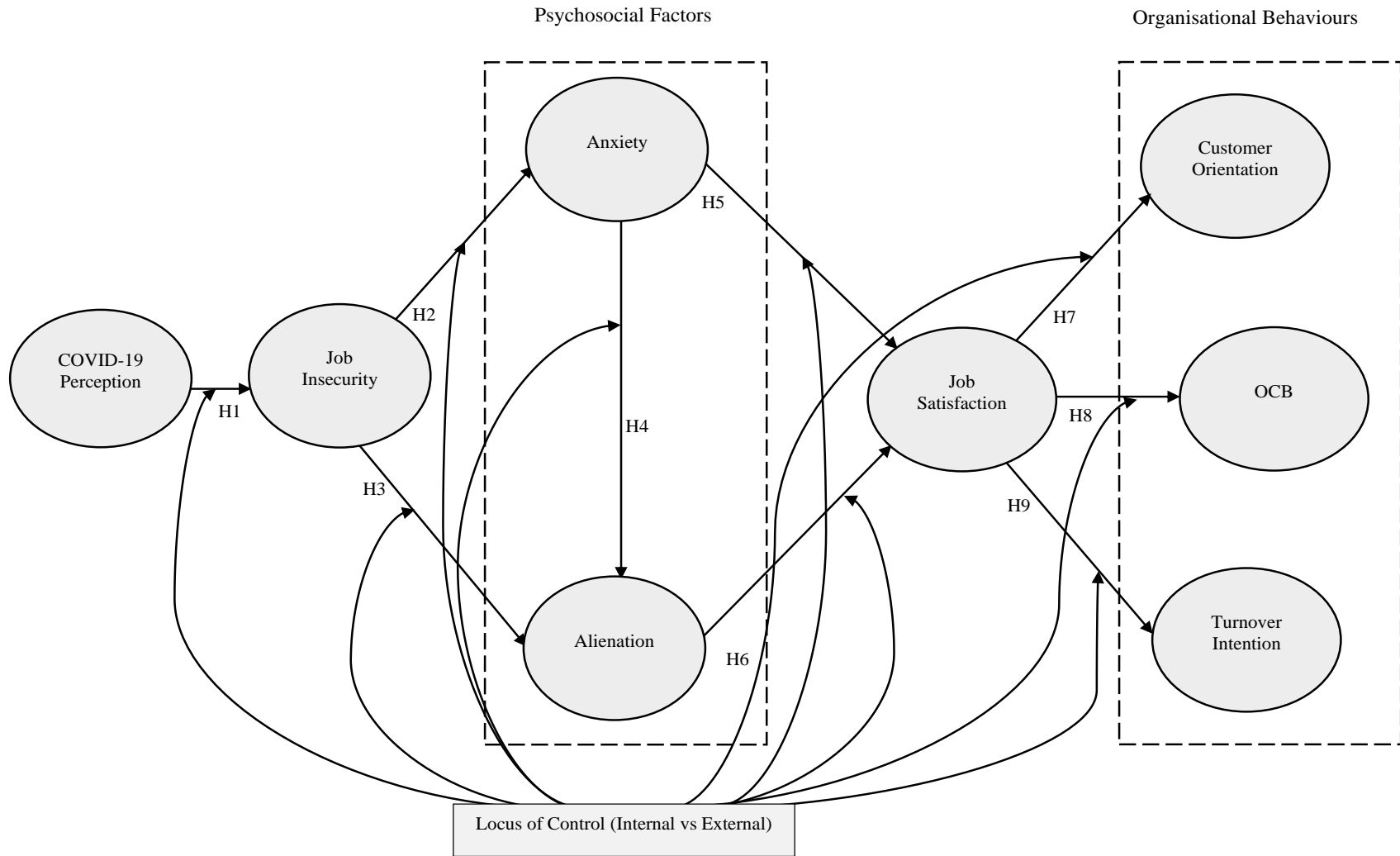
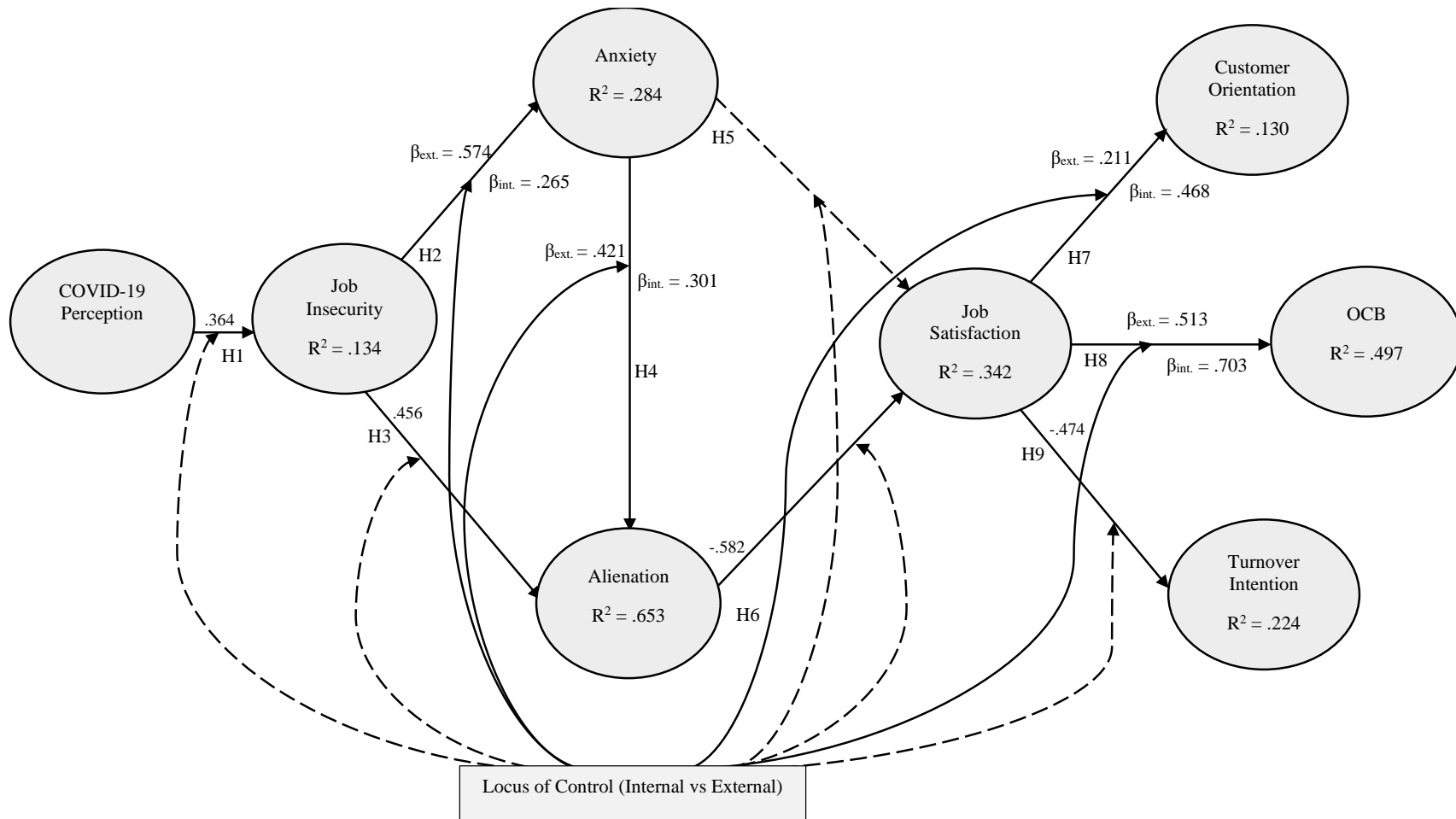


Figure 2: Hypotheses testing results– the alternate model



Note.

- All values are significant and of medium or large effect size.
- Dashed arrows represent non-significant effect.