
Loud Quitting in the Social Media Age: A Conceptual Study of Disengagement in Public Employees

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore a new trend known as loud quitting, a modern method to show dissatisfaction publicly on social media platforms. It looks at the forces that lead to disengagement, such as psychological contract violations and perceived organisational injustice. This disengagement leads to an open and visible act of expression, called loud quitting, which impacts the reputation and trust in the organisation. The study provides a framework for understanding the relationship between disengagement and loud quitting, which is moderated by social media-based impression management, drawing on Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, and Impression Management Theory. It highlights how online voice and self-presentation shape disengagement in current times.

Keywords: Loud Quitting, Social Media Age, Disengagement, Employee Voice, Public Employees, Social Exchange Theory

INTRODUCTION

The relationship between employees and employers has changed significantly due to the current social media age. These dramatic changes have blurred the line between employers and employees and changed the way individuals interact in their private and professional arenas. The Social media platforms have changed the nature and efficiency of communication (Beck, 2007). It has become the ubiquitous part of modern workplace relationships (Ellerbrok, 2010; Jacobson and Howle Tufts, 2013). Meanwhile, disputes about what is acceptable and appropriate to expose on social media are raising conflicts associated with social media dynamics within the boundaries of employer-employee relationships (McDonald & Thompson, 2016). Now, employees use platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Blogs are used by employees to share their workplace experiences as well as their disengagement or dissatisfaction (Miles & Mangold, 2014). This e-voice can be explosive like a bomb waiting to explode when employees use these social media platforms to post negative comments about the organization. As employees increasingly use social media to express their opinions as a voice, this information goes beyond the limits of the internal communication system and reaches hundreds of people with just a few keystrokes. This trend of employees using social media platforms to express their dissatisfaction with their jobs, discuss their exit experiences, or criticize their employers is labelled as “Loud Quitting.”

Unlike passive disengagement, Loud Quitting involves openly sharing negative events and experiences directly with everyone, including colleagues and superiors on social media (Yikilmaz & TARAKCI, 2023). Loud quitting is more noticeable, damaging the reputation of the organization and hurting other existing employee’s trust as well. It is a method of showing dissatisfaction with their work, their manager, the employing organisation, or anyone who would listen (Hungerford et al. 2024). Loud quitting is not just a threat to resign, but also has the potential to damage the output of the workplace and erode trust, by spreading dissatisfaction to other employees (Gostik, 2023). As per “Gallup’s State of the Global Workplace: 2025 Report”, there is a decline of two percent

in global employees, which resulted in an estimated \$438 billion in lost output for the global economy (Harter & Pendell, 2025).

While quiet quitting is a passive way of showing disengagement and a quiet withdrawal caused by dissatisfaction, loud quitting actively expresses dissatisfaction and is gaining attention, still in an emerging phase. There is a sudden change from private disengagement to public protest, showing deeper problems between employee and organisation relationships.

In the age of social media, this paper aims to explore the reasons and methods that public employees use to engage in loud quitting and show disengagement. Public employees work in public organizations and institutions. They are employed by the federal government, state government, or local bodies (United States Code, 2025) and receive pay directly from the government for providing operations and services on their behalf (Woo, 2022). Public employees act as a public face for their government organization, making their online behaviour or expression of any negative event or disengagement have an impact on a large scale. Such actions can damage the organization's reputation and affect public confidence. Despite growing interest, there is still a lack of academic understanding regarding loud quitting, especially concerning public employees.

This paper aims to theorize loud quitting as a modern form of disengagement, shown with the help of social media in this digital era, and connects organisational unfairness, unfulfilled expectations, and emotional disengagement to an increasing number of loud quitting behaviours among public employees, building on Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, and Impression Management Theory. The purpose of this paper is to provide a conceptual or theoretical framework on Loud quitting, which will describe the causes, process, and outcomes of loud quitting by public employees within public organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Social Media and Employee Voice

The digitization and rapid explosion of social media have transformed the way people interact and communicate with each other (Holland et al., 2019; Martin et al., 2015; Mennie, 2015), altered workplace communication norms, and opened up new avenues for employees to express themselves. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool to foster communication and collaboration within the organization (Young and Hinesly, 2014). It allows people to connect, driven by a fundamental human urge to exchange information with each other (Ghani & Malik, 2023). In today's digitalised world, businesses are using social media to help their staff and stay competitive (Walker, 2020). With the growth of social media, people's capacity to express their opinions has grown alongside (Dreher, 2014). The use of social media platforms as a voice platform (Conway et al., 2019; Balnave et al., 2014) to express opinions, concerns, and dissatisfaction regarding work or organizational issues by employees has increased (Ghani & Malik, 2023). Employee voice is 'the ways and means through which employees attempt to have a say and potentially influence organisational affairs about issues that affect their work and the interests of managers and owners' as defined by Wilkinson et al. (2014). Employee voice 'describes how employees concerns, express, and advance interests, solve problems, and contribute to and participate in workplace decision-making' (Pyman et al., 2006)

Social media has redefined the boundary of employee voice expressed through social media platforms. The emergence of social media immediately disseminates information to a worldwide audience and is altering how employees communicate, which is frequently outside management's control (Holland et al. 2018). Social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, and other social media channels allow employees to share their experiences and convey their attitudes towards their organizations (Barnes et al. 2018). As compared to the past, the expressive repertoire of employees has been transformed by the digital era, resulting in a more collaborative, visible, and open environment (Samdanis & Lee, 2017). Employees seek validation, express their frustration, or draw attention to injustice with the help of social media platforms. Prior studies indicate that digital tools enhance employee participation in decision-making procedures, create opportunities for more e-voices, and reduce the expenses associated with information reproduction and dissemination (DiMaggio et al. 2001). Sharing information worldwide by employees can risk the organization's reputation and public trust. According

to Gallup, *one out of every five employees* is now a loud quitter (**Gostik, 2023**). In this context, the traditional idea that employee voice is internal is no longer valid.

This change has special ramifications for the public sector that influence how public employees interact with these resources (**Kim and Lee, 2006**). The most popular social media platforms in public administration are Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, blogs, Flickr, and LinkedIn (**Criado, 2013**). Public employees are expected to demonstrate political neutrality, professionalism, and loyalty (**Rothstein & Sorak, 2017**). But when public employees use social media to criticize policies, leaders, or workplace practices, their digital expressions might contrast with bureaucratic norms and public trust. **Sobaci & Karkin (2013)** found that Turkish mayors have started using this social media platform to send private messages, share information, and disclose their location as well as their political activity, which conflicts with privacy norms. Use of social media involves risks of online posting and sharing negative information (**Millham & Atkin, 2016**), which raises privacy concerns. Public employees with their dual responsibilities as citizens and government employees are probably more concerned about privacy in the workplace. In reaction, it is assumed that public employees will be less inclined to use social media at work (**DiMicco et al. 2008**).

This dispute between organizational norms and freedom of speech arises against the backdrop of loud quitting, a public and largely visible act of disengagement. Thus, Social media transforms not only the way in which employee voice is expressed, but also changes the audience by expressing their dissatisfaction or disengagement directly to the public instead of the internal workplace.

Theoretical Foundations

A conceptual understanding of Loud quitting requires a multidisciplinary approach that links employee disengagement, organizational relationships, and public self-expression in the social media age. Dissatisfaction is not the only factor that leads to disengagement, but is caused by many other issues like work burden, lack of work–life balance, lack of pay & benefits, lack of opportunities, or support for career progression, misalignment between organisational mission and values, and other workplace issues like favouritism, poor communication of goals or deadlines for the work (**Hungerford, 2024**), which drives loud quitting. Therefore, the phenomenon of loud quitting is not simply an act of showing disengagement but a complex behavioral response involving perceived unfairness, emotional detachment, and strategic public communication that represents how employees choose to share their organizational experiences with a wider audience through social media platforms. The factor that prompts an employee to choose quiet quitting (a safer form of disengagement) over loud quitting is the reason for the disengagement (**Hungerford, 2024**).

The traditional theories of disengagement assume that disengagement stays within the organisational borders in the form of internal withdrawal or reduced effort, but in the age of social media, it is shown publicly in a more visible form. According to *Gallup's State of the Global Workplace (2023)*, approximately 18% of workers worldwide are actively disengaged, known as "loud quitters," demonstrating a real and expanding trend of notable disengagement. Public employees no longer work behind closed doors, and their voices spread worldwide, impacting both internal culture as well as external reputation.

This research uses three interconnected theories - Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, and Impression Management Theory to explain this shift from silent disengagement to visible expression. This offers a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for employee's disengagement, the way this disengagement triggers public expression, and the reasons for considering social media as a preferred medium for expression.

Social Exchange Theory (SET): Social exchange theory is one of the most important conceptual frameworks that interprets workplace behaviour (**Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005**). Its origin can be traced back to the 1920s (**Malinowski, 1922; Mauss, 1925**). It bridges the fields of social psychology (**Gouldner, 1960; Homans, 1958; Thibault & Kelley, 1959**), sociology (**Blau, 1964**), and anthropology (**Firth, 1967; Sahlins, 1972**). Social exchange theory is based on three fundamental pillars: exchange rules and norms, resources transferred, and emerging relationships (**Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005**). According to **Blau (1964)**, social exchange relates to the behaviors that depend on the positive actions of others, whereas exchange behaviours are the voluntary actions that are driven by expected returns or rewards. It is based on the principle of Reciprocity that exchange

tangible and intangible resources, such as trust, respect, loyalty, and recognition. According to this theory, when one party gives another a valuable and beneficial resource, it creates an obligation to give a beneficial resource back in return (Mitchell et al. 2012). Thus, an individual possesses several interdependent actions that create an obligation (Blau 1964; Emerson 1976; Homans 1958). This results in positive reactions like dedication, engagement, and citizenship when employee's contributions are valued, appreciated, and rewarded fairly. But when this reciprocal cycle is broken due to negative experiences like unfair treatment, lack of attention, or organizational neglect, employees show negative reactions like withdrawing and increasing disengagement, or turnover intentions.

This theory explains the shift from merely reducing efforts to a safer form of disengagement, like quietly disengaging, to openly expressing dissatisfaction through loud quitting. Employees look for other ways to restore the reciprocity cycle when the organization fails to provide valuable resources. Social media platforms give workers a space to share negative experiences, voice complaints, seek support, or address perceived injustices publicly. This becomes more complex in the context of public organizations, which emphasize political neutrality, professionalism, and loyalty (Rothstein & Sorak, 2017). When these values are broken, employees may feel a stronger sense of relationship violation, leading to loud quitting as a method to express disappointment. By expressing disengagement, employees attempt to balance an unfair exchange by controlling their story and shaping how the public perceives the situation.

Psychological Contract Theory: The concept of psychological contract was coined in the 1960s (Argyris, 1960). The history of psychological contract theory is associated with Rousseau's (1989), which describes the relationship between employee and organisation, shaped by a set of expectations and unspoken promises. 'The psychological contract is individual beliefs, shaped by the organization, regarding terms of an exchange agreement between the individual and their organization' (Rousseau, 1995, p. 9). The underlying assumption of the relationship between parties is that each party will exchange something they can offer for something they can get in return (Conway & Briner, 2011).

The traditional theory explains the behaviour of employees by focusing on the degree to which an employee feels their employer has fulfilled the promises (Conway & Briner, 2011). When the promise is fulfilled, employees respond with like job satisfaction, higher trust, commitment, and engagement. In contrast, a broken promise leads to withdrawal behaviors and reduced performance. The psychological contract violation is significantly useful in understanding the loud quitting phenomenon. An organisation that fails to meet expectations and promises, such as fair representation, open communication, and appreciating employee's work, prompts employees to express their disengagement and displeasure by loud quitting. Loud Quitting is like a form of psychological revenge. Hence, loud quitting reflects deterioration of the relationship between the employee and the organization.

The psychological contracts involve the commitment to show and exchange high moral standards like honesty, stability, and public accountability in the case of public employees. When an organisation breaks these standards through bureaucratic inefficiencies, lack of recognition, or political interference, public employees may feel more morally wronged in comparison to the private sector's employees. This violation enhances the desire to express publicly and seek public expression of their grievances, instead of complaining within the organisation to damage the organization's reputation and regain their own feeling of autonomy and integrity.

Impression Management Theory: In the late 1950s, scholars began to explore impression management (Tedeschi, 2013). Goffman's book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959), was a groundbreaking study to understand this theory. According to Goffman, impression management is a component of the social system, where behaviour is a reaction to both internal standards and external demands for self-identification (Tedeschi, 2013). It is the process by which people manage the impressions that people form of them, which involves two steps. At first, people are involved in impression motivation, which is the extent to which people are motivated to influence other's perception of themselves own and the second step involves impression construction, which tells about the type of impression people attempt to create in others (Leary & Kowalski, 1990). Employees use impression management in work environments to keep a positive reputation in front of colleagues, superiors, and the organization as a whole, aiming to appear capable, devoted, loyal, or professional

In the age of social media, the boundaries of impression management extended from the traditional office setting to the online worldwide space. Employees use social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Blogs (Miles & Mangold, 2014) to showcase their professional identities, express values, and engage in public discourse. This creates impressions in the minds of the public that either support or contradict organizational relationships. In this viewpoint, loud quitting is a type of impression management. Employees use criticism or public resignation posts to influence how others view their departure and shape perceptions about it.

From this viewpoint, loud quitting is not just a way to show disengagement, but also a form of expressive communication. Employees try to project an image of honesty, courage, or ethical resistance to perceived injustice. They seek validation and support by sharing their public expressions. For public employees who work for the government (Woo, 20220), their online actions can affect their personal reputation but also the legitimacy of their organisation. When employees show loud quitting behaviour, it signals justice, ethics, or transparency issues within the public sector. Thus, the social media statements from public employees expressing disengagement or dissatisfaction can act as both *self-protective acts* and *public accountability claims*. Therefore, Impression Management theory helps to explain the visibility and symbolic meaning of loud quitting actions.

Conceptual Framework and Propositions of Loud Quitting

The proposed conceptual model integrates Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, and Impression Management Theory to explain how public employees engage in loud quitting behaviour in today's social media age. According to the framework, loud quitting is a multidimensional and complex reaction to unmet psychological expectations, perceived organisational injustices, and the growing impact of digital self-expression.

The Social Exchange theory says that employees feel a violation of the reciprocity cycle when their efforts are not fairly compensated for by the company. and there is an imbalance between the employee's contribution and the organisation's reward through lack of recognition, unfair treatment, or limited growth opportunities. This leads to an imbalance between what the employee contributes and what the organization rewards, often due to a lack of recognition, unfair treatment, or limited growth options. This imbalance reduces the commitment and increases disengagement possibilities, which results in loud quitting.

The Psychological Contract theory suggests that emotional discomfort and a loss of confidence arise from psychological contract violations. These violations occur when workers believe that the company has not fulfilled its unspoken commitments. Such violations typically lead to quiet quitting or turnover intentions. In the age of social media, employees are more inclined to use these platforms to express perceived injustices and seek moral validation.

Additionally, Impression Management Theory explains the public nature through which loud quitting can be understood. Employees utilize social media platforms to reconstruct their identity and restore their reputation, making their act of quitting a public statement through loud quitting. This act of public expression assists them in managing how the public, employers, and peers view their exit.

Based on this conceptual framework, perceived organisational injustice and psychological contract violations trigger employee disengagement, which further aggravates the need for social validation and image restoration on social media, ultimately leading to loud quitting. Public employees who work in a moral and service-oriented environment may experience this phenomenon more intensely as their organisational image is connected with civic values and public accountability.

Proposed Relationships and Propositions:

The combination of these perspectives leads to a more comprehensive understanding of Loud Quitting.

Proposition 1: Perceived organizational injustice is positively associated with employee disengagement among public employees (Supported by Social Exchange Theory: Imbalance in reciprocity leads to withdrawal).

Proposition 2: Psychological contract violation increases employees’ intention to express dissatisfaction publicly (Supported by Psychological Contract Theory: Breach leads to emotional response and retaliatory expression).

Proposition 3: Employee disengagement mediates the relationship between organizational injustice and loud quitting behavior (Disengagement acts as the psychological process through which dissatisfaction is expressed).

Proposition 4: Social media use for impression management moderates the relationship between disengagement and loud quitting, such that employees with higher online visibility or self-presentation motives are more likely to engage in loud quitting.

(Explained through Impression Management Theory: Public expression as image control.)

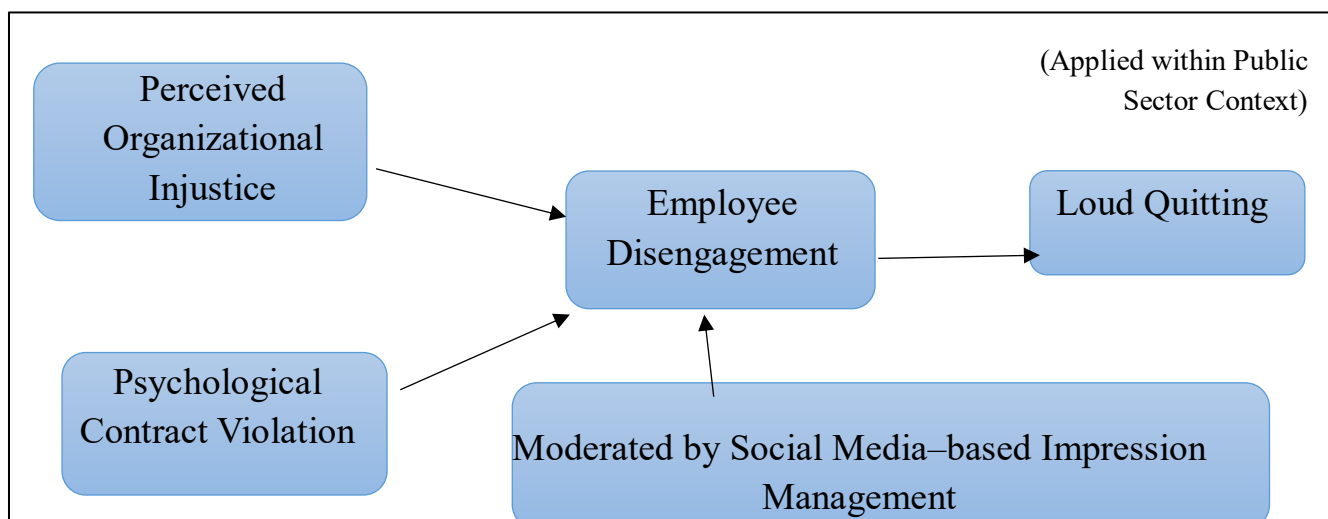
The framework sees Loud Quitting as not just an impulsive action, but an act of disengagement that is influenced by relationship breaches (Social Exchange theory and Psychological Contract Theory) and the motive to build image in public (Impression Management Theory).

Proposed Conceptual Model

The conceptual model intends to show the relationship between organizational injustice, psychological contract violation, employee disengagement, social media–based impression management, and loud quitting behavior among public employees by incorporating ideas from Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, and Impression Management Theory.

The main causes of employee disengagement are perceived **organisational injustice** and a **breach of the psychological contract**. Public employees lose trust and emotional attachment with the organisation when they face injustice, neglect, or broken implicit promises. This imbalance disturbs the relationship between the employee and the organisation, undermining teamwork and increasing disengagement. This is rooted in Social Exchange Theory and Psychological Contract Theory. **Employee Disengagement** acts as a mediator, turning negative perception into actions. Disengaged workers are less likely to make positive contributions and often seek ways to express their frustration. Loud Quitting, a visible and outspoken resignation, reflects this internal disengagement on social media.

Social media-based impression management is a moderating factor that plays a role in how disengagement is expressed on social media. Workers who share more online, having a strong social media presence, are more likely to voice their disengagement to craft an image of being principled and authentic. This behavior supports Impression Management theory that suggests people attempt to shape how other people see them, especially during career transitions or events that might harm their reputation. Finally, **Loud Quitting** is the end result of disengagement. It is an act of disengagement to show dissatisfaction, criticism, and moral position against organisational justice. These actions indicate disengagement with leadership ethics or bureaucratic systems for public employees.



Theoretical Contributions

It extends Social Exchange theory and Psychological Contract theory to the social media context. This study conceptualizes loud quitting as a modern and public expression of exchange disruption. It changes the view of disengagement from a silent withdrawal to an expressive reaction on social media.

By using Impression Management Theory, the study adds a new aspect of digital self-presentation in relation to employee quit behavior. It connects employee disengagement to employee voice, digital visibility, and self-presentation. The study describes how workers use social media to control their image, defend their choices, and obtain social approval.

The study adds to the literature on public administration by exploring this phenomenon in the context of public employees. It highlights the challenges public employees face. It shows how violations of moral and service-oriented psychological contracts can lead to an obvious, value-driven disengagement.

Practical Implications

The study offers a practical insight for organisations, and firstly, it stresses the importance and advantage of having a clear grievance procedure for complaints, responsive leadership, effective internal communication, and feedback mechanisms. This will act as a precaution and will make employees feel heard before their frustration and disengagement turn into a public act.

Organizations should monitor employee opinion on digital platforms and use it as a tool for organisational learning rather than just a threat. Employee opinions and feedback can help organisations in making their workplace more fair, recognized, and credible.

The framework also signals to reshape expectations through fairness, respect, and open communication that will increase the trust and commitment of employees towards the organisation and help it in its growth in the long run.

At last, the study suggests that leaders and organisations to effectively manage online employee voice. This implication can help organizations in turning threats into opportunities to build trust and credibility.

Future Research Directions

The future research should test the given framework in real-world settings with the help of surveys, experiments, or case studies in various public organizations.

A comparative analysis can be done with respect to public as well as private employees to increase the generalizability of the study and conceptual framework.

The future research should examine the platform dynamics of different social media platforms like LinkedIn, Twitter, or Instagram.

At last, Longitudinal studies could be done to look at the long-term effects of loud quitting on workplace culture, employee career outcomes, and organisational reputation, while studying mediators like perceived injustice, emotional weariness, or organisational silence on the other side to understand this phenomenon better.

CONCLUSION

The conceptual paper explores the rising issue of Loud Quitting among public employees in the current social age and provides an integrative framework based on Social Exchange Theory, Psychological Contract Theory, and Impression Management Theory. Based on this paper, the primary drivers of Loud Quitting are the desire for digital self-expression, perceived organisational injustice, and psychological contract. By using

organizational theories with the realities of social media visibility and openness, this paper explores how employees express dissatisfaction in the modern age. The paper helps to understand the factors that lead to disengagement and take the form of public expression instead of being limited to organizational boundaries.

If the employees of the organisation show loud quitting behaviours, that indicates the existence of deeper issues that need attention. Loud quitting indicates deeper issues that need attention in public organizations, where integrity, responsibility, and trust are essential. The paper offers a new theoretical framework by presenting employee disengagement as a relational, psychological, and communicative process shaped by the digital age, which will help in the growth and development of public organizations by focusing simultaneously on the organization's reputation as well as employee voice in the form of loud quitting through social media platforms.

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