

## DEHUMANIZATION – A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW AND RESEARCH AGENDA

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### ABSTRACT

*Dehumanization as a concept has drawn more attention from academics and practitioners recently due to its effects on emotional tiredness, work satisfaction, and turnover intention. This paper's goals are to perform a thorough analysis of the body of research on dehumanization, assess the state of the field, pinpoint study areas, and make recommendations for future directions in the field. The authors of this work employed thematic coding to identify the present research streams in dehumanization studies and provided recommendations for future research using systematic review methodologies. Through research synthesis, the antecedents and moderators/mediators of dehumanization were identified. The review of literature also identified geographic representation of dehumanization research, methodological approaches to explore dehumanization, and the prominent theories adopted to investigate dehumanization. The authors then discovered five study areas where dehumanization has been primarily examined. Lastly, the authors offer recommendations for possible directions for future dehumanization research. One of the few that provides a thorough analysis of the literature on dehumanization and identifies uncharted territory for further study is this one.*

**Key Words:** Dehumanization, Infra-humanization, Literature review, and Mistreatment

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Dehumanization is the feelings that occur when individual considers himself as a tool or a robot. Scholars claims that when an individual is considered as animal or machine than feelings of dehumanization arises (Bastian and Haslam, 2011; Caesens et al., 2017; V`ayrynen and Laari-Salmela, 2018).Scholars argue that feelings of dehumanization badly affect the employee attitudes and behaviors, wellbeing and satisfaction (Bell and Khoury, 2011, 2016) as it negatively influences the basic needs of individuals (Christoff, 2014).Further, the concept of dehumanization also studied with employee psychometric strain and employee emotional exhaustion (Caesens et al., 2019). A novel idea in organizational behavior literature is organizational dehumanization. This idea was found in the research of

organizational behavior by Caesens et al. (2017). Social psychology is the source from which this excerpt is extracted (Haslam and Loughnan, 2014; Leyens et al., 2001). According to Caesens et al. (2017), the literature considers the attitudinal consequences while ignoring the behavioral outcomes.

In addition, present study is very important in several ways. First, dehumanization cause challenges for the organization and posing financial losses (Michalak and Ashkanasy, 2020). Further, little empirical literature available on the organizational dehumanization (Dhanani and LaPalme, 2019). hence, this study focus on organizational dehumanization to further strengthen the literature on it. Additionally, Dhanani and LaPalme (2019) recommend that more research be done on the potential causes and effects of organizational dehumanization. By providing a fresh perspective on the employee organization interaction paradigm, the current study adds to the body of knowledge in organizational and managerial psychology. Organizational dehumanization can be defined as an employee's belief that they are a changeable tool (Caesens et al., 2019).

Keeping in view the given literature and research, a comprehensive understanding and review of dehumanization research is required (Rezwan and Takahashi, 2021; Xiao and Cooke, 2018). So, current study take dehumanization literature from three wave approach with the aim to synthesis and assess extant literature on dehumanization. First, we take dehumanization literature in terms of geographic representation, the methodological approaches, the investigation levels and the applied theories. Second, we highlights research streams and some remaining gaps. Third, we highlights some important topics that researchers may explore in future studies. Finally, by following the positivism philosophy (De Garcia et al., 2020), this study comprehensively collect and synthesis the literature on dehumanization. Following this introduction, this study will present a conceptual framework of dehumanization. We will go over the systematic review approach that was used and we finally discuss our research findings by offering suggestions for future research.

According to Väyrynen and Laari-Salmela (2015), p. 2, "dehumanization" is defined as "a psychological phenomenon whereby people perceive of other human beings as something less than, or profoundly different from, themselves; in other words, their human characteristics are being denied. "Employees believe they are being treated like tools or robots (Caesens et al., 2019). Employee perspective is that they are seen by the organization as a flexible tool (Caesens et al., 2019). Workers believe they are treated less human—that is, like an animal or a machine—in the workplace (Bastian and Haslam, 2011), and they blame their employer for this (Caesens et al., 2019).

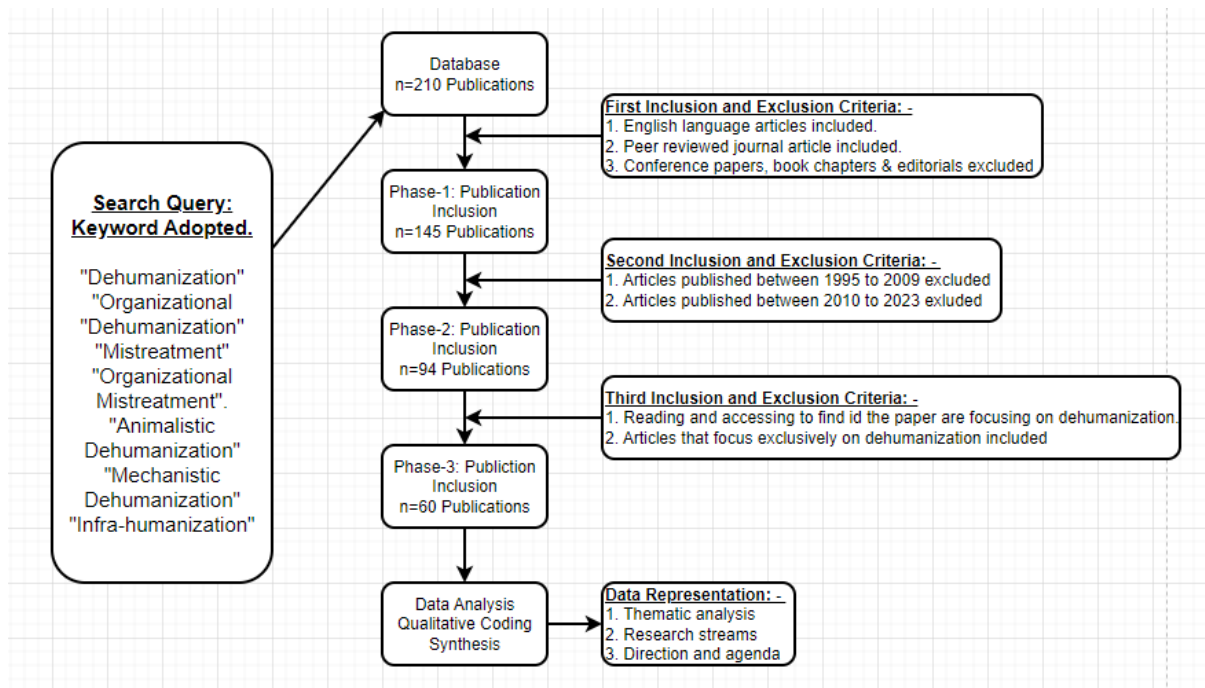
## 2. METHODOLOGY

The current study followed Tranfield et al. (2003)'s recommendations and employed systematic review procedures. According to Petticrew and Roberts (2008), the systematic review approach is the most effective means of recording, assessing, and combining all pertinent research on a given subject. It helps in finding out the gaps in literature and existing body of knowledge. Figure 1 describes and summarizes the methodological procedure.

To extract publications, the researcher chooses Elsevier's "Scopus" database, Google Scholar and Web of Science (WoS) (Bosman et al., 2006; Thürrer et al., 2020). Scopus is most widely used, robust, most convenient database and with many additional features. Hence, Scopus has proved an exciting reputation for conducting systematic review methods (Centobelli and Ndou, 2019; Vieira and Gomes, 2009). Secondly, on the basis of peer and author recommendation, a keyword selection was conducted, using synonymous. Because the focus of the current work to review the field of dehumanization, there might be some articles that have used as keywords such as "organizational dehumanization," "organizational

mistreatment,” or “dehumanization” interchangeably, where focus of those articles established on dehumanization. In view of above, we used different keywords and applied in the Title, Abstract and Keywords’ section of Scopus database which resulted in more than 200 articles.

**Figure 1 Methodological procedure adopted for systematic review process**



Thirdly, we fetch data from the blind peer-reviewed journal articles as they ensure more robust methodological standard than book chapters, editorials and, conference papers (Adams et al., 2017; Thyer, 2008) leading to our inventory of 145 papers. Fourthly, current study only focus on the concept of dehumanization and we first look at the publication dates of article. Between 1995 and 2023, 145 articles were published. After assessing the essential articles our inventory reduces to 94 articles. We then examine the remaining 94 articles to identify that whether they are related to the dehumanization and to ensure that other different concepts were not mixed up with the concept of dehumanization. After reading and re-reading our inventory drops to 60 articles that focused on the concept of dehumanization between 2010 and 2023. Out of these 60 articles, to take the stock we followed the descriptive stock of the literature by Paul and Criado (2020) and qualitative thematic synthesis by Anand et al. (2021). We synthesized and gathered literature that guides our research themes and future research inquiries, adhering to Heisig and Kannan's (2020) suggestions

### 3. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

#### 3.1. Current stock of dehumanization research

The aim of this section is to take and focus on the relevant articles related to dehumanization. So, current research analysis offers three perspectives i.e. geographical representation of the conducted research, methodological approaches in the study of dehumanization; and prominent theories used to study dehumanization.

#### 3.2. Geographic representation of dehumanization research

In this study of dehumanization, country based data used which can encourage the temporal diffusion of the contexts and concepts by scholars. Studies on the dehumanization mostly

flourished in Asia. This attracts the researchers to further investigate the dehumanization for example, in the context of developed vs emerging economy.

### 3.3. Methodological approaches to study dehumanization

The studies which highlighted the dehumanization are quantitative approaches that is survey measurements, experimental designs and cross sectional analysis. Literature claims that a few qualitative studies exist on dehumanization. Research shows that there is very least longitudinal studies on dehumanization, although mostly quantitative studies exist in literature (Khalid et. al., 2019; Jahanzeb et al., 2020).

### 3.4. Theories adopted to explore dehumanization research

Theories are very important to understand the theoretical and conceptual breakthroughs in the fields that are vigorous to the marketers and researchers for exploitations of specific contexts (Dennis and Kintsch, 2007). Researchers used different theories to examine the causes and consequences of dehumanization from individual, dyadic, group and organizational level. Conservation of resources theory and social exchange theory are popular for examining the effects of dehumanization. Although, infrahumanisation theory is most widely used. Beside these theories, social cognitive theory, equity theory and organizational support theory also used in some studies.

**Table-1: - Paper distribution based on methodologies studied**

Methods	Selected exemplary citations
Quantitative	Caesens et al., 2017; Nguyenl & Stinglhamber, 2019, Pizzirani, Karantzas, & Mullins, 2019; Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019; Nguyen, & Stinglhamber, 2021.
Qualitative	Taskin, Parmentier & Stinglhamber., 2019.
Experiments	Mekawil, Bresin & Hunter, 2019; Shin, & Kim, 2020; Waytz, A., & Epley, N., 2012. Rai, T. S., Valdesolo, P., & Graham, J. 2017; Fontesse, S., Demoulin, S., Stinglhamber, F., & Maurage, P.2019.

**Table-2: - Prominent theories adopted in investigating dehumanization**

Conservation of Resource Theory (COR)	Hobfoll et al. 2018; Aisha at. Al., 2020, Nguyenl & Stinglhamber., 2018.
Equity Theory	Adams (1965) Aisha at. al 2020
Social Exchange theory	(Mitchell and Ambrose, 2007; Aisha et al. 2020; Caesens & Stinglhamber., 2019.
Organization support Theory	Caesens et al., 2017.
Social-cognitive theory	McFaul, 2008.
Bandura's theory of moral disengagement	Bandura, 1999, 2002.
Three-factor theory of anthropomorphism	Shin, & Kim, (2020).
Optimal distinctiveness theory	Taskin, Parmentier & Stinglhamber, 2019.
Cognitive evaluation theory	Nguyen, & Stinglhamber. 2021.
Infrahumanisation Theory	Waytz, A., & Schroeder, J., 2014.

Social learning theory of aggression	Waytz, A., & Schroeder, J., 2014.
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### 3.5. Research synthesis and streams in dehumanization

As per the content analysis of current study, dehumanization has been examined at the individual and interpersonal levels. All the previous studies reported negative effects of dehumanization. Our analysis also examines some factors that may influence dehumanization to occur in an organization and conditions that may suppress its effects. Tables 4 and 5 provide details of those. On the basis of qualitative coding and synthesis, we extract following research streams where, to the best of our knowledge, dehumanization has been highly studied.

Table-3: - Antecedents of dehumanization behavior investigated in the literature	
Social, psychological, and demographic paths	Haslam and Loughnan, 2014; Markowitz and Slovic, 2020; Markowitz and Slovic, 2020
Abusive supervision	Caesens & Stinglhamber, 2019.
Social life and relations	Fontesse, Demoulin, Stinglhamber, & Maurage, 2019
Loneliness, stigmatization	Fontesse, Demoulin, Stinglhamber, & Maurage, 2019
Physical environment	Fontesse, Demoulin, Stinglhamber, & Maurage, 2019
Contextual factors such as empowerment	Fontesse, Demoulin, Stinglhamber, & Maurage, 2019
Social exclusion, negative stereotypes	Fontesse, Demoulin, Stinglhamber, & Maurage, 2019

Table-4: - Factors moderating/reducing dehumanization behavior investigated in the literature	
Selected Moderators/Mediators reducing dehumanization selected exemplary citations	
Perceived organizational support	Caesens et al., 2017
Emotional exhaustion	Caesens & Stinglhamber., 2019
Gender	Bell, C. M., & Khoury, C., 2016

Table-5: Types of Dehumanization	
Type	Explanation
<b>Animalistic dehumanization</b>	"The propensity to disagree with features that differentiate humans from animals as refinement, rationality, civility, maturity and moral sensibility" is the definition of animalistic dehumanization. This kind of dehumanization views workers as brutish, amoral, animal, and childcare. This kind of dehumanization is seen in the context of immigration, conflict, and genocide (e.g., Kelman, 1973).
<b>Mechanistic dehumanization</b>	When employees are viewed as non-human entities, such as a tool or machine, this is known as mechanistic dehumanization (Haslam, 2006). "Those who are dehumanized in this manner are thought to lack characteristics that characterize human nature, such as cognitive openness, individuality, agency/depth, and interpersonal warmth."



### **3.5.1. Research stream-1: Dehumanization is a new concept in organizational behavior**

Researchers are less knowledgeable about the origins and effects of dehumanization, which is a novel concept in the study of organizational behavior (Caesens et al., 2019). The term "dehumanization" originates from social psychology literature, such as Leyens et al.'s 2001 work. There is a dearth of research on the effects of organizational maltreatment (Dhanani and LaPalme, 2019). Experts assert that there is a dearth of attention to this topic in the literature (Dhanani et al., 2018).

### **3.5.2. Research stream-2: Dehumanization is a negative act**

Research highlights the negative effects of dehumanization. Scholars also show that dehumanization can have attitudinal and behavioral outcomes. Literature claims that dehumanization badly affect the employee's attitudes (e.g., well-being and intentions to quit) (Bell and Khoury, 2011a, 2016) as it negatively affect the employee fundamental needs (Christoff, 2014). Further, this concept less studied in the study of organizational behavior (Caesens et al., 2019).

### **3.5.3. Research stream-3: Dehumanization is referring to mechanistic dehumanization**

According to academics, mechanistic dehumanization is often referred to as "organizational dehumanization" because it primarily takes place in the setting of organizations (Bell and Khoury 2011; Christoff 2014). Nonetheless, certain investigators discovered that animalistic dehumanization also transpires. According to Caesens et al. (2017), it would be extremely innovative in subsequent study to examine whether animalistic and mechanistic dehumanization differs from one another as well as to look into the particular causes and effects of each type.

### **3.5.4. Research stream-4 Dehumanization lead to negative self-evaluation**

Our main findings claims that when organization dehumanize their employees than they engage themselves in emotional strategies which enhance the probability of negative self-evaluations leading to low level of job satisfaction. In order to support employees' well-being—that is, their sense of fulfillment both personally and professionally—organizations would be wise to minimize the perception of dehumanization among their workforce.

### **3.5.5. Research stream-5**

Dehumanization research implications are largely at the individual level. Our analysis reflects that mostly of the research on dehumanization has individual level as its unit of analysis is individual. Moreover, literature report antecedents and consequences of dehumanization at the individual level. However, the investigation and exploration of dehumanization cannot be ignored.

## **4. DISCUSSIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

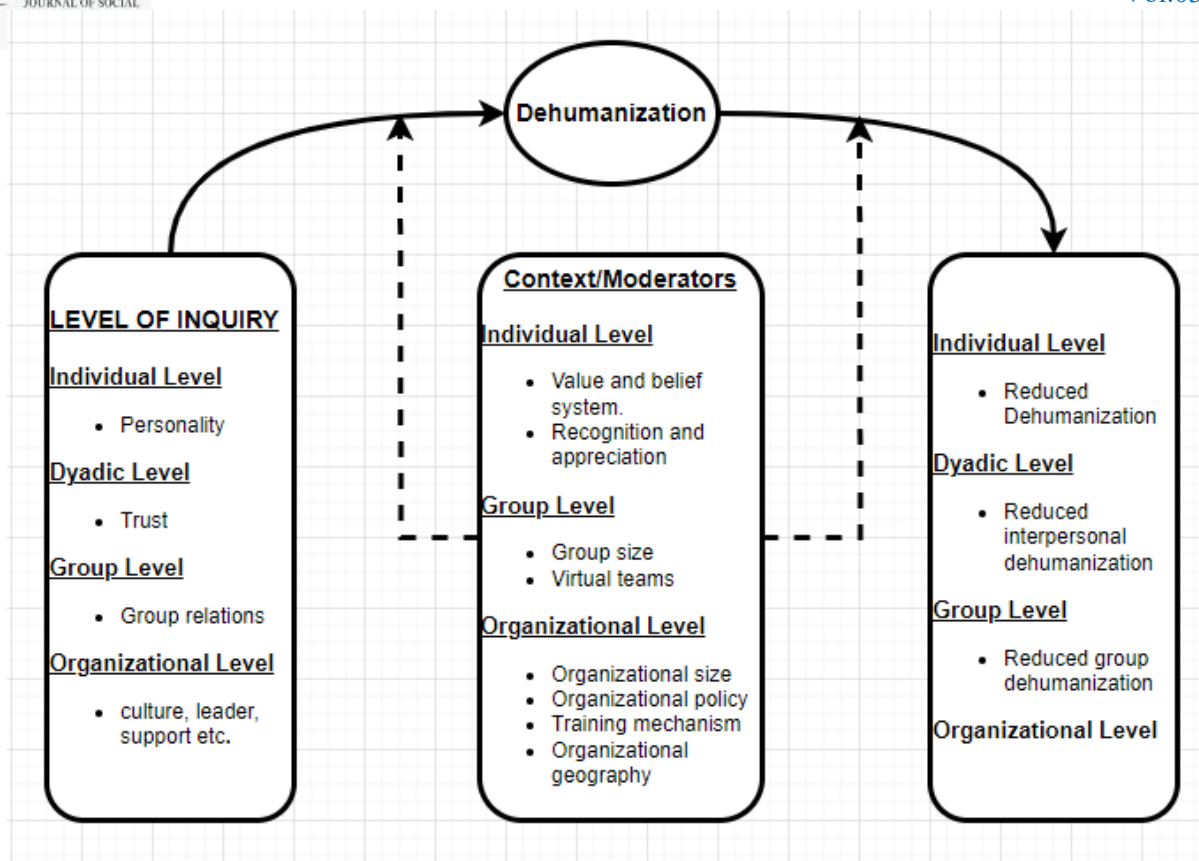
**Table-6: - Summary of key avenues for future research on dehumanization**

Theme	Key research questions
Organizational size	How does dehumanization differ based on the size of the organization, e.g. the causes and consequences of dehumanization in SMEs, start-ups, family firms and large organizations?
Training mechanisms	What type of training can organizations develop to counter dehumanization feelings?
Organizational policy	What is the stance of human resource departments on having a policy toward dehumanization? Can a policy document help in overcoming or

	reducing dehumanization feelings?
Geography	How does dehumanization differ between a developed economy vs emerging economy? How does culture influence dehumanization behaviors?
Recognition and appreciation	Can recognition and appreciation for employees in organization reduce the inclination toward dehumanization?
Values and belief	What values and belief system (cultural, ethical and principles) may help in reducing dehumanization among employees?

The present research adds to theory in two ways. First, we describe the current status of the literature on dehumanization, the important theories that have been applied, the research methodologies that have been chosen, and the study streams that are devoted to the topic of dehumanization. Second, because this field is understudied, we discovered that there are a number of regions with less research that could provide a variety of directions for further investigation (Table 6). Further, on the basis of our systematic review methods, we identify important research topics regarding dehumanization (Figure 2) that have been insufficiently explored so far. Study analysis reflects that the effects of different organizational structures on organizational dehumanization should be investigated.

Further, literature also identify that scholars may investigate the antecedents and consequences of dehumanization. So, there is a need to investigate these areas. We also propose that future dehumanization studies need more cross-disciplinary convergence (e.g. marketing, innovation and technology) and diverse samples (e.g. leaders, line managers, blue- and white-collar workers, salespeople and top management). Our analysis shows that mostly studies are quantitative on organizational dehumanization. Future researcher should conduct more exploratory and qualitative studies to know the dehumanization from different perspectives. Researchers can identify different theories and patterns using qualitative studies from individual, group and organizational level. To date, there is no Meta -analyses study that examine the nature of dehumanization. So there is a need to do meta-analysis that would benefit us greatly in investigating the concept of dehumanization.



**Figure-2: - Framework for dehumanization future direction**

Scholars claim that studies on organizational dehumanization still lack in organizational-level literature. So, researcher should explore new avenues such as organizational culture and organizational policy in the study of dehumanization. Further, in ethical environment dehumanization is considered as unhealthy, unethical and harmful to both organizations and employees (Men et al., 2020). Hence, future research may investigate the dehumanization from ethics point of view. For instance, do ethical factors, such as altruism, compassion and pro-social behaviors, help in reducing dehumanization, which may be investigated in the future? It is very significant to consider dehumanization from diverse cultural perspectives as it is poorly studied and gaining a deeper understanding of the causes and effects of dehumanization, a behavior that is likely to be understood as harmful in most cultures. Future researchers and marketers can study the nature of dehumanization in different cultures. Researchers also lacks understanding of the technological context in the study of dehumanization. Future research could examine the role of dehumanization in a virtual or online context. Virtual relationships i.e. Online leadership and virtual team relationships could be investigated in the future to better understand the underlying mechanisms of dehumanization in virtual networks.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Dehumanization is familiar as a rather young research area that attracts further investigation. Through systematic and more comprehensive reviews we aimed at advancing the understanding of dehumanization. We converged a large amount of literature by identifying the existing research themes and name potential future research directions. Overall, our comprehensive review showed that the extant literature on dehumanization is increasingly focused on specific geographical areas, a specific industry size and limited industry segments. In recent years, many attempts have been made to study dehumanization. However, this paper is the first to attempt to review systematically focusing on dehumanization and offers



foundations for scholars looking to enhance their understanding and advancing research on dehumanization.

### 5.1. Limitations and future directions

Although, current research have important theoretical (e.g. De-humanization as a novel explanation for the detrimental impacts of workplace design) and methodological (e.g. mixed methods) strengths, study also offers some limitation. In the future, longitudinal designs would be needed to investigate the dehumanization phenomena. Further qualitative research and theoretical developments would be required to study what emerged from our qualitative investigation regarding the disappearance of the body as a new kind of de-humanization. Future research may extend the results of this research to other consequences than those taken here.

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