Gossip as a medium of informal communication: A measurement model of gossip engagement at the workplace

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ABSTRACT

The presence of gossip in day-to-day communication has made this practice a common phenomenon among the members of society. Even though the sources are disputable, the inclination to engage in gossip as an informal communication medium indicates that it is still highly regarded as one of the strategies for getting information instantaneously. This study aims to develop a measurement model of Gossip Engagement by utilising four measurements: Positive Job-related Gossip, Negative Non-Job-related Gossip, Negative-Job-related Gossip, and Positive Non-Job-related Gossip adapted from the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS). A total of 187 respondents participated voluntarily during the pilot test procedure. Principal component analysis and varimax rotation were conducted in the exploratory factor analysis procedure. The factors generated from the procedure were Positive Job-related Gossip, Negative Non-Job-related Gossip, Negative-Job-related Gossip and Positive Non-Job-related Gossip. Subsequently, a cross-sectional survey, was conducted via a questionnaire involving 783 respondents in Kelantan, Malaysia. The data derived was then analysed using structural equation modelling (SEM) of AMOS. The confirmatory factor analysis test validated the Gossip Engagement construct for fitness index, validity and reliability. Lastly, the study managed to produce a measurement model of Gossip Engagement in the workplace setting. The study also demonstrates that WGS can be replicated in other local and Asian contexts as a predicting factor for additional variables such as individual work performance.

Keywords: *Informal communication, gossip engagement, workplace gossip scale, confirmatory factor analysis, measurement model*

INTRODUCTION

The inclusion of gossip in communication is a common phenomenon among members of the society, regardless of their different circumstances. The practice of gossip, which is one of the patterns of data flow in the grapevine, can be traced back to the time of the American civil war (Ahmad et al., 2009). The "grapevine" term was first introduced to highlight the deceptive or unusual form of information that circulated during the American Civil War (Ahmad et al., 2009). Nevertheless, the existence of grapevine in organisational-based communication has long attracted those who long for immediate information (Grosser et al., 2012). The ability to spread information instantaneously has prompted people's interest in understanding gossip further. Even though the sources are often disputable, the tendency to gossip as an informal communication indicates that it is still regarded as a popular mechanism to disseminate information (Md Ghani et al., 2015). Prior to this perception, significant reputational harm can stem from a crisis caused by the circulation of gossip in an organisation (Abdul Manaf et al., 2013). Such an assumption indicates that although gossiping is the fastest way of getting the latest information, it can also harm the organisation involved in many ways.

In large-scale organisations, while formal communication channels are often utilised to help close the hierarchical gap between different levels of employees, informal communication networks often fill in and supply the much-desired information that flows from top to bottom (Erden, 2013). The organisational setting employs formal communication when it comes to informing members of the group. Nevertheless, the requirement to socialise has given a chance for informal communication, which involves gossip dissemination, to take root in the heart of organisational communication (Erden, 2013; Robinson & Thelen, 2017). Despite the sensation and intensity that it brings, excessive gossip might cause harm, specifically in the organisational context. Spread of news, especially malicious ones, could affect the performance of employees. However, understanding the gossip practice can be quite challenging as the circulation and dissemination of gossip does not have a starting or even an ending point (Abdul Manaf et al., 2013).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The concept of grapevine

In any organisation, the grapevine has always been the medium to deliver information, especially among colleagues, regardless of the organisational strata. The grapevine is assumed to affect both the public and private sectors because of the simultaneous occurrence of facts and perceptions within the message (Md Ghani et al., 2015). Moreover, the tendency to spread news or information is also high, especially when it involves employees in any organisation. The existence of an excessive grapevine might cause harm to an organisation. Further, the rampant spread of news, especially ones that are malicious, can affect employees' performance. Three essential chains manifest the existence of a grapevine. The first chain of grapevine is known as the single-strand chain. This is the basic form of all grapevine chains. The single-strand chain implements a simple concept of A tells B, B tells C, and the process continues in a straightforward manner. Each participant from the grapevine chain will keep on telling the information to the next participant. A longer strand will cause inaccuracy, misrepresentation, and confusion within the delivered message. As such, the last person in a single-strand chain might have the tendency to receive a different version of the message (Ahmad et al., 2009).

The second chain of grapevine is known as the cluster chain. The cluster chain refers to the selection of only certain participants from a particular social informal group to receive the information (Ahmad et al., 2009). When the information begins to transmit, person A, who started the chain, will contact person B and C in the same circle of friendship. Afterwards, person C, who shares the same workstation with person D, will share the same information, and person D, who goes to another department to meet his friend, person E, will have the privilege of sharing the information. The list goes on as long as the sender and the receiver of the information are comfortable with each other. The cluster chain frequently occurs in organisations because people tend to share information with those who are usually close to them. Nevertheless, ambiguity, confusion and misinformation can still take place in this chain regardless of the selective pattern (Ahmad et al., 2009).

Communicating gossip: Engaging unfiltered information

The third form of grapevine chain is described as the gossip chain. In the gossip chain, a person who starts the gossip will tell anyone that he/she encounters (Ahmad et al., 2009). There is no discrimination in selecting the receiver of the message throughout the gossip chain. However, the gossip chain appears to take a longer time to spread the information, as it depends solely on the source of information to deliver it. Thus, the presence of gossip in organisational-based communication has long attracted those who crave for instant information. Other than that, the tendency to spread information through word of mouth from one person to another without validating the source can also be best described as gossip, which is one of the chains in the grapevine (Md Ghani et al., 2015).Nevertheless, gossip can be interpreted as a powerful tool in circulating information throughout the organisational sphere. The practice of gossip itself has been a significant social networking culture before the advent of the World Wide Web. In daily interactions, gossip can be easily interpreted as a form of informal conversation about another person who is absent at the scene, be it positive or negative (Chang & Kuo, 2021). In this regard, positive gossip connotates positivity and appreciation, whereas negative gossip implies negativity and depreciation (Chang & Kuo, 2021).

One of the unusual descriptions of gossip is that the receiver of the gossip will be the third party or third receiver of the said information. Such an assumption is aligned with the notion of gossip not having both a starting and an ending point (Abdul Manaf et al., 2013). The feeling of uncertainty, the absence of context and details as well as the tendency to be affected by the consequences are some characteristics of gossip (Abdul Manaf et al., 2013). The information circulated in the gossip is also assumed to carry an insignificant amount of factuality, as gossip is also described as having small and idle chats, which surprisingly relays a small amount of information regardless of the truth (Kuo et al., 2020). Nevertheless, there are always assumptions that the gossip is actually lacking authenticity as well as being genuinely true. Michelson and Mouly (2004, p. 192) opined that "rumour and gossip are used interchangeably as an informal communication transmitted to another person, regardless of whether or not the communication has been established as fact." This suggests that the basis of understanding gossip is in the notion that it does not possess any facts or evidence that can support the premises. Besides that, workplace gossip is also best regarded as informal chats, especially during break times, involving topics ranging from policy changes to job position, customers' feedback, and so on (Lee et al., 2016). Nevertheless, the bond created from indulging in gossip is surprisingly effective in enhancing interpersonal interaction as well as promoting physical and social networking (Lee et al., 2016).

The effect of gossip in the workplace setting

In any organisational setting, excessive gossiping in terms of spreading unreliable information can threaten the group's overall well-being. For example, gossiping has long been recognised as one of the threats to organisational safety due to its capability in triggering arguments and sowing doubts, despite not having a reliable source (Michelson et al., 2010). One of the effects of excessive gossiping is workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is an act involving repeated physical and verbal abusive behaviour, which is harmful and takes place among employees in organisations (Hassan & Al Bir, 2014). In their study, Hassan and Al Bir (2014) found that employees in several organisations in Malaysia were affected in terms of performance due to gossips regarding their personal matters as well as work matters. Their data indicates that 82.2% of employees in organisations are affected by gossip as a form of workplace bullying in Malaysia (Hassan & Al Bir, 2014). Gossiping about a particular member of an organisation is perceived as harmful due to its ability to diminish that person's good reputation. Thus, gossiping is a cheap way of manipulating peoples' perceptions towards each other, and affecting employee relationships as well as job performance (McAndrew, 2014). This is because workplace gossip, characterised by uncertainty, incompleteness, and ambiguity places targets in an unfavourable position and causes them damage by tarnishing their reputation and self-esteem through employee cynicism (Chang & Kuo, 2021; Kuo et al., 2020).

Apart from being a significant threat to the organisation, gossip can also lead to unethical behaviour in the workplace. This practice is considered a "cancer" in all organisations regardless of which level it takes place (Pathak, 2014). Such unethical behaviour, also known as workplace deviant behaviour, will not only jeopardise the organisation's financial well-being but also harm the faith and trust of employee-employer as well as employee-client relationships (Pathak, 2014). Workplace deviance can also be described as acts or behaviour, deliberate and intentional, to bring harm to the well-being of an organisation, whether it involves only employees or both employer and employee or the organisation itself (Anwar et al., 2011). For example, there have been instances where reports have been lodged by clients who have seen frontliners at bank and cash counters talking to their peers about non-work related matters, including using the company phone (Pathak, 2014). These employees may not be aware but their clients are often watching and listening to every detail of their informal conversations. Gossiping is also consistent with other deviant working behaviour such as fraud, theft, aggressive behaviour, corruption and sexual harassment (Pathak, 2014). In their work, Lee et al. (2016) found that negative behaviour such as verbal attacks were found to affect the performance of kindergarten teachers in Taiwan. By spreading negative gossip which often target personal reputation at the workplace, the affected victim feels rejected or isolated, causing harm to their physical and psychological well-being in the long run (Lee et al., 2016). Engaging in gossip is also related to betrayal as it involves misunderstanding and criticising a teacher in front of other colleagues to develop a common alliance among other teaching colleagues (Lofgren & Karlsson, 2016).

With the widespread use of modern-day technology, gossip can also be a source of cyberbullying. Hence, the traits of cyberbullying are believed to be almost similar to gossiping, whereby it is deliberately done in a covert manner, does not involve face-to-face interaction with the victim and involves swift dissemination of malicious information (Lai et al., 2016; Tan et al., 2019). Other than that, convenient accessibility within a rendered environment could also prompt people to exhibit aggressive behaviours such as sending insults and sharing malicious information through virtual interactions (Mat So'od et al., 2020). Such practices are similar to gossiping where the affected victims would feel rejected and isolated as the attackers target their personal reputation, causing harm to the victim's physical and psychological well-being in the long run (Lee et al., 2016).

METHODOLOGY

Instrument
In this study, the items employed were adapted from the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS), which was re-conceptualised into two dimensions of workplace gossip; JRG (Job-related gossip and NJG (Non-job-related gossip) (Kuo et al., 2015). The scale, was adapted from the original scale developed by Kuo et al. (2015). A total of 20 initial items which represent two factors: JRG (Job-related gossip) and NJG (Non-job-related gossip) were initially employed to assess the suitability of the scale to the current research setting (Awang, 2015).

Sampling and data collection
In order to obtain a random sample, the study utilised quota stratified random sampling, which was deemed suitable for the sample frame of teachers in the state of Kelantan, Malaysia. Quota stratified random sampling involves subsamples with different sample sizes, and the subsample itself comprises the number of subjects in accordance with its proportion in the population (Chua, 2016). A total of 783 respondents were randomly selected from the list of teachers found on the official website of Kelantan's State Education Department (2019). Subsequently, the demographic of Kelantan is one of the factors that contributes towards the uniqueness of its population (Chia & Lim, 2020). Although Kelantan holds a large population of Malays, along with other ethnicities such as Chinese, Indian, and Siamese, the notion of belonging and being a Kelantanese itself is one form of self-identity that they possess (Pawanteh & Kuake, 2016). This is evident from the cultural and environmental differences experienced by teachers serving in Kelantan schools (Chia & Lim, 2020; Zulkornain et al., 2020). Nevertheless, unique traits such as sense of belonging and identity of being part of a certain group or category, can be seen reflected in the behavioural traits portrayed by members of the group when communicating with in-group and out-group members (Pawanteh & Kuake, 2016). Thus, the researcher has decided to conduct the study in this unique state.

In defining the sample size of teachers in Kelantan, the first step taken was determining the subsample size needed for each subpopulation. Based on the data for primary and secondary teachers in Kelantan, there were a total of 29,175 active teachers, categorised into primary schools (N=16,336) and secondary schools (N=12,839) throughout the 10 districts of Kelantan (Kelantan State Education Department, 2019). The study also utilised the sample size proposed by Krejcie and Morgan due to its practicality and convenience in past studies (1970 as cited in Aziz et al., 2016). The respondents were then given a self-administered questionnaire once contact and permission was acquired with the schools.

Pilot test
The pilot test was conducted from the third week of January until the first week of April 2019. The data collected was then analysed using SPSS version 21. The data derived from the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) was subjected to exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to determine the factors that will be generated from the initial items. It is important to extract factors that will best represent the suitability of the developed items (Tan et al., 2016). The internal consistency and reliability of the scale was then determined by computing the Cronbach's alpha coefficient (α). EFA was conducted to determine the underlying factors of gossip engagement among teachers in the local setting and to ensure that the constructs are consistent with the researcher's understanding (Awang et al., 2015).

The principle component analysis (PCA) was conducted with varimax rotation to determine the validity of the construct. PCA and varimax rotation were carried out until all non-suitable items were removed, and an adequate number of items could be achieved before the interpretation and labelling process. Based on the anti-image correlation matrix, a value of .50 is considered an adequate level for sampling (Hair et al., 2010). Eventually, four factors representing the construct of Gossip Engagement emerged. Table 1 provides the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin's (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity outcomes.

Table 1. KMO and Bartlett's test score

KMO and Bartlett's test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy		.929
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-square	6588.620
	df	253
	Sig.	.000

Based on the data derived from PCA with varimax rotation, a four-factor solution consisting of Positive Job-related Gossip, Negative Job-related Gossip, Negative Non-job-related Gossip and Positive Non-job-related Gossip were formed. The procedure also managed to identify 23 significant items which best represent the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) involving teachers in Malaysia. Table 2 visualises the 4-factor solution for 23 items derived from the PCA with varimax rotation, indicating a total variance of 87.71%. This value is deemed to be adequate as it has exceeded the minimum requirement of 60% (Awang, 2015).

Table 2. Total variance explained

Factor	Eigenvalue	% of variance	Cumulative (%)
1	12.436	54.070	54.070
2	4.761	20.701	74.771
3	1.854	8.060	82.831
4	1.122	4.880	87.710

The Cronbach's alpha (α) value derived for factor one was .976, for factor two, .981, for factor three, .964, and for factor four, .910. The total Cronbach's alpha (α) value derived for all 23 remaining items was .961. Many researchers set a standard value of more than .70 in assessing the reliability of the entire scale (Hair et al., 2019; Awang, 2015). Therefore, it can be concluded that all items listed in the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) are consistent and reliable, as they have met the satisfactory criteria. Seven items were assembled under the first factor known as Positive Job-related Gossip. These items demonstrated significant high loadings which were .935, .930, .923, .910, .893, .884 and .836 respectively. Factor two consisted of seven items, which demonstrated significant loadings of .906, .903, .891, .876, .871, .844 and .830. Factor two, which is identified as Negative Job-related Gossip, displayed an alpha value of .981.

Five items were grouped into factor three, which achieved an alpha value of .964. The loadings of these items were .859, .849, .826, .826 and .814, which can be classified as Negative Non-job-related Gossip. The final factor derived can be described as Positive Non-job-related

Gossip. Four items were derived from factor four, with loadings of .787, .762, .758 and .688. The alpha value for factor four was .910. Table 3 shows the factor loadings of the items in the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) along with the Cronbach's alpha (α) values.

Table 3. Factor loading of items in Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS)

Item code	Factor	α	Items	Loadings
C4			Colleague's credibility in job role.	.935
C2			Colleague's diligence to work.	.930
C3			Colleague's dedication to work.	.923
C6	Factor 1 Positive Job-related Gossip	.976	Colleague's good interpersonal skills.	.910
C1			Colleague's excellent job performance.	.893
C5			Colleague's job experience.	.884
C7			Colleague's demonstration of ethical behaviours at work	.836
C12			Colleague's poor job knowledge.	.906
C10			Colleague's poor work engagement.	.903
C11			Colleague's inexperience.	.891
C9	Factor 2 Negative Job-related Gossip	.981	Colleague's carelessness.	.876
C13			Colleague's poor interpersonal skills.	.871
C14			Colleague's poor workplace ethics.	.844
C8			Colleague's poor job performance.	.830
C21			Colleague's poor interaction with children.	.859
C27	Factor 3 Negative Non-job-related Gossip	.964	Colleague's poor relationship with family.	.849
C20			Colleagues' betrayal of their partners.	.826
C19			Colleagues' lying to their partners.	.826
C23			Colleague's marital problems.	.814
C17			Colleague's new friendship.	.787
C16	Factor 4 Positive Non-job-related Gossip	.910	Colleague's recent sorrowful life events, such as illness or car accident.	.762
C18			Colleague's new love relationship.	.758
C15			Colleague's recent joyful life events, such as purchasing a house or a car.	.688

Data analysis

The study utilised the measurement model known as Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) (Awang, 2015). In the process of confirming the goodness of fit, three assessments were conducted using CFA, which are uni-dimensionality, validity and reliability for the latent constructs (Awang, 2014; Awang et al., 2015; Bakar & Afthanorhan, 2016; Mohammad Mahmudul Hoque et al., 2017; Mohammad Mahmudul Hoque & Awang, 2016; Kashif et al., 2015; Awang, 2015). Before modelling the latent constructs in the structural model, the CFA procedure was conducted first, beginning with uni-dimensionality, followed by validity and reliability (Awang, 2014).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

In CFA, the measurement model was subjected through a rigorous process of validity assessments: construct validity, convergent validity, and discriminant validity (Ibrahim, 2017; Ibrahim et al., 2017; Awang, 2015). The construct validity was tested using the measurement model's fitness index, followed by convergent validity, which was assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE). Next, Composite Reliability (CR) was used to measure the model's reliability. The initial measurement model measured four sub-constructs categorised as Positive Job-related Gossip (PJR) consisting of seven items, Negative Job-related Gossip (NJR) − seven items, Negative Non-job-related Gossip (NNJR) − five items and Positive Non-job-related Gossip (PNJR) − four items. The initial measurement model did not meet the uni-dimensionality requirement due to items with very low factor loadings, such as items C10 (0.530, $R^2 = 0.28$) and C15 (0.104, $R^2 = 0.01$). As the items in Gossip Engagement (GE) were adapted from the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS), the threshold of 0.6 is believed to be suitable in removing items with a low factor loading (Celse et al., 2016; Chang et al., 2015; Kuo et al., 2015). Hence, any items with a low factor loading were removed, beginning with the lowest factor loading item to achieve uni-dimensionality (Awang, 2015).

Nonetheless, after the removal of items C15 and C10, the measurement model was still not meeting the threshold for all three model fit indices namely Absolute Fit Index, Incremental Fit Index, and Parsimonious Fit Index. Since the measurement fitness indices did not achieve the required value, the Modification Indices (MI) was used to remedy this issue. MI is an indicator of items being redundant in the model, thus resulting in the lack of fitness in the measurement model (Awang, 2015). The indicator for a high-value MI is >15, as proposed by Hair et al. (2014) and Awang (2015). The correlated measurement errors of redundant items were set as a "free parameter", and the measurement model was re-analysed (Hair et al., 2014; Awang, 2015). Figure 1 visualises the measurement model for the Gossip Engagement construct along with outcomes for Absolute Fit Index, Incremental Fit Index, and Parsimonious Fit Index.
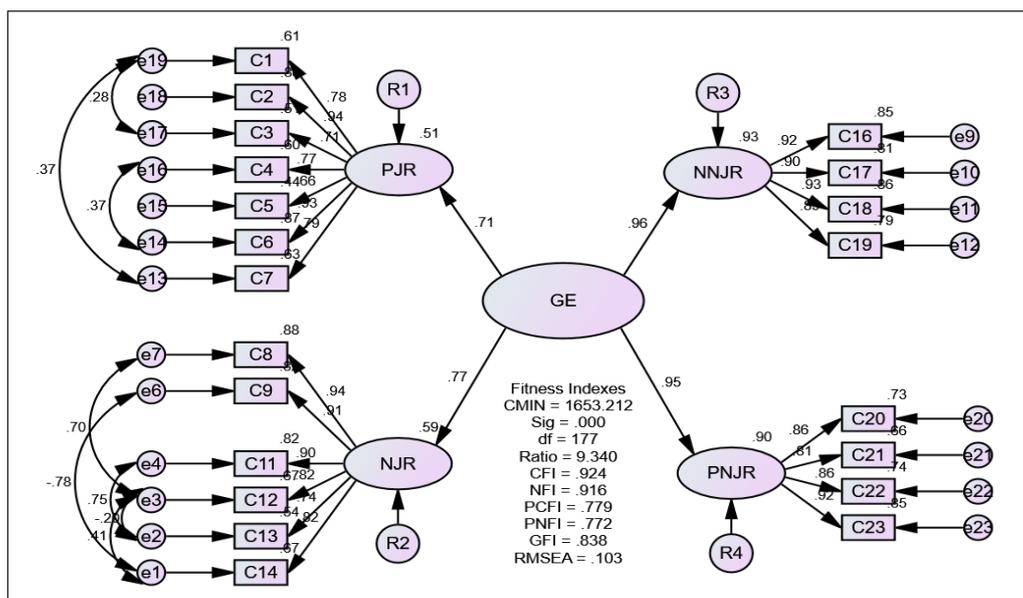

Figure 1. The measurement model of the Gossip Engagement construct

Hair et al. (2014) proposed that at least one index of fit is utilised from each category of Absolute Fit, Incremental Fit, and Parsimonious Fit indices. Thus, the measurement model of the Gossip Engagement (GE) construct fulfilled all the threshold values required to accomplish construct validity. The model fit indices are summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. The summary of fit indices for the measurement model of Gossip Engagement

Name of category	Name of index	Index value	Level of acceptance	Literature	Comments
Absolute fit	RMSEA	0.10	RMSEA < 0.08-0.1	Browne & Cudeck (1993), Kenny et al. (2015); MacCallum et al. (1996)	Accepted
Incremental fit	CFI	0.92	CFI > 0.90	Bentler (1990); Byrne (2001)	Accepted
Parsimonious fit	PCFI	0.78	PCFI > 0.50	Meyers et al. (2006)	Accepted

The next step of CFA is to assess convergent validity (CV) through the computation of Average Variance Extracted (AVE), which is considered met if it exceeds the threshold value of > 0.50 (Awang, 2014; Mohammad Mahmudul Hoque et al., 2017; Awang, 2015). On the other hand, composite reliability (CR) for the Gossip Engagement (GE) construct's measurement model is accepted for a value that exceeds the threshold value of > 0.60 (Awang, 2014; Hoque et al., 2017; Awang, 2015). Subsequently, the results demonstrated that the measurement model of the Gossip Engagement (GE) construct achieved both CV and CR. Table 5 and Table 6 show the CR and CV values for the main construct and their respective sub-constructs.

Table 5. CV and CR for the Gossip Engagement construct

Construct	Sub-construct	Factor loading	CR (> 0.6)	AVE (> 0.5)
Gossip Engagement	PJR	0.713	0.916	0.734
	NJR	0.771		
	NNJR	0.964		
	PNJR	0.950		

Table 6. CV and CR for the Gossip Engagement sub-constructs

Sub-construct	Item code	Factor loading	CR (> 0.6)	AVE (> 0.5)
PJR Positive Job-related Gossip	C1	0.783	0.927	0.648
	C2	0.939		
	C3	0.714		
	C4	0.773		
	C5	0.663		
	C6	0.933		
	C7	0.792		

Table 6. (con't)

Sub-construct	Item code	Factor loading	CR (> 0.6)	AVE (> 0.5)
NJR Negative Job-related Gossip	C8	0.938	0.942	0.733
	C9	0.906		
	C11	0.904		
	C12	0.818		
	C13	0.737		
	C14	0.818		
NNJR Negative Non-job-related Gossip	C16	0.919	0.949	0.824
	C17	0.899		
	C18	0.926		
	C19	0.887		
PNJR Positive Non-job-related Gossip	C20	0.857	0.921	0.745
	C21	0.810		
	C22	0.859		
	C23	0.922		

The assessment of normality for all items

In the final step of assessing the distribution of items of the Gossip Engagement (GE) construct, the study needed to assess normality for all the items involved. The normality assessment is done using the skewness value, which should fall in the range between -1.5 to 1.5 in order for the data to be normally distributed, or at least, does not depart from the normal distribution (Awang, 2015). Based on Table 7, the distribution of data for the items of the Gossip Engagement (GE) construct was found to have achieved the normality assumption of parametric analysis (Baistaman et al., 2020).

Table 7. The assessment of normality for the items of the Gossip Engagement construct

Variable	Min	Max	Skewness	C.R.	Kurtosis	C.R.
C23	1.000	9.000	.485	5.539	.028	.161
C22	1.000	7.000	-.461	-5.262	-.858	-4.901
C21	1.000	7.000	-.549	-6.268	-.028	-.162
C20	1.000	8.000	.120	1.368	-1.085	-6.198
C19	1.000	8.000	-.030	-.337	-.307	-1.752
C18	1.000	8.000	-.006	-.070	-.644	-3.676
C17	1.000	9.000	.298	3.401	-.440	-2.511
C16	1.000	8.000	.060	.683	-.263	-1.504
C14	2.000	9.000	.558	6.380	-.381	-2.174
C13	1.000	9.000	.361	4.120	.209	1.197
C12	2.000	9.000	.583	6.659	-.666	-3.804
C11	1.000	9.000	-.113	-1.287	-.194	-1.108

Table 7. (con't)

Variable	Min	Max	Skewness	C.R.	Kurtosis	C.R.
C9	2.000	8.000	.437	4.987	-.008	-.046
C8	2.000	9.000	.563	6.435	-.805	-4.597
C7	1.000	8.000	.218	2.485	.251	1.436
C6	1.000	8.000	-.386	-4.411	-.007	-.039
C5	1.000	8.000	-.138	-1.573	1.453	8.297
C4	1.000	8.000	-.585	-6.688	.721	4.118
C3	2.000	8.000	-.158	-1.801	.020	.112
C2	1.000	9.000	-.292	-3.337	.301	1.719
C1	1.000	8.000	-.323	-3.691	1.940	11.079
Multivariate					108.156	48.687

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

The future direction of gossip research

In communication studies, organisational life and the gossip phenomenon are inseparable; in other words, gossip is inevitable in organisations (Michelson & Mouly, 2004). The outcome of studies like this as well as any future studies can help employers to determine the right person for the right job. To maximise performance in any organisation, employees need to be placed in the correct department. Thus, future studies can help to formulate an assessment of personality and inclination towards gossip engagement prior to hiring. For example, a person who demonstrates a high tendency to gossip and could potentially spread unreliable information should not be placed in a critical departments or functions such as finance and human resource. In terms of theoretical implications, this study has further elucidated the Social Gossip Theory by Dunbar (1993) and Mesoudi et al. (2006), which highlights that social communication is facilitated by the evolution of language used as a medium of communication. Whenever formal channels cannot fulfil the thirst for information, gossip will take its place to fulfil the needs of those who are in need of instant updates (de Oliveira Martin, 2015).

Another significant conceptual implication that can be derived from the present research is the formulation of the Grapevine Code of Conduct. Prior to the establishment of the Journalism Code of Ethics Malaysia (Wariya, 2011), the Grapevine Code of Conduct in Organization was able to maintain peace and harmony by providing a guideline on information dissemination. One of the conducts stated in the Journalism Code of Ethics that can be adapted into the Grapevine Code of Conduct in Organization is item number one, which states that "journalist is to report the truth and respect the rights of the public to be well-informed" (Wariya, 2011). Thus, in making sense of the organisational setting, such conduct can remind employees of the impact of excessive gossiping on the organisation's well-being. Ironically, people who spread rumours and constantly gossip can be acknowledged as self-appointed journalists in the organisation they serve. Although the establishment of the Grapevine Code of Conduct in Organisation seems to be elusive, the data derived from this study can help rectify the current practices of the grapevine, especially in managing rumours and gossip circulation among employees. Thus, the current Journalism Code of Ethics Malaysia by Wariya (2011) can be used as one of the primary references.

In terms of practical implications, not only does this study offer empirical data for future research, but it can also be utilised as a point of reference on how organisations can manage and even benefit from gossip engagement. For instance, the study can help organisations manage the spread of fake news which can also be the source of gossiping. This is because one of the motives for spreading fake news is to tarnish or destroy the image of the targeted individual (Tengku Mahamad et al., 2021). The data from this study could assist in refining or formulating relevant and effective human resources, recruitment, public relation, and communication-based working policies.

One of the policies that can be amended or developed based on the output of this study would involve the recruitment process, which can assist future or current employers. To maximise performance in any organisation, the right personnel need to be placed in the right department/function. Thus, the set of items used in this study can be adapted to assess individual characteristics such as influence resources and gossip engagement likelihood prior to hiring. For example, an individual who demonstrates a strong tendency to gossip will not be placed in a critical departments such as finance or public relations, based on such assessments, to avoid any unintended harmful consequences to the organisation.

In the context of the Malaysian organisational setting, gossip management has not been thoroughly addressed due to its ambiguity within the message delivered by the speakers. Therefore, it is hoped that researchers, academics, as well as policymakers will pay heed and place more emphasis on addressing this issue. The study also suggests that the Workplace Gossip Scale (WGS) can be replicated in other local and Asian contexts as a predicting factor for additional variables such as individual work performance.

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