The Effect of Workplace Negative Gossip on Employees' Turnover Intention in Tourism and Hospitality Industry: The Mediating Role of Social Loafing

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Abstract

Employee turnover is a significant concern for tourism and hospitality businesses. This study investigates the effect of workplace negative gossip (NWG) on employees' turnover intention in five-star hotels and category-A travel agencies in Egypt with a focus on the mediating role of social loafing (SL). PLS-SEM analysis was performed on 389 valid replies using the WarpPLS 7.0 program. Results revealed that workplace negative gossip positively impacts turnover intention and social loafing. In addition, the study indicates that social loafing positively impacts turnover intention. Furthermore, the study supported the hypothesis that social loafing mediates the relationship between workplace negative gossip and employee turnover intention. This study fills a gap in research on NWG and SL's impact on employee turnover intention, especially in the tourism and hotel industry. The research also provides guidelines for managing NWG and SL in hotel and tourism firms, which may reduce employee turnover intention.

Keywords: Workplace Negative Gossip, Employees' Turnover Intention, Social Loafing, Hotel and Tourism Industry

Introduction

The hospitality and tourism industry has a high turnover rate (Mohsin et al., 2022). Employee turnover is a significant concern particularly for tourism and hospitality businesses (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023), and is often driven by employees' desire to leave their job while still employed (Nguyen et al., 2023). High turnover rates in the tourism and hospitality sectors can lead to high costs, loss of talent, and decreased customer satisfaction (Dogru et al., 2023). It also negatively impacts employee motivation, engagement, commitment, and productivity, ultimately affecting firm performance and productivity (Li, Kim, & Zhao, 2017).

The tourism and hospitality industry's unique characteristics such as uncertainty, high customer demands, heavy workload, underpay, and potential bullying (Shi et al., 2021) push their employees toward engaging in harmful behaviors such as negative gossip (Khairy & Elzek, 2024) and social loafing in the workplace. On one hand, gossip, a common practice in daily conversations (Wu et al., 2018), has been linked to negative workplace effects such as fostering political activities, knowledge hiding, leading to work-life conflict, and damaging personal well-being (Akgunduz et al., 2023; Li et al., 2023), and ultimately may lead to employees' turnover intention. On the other hand, social loafers in the workplace contribute less to group efforts than those solely responsible, posing a risk to companies that require effective coordination and goal achievement (Azur et al., 2019). Service organizations often foster negative workplace gossip due to their close contact and intense interactions (Cheng et al., 2023). In collaborative environments like service organizations, employees may encounter negative organizational behaviors such as gossip (Akgunduz et al., 2023). Service-providing businesses, like hotel and tourism premises, rely heavily on human resources to satisfy guests and internal customers.

However, exposure to negative organizational behaviors, such as negative gossip, can lead to revenge and blame, causing undesirable outcomes like quit intentions and unproductive behaviors (Akgunduz et al., 2023) such as social loafing.

Although research on loafing, a deliberate reduction in employee productivity, is increasing (Edrees et al., 2023), social loafing, a prevalent issue in the hotel and tourism industry, is a growing concern (Aliane & Gharbi, 2023). Existing studies on the impact of perceived coworker loafing on other work variables are limited, as they primarily focus on explaining and empirically proving this concept (EFFICIENCY, 2020). In addition, identifying factors influencing turnover intention among hotel and tourism employees is crucial for developing effective human resources management strategies. However, the relationship between negative gossip, social loafing, and turnover intention in the tourism and hospitality industry is underexplored. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the effect of workplace negative gossip on employees' turnover intention in the hotel and tourism industry, placing a focus on the mediating role of social loafing.

Literature review and hypotheses development

Work has become increasingly interdependent, leading to an increased focus on identifying and removing behaviors that hinder effective collaborative performance, particularly gossip, which is informal and evaluative talk about not present members within an organization (Brady et al., 2017). Negative workplace gossip can cause significant damage to employees' dignity, reputation, attitudes, and behaviors, leading to emotional exhaustion, reduced proactive behaviors, service performance, inhibited organizational citizenship behaviors, and increased workplace ostracism and political acts (Kuo et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2018; Ye et al., 2019; Cheng et al., 2020; He & Wei, 2022). Negative workplace gossip can negatively impact targets' reputations by containing sensitive information and invading their privacy (Sun et al., 2023). Gossipers spread negative evaluations, leading to unfavorable consensus (Cheng et al., 2023b). In the hospitality and tourism sector, gossip can spread quickly due to frequent interactions, affecting reputations formed through consistent behaviors and word-of-mouth (Cheng et al., 2023a). Moreover, the social information processing theory suggests that negative gossip creates a negative social atmosphere, affecting perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors (Salancik and Pfeffer, 1978). This can lead to turnover intention, especially for hotel and tourism businesses, where high professional ethics requirements may be more damaging. Deviant workplace behaviors, such as bullying, ostracism, and incivility, can also lead to turnover intention (He & Wei, 2022). Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H1: Negative workplace gossip increases employees' turnover intention.

Social loafing, a term used since the 1970s, refers to the negative impact of group membership on individual performance, it is defined as a decrease in effort and performance when individuals work in a group compared to individually (Karau and Williams, 1995). This is due to individuals assuming their coworkers have already completed tasks, which can lead to a lack of individual performance evaluation (Himmetoğlu et al., 2022). Perceived loafing refers to an individual's perception of group members' performance, indicating they contribute less than they could, and it influences their desire to stay in a group, as they can leave (Whiteoak, 2007). Studies indicate a negative correlation between perceived social loafing and group outcomes like cohesion, affective tone, and member satisfaction (Monzani et al., 2014; Teng & Luo, 2015). Perceived social loafing is a belief that team members could achieve higher quality output if all members

made the same effort; this can disrupt the belief of instrumentality, leading to less team satisfaction and less attraction (Monzani et al., 2014). Additionally, it can lead to negative evaluations of team performance, reducing satisfaction and leading to team members' desire to leave (Peñarroja et al., 2017). In addition, social loafing, a negative employee behavior, is characterized by low motivation (Akgunduz & Eryilmaz, 2018) and can lead to low productivity, poor commitment (Khan et al., 2020), and ultimately, non-loafers leaving the organization. Consequently, the following hypothesis is formulated:

H2: Negative workplace gossip increases employees' turnover intention.

Expectancy theory developed by Vroom in 1964 suggests that individuals only exert effort in team performance contexts when they believe their efforts will lead to valued team outcomes. Members adjust their social loafing levels based on team expectancy perceptions (Spoelma & Hetrick, 2021). Negative gossip, a key factor in teams, negatively impacts members' expectancies by presenting evaluations that downgrade their perceptions of their teammates (Brady et al., 2017). This, in line with expectancy theory, leads to a belief that effort doesn't improve team performance, resulting in social loafing. Negative team gossip triggers lower expectancies among members, as they perceive their team as having poor reputations and low-quality relationships due to negative actions and criticisms (Lee & Barnes, 2021). In addition, negative team gossip leads to negative emotional reactions, such as anxiety and anger, affecting members' expectations. High levels of gossip create apprehension and animosity, making associations between effort and performance difficult to perceive (Martinescu et al., 2014). Negative reactions make members pessimistic about the team's potential for high performance, decreasing the utility of individual effort and increasing social loafing (Spoelma & Hetrick, 2021). Consequently, the following hypotheses are formulated as follow:

H3: Social loafing increases employees' turnover intention.
H4: Social loafing mediates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employees' turnover intention.

The conceptual framework is presented in Figure (1) below.

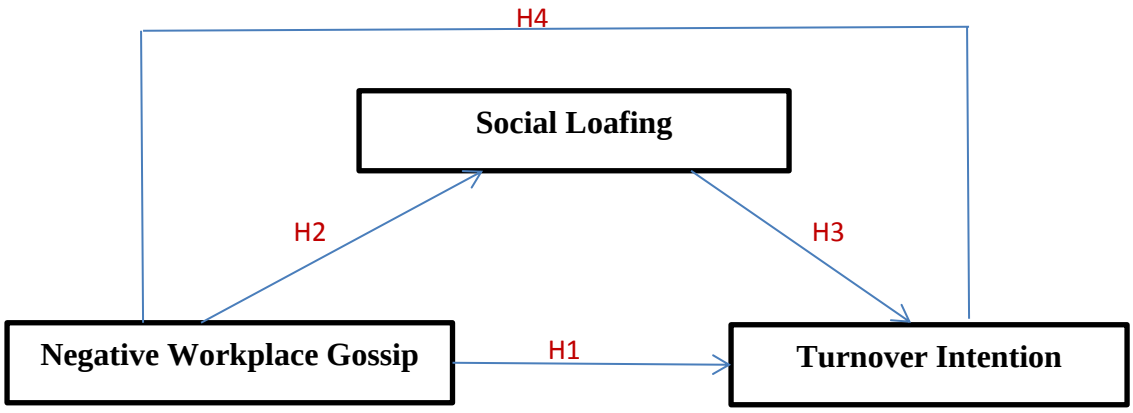

Figure (1): The conceptual framework

Methodology

Measures and Instrument Development

The study relied on a self-administered questionnaire to investigate workplace negative gossip, employee turnover intention, and social loafing. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, one measuring latent variables and the other addressing the characteristics of the sample. Negative workplace gossip was assessed using a 10-item scale from Brady et al. (2017), including "I questioned a co-worker's abilities while talking to another work colleague" and "I vented to a work colleague about something that your supervisor has done". In addition, the current study relied on Babakus et al. (2008) who developed a 3-item scale to assess employees' turnover intention, including phrases like "I will probably be looking for another job soon" and "I often think about leaving this hotel". Moreover, the study utilized Price et al.'s (2006) 4-item scale to assess social loafing. For example, "I left my work to others to do" and "I claimed there were other things to do when others needed help". Refer to Appendix (A) for further information on measurement scales.

Sampling and Data Collection

Data from full-time employees at Egypt's five-star hotels and category-A travel agencies—which control the country's hospitality and tourism sectors and both host foreign tourists—was used to test the study model. There are 30 five-star hotels and 1666 category-A travel agencies in the Greater Cairo region (The Ministry of Tourism, 2022). A convenience sample approach was used in the study because of the huge population and the researchers' limited resources. The study followed Hair et al.'s (2010) sample size recommendation, which is determined by the number of variables researched and ten responses for each variable on the measurement scale. The research entailed delivering 750 questionnaires to the investigated organizations in the Greater Cairo region after contacting the human resources department for authorization to distribute the questionnaire forms on their premises, however, only 389 were valid, resulting in a 51.9% response rate. Twenty 5-star hotels provided 212 (54.5%) of the sample, while 40 travel agencies provided 177 (45.5%) of the surveys.

Data Analysis

The study utilized PLS-SEM and PLS-MGA in WarpPLS software to analyze the measurement and structural model, test hypotheses, and identify significant differences among employees in hotel or travel agency settings.

Results

Participant profile

According to data presented in Table (1), the study included 389 participants, 85.3% of whom were men and 14.7% of whom were women, with 37.5% aged 30-40 and 48.1% under 30. A bachelor's degree was held by the vast majority of respondents (79.4%, n=309). In addition, the participants' tenure was categorized into four groups: under two years, two to less than six years, six to ten years, and above ten years; these groups included 142 (36.5%), 120 (30.8%), 51 (13.1%), and 76 (19.5%) of the sample, respectively. Furthermore, there were 212 hotel employees and 177 travel agency employees.

Table 1. Employees' profile (N=389)

		Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	332	85.3
	Female	57	14.7
Age	< 30 years	187	48.1
	30 : < 40 years	146	37.5
	40 : < 50 years	47	12.1
	> 50 years	9	2.3
Education	High schools/institute	48	12.3
	Bachelor's degree	309	79.4
	Master/PhD	32	8.2
Tenure	< 2 years	142	36.5
	2 to <6 years	120	30.8
	6 to 10 years	51	13.1
	> 10 years	76	19.5
Workplace	Hotels	212	54.5
	Travel agencies	177	45.5

Reliability and Validity

The study's constructs' composite reliability scores were above the minimum acceptable threshold (CR>0.70), as shown in the reliability analysis in Table (2). The item loadings were found to be significant ($p < 0.05$). AVE values for negative workplace gossip, social loafing, and turnover intention were all above 0.50, indicating convergent validity (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988).

Table 2. Factor loadings, Cronbach's *ά*, CR, and average variance extracted (AVE)

	Item loading	CR	CA	AVE
Social Loafing (SL)	-	0.910	0.868	0.716
SL.1	0.854**			
SL.2	0.847**			
SL.3	0.847**			
SL.4	0.836**			
Negative Workplace Gossip (NWG)	-	0.930	0.915	0.572
NWG.1	0.569**			
NWG.2	0.828**			
NWG.3	0.734**			
NWG.4	0.784**			
NWG.5	0.748**			
NWG.6	0.805**			
NWG.7	0.763**			
NWG.8	0.792**			
NWG.9	0.787**			
NWG.10	0.720**			
Turnover Intention (ToI)	-	0.903	0.838	0.758
ToI.1	0.906**			
ToI.2	0.911**			
ToI.3	0.789**			
"CR: Composite reliability; CA: Cronbach's alpha; AVE: average variance extracted" ** P-value for item loading				

Model fit

The study successfully met all ten of Kock's (2021) model fit and quality index criteria, as stated in Appendix B.

Multi-group analysis

Multi-group analysis (MGA) is a widely used method for group comparisons, examining differences between categorical or continuous variables (Hair et al., 2021). It can be executed using partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-MGA), allowing researchers to test for meaningful differences (Matthews et al., 2018). MGA was conducted and found that there are no significant differences in the path coefficients between the employees of five-star hotels and those of travel agencies (See Table 3).

Table 3: PLS-MGA

Constructs/Hypotheses	Path coeff. (Five-Star Hotel)	Path coef. (Travel Agency)	Absolute path coeff. Diff.	p-values	Supported/Not Supported
WNG→SL	0.660	0.733	0.073	0.169	Not Significant
SL→ ToI	0.207	0.210	0.003	0.484	Not Significant
WNG → ToI	0.624	0.633	0.009	0.453	Not Significant

Hypotheses Testing

Figure 2 shows workplace negative gossip (WNG) positively impacts turnover intention (ToI) (β=0.62, P<0.01) and social loafing (SL) (β=0.68, P<0.01), supporting H1 and H2 as NWG increases, leading to high turnover intentions and social loafing. In addition, the study indicates that SL positively impacts ToI (β=0.21, P<0.01), indicating that higher SL leads to higher ToI, thus supporting H3. Figure 2 also reveals that NWG interpreted 46% of the variance SL (R2=0.46). While NWG and SL interpreted 61% of the variance in employee turnover intention (R2=0.61).

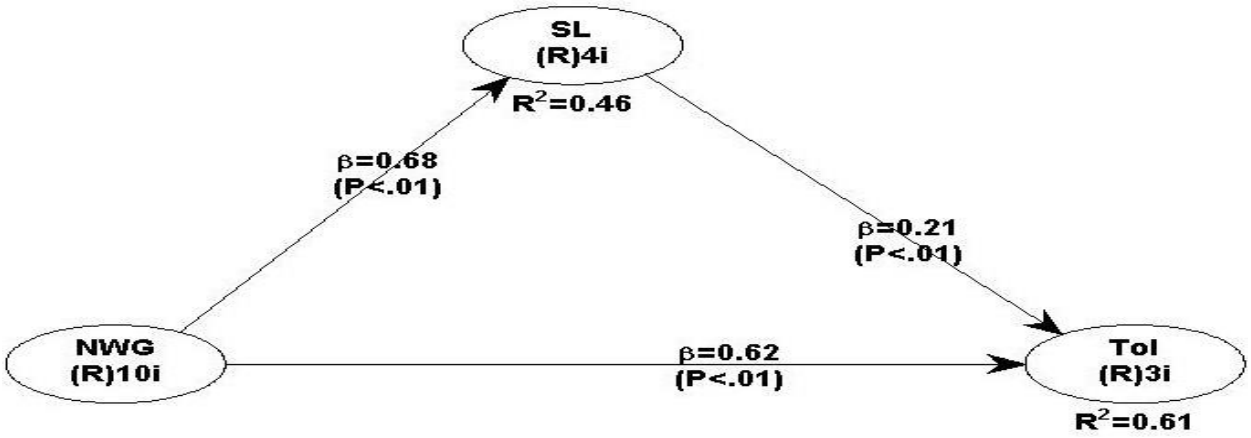

Figure 2: Results of the testing model of the study

Mediation analysis

The study utilized bootstrapping analysis to evaluate the indirect effect of social loafing as a mediator (see Table 4). The bootstrapping analysis showed a significant indirect effect (β=0.143; 0.680×0.210) with a t-value of 5.100 and a 95% confidence interval that does not cross a zero in the middle (LL= 0.088, UL=0.198), confirming mediation. Therefore, the study supports the hypothesis (H4) that social loafing mediates the relationship between workplace negative gossip and employee turnover intention.

Table 4. Mediation analysis

Hypothesis (4)	Path a WNG → SL	Path b SL →ToI	Indirect Effect	SE	*t-value*	Bootstrapped Confidence Interval		*Decision*
						95% LL	95% UL	
WNG→SL→ ToI	0.680	0.210	0.143	0.028	5.100	0.088	0.198	Mediation

Discussion

The study investigates the impact of negative gossip in the Hotel and Tourism Industry on employee turnover intention, focusing on social loafing as a mediating factor. A research model with four hypotheses was established and tested. Results supported all proposed hypotheses (H1, H2, H3, and H4). Results revealed that negative workplace gossip has a positive effect on employees' turnover intention (H1) This is consistent with the previous result of He and Wei (2022) who argued that negative workplace gossip increases turnover intention. In the hospitality and tourism sector, gossip can spread quickly due to frequent interactions, affecting reputations and causing turnover intention. Negative workplace gossip can damage employees' dignity, reputation, attitudes, and behaviors, leading to emotional exhaustion, reduced proactive behaviors, and increased ostracism.

The findings also revealed that negative workplace gossip increases social loafing (H2), social loafing increases employees' turnover intention (H3), and increases mediates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employees' turnover intention (H4). These findings are consistent with previous studies findings (Peñarroja et al., 2017; Spoelma & Hetrick, 2021). Perceived social loafing is a belief that team members should all work together, leading to decreased team satisfaction and attraction. This behavior can result in negative evaluations of performance, low motivation, low productivity, poor commitment, and leaving the organization. Further, negative gossip in teams negatively affects members' expectations by lowering their perceptions of their teammates. This, in line with expectancy theory, leads to a belief that effort does not boost team performance, leading to social loafing. Anxiety and hostility are fostered by excessive gossip, making it challenging to perceive relationships between performance and effort.

Theoretical and practical implications

The study adds to existing knowledge on workplace negative gossip, social loafing, and employee turnover intention, particularly in the hotel and tourism industry in the Egyptian cultural context. The study suggests that social loafing mediates the link between workplace

gossip and employee turnover intention, expanding previous research primarily focusing on Western European and Asian data. In addition, the expectancy theory is enhanced by the results of the current study that adopted such a theory in examining the mediating role of social loafing in the relationship between workplace negative gossip and employee turnover intention.

Moreover, the study found that social loafing increases employee turnover intentions and increases the effect of negative workplace gossip in accelerating turnover intention. In line with this result, it is suggested that promoting fair resource distribution could potentially reduce social loafing in hotel and tourism businesses. This can be achieved by implementing strict policies that distribute punishments for loafers and rewards for non-loafers. Hotel and tourism managers can also reduce social loafing by assigning observers to group work and evaluating individual employee performance to increase task visibility. Furthermore, making something change to its opposite is a strategy to combat negative gossip in the workplace. Supervisors in hotel and tourism establishments can use positive gossip to enhance their employees and effectively communicate messages. Supervisors can effectively use positive gossip as a tool to boost employee enthusiasm and commitment to their work.

Limitations and further research

The main limitation of the study is its generalization, as the results were based on five-star hotels and category-A travel agencies in Egypt. Further research should involve different hospitality and tourism segments (for example, three and four-star hotels, restaurants, and airline companies), and different countries (for instance, other MENA countries or Western countries). In addition, the study's quantitative data lacks explanations for results and participant suggestions. Future research should focus on qualitative research to identify antecedents of negative workplace gossip and other factors affecting social loafing, using mixed design for deeper insights.

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Appendix (A): Measurement items
Negative workplace gossip
"NWG.1. I asked a work colleague if they have a negative impression of something that your supervisor has done.
NWG.2. I questioned your supervisor's abilities while talking to a work colleague.
NWG.2. I criticized your supervisor while talking to a work colleague.
NWG.4. I vented to a work colleague about something that your supervisor has done.
NWG.5. I told an unflattering story about your supervisor while talking to a work colleague.
NWG.6. I asked a work colleague if they had a negative impression of something that another co-worker had done.
NWG.7. I questioned a co-worker's abilities while talking to another work colleague.
NWG.8. I criticized a co-worker while talking to another work colleague.
NWG.9. I vented to a work colleague about something that another co-worker had done.
NWG.10. I told an unflattering story about a co-worker while talking to another work colleague."
Turnover intention
« ToI.1. I will probably be looking for another job soon.
ToI.2. It would not take much to make me leave this hotel.
ToI.3. I often think about leaving this hotel. »
Social loafing
"SL.1. I left my work to others to do.
SL.2. I claimed there were other things to do when others needed help.
SL.3. I avoided work and responsibility.
SL.4. I loafed on my share of tasks."

Appendix (B) Model fit and quality indices

	Assessment	Criterion	Supported/Rejected
Average path coefficient (APC)	0.502, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average R-squared (ARS)	0.533, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average adjusted R-squared (AARS)	0.532, P<0.001	P<0.05	Supported
Average block VIF (AVIF)	1.933	acceptable if ≤5, ideally ≤3.3	Supported
Average full collinearity VIF (AFVIF)	1.802	acceptable if ≤5, ideally ≤3.3	Supported
Tenenhaus GoF (GoF)	0.603	small ≥0.1, medium ≥0.25, large ≥ 0.36	Supported

Sympson's paradox ratio (SPR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥0.7, ideally = 1	Supported
R-squared contribution ratio (RSCR)	1.000	acceptable if ≥0.9, ideally = 1	Supported
Statistical suppression ratio (SSR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.7	Supported
Nonlinear bivariate causality direction ratio (NLBCDR)	1.000	acceptable if >= 0.7	Supported

الملخص العربى

تأثير النميمة السلبية في مكان العمل على نية دوران الموظفين في صناعة السياحة و الفنادق: الدور الوسيط للتسكع الاجتماعي

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يعد معدل دوران الموظفين مصدر قلق كبير لشركات السياحة والضيافة. تبحث هذه الدراسة في تأثير النميمة السلبية في مكان العمل على نية دوران الموظفين في فنادق الخمس نجوم ووكالات السفر من الفئة (أ) في مصر مع التركيز على الدور الوسيط للتسكع الاجتماعي . تم إجراء تحليل PLS-SEM على 389 ردًا صالحًا باستخدام برنامج WarpPLS 7.0. الاحصائى . كشفت النتائج أن النميمة السلبية في مكان العمل تؤثر بشكل إيجابي على نية الدوران والتسكع الاجتماعي. وبالإضافة إلى ذلك، تشير الدراسة إلى أن التسكع الاجتماعي يؤثر بشكل إيجابي على نية دوران العاملين. علاوة على ذلك، دعمت الدراسة الفرضية القائلة بأن التسكع الاجتماعي يتوسط العلاقة بين النميمة السلبية في مكان العمل ونية دوران الموظفين. تسد هذه الدراسة الفجوة في الأبحاث حول تأثير النميمة السلبية ولتسكع الاجتماعي على نية دوران الموظفين، خاصة في صناعة السياحة والفنادق. يوفر البحث أيضًا إرشادات حول كيفية التعامل مع النميمة السلبية والتسكع الاجتماعي في شركات السياحة و الفنادق ، مما قد يقلل من نية دوران الموظفين.

الكلمات المفتاحية: النميمة السلبية في مكان العمل، نية دوران الموظفين، التسكع الاجتماعي، صناعة السياحة والفنادق.