How and When Negative Workplace Gossip Influences Service Sabotage Behavior? A Study Among Hotel Frontline Employees in China

Abstract:

Purpose: *Drawing upon the conservation of resources (COR) theory, this study is aimed at examining that ego depletion mediates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employees' service sabotage behavior, and psychological resilience moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior through the mediator of ego depletion among hotel frontline employees and their colleagues.*

Design/Methodology/Approach: *A paired sample was collected at 3-time points from employees and their colleagues working in hotels located in Guizhou province, China. The PROCESS macro for SPSS was applied to examine the moderated mediation model.*

Findings: *The results showed that negative workplace gossip has a positive effect on employee service sabotage behavior, and that ego depletion mediates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior. Psychological resilience weakens the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion, as well as the indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on employee service sabotage behavior through ego depletion.*

Originality/Value: *The present research provides a thorough understanding of when and how negative workplace gossip influences employee service sabotage behavior in the hospitality industry. The findings of this moderated mediation relationship expanded the boundary conditions of negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior.*

Keywords: negative workplace gossip, service sabotage, ego depletion, psychological resilience

1. Introduction

Service sabotage behavior are commonly seen in the hotel industry, such as *'bad service attitude', 'deliberately ignoring customer requests'*, and *'substandard cleaning service'* (Wang et al., 2011; Harris and Ogbonna, 2006). Previous studies have shown that service sabotage behavior can substantially lower customer satisfaction and loyalty (Skarlicki et al., 2016), and jeopardize the image and development of the hotel in the long run (Hongbo et al., 2019). Thus, it is important to examine the antecedents of service sabotage behavior and the mechanisms of its formation.

Prior research has focused on the factors that cause service sabotage behavior in supervisors, customers, and employees (Cheng et al., 2020; Park and Kim, 2019; Lee and Ok, 2014), but largely neglected the role of coworkers. As an integral part of the organizational environment, coworkers play a crucial role in employees' social interactions (McMullan et al., 2018). Trumping a supervisor's influence on employees, and coworkers can both be the source of dissatisfaction and deviant behavior and the source of inspiration and happiness at work (Marescaux et al., 2019). Previous research has confirmed that workplace ostracism can trigger counterproductive work behaviors among employees (Yang and Treadway, 2018) and that coworker incivility can negatively affect employee work engagement (Torkelson et al., 2016). In addition, negative workplace gossip, which is both widespread and frequent-occurring at the workplace, exerts a significant impact on the psychology and behavior of the targets (Pelled, 2000). Thus, the first objective of this study is to examine the relationship between negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior.

The Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) defines resources as anything valuable in terms of individual survival and development, and divides resources into four categories: i) objects, ii) conditions, iii) personal characteristics, and iv) energies.

According to COR theory, individuals tend to acquire and protect their resources. The threat or the result of losing personal resources will bring pressure and prompt individuals to take action to cope with such pressure (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll, 1989). Specifically, when employees perceive that they are becoming the targets of negative workplace gossip, their stress levels will rise (Cheng et al., 2022). Employees are compelled to invest their key resources (time, attention, etc.,) to cope with the psychological pressure brought by negative workplace gossip. Such a coping mechanism accelerates the loss of employees' resources, causing ego depletion.

Ego depletion is defined as the state of diminished resources following exertion of self-control (Baumeister et al., 2007). When individuals are faced with a lack of resources, they will take priority actions to protect the remaining resources (Hobfoll, 1989). Therefore, when employees suffer from ego depletion, in the process of serving customers, they will reduce the investment of resources such as energy and time to save the remaining resources, such as service sabotage behavior such as deliberately slowing down service speed and indifferent service attitude. And the lack of resources makes it difficult for employees to control their behavior, which leads to service sabotage behavior. Therefore, the second objective of this study is to examine the mediating role of ego depletion between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior.

Based on the COR theory, resource-rich individuals are less susceptible to resource loss than resource-poor ones, and can better avoid further loss of resources (Hobfoll, 2001). Psychological resilience, as a distinct personality trait, represents the individual capacity to recover from stress and adversity to maintain mental health and prosper (Hsu et al., 2012). Psychological resilience is a positive psychological resource that affects individual cognitive abilities and responsive actions (Luthar et al., 2000).

Researchers have found that psychological resilience slows down the loss of employee resources caused by stressors (Anasori et al., 2021). Employees with higher levels of psychological resilience are less likely to participate in service sabotage because they have more positive psychological resources to counter the drain on resources brought by interpersonal stressors like negative workplace gossip.

In contrast, employees with low psychological resilience have limited positive psychological resources to draw on, making them more vulnerable to the depletion of resources caused by negative workplace gossip. Therefore, the third aim of this study is to analyze the moderating effect of psychological resilience between negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior through the mediating role of ego depletion. In sum, this study presents a theoretical model of negative workplace gossip and employees' service sabotage behavior based on COR theory. The theoretical framework is shown in Figure 1.

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FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

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The present study offers four significant contributions. First, we propose and confirm the direct positive correlation between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior, which expands the research on the antecedent variable of service sabotage behavior and the outcome variable of negative workplace gossip. Second, this study proposes a theoretical framework to account for the relationship between negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior and enriches the research on the mediating variables between the two by confirming the mediating role of ego depletion. Third, this study confirms the moderating effect of psychological resilience, reveals the boundary condition of negative workplace gossip

affecting employees' service sabotage behavior, and deepens the research on the moderating variables of negative workplace gossip.

2. Literature Review and hypothesis development

2.1 Literature review of negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior

Kurland and Pelled (2000) proposed the concept of negative workplace gossip for the first time based on the previous studies and defined it as a negative evaluative discussion between a few people in the organization and members who are not present. Subsequently, some studies defined negative workplace gossip more directly as malicious and aggressive verbal discussions between members of a small number of organizations on absent members (Baumeister, 2004). From the perspective of gossip, some scholars further define it as the discussion and dissemination of negative information by members of the organization perceived by the gossip (Chandra and Robinson, 2009). Previous scholars have mainly focused on the consequences of negative workplace gossip, primarily including cognitive variables (Ye et al., 2019), emotional variables (Naeem et al., 2020), behavioral variables (Wu et al., 2018b), and performance variables (Babalola et al., 2019).

Harris and Ogbonna (2002) extended employee sabotage behavior from the production field to the service industry, and defined service sabotage as the behavior of frontline service employees that adversely affects customer service in the process of providing services to customers. Subsequent studies have further defined service sabotage as a more destructive counterproductive behavior, which refers to the behavior of frontline employees in the service industry to intentionally harm the interests of customers when they come into contact with customers (Wang et al., 2011). The previous literature indicates that scholars have primarily explored the influence of factors related to supervisors (Park and Kim, 2019), customers (Cheng et al., 2020),

and employees (Lee and Ok, 2014) on service sabotage behavior.

By briefly reviewing the origin, development, differences, antecedents, and consequences of negative workplace gossip and employees' service sabotage behavior, it is evident that the relationship, and the mediating and moderating mechanisms between the two are unclear. This study presents a novel and comprehensive theoretical model that links negative workplace gossip with employees' service sabotage behavior within the framework of the COR Theory. It pioneers in exploring how ego depletion mediates this relationship and further investigates the moderating role of psychological resilience. This research has substantial implications for the hotel industry, offering a foundation for developing targeted strategies to mitigate service sabotage behavior and enhance overall service quality, thereby ensuring long-term organizational success.

2.2 Relationship between negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior

It is argued that negative workplace gossip can positively predict employees' service sabotage behavior for the following reasons. First, according to COR theory, the lack of resources (e.g., mood, self-esteem, time, attention, etc.) affects employees' behavior in the workplace (Hobfoll, 2002). As a stressor (Grosser et al., 2012), negative workplace gossip affects the emotional experience of employees. The lack of emotional resources makes employees unwilling to devote more resources to subsequent work (Hobfoll, 1989). In the process of serving customers, employees will show service sabotage behavior such as slowing down service speed, negatively treating customers, and not answering customers' calls to delay the loss of resources i.e., time, energy, and emotions (Cheng et al., 2020).

Secondly, negative workplace gossip can pose a threat to resources such as employees' social status in the workplace (Naeem et al., 2020), and hurt the self-esteem resources of the victims (Wu et al., 2018a). Self-esteem is an individual's feeling or

experience of self-worth, and sabotage behavior helps individuals to establish or enhance their sense of self-worth (Crino, 1994). Additionally, Harris and Ogbonna (2002) also proposed that individuals who commit service sabotage behavior will gain a certain social status and self-esteem. Consequently, in the process of serving customers, employees will deliberately engage in service sabotage behavior to vent their dissatisfaction, gain self-esteem and improve their social status in the workplace to replenish resource loss.

Finally, negative workplace gossip, as a form of indirect aggression (Kurland and Pelled, 2000), affects the interpersonal interaction between employees and coworkers (Danziger, 1988). Previous studies have found that negative interpersonal interaction causes employees to engage in service sabotage behavior in the service setting (Hongbo et al., 2019). In sum, since negative workplace gossip increases employees' perceptions of stress and all types of service sabotage behavior relieve stress (Park and Kim, 2019), employees are more likely to engage in service sabotage behavior to offset the resource depletion caused by negative workplace gossip. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: *Negative workplace gossip positively influences employees' service sabotage behavior.*

2.3 The mediating role of ego depletion

Ego depletion is defined as the state of diminished resources following exertion of self-control (Baumeister et al., 2007). It implies that individuals' self-control actions consume their resources, and weakens their self-control capacity in subsequent activities (Muraven et al., 1998). Active regulation of mood and emotion (Hagger et al., 2010), control of impulse and cognition (Baumeister and Vohs, 2007), and coping with interpersonal stress (Hsu et al., 2012) will consume individual resources and cause

individuals to fall into ego depletion.

According to COR theory, individuals use their primary resources to cope with stressful situations in their current environment (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, 2001). Negative workplace gossip can lead to ego depletion for the following reasons. First, negative workplace gossip acts as an interpersonal stressor (Grosser et al., 2012). When employees perceive themselves as the target of negative workplace gossip, they need to make efforts to exercise self-control to cope with the stress caused by negative workplace gossip. This process requires the active mobilization of precious resources to counter the negative impact of negative workplace gossip, thereby accelerating the consumption of their resources. Second, negative workplace gossip occurs in the absence of the target employee (Chandra and Robinson, 2009). The victims may perceive themselves as being the subject of negative workplace gossip from the unusual behavior of their colleagues, such as ending communication when the target approaches (Foster, 2004).

Due to the covert nature of negative workplace gossip (Wu et al., 2018b), it takes extra energy resources including attention for the target of negative workplace gossip to identify its source. In addition, to concentrate on their work, they consume extra resources to control their attention from identifying gossipers (Cheng et al., 2022). Finally, negative workplace gossip can damage the target's reputation (Hess and Hagen, 2006) and undermine coworker cooperation (Kurland and Pelled, 2000). When employees perceive hostility in interpersonal interactions, they use enormous resources to refrain from retaliating against the gossiper (Lee et al., 2016). As a result, it is argued that negative workplace gossip requires greater resources from employees and eventually leads to ego depletion.

On the one hand, according to the conservation of resources theory, when

individuals suffer from   loss of resources and face resource scarcity, they tend to make aggressive behavior to protect the remaining resources (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Employees who experience ego depletion lack sufficient resources to control their performance in the workplace. It is hard to comply with the organizational rules andregulations as well as social norms. It is easy to cross the moral bottom line and tend to make irrational and destructive behavioral responses (Klotz et al., 2018). As a result, employees who have experienced ego depletion will change their work attitudes and engage in service sabotage behavior, including the deliberately provoking customer or retaliating against customers.

On the other hand, the consequence of ego depletion is more serious among individuals with poor resources. For them, avoiding the further loss of resources is more important than acquiring new resources (Liu et al., 2020). Therefore, when employees experience ego depletion, to protect their remaining resources, they would no longer invest the same level of resources such as energy and time in work to control their work performance, resulting in a higher tendency of employees to engage in service sabotage behavior, such as deliberately slowing down service speed, indifferent service attitude, and so on. In sum, employees who perceive themselves as the subject of negative workplace gossip will consume extra resources as a means of coping, which eventually can lead to ego depletion. To protect their remaining resources, they will reduce the investment of resources needed for subsequent activities, resulting in service sabotage behavior. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2: Ego depletion plays a mediating role in the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employees' service sabotage behavior.

2.4 The moderating role of psychological resilience

Psychological resilience, as a positive psychological resource and a unique

cognitive trait (Luthar et al., 2000), refers to an individual's ability to adapt swiftly to the environment and respond positively to recover from stress, distress, and risk (Masten, 2001). It also promotes the ability to recover and regulate oneself, as well as the prevention of additional loss of individual resources (Luthar et al., 1993).

The COR theory posits that when faced with stressful events, individuals with different personality traits differ in their perceptions and reactions (Hobfoll, 1989). The psychological resilience of employees has been found to influence their perceptions of stress and, subsequently their ways of coping with stressful events (Martinez-Corts et al., 2015). We propose that employee psychological resilience moderates the influence of negative workplace gossip on employee ego depletion for the following reasons. First, employees with higher psychological resilience are more proactive in building resilience to stress (Luthar et al., 2000). Negative workplace gossip is subjectively perceived by individual employees (Chandra and Robinson, 2009), and employees with high psychological resources tend to view negative workplace gossip with a positive attitude, which prevents employees from experiencing psychological stress (Tugade and Fredrickson, 2004). Second, employees with a high level of psychological resilience can adjust their anxiety in time to respond positively to the current adverse circumstances (Almeida, 2005). This adjustment and response limit the adverse effects of negative workplace gossip, reduce the likelihood of resource depletion, mitigate the consequences of resource loss, and weaken the negative effects of negative workplace gossip on ego depletion. Finally, according to COR theory, the more abundant resources an individual possesses, the more they can replenish resources in time to speed up self-recovery (Hobfoll, 1989). Psychological resilience is a positive psychological resource (Luthar et al., 2000).

Employees with high psychological resilience can replenish resources more

quickly (Richardson, 2002), which can accelerate the recovery of resources, reduce the occurrence of ego depletion, and thereby mitigate the negative impact of negative workplace gossip on employees' psychological state. Employees with low psychological resilience, on the other hand, have fewer positive psychological resources, struggle to resist negative emotions and negative influences, and are less able to cope with the external pressure caused by negative gossip. They find it difficult to replenish resources consumed in controlling one's cognition, emotion, and behavior promptly. As a result, the continuous depletion of resources strengthens the positive relationship between negative workplace gossip and employees' ego depletion. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H3: Psychological resilience negatively moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion. The lower the psychological resilience, the greater the effect of negative workplace gossip on ego depletion.

Hypothesis 2 proposes the mediating role of ego depletion between negative workplace gossip and employees' service sabotage behavior. Combined with Hypothesis 3, which says that the psychological resilience of employees moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion, it can be assumed that employees with high psychological resilience are better at coping with negative workplace gossip, more likely to control and regulate their own emotions and resources, and less likely to suffer from ego depletion. Thus, it is argued that high psychological resilience moderates the service sabotage behavior caused by negative workplace gossip through employee ego depletion. On the contrary, low psychological resilience will intensify employees' control over resource consumption and makes it more likely for them to engage in service sabotage behavior to prevent resource depletion. So, in the end, a low level of psychological resilience will make the ego-depleting effects of

negative workplace gossip, and increase the frequency of employee service sabotage behavior. Thus, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H4: *Employee psychological resilience negatively moderates the indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on employees' service sabotage behavior via ego depletion. The indirect effect is enhanced when the employees' psychological resilience is lower.*

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Participants and Procedures

The respondents of this study were frontline service staff and their coworkers in several four-star and five-star hotels in Guizhou, China. The data were collected through paper-based survey questionnaires administered in three steps. First, the researchers contacted the heads of the HR departments of the hotels, informed them of the purpose of the research, and randomly selected participants with their assistance. Second, the researchers encoded employees with Arabic numerals based on a survey list, writing this code in the top right corner of the large envelope. Third, the researchers placed two sets of employee questionnaires and one set of coworker questionnaire into three small envelopes, labeling them as T1, T2, and T3 on the top right corner. Subsequently, the researchers placed these three small envelopes and completion instruction into corresponding large envelopes. Finally, two research assistants distributed questionnaires at each hotel, and the questionnaires were sealed by the respondents completing them and collected on the spot by the research assistants. To motivate the participants, the researchers provided a modest gift worth 30.00 RMB to each person who completed all questions.

To minimize common method bias, this study adopted a longitudinal design to collect data at three distinct time points, each spaced two weeks apart. On July 4th,

2022 (T1), the researchers requested employees to complete questionnaires regarding demographic factors, negative workplace gossip, and psychological resilience. On July 18th, 2022 (T2), the researchers asked employees to report their ego depletion. On August 1st, 2022 (T3), the researchers invited employees' coworkers to report their service sabotage behavior. A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed by the researchers. After eliminating invalid questionnaires, a total of 376 matched samples were collected. Among the final valid sample, the gender of the employees was mainly female (280 respondents= 74.5%), and the age was mainly 26-35 years old (115 respondents= 30.6%). The education level was mostly bachelor's degree (163 respondents= 43.4%). The working time with coworkers concentrated on the period of 7 to 12 months (126 respondents= 33.5%), and the time working with a coworker was also mainly 7-12 months (126 respondents= 33.5%).

3.2 Measurements of variables

All of the scales used in this study were well-established, reliable, and valid instruments, and were adapted through a translation-back translation procedure. The negative workplace gossip, service sabotage, ego depletion, and psychological resilience scales were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 to 5 indicating "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree."

Negative workplace gossip was measured by a 3-item scale developed by Chandra and Robinson (2009). A sample item was, "Others spreading rumors about you". The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.813.

Ego depletion was rated with a 5-item scale devised by Lin and Johnson (2015). "I feel drained" was one of the questions. The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.891.

A 6-item scale designed by Smith et al. (2008) was adopted to appraise psychological resilience. A sample question was, "I tend to bounce back quickly after

hard times". The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.945.

Service sabotage behavior was assessed with a 6-item scale developed by Chi et al. (2015). A sample question was, "Behaving negatively towards customers". The Cronbach's α for this scale was 0.936.

Based on previous studies (Duffy et al., 2012; Cheng et al., 2020), gender, age, education level, and time spent with colleagues were used as control variables.

4. Results

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

AMOS v.26 was utilized to conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine the discriminant validity of negative workplace gossip, ego depletion, psychological resilience, and service sabotage behavior (please see Table 1 for CFA results). The results showed that the four-factor model fit the data significantly better (χ^2/df= 2.931, CFI= 0.947, TLI= 0.939, $RMSEA$= 0.072, $SRMR$= 0.038) than other nested models including three-factor, two-factor, and one-factor models, indicating a good discriminant validity among the four variables.

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TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

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4.2 Descriptive statistical analysis

Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted through SPSS v.26. Table 2 lists the means, standard deviations, and correlation coefficients of the main variables as well as control variables. Negative workplace gossip has a significant positive correlation with ego depletion (r= 0.423, p<0.01) and service sabotage behavior (r= 0.222, p<0.01). Ego depletion has a significant positive correlation with service sabotage behavior (r= 0.357, p<0.01). The results above provided preliminary support for Hypothesis 1 and

Hypothesis 2.

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TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

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4.3 Hypotheses testing

H1 proposed that negative workplace gossip positively affects service sabotage behavior. To test H1, linear regression analysis was utilized. After controlling for the effects of sex, age, education level, and tenure with coworkers, results showed that negative workplace gossip had a significant positive effect on service sabotage behavior (β= 0.211, p<0.001). Hence, H1 was supported.

We tested all of the remaining hypotheses in SPSS using Hayes's (2022) PROCESS macro with 5,000 Bootstrap procedure, which allowed us to assess bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for the indirect effect, moderated effect, and conditional indirect effect. To test H2, we adopted PROCESS (Model 4-mediation; Hayes, 2022). The results showed that negative workplace gossip was positively related to ego depletion (β= 0.348, *95% CI* [0.273, 0.423]). Similarly, ego depletion was positively related to service sabotage behavior (β= 0.458, *95% CI* [0.313, 0.603]). In addition, the results also supported a significant indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on service sabotage behavior via ego depletion (indirect effect = 0.16, *95% CI*= [0.101, 0.226]). Thus, H2 was supported.

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TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

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H3 was tested by utilizing Model 1-moderation in PROCESS Macro (Hayes, 2022) and found that the relationship between negative workplace gossip and psychological resilience had a significant negative effect on ego depletion (β= -0.151, 95% CI= [-0.21, -0.091]). This indicates that psychological resilience has a significant negative moderating effect on the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion. As a result, H3 received preliminary support. Figure 2 demonstrates the moderating effect of psychological resilience on the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion. Furthermore, the results of a simple slope analysis showed that the positive effect of negative workplace gossip on ego depletion was weaker at high levels of psychological resilience (β= 0.165, 95% CI= [0.063, 0.268]) and stronger at low levels of psychological resilience (β= 0.493, 95% CI= [0.40, 0.587]). Therefore, H3 was supported.

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FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

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Model 7-the first stage moderated mediation was performed by following the PROCESS Macro procedure (Hayes, 2022) to test H4. As shown in Table 4, the moderated mediation indices revealed that psychological resilience indirectly moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior through the mediating role of ego depletion (β= -0.069, 95% CI= [-0.124, -0.031]). In addition, the positive indirect (via ego depletion) relationship between negative workplace gossip and employees' service sabotage behavior was stronger at

low psychological resilience (β= 0.227, 95% CI= [0.136, 0.345]) than at high (β= 0.076, 95% CI= [0.029, 0.126]) psychological resilience, thereby supporting H4.

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TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

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5. Discussion

5.1 Main findings

Based on the COR theory, this study examined the impact of negative workplace gossip on employee service sabotage behavior. This paper draws the following conclusions: (1) Negative workplace gossip has a significant positive correlation with employee service sabotage behavior. (2) Ego depletion mediates the impact of negative workplace gossip on employee service sabotage behavior. (3) Psychological resilience negatively moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion. (4) Psychological resilience negatively moderates the indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on employee service sabotage behavior through ego depletion.

5.2 Theoretical implications

First, this study examined the influence mechanism of negative workplace gossip on employee service sabotage behavior. Empirical studies have been conducted on the antecedents of employee service sabotage behavior from the perspective of supervisors, customers, and employees themselves, such as abusive supervision (Park and Kim, 2019), customer incivility (Cheng et al., 2020), and employee emotional dissonance (Lee and Ok, 2014). However, the influence of colleagues on employee service sabotage behavior was largely neglected.

Previous studies have found that the behavior of colleagues in the organization

will have an important impact on employees' attitudes and behaviors (Torkelson et al., 2016). Negative colleague behaviors such as negative workplace gossip are widespread in organizations and can pose significant peer influence on employees (Wu et al., 2018b). Moreover, previous explorations into negative workplace gossip focused on its effects on positive employee behaviors such as creativity (Liu et al., 2020), and organizational citizenship behavior (Xie et al., 2019). There is a lack of inquiry into the 'dark' side of negative workplace gossip. Since employee service sabotage behavior seriously affects organizational performance (Hongbo et al., 2019), it is important to examine the impact of negative workplace gossip on employee service sabotage behavior. By focusing on the colleague behavior of negative workplace gossip, this study responded to Zhou et al.'s (2018) call for examining the antecedent variables of service sabotage behavior and enriche the outcome variables of negative workplace gossip.

Second, based on COR theory, this study offered insights into how negative workplace gossip affects employee service sabotage behavior through ego depletion and unveils the 'black box' of the mechanisms underlying negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior. This study verifies the positive impact of negative workplace gossip on ego depletion proposed by Cheng et al. (2022). Furthermore, we also confirm the positive impact of ego depletion on employee service sabotage behavior proposed by Cheng et al. (2020). Hence, the above constructs are integrated into the same theoretical framework to study. On this basis, the above constructs are integrated into the same theoretical framework for research.The impact mechanism of negative workplace gossip is diverse and needs to be examined from different perspectives. Therefore, from the perspective of COR theory, we proposed and confirmed that ego depletion is the bridge connecting negative workplace gossip and

service sabotage behavior.

Third, this study examined the moderating role of psychological resilience in the mechanism of negative workplace gossip influencing employee service sabotage behavior through ego depletion and broadened the boundary conditions of the influencing factors of negative workplace gossip. Previous studies have examined the role of perceived organizational support (Xie et al., 2020), forgiveness climate (Yao et al., 2020), and emotional regulation (Naeem et al., 2020) in moderating the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee behavior, but neglected the moderating role of employees' positive psychological qualities. Xie et al. (2019) also called for further exploration of the moderating effect of personality traits on negative workplace gossip and employee behavior.

Drawing upon the COR theory, this study proposed and confirmed the moderating role of psychological resilience between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion and the indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on service sabotage behavior via ego depletion. These findings expanded the existing research on the situational factors in the effect of negative workplace gossip and deepened our understanding of the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior.

5.3 Practical implications

First, since negative workplace gossip positively predicts employee service sabotage behavior managers, should pay attention to the harmful effects of negative workplace gossip on employees and organizations, and take strong measures to curb the spread of negative workplace gossip. On one hand, to stop the dissemination of negative workplace gossip, organizations should add regulations to explicitly prohibit negative workplace gossip and punish employees who violate the regulations so that

employees can consciously comply with the regulations and regulate their behavior. On the other hand, to create a free and relaxed communicative environment, organizations should encourage employees to communicate more and establish effective communication channels such as company dinners and group activities.

Second, since ego depletion can trigger employee service sabotage behavior, both managers and employees need to take action to prevent the occurrence of employee ego depletion. Employees need to self-examine the consumption of resources in daily work, arrange working time reasonably, and take rest timely to replenish resources. Meanwhile, managers need to closely monitor the consumption of employees' resources, and provide psychological guidance to employees on time. In addition, managers can motivate employees through financial incentives or emotional support, such as giving bonuses or caring and valuing employees, to stimulate positive emotions and alleviate employees' ego depletion.

Third, since employee psychological resilience moderates the positive effects of negative workplace gossip on ego depletion, psychological resilience needs to be added to the selection criteria in the organizational recruitment of employees, and interviewers can conduct psychological tests to examine candidates' psychological resilience. Fourth, to maintain the psychological health of employees, organizations should conduct psychological training and provide counseling services to actively listen to employees and allow them to release stress and vent negative emotions. In addition, organizations should increase transparency in teamwork to reduce employee conflict caused by employee information asymmetry, create a harmonious team atmosphere, enhance team cohesion, and reduce employees' psychological insecurity.

5.4 Limitations and future recommendations

The following are the limitations of our study. First, since the data were only

collected from China, the influence of Chinese cultural characteristics such as collectivism cannot be avoided. There may be differences in perception and tolerance of negative workplace gossip among employees from different cultural backgrounds. Future studies may consider selecting samples of employees from different cultural backgrounds to further test the generalizability of the findings of this study. Second, this study focused on the mediating role of ego depletion in the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior. But other mediating variables, such as perceived insider status, need to be examined in future research to reveal the underlying mechanisms of negative workplace gossip affecting employee service sabotage behavior.

For instance, negative workplace gossip may reduce employees' sense of belonging to the organization and affect employees' perceived insider status, prompting them to engage in service sabotage behavior. Finally, this study only investigated one individual trait, psychological resilience, as the moderator of the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior through ego depletion. Future studies could investigate the moderating effects of other individual traits. For instance, employees with high negative affectivity may pay more attention to the negative effects of negative workplace gossip on themselves and consequently, adopt negative affective reactions such as service sabotage behavior.

6 Conclusion

We examined the mediating role of ego depletion in the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior, and examined the moderating effect of employee psychological resilience between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior through ego depletion. Drawing upon COR theory, we found that negative workplace gossip positively affects employee

service sabotage behavior, and ego depletion mediates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior. Psychological resilience negatively moderated the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion, and also negatively moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and service sabotage behavior through the mediator of ego depletion. The present study offers an excellent understanding of when and how negative workplace gossip influences employee service sabotage behavior in the hospitality industry. The findings of this moderated mediation causal relationship extended the boundary conditions of negative workplace gossip and employee service sabotage behavior.

Declarations

Conflict of Interest: The authors have declared that they do not have any conflict of interest.

Ethics Statement: We certify that we have complied with the APA ethical principles regarding research with human participants of the present research.

Data Availability: Data will be made available on request.

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Table 1 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	$\Delta\chi^2(\Delta df)$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR
Four-factor model	2.931	164	480.623		0.947	0.939	0.072	0.038
Three-factor model	5.620	167	938.463	457.840[***](3)	0.872	0.854	0.111	0.101
Two-factor model	12.590	169	2127.732	1647.109[***](5)	0.674	0.634	0.176	0.206
One-factor model	23.790	170	4044.363	3563.740[***](6)	0.356	0.280	0.247	0.247

Note:[***]p<0.001; Three-factor model: Combining negative workplace gossip and service sabotage into one factor;

Two-factor model: Combining negative workplace gossip and service sabotage into one factor, and combining ego depletion and psychological resilience into one factor; One-factor model: Combining all constructs into one factor.

Table 2 Results of descriptive statistical analysis

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1.Sex								
2.Age	0.088							
3.Education level	0.064	0.052						
4.Tenure with coworker	-0.014	0.094	-0.010					
5.Negative workplace gossip	-0.063	0.111*	-0.075	0.082				
6. Ego depletion	-0.007	-0.053	-0.054	0.041	0.423**			
7.Psychological resilience	-0.050	-0.042	-0.065	0.006	0.039	0.075		
8.Service sabotage	-0.025	0.074	0.022	0.126*	0.222**	0.357**	-0.127*	
M	0.745	2.351	2.676	2.277	1.871	2.226	3.156	2.142
SD	0.437	1.090	0.843	1.050	0.724	0.582	1.090	0.806

Note: $p<0.05$, ** $p<0.01$. Sex: Male (0), female (1); Age: ≤25 years (1), 26-35years (2), 36-45years (3), ≥46 years (4);Education level: High school (1), Junior college (2), bachelor degree (3), graduate degree (4); Tenure with coworker: ≤6 months (1), 7-12months (2), 13-24months (3), ≥25months (4).*

Table 3 Regression results for mediation and moderation model

Variables	Service sabotage		Ego depletion			
	Model 1		*Model 2*		*Model 3*	
	Effect	Boot 95% CI	Effect	Boot 95% CI	Effect	Boot 95% CI
Sex	-0.049(0.089)	[-0.225,0.126]	0.041(0.063)	[-0.083,0.164]	0.048(0.061)	[-0.072,0.168]
Age	0.056(0.036)	[-0.016,0.127]	-0.056(0.025)	[-0.106,-0.006]	-0.048(0.025)	[-0.096,0.001]
Education level	0.042(0.046)	[-0.049,0.132]	-0.013(0.033)	[-0.077,0.051]	-0.026(0.032)	[-0.088,0.037]
Tenure with coworker	0.077(0.037)	[0.004,0.15]	0.009(0.026)	[-0.043,0.06]	0.002(0.025)	[-0.048,0.052]
Negative workplace gossip	0.075(0.06)	[-0.043,0.193]	0.348(0.038)	[0.273,0.423]	0.804(0.10)	[0.609,1.0]
Ego depletion	0.458(0.074)	[0.313,0.603]				
Psychological resilience					0.293(0.059)	[0.178,0.408]
Negative workplace gossip × psychological resilience					-0.151(0.03)	[-0.21,-0.091]
R^2	0.153		0.19		0.244	
F	11.118[***]		17.381[***]		16.932[***]	

Note: Boot SE was presented in parentheses. [***]p<0.001.

Table 4 Conditional indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on service sabotage behavior

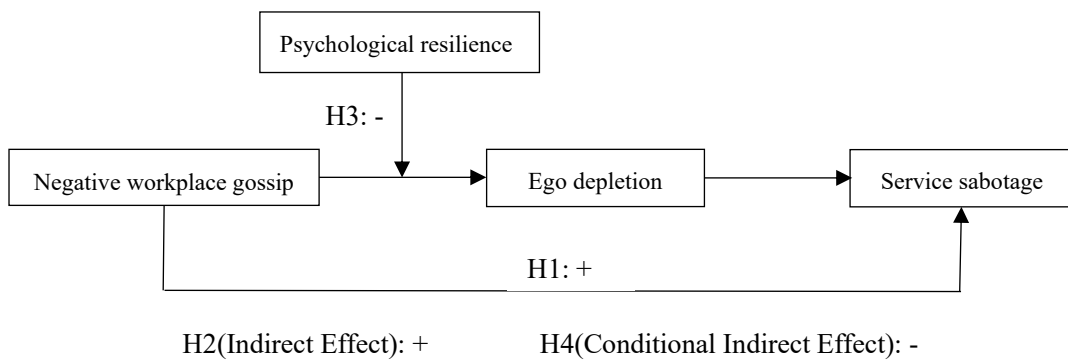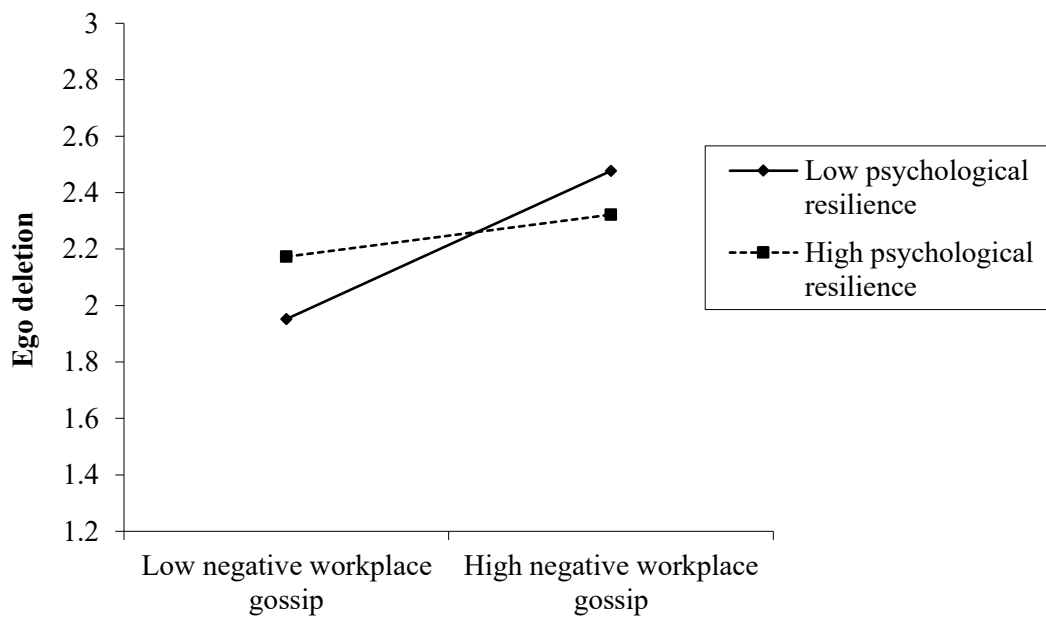| Moderator	Indirect effect	*Boot SE*	Boot LL 95% CI	Boot UL 95% CI
Low psychological resilience	0.227	0.052	0.136	0.345
Mean psychological resilience	0.151	0.032	0.095	0.22
High psychological resilience	0.076	0.025	0.029	0.126
Moderated mediation index	-0.069	0.024	-0.124	-0.031

Figure 1 Research framework

Figure 2 The moderating effect of psychological resilience on the relationship between negative workplace gossip and ego depletion