

**The effect of workplace gossip on faculty members performance: a moderated
mediation model of performance pressure and coping**

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Abstract

The current study addresses the measurement of the mediating effect of performance pressure and the moderating effect of coping in the relationship between workplace gossip and job performance among the faculty members at Zagazig University. Based on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, Social Processing Theory, Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, Social Exchange Theory (SET), and Stress Coping Theory, the researchers developed the research model. The measurement model and research hypotheses were then tested using the Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (SEM-PLS) method on online survey data from 300 respondents. The results revealed that negative gossip negatively affects job performance and positively influences performance pressure. Additionally, the findings indicated that performance pressure mediates the relationship between negative gossip and job performance. Coping plays a positive moderating role in the relationship between performance pressure and job performance. The study also offers a comprehensive insight into how the faculties of Zagazig University can utilize organizational gossip to create performance pressures that enhance job performance. The study emphasizes the importance of faculty members at Zagazig University consciously analyzing workplace conditions, encouraging them to make greater efforts to leverage organizational gossip in generating performance pressures that lead to higher levels of job performance among the faculty members at the university.

Keywords: workplace gossip, job performance, performance pressure, coping.

المخلص:

تتناول الدراسة الحالية قياس الأثر الوسيط لضغوط الأداء، والأثر المعدل للتأقلم في العلاقة بين التثرثرة في مكان العمل والأداء الوظيفي لمعاوني أعضاء هيئة التدريس بجامعة الزقازيق. واستناداً إلى نظرية الحفاظ على الموارد (COR)، ونظرية المعالجة الاجتماعية، ونظرية معالجة المعلومات الاجتماعية (SIP)، ونظرية التبادل الاجتماعي (SET)، ونظرية التعامل مع الضغوط، صاغ الباحثان نموذج البحث. بعد ذلك، تم اختبار نموذج القياس وفروض البحث من خلال أسلوب النمذجة الهيكلية بطريقة المربعات الصغرى الجزئية SEM-PLS على بيانات الاستقصاء عبر الإنترنت لـ 300 مفردة. توصلت النتائج إلى أن التثرثرة السلبية تؤثر سلباً على الأداء الوظيفي وتؤثر إيجابياً على ضغوط الأداء. كما أشارت النتائج إلى أن ضغوط الأداء تتوسط العلاقة بين التثرثرة السلبية والأداء الوظيفي. وللتأقلم دور معدل إيجابي في العلاقة بين ضغوط الأداء والأداء الوظيفي. كما تقدم نتائج الدراسة رؤية شاملة لكيفية استفادة كليات جامعة الزقازيق من التثرثرة التنظيمية في توفير ضغوط أداء تعزز الأداء الوظيفي. وتؤكد الدراسة على أهمية قيام معاوني أعضاء هيئة التدريس بجامعة الزقازيق بتحليل ظروف العمل بشكل واع، مما يحثهم على بذل المزيد من الجهود للاستفادة من التثرثرة التنظيمية في توفير ضغوط الأداء التي تحقق مستويات مرتفعة من الأداء الوظيفي لمعاوني أعضاء هيئة التدريس بجامعة الزقازيق.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التثرثرة في مكان العمل، الأداء الوظيفي، ضغوط الأداء، التأقلم.

1. Introduction

Gossip is a recurrent everyday practice and, as a social phenomenon by nature, it extends into organizations. It also reflects aspects of personality and its development and is classified among social functions (Leach, 2018). Numerous studies have addressed gossip across various disciplines over many years. While some psychological research has focused on gossip, these studies are relatively few (Dai et al., 2022).

Naturally, gossip prevails in the social lives of individuals outside institutions despite its negative connotations as a reality or accepted norm, and it extends into institutions depending on the nature of their employees (Wu et al., 2018). Practically, the presence of gossip in organizations is a constant; the idea of its complete absence is untenable. However, there is variation among organizations in the extent of gossip-related practices and the number of individuals involved. Additionally, there is diversity and difference in the strategies and approaches employed in workplace gossip (Ferrari, 2015). Georganta et al. (2014) view organizational gossip as an inevitable outcome of employee interaction in the workplace throughout the day and the development of situations and events that necessitate the exchange of information among them. This exchange occurs in various conversational forms, ranging from beneficial to harmful, depending on whether the gossip is positive or negative.

Accordingly, it cannot be ignored that in any place where people gather, various conversations emerge, often beginning with the question, "Have you heard about...?" Naturally, this extends to the workplace. Koloskova et al. (2019) indicated that 14% of employee conversations during coffee breaks are gossip, and 66% of employee discussions involve social topics, particularly those concerning other colleagues within social networks. Gossip links three parties: the sender, the receiver, and the subject of the gossip—the third party. Over time, organizational gossip becomes a key tool for strengthening informal relationships among employees (Leach, 2018). Naturally, from a communications perspective, gossip forms an integral part of the social environment that cannot be ignored or avoided. Through gossip, information about individuals, events, or relevant matters becomes available that might otherwise be inaccessible. Institutions must adapt to gossip not only to function efficiently but also to leverage and benefit from it (Georganta et al., 2014).

Organizational gossip can be defined as conversations between individuals in the workplace about another member of the organization who is absent. These discussions may include topics about people or events—essentially, it is a dialogue between two parties about a third, absent party. Gossip can be positive, describing ethical behaviors and events, using praise, commendation, peace, and forgiveness, and focusing on supporting and

enhancing the reputation of the absent third party. Conversely, it can be negative, referring to informal evaluative talk within the organization about the absent member. Negative gossip is more prevalent, to the extent that it has cast a shadow over the concept itself (Beersma et al., 2018; Grosser et al., 2012).

According to the negative bias theory, the majority of existing literature on workplace gossip focuses only on negative gossip. Most studies examining both negative and positive gossip have found that negative gossip patterns have more detrimental consequences on work outcomes than positive gossip. For example, the results of several studies have indicated that negative gossip has a stronger negative impact on individual performance compared to positive gossip (e.g., Brady et al., 2017). The harmful effects of negative gossip in the workplace extend to a variety of additional variables on which positive gossip has either a minimal or even positive impact. For instance, perceptions of organizational justice are negatively associated with negative workplace gossip and positively associated with positive workplace gossip (Kim et al., 2019).

However, regarding the aforementioned pattern related to the parity of gossip, there are also anomalies in the literature. For example, Ellwardt et al. (2012b) found that negative gossip had a stronger positive relationship with trust in colleagues than positive gossip. Another study found that the relationship between gossip and job satisfaction was similar for both negative and positive gossip, with the negative relationship between positive gossip and job satisfaction slightly exceeding that of negative gossip (Ellwardt et al., 2012). Brady et al. (2017) added that both positive and negative gossip negatively impact performance, while others have found that positive gossip can have a beneficial effect on individual performance in certain cases (e.g., Dlamani et al., 2019; Bai et al., 2020).

In practical terms, many scholars emphasize the necessity for parity in workplace gossip, where organizations balance positive and negative gossip equally. This includes both "blame casting" and "praise" or organizational learning, as well as recounting success stories and organizational triumphs, in an equitable manner. Such equilibrium is expected and occurs frequently across various organizational cultures (Grosser et al., 2012). Brady et al. (2017) further noted that there is an equal distribution of negative and positive information concerning gossip dialogues, contradicting its prevalent negative reputation, where it is conventionally understood as a term dominated by negative information, focusing on undermining an individual's status, defaming or character assassination.

Researchers in organizational studies have confirmed that organizational gossip is detrimental to organizations and that employees should refrain from it. Subsequent studies have further supported and reinforced the detrimental

impact of gossip on organizations, as gossip in the workplace has been linked to a variety of work-related outcomes affecting various aspects of organizational life. For individuals, workplace gossip has been implicated as a driver of decreased organizational-based self-esteem, heightened cynicism, and diminished performance (Kuo et al., 2015; Tian et al., 2019; Wu et al., 2016). Regarding relationships, gossip has been found to foster friendships in the workplace (Ellwardt et al., 2012), and it has been hypothesized to have other beneficial effects such as enhancing interpersonal relationships among coworkers, promoting group values and standards, and serving as a mechanism for coping with stress (Grosser et al., 2012). Finally, concerning factors influencing organizational levels, gossip has been found to have negative associations with perceptions of organizational justice and fairness and organizational citizenship behaviors (Brady et al., 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Naeem et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2018). Tan et al. (2021) concluded that there is a significant negative relationship between the overall spread of organizational gossip and the psychological well-being of workers in the workplace. This is because employees' attention may be directed towards monitoring others or constantly focusing on feeling monitored by others, which can negatively impact peer relationships. Georganta et al. (2014) concluded that negative gossip has a positive impact on job burnout and a negative impact on job engagement and patient safety.

Additionally, some studies have focused on examining the outcomes of gossip as individual behaviors by concentrating on the gossip triad: the gossip topic, the gossipers, and the gossip targets (e.g., Michelson, Michelson, et al., 2010; Wittek, R., & Wielers, R. (1998)). Kurland & Pelled (2000) found that gossiping employees have higher reward power and coercive power, while gossip targets suffer from reputational damage. Ellwardt et al. (2012) addressed gossip about managers, where rumors about managers increase in situations of low trust, unfriendly relationships, and infrequent communication. Feinberg et al. (2012) discussed the virtues of gossip by promoting cooperation and deterring antisocial behavior within groups, attempting to demonstrate the existence of positive social gossip dynamics, and providing negative evaluative information about the target in a way that protects others from antisocial or exploitative behavior, offering a model for positive social gossip.

However, some studies have examined the social motives behind gossip, which include information gathering, verification, and social enjoyment, with informational motivation being the most common. Brady et al. (2017) addressed these previous gossip motives and added that while gossip may initially appear as idle or malicious talk, this is a completely negative view of gossip. There is a more balanced perspective of gossip, arguing that it is a complex behavior that can have positive and beneficial functions. Other

researchers have also agreed with this viewpoint (Ben-Ze'ev, 1994; Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Dunbar, 2004; Feinberg, ...).

Despite the increasing number of studies on workplace gossip in the past decade, we still know little about its impact on job performance. To address this research gap and expand our understanding of the effects of gossip, this study explores the relationship between workplace gossip and job performance, defined as the individual achievement of work goals and meeting organization-defined expectations (Ben-Hador, B., 2019). For example, Xie et al. (2019) define performance as the positive contribution of an employee to the organization's success. Ben-Hador (2019) examined social capital and gossip as determinants of job performance, and the results confirmed that gossip does not have a significant impact on performance. This contradicts the findings of Grosser et al. (2010), who found a negative relationship between both positive and negative gossip and supervisor ratings of employee performance. Additionally, the study supported the idea that an individual's high engagement in negative gossip is likely to be perceived by their supervisors as indicative of low performance. Lee et al. (2016) emphasized the negative impact of negative workplace gossip on the performance of kindergarten teachers. Bowling & Beehr (2006) noted that repeated exposure to negative behaviors predicts negative outcomes in terms of both well-being and performance.

Similarly, Tian et al. (2018) confirmed the negative impact of overall workplace gossip on proactive performance. Additionally, Tian et al. (2018) found the mediating role of affective harmony in the relationship between negative gossip and proactive performance, suggesting that organizational social support mitigates the association between workplace gossip and affective harmony, making the relationship weaker when organizational social support is high rather than low. Wu et al. (2018) addressed the negative impact of negative gossip on proactive performance through emotional exhaustion and the moderating role of traditionality in the relationship between negative gossip and emotional exhaustion. Tian et al. (2020) reported that the prevalence of overall gossip positively affects employee performance through performance pressure, concluding a positive indirect relationship between negative gossip and employee performance through performance pressure. Moreover, Boradya et al. (2006) found that employees during times of change tend to feel stress and pressure, and Leung et al. (2016) affirmed that excessive pressure can harm performance. Samnani & Singh (2014) mentioned that in high-pressure environments due to some work-related negative behaviors, there may be greater increases in performance, although higher performance demands are also associated with higher levels of pressure (Samnani & Singh, 2012).

This, and performance pressure refers to the urgent need to improve performance to achieve optimal results or avoid negative outcomes (Şantaş et al., 2018). Performance pressure occurs when individuals face situations that exceed their ability to manage them, encountering intense pressure to deal with an obstacle, hindrance, or looming threat, making the experience exhausting. Here, an economic perspective can be used to interpret pressure, where individuals have resources, they try to protect, defend, and maintain. Resources can be anything valued by the individual, such as material possessions (e.g., home or car), life circumstances (e.g., having friends and relatives, stable employment), personal traits (e.g., positive outlook on the world, work skills), or other assets (such as money or knowledge). From this perspective, pressure occurs when those resources are threatened or lost (Ren et al., 2022).

Fortunately, with positive coping strategies, individuals can learn to mitigate the destructive power of work pressures (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Moreover, stress can be transformed into a form of assistance alongside problem-solving in workplace practical experience (McAndrew et al., 2007), where negative gossip in the organization can serve as an opportunity for self-improvement, understanding potential job rules, and enhancing competitiveness to achieve success at work (Wert & Salovey, 2004).

Hence, efforts are made to reduce psychological distress from negative gossip by seeking possible coping strategies that lead to coherence between behavior and perception in general. The process of reducing antagonism revolves around changing perception or behavior, whichever is easier to change, and here, there are several solutions (Zou et al., 2020): (1) changing the behavior direction; (2) adjusting behavior according to direction; (3) justifying behavior and adapting to achieve the required balance, pushing the individual toward higher performance behaviors. Coping refers to the individual's cognitive-behavioral efforts to manage specific internal and external demands arising from stressful encounters (Lee et al., 2019). Lee et al. (2019) found the role of coping strategies in improving the relationship between negative gossip and the performance of kindergarten teachers.

The concept of job performance has gained significant attention because it is the most important measure of an organization's efficiency and productivity (Badran, 2023; Hajij, 2023). Job performance can be described through two main components: the first is task performance, which relates to an individual's ability to perform specific activities correctly; the second is contextual performance, also known as organizational citizenship behavior, which consists of behaviors that go beyond assigned tasks and responsibilities (Chiang et al., 2020). Job performance is of utmost importance for higher education institutions - universities - because it directly affects the quality of educational services provided to students and the efficiency of the operations

and overall performance of the institution. To ensure optimal educational services for students, faculty assistants must perform well, as their performance impacts the professional reputation of universities.

Based on the foregoing, there seems to be a research gap represented by:

1. The scarcity of Arabic research addressing organizational gossip in general— to the best knowledge of the researchers— as a broader concept than mere rumors, encompassing all forms of organizational gossip.
2. Most studies have focused on negative gossip, lacking a balanced perspective that adopts a mixed view reflecting both the positive and negative effects of the concept as a whole or separately on negative and positive types.
3. Some studies found a negative relationship between overall/negative organizational gossip and job performance, while others denied the relationship, and some found no significant relationship with performance. Additionally, studies are confirming the positive relationship of negative organizational gossip with employee performance.
4. Studies that used performance pressure and coping strategies as mediators in the relationship between negative gossip and job performance often focused on one of them, although the pressure-coping theory considers them two processes or stages.

In this regard, the current study seeks to explore the relationship between both negative and positive organizational gossip and job performance. Based on the premise that the spread of negative organizational gossip constitutes performance pressure, activating adaptive social interactions through the modified role of coping, and also the impact of positive organizational gossip on performance to ascertain the equality of results between positive and negative. Accordingly, the research problem is defined by the following main question:

What is the nature of the roles of performance pressure as a mediator and coping as a moderating variable in the relationship between negative organizational gossip and job performance? And what is the impact of positive organizational gossip on job performance?

This is achieved by seeking answers to the following subsidiary questions:

RQ1: What is the nature of the relationship between negative organizational gossip and job performance?

RQ2: What is the nature of the relationship between negative organizational gossip and performance pressure?

RQ3: What is the nature of the relationship between performance pressure and job performance?

RQ4: Does performance pressure mediate the relationship between negative gossip and job performance?

RQ5: What is the moderating role of coping in the relationship between performance pressure and job performance?

RQ6: What is the nature of the relationship between positive organizational gossip and job performance?

From here, the contributions of the current study are defined as follows:

1. The current study presents a dual model that deals with the types of gossip concerning job performance, which may explain the equal impact of organizational gossip, while most studies have focused on negative organizational gossip. This is justified by the expectation that negative life events have a greater impact than positive events on individuals' physiological, cognitive, emotional, and social responses according to the negative bias theory (Tian et al., 2018), leading to a lack of balance in adopting a mixed perspective that reflects both positive and negative aspects.
2. Understanding the mechanism of the impact of negative gossip on job performance extensively. Some studies have addressed the mechanism through the mediating effect of performance pressure on the relationship between negative gossip and job performance, while others have focused on the mediating effect of coping strategies. Therefore, the current study presents a mechanism of influence through a model that includes the variables of performance pressure (as a mediator) and coping (as a moderating variable), considering them as two stages or processes according to the pressure-coping theory. The first assessment reflects cognitive pressure in which the individual recognizes that negative actions pose a threat or challenge to them. If so, they move on to the second stage, coping, which activates adaptive social interactions.
3. Introducing a model that examines the impact of positive gossip on job performance based on the theories of emotional events and resource conservation.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Organizational Gossip

Organizational gossip plays an important role in maintaining social cohesion within functional groups. Although the interconnectedness in social relationships may seem simple, it is fundamentally the most important function among humans since the dawn of creation. According to Dunbar (2004), the extensive nature of gossip is the "essence of human social relationships, and in practical reality, from a biological standpoint, without gossip, there would be no society." He explains that the human brain has evolved and enlarged as a result of the cognitive demands of gossip, which continually raise its threshold.

Researchers have attempted to define gossip in various ways. Erdogan et al. (2015) describe gossip as "talking about personalities," with society participating in encouraging others to speak in the same manner. Ellwardt (2019) connects gossip with the concept of validity, defining it as "uncertain information about other people or events that are shared informally among individuals." Other researchers, such as Martinescu et al. (2019), Xie et al. (2019), and Marshall (2015), view workplace gossip as a type of personal and social behavior that occurs when an organizational member (the narrator/source) engages in informal and evaluative communication with another member(s) (the listener/recipient) about a third absent member (the target).

Ellwardt (2019) further asserts that the consistent element in gossip is the dissemination of human news, which may include daily updates and personal information about others, thus lacking an evaluative component. However, the notion that gossip is devoid of evaluation and is merely news dissemination is unacceptable for two main reasons:

1. There is a clear cultural heritage that contains a negative evaluation of gossip, forming the basis for imposing social sanctions against its practice. Thus, the evaluation here encompasses the concept of gossip itself.
2. Naturally, most exchanges of personal news include some evaluations within the framework of shared implicit knowledge and cultural norms of conversation. These evaluations can be positive or negative and may be direct explicit or indirect within the context of other conversations with different parties.

Here, Zinko et al. (2017) argue that the evaluative characteristic is one of the most prominent and important components of gossip, influencing its positive and negative outcomes on an individual's reputation, even if the conversation is casual or trivial, whether explicit or implicit. Consequently,

Şanta et al. (2018) view gossip as the exchange of personal information (positive or negative) to evaluate an absent third party. Bai et al. (2019) add that gossip is "an informal evaluative conversation about an absent person".

Accordingly, Bencsik and Juhasz (2020) provided a practical definition of gossip as "the informal exchange of valuable information loaded with value about the discipline of organizational/community members." This definition implies that a certain level of secrecy accompanies the process of gossip, and therefore, formal communication methods such as memos, newsletters, and board bulletins cannot be included as tools of gossip. The value aspect reflects that the information is prominent or scandalous enough to capture the recipient's interest.

Xie et al. (2019) describe it as "uncertain information about other people or events that are informally exchanged among certain individuals within the organization." Bai et al. (2020) proposed the most comprehensive and widely accepted definition in recent research, describing gossip as "evaluative and informal talk within an organization, usually involving no more than a few individuals about another absent member in the organization".

It is worth noting that some consider gossip and rumors to be synonymous and advocate for their inclusion in a single category (Haeupler et al., 2015). Others argue that gossip and rumors often overlap and are indeed confused with each other, making it impossible to overlook the interplay between the two concepts, which becomes evident when examples of each are mentioned in individuals' daily lives. This has led some to emphasize the need to distinguish between rumors and gossip (Ferrari, 2015). The debate has extended to the point where several researchers have noted that many instances of social exchange are examples of both gossip and rumors simultaneously, and they often pass through the same channels or parties (HİMMETOĞLU et al., 2020; Liff & Wikström, 2021).

The present study considers organizational gossip as an encompassing concept that includes rumors as one of its components. Accordingly, it focuses on including rumors as a form of workplace gossip, which can be positive or negative depending on its content. Therefore, the operational definition of gossip in the current study extends to encompass all forms of simple informal conversations, including rumors, based on the areas of similarity between these forms.

In this regard, gossip can be distinguished by classifying it according to its nature into two types: positive or negative (Grosser et al., 2012).

A. Negative Gossip in the Workplace:

Negative gossip refers to informal, evaluative talk within an organization about an absent member of that organization. It reflects the negative

information circulated in conversations among colleagues about an absent individual, often deliberately spread to harm that person. Naturally, this behavior is unethical and socially destructive, often focusing on diminishing the reputation of the targeted individual. Despite this, negative gossip constitutes a significant and fundamental part of daily organizational life (Grosser et al., 2012).

It is important to note that negative gossip represents a distinctive socio-psychological structure within the workplace, differing from other forms of informal communication and social mistreatment, such as social undermining, bullying, and abusive or aggressive behaviors. Unlike other types of informal communication (e.g., chit-chat, social talk), which are often entertainment-oriented, unintended, less evaluative, and not necessarily focused on personal aspects but rather on the work environment in general (Haften, 2004), negative gossip typically includes both overt and covert behaviors (Hershcovis et al., 2020).

Moreover, negative gossip occurs within the framework of self-consistency theory, often in a covert or indirect manner, depending on the nature of gossip in the workplace, and always in the absence of the target. As such, negative workplace gossip can be seen as a form of indirect attack or aggression (Beersma et al., 2018), or victimization (Ellwardt et al., 2012), which may sometimes provoke rash or reckless emotional responses, unlike direct forms of informal communication and social mistreatment. This is because the target often cannot identify the source of the gossip or verify its content, making confrontation difficult and leaving the target in a state of uncertainty (Hershcovis et al., 2020).

B. Positive Gossip in the Workplace:

Positive gossip describes ethical behaviors and events, using phrases of praise, commendation, peace, and tolerance, focusing on supporting and enhancing the reputation of the absent third party. It often serves as an explicit call to motivation and action. Furthermore, positive gossip extends to educating and informing colleagues to improve their functional efficiency, thereby emphasizing its role in organizational learning and knowledge transfer. This process enhances employees' skills and improves performance without incurring training costs or additional burdens.

Additionally, positive gossip provides an opportunity to celebrate and promote socially desirable behaviors within the organization. It can be the exclusive means to highlight organizational heroes or role models, thereby contributing significantly to shaping and building the organizational culture. It allows individuals to commend members of the organization and establish exemplary standards for practices related to various organizational roles.

2.2 Negative Gossip in the Workplace and Job Performance

Job performance reflects the official role of the tasks associated with a job, which an individual is assigned, and is determined according to the job description. Negative gossip in the workplace is simply a conversation during a work break with the effect of entertainment and friendly communication, so how its negative aspect is determined remains uncertain. The more confusing issue is that it is difficult to distinguish between the gossip maker and the listeners, as negative gossip in the workplace is hard to trace, and no one present in the gossip conversation will admit to being the source of the gossip (Foster, 2004; Ellwardt, 2012). Therefore, from the perspective of the target of the gossip, Chandra and Robinson (2009) emphasized that negative gossip in the workplace is the employee's perception of harmful negative news spread by others in the workplace.

From the viewpoint of social exchange theory, when an employee feels the social pressure resulting from organizational attacks, they may escape to avoid verbal punishment from colleagues, or the employee may be highly sensitive to verbal attacks in negative workplace gossip in terms of personal dignity and reputation. Here, embarrassment forces the employee to feel rejected, leading to psychological and physical stress, further affecting job performance (Chandra & Robinson, 2009; Grosser et al., 2010). According to the conservation of resources theory, when an employee is subjected to negative gossip in the workplace, it requires significant effort from the employee to convince their colleagues that they are not like those gossiped about. Since personal resources are limited, this ends up depleting the employee's resources, negatively impacting their job performance (Chandra & Robinson, 2009). Considering negative gossip as a form of aggression in the workplace, it is a type of verbal attack in the workplace, so frustration will cause the employee's negative feelings and worsen their job performance (Spector & Fox, 2002). Grosser et al. (2010) found that negative gossip in the workplace negatively affects job performance. Accordingly, the first hypothesis of the study can be formulated as follows:

H1: Negative gossip in the workplace has a statistically significant negative effect on job performance.

2.3 Negative Gossip in the Workplace and Performance Pressure

Chandra and Robinson (2009) defined negative gossip in the workplace as the employee's perception of harmful negative news spread by others in the workplace. This definition directly implies that determining whether there is negative gossip in the workplace is judged by the victimized employee. If the concerned party feels comfortable with this matter or does not realize it at all, it is not negative gossip in the workplace. More importantly, negative gossip in the workplace, as perceived by employees, contains harmful

evaluative messages with the characteristic of verbal attack, causing a type of psychological harm similar to work or social pressures (Wert & Salovey, 2004).

Thus, with the definition determined from the perspective of the gossip target, measuring negative gossip in the workplace should rely on a self-report inventory. These items are not negative news that one hears or participates in spreading; rather, it is negative news through which one perceives that they are subjected to verbal attack. Negative gossip behaviors in the workplace include various forms, such as (Tan et al., 2020):

- Negatively affecting others' reputations.
- Deliberately spreading harmful news about others.
- Intentionally reporting others' socially unacceptable behaviors, preparing to ostracize them in their group and among peers.

In this way, negative gossip may function as an informal tool to control those who do not adhere to standards by pushing them to perform up to the desired benchmark (Foster, 2004). The concept of performance pressure is rooted in three established and related theories: the conservation of resources theory (COR), the job demand-control theory, and the social information processing theory through social exchange. The COR theory analyzes the causes of stress from the perspective of individual psychological resources; the job demand-control theory reflects the dynamic interaction process between stress and job demands, with stress increasing as job demands increase. The social exchange theory explains the dynamic interaction process of stress in the relationship between the individual and colleagues, and the individual and the organization (Ren et al., 2022).

Furthermore, the prevalence of negative gossip in the workplace makes employees perceive that their jobs are under scrutiny and visible to others (Beersma & Vanhlet, 2012). Particularly when performance evaluation information is disseminated through informal channels, where gossip is widespread, it may extend from informal channels to formal channels, represented in regular performance evaluations between managers and key direct employees, forming additional performance pressure (Chen & Chen, 2023).

Therefore, when negative gossip is prevalent in the workplace, employees realize that their reputation may be affected, potentially impacting their opportunities for advancement and promotion in the organization. Due to concerns about reputation, it can be assumed that employees experience higher performance pressure sourced from signals in the work environment regarding the spread of rumors and negative gossip. Consequently, employees

perceive that negativity is inherent in the workplace, leading to increased performance pressure for two reasons (Tan et al., 2020):

- Exposure to negative evaluation by colleagues is associated with negative outcomes such as reputation destruction and social stigma from colleagues. Conversely, there are opposite results when receiving praise and commendation for good performance. Here, negative evaluation by others is more costly than the absence of positive evaluation, despite the regret over lost opportunities for admiration from others.
- Employees' response to negative stimuli is stronger compared to positive stimuli, thus they feel performance pressure when they perceive that negative gossip is widespread, known as negative bias.

Tan et al. (2021) found that negative gossip positively affects performance pressure. Accordingly, the second hypothesis of the study can be formulated as follows:

H2: Negative gossip in the workplace has a statistically significant positive effect on performance pressure in the workplace.

2.4 Performance Pressure and Job Performance

An individual experiences stress and performance pressure when job demands exceed their personal, physical, or social capabilities. When tensions arise between the employee and the manager, colleagues, or even external stakeholders such as interest holders, it can lead to gossip among and between colleagues as a means of venting and alleviating pent-up stress (Kong, 2018).

Naturally, according to Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, it can be assumed that the spread of negative organizational gossip may lead to increased work stress, as employees fear that sooner or later, they might become gossip targets. This is positively related to job performance as employees strive to protect and maintain their job positions. Performance pressure also affects individuals' beliefs regarding the negative consequences associated with failing to achieve the desired goal (Chen & Chen, 2023), by influencing their controlled motivations, which are driven by external incentives such as the desire to avoid external threats (Raub and Robert, 2013). Such controlled motivations lead individuals to prioritize avoiding negative feelings or outcomes over striving for positive results (Podsakoff et al., 2023).

The dissemination of information through the spread of negative organizational gossip inclines employees to construct and interpret reality through the lens of social information processing theory. This approach is suitable and useful for studying adaptive outcomes under harmful conditions, such as working in an environment where negative gossip is prevalent. The

basic principle of social information processing theory is that the social environment provides employees with useful cues for interpreting reality. Upon receiving and processing these cues, employees modify their behaviors in different situations, which may extend to include anticipating outcomes related to those behaviors at work (Crick & Dodge, 1996).

Naturally, social environment cues and signals affect employees' attitudes and behaviors. Applying this perspective to negative gossip in the workplace, it can be proposed that the spread of negative gossip at work becomes more evident through observations and interactions among colleagues within the individual's social environment, which shapes the employee's attitudes toward work, resulting in:

- The likelihood of being targeted by gossip, like others.
- An increased likelihood of being monitored by others for their performance.

Indeed, these signals eventually lead to the development of performance pressure, reaching higher levels within the framework of attitude systems, which occur as a result of negative evaluative orientation towards performance shortcomings (Eisenberger & Aselage, 2009). Foster (2004) suggests that the spread of negative organizational gossip makes employees feel that they are targets of gossip, especially when they hear about others directly or indirectly through communication networks. They anticipate that the same communication channels will easily spread gossip about them, leading to a certainty that they could easily be the subject of rumor spreading or gossip, resulting in pressure.

Naturally, the performance pressure resulting from the spread of negative gossip in the workplace positively affects job performance, leading to higher job performance to avoid negative evaluations expressed through perceived performance deficiencies or inadequacies. The exaggerated outcomes may force employees to double their efforts in performance development and perseverance to overcome difficulties, and they may alleviate performance pressure by finding new ways and methods to increase job performance (Tan et al., 2020).

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model suggests that job demands, such as physical workload, time pressure, and role ambiguity, may lead to stress and burnout. Conversely, job resources, such as physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job, can help employees achieve their goals and develop personally. This implies that job resources can mitigate the harmful effects of job demands. Accordingly, employees engage in more performance to maintain job resources in the face of performance pressure, which is a job demand (Arun Kumar & Lavanya, 2024). Here, based on social exchange theory, which posits that when one party acts in ways that benefit another, an implicit obligation of reciprocity

arises in the future, social exchange theory complements preventing the depletion of individual internal resources within the framework of the conservation of resources theory, providing the potential for future exchange of individual and organizational resources. Additionally, the job demand-control model proposed by Karasek (1979) predicts increased pressure with increasing job demands while emphasizing the principle of "matching rights and responsibilities," suggesting that achieving this match can reduce work pressure and improve work motivation. Generally, the job demand-control theory supports the idea that individual characteristics and the organizational environment predict employee pressure and performance.

Empirical studies, such as those included in the study by Wagenaar & Groeneweg (1987), supported the notion that social pressure towards performance affects job performance more than formal rules. Male nurses perceived that their work performance was under scrutiny and tangible due to gender, making it clear that doubling performance pressure was necessary because it became easier for them to identify success or failure in job performance due to others' attention (observing behaviors and performance), pushing them to overachieve to cope with performance pressure. Similarly, Gardner (2012) found in his study involving 72 teams of auditors and consultants that high-performance pressure leads to higher team performance levels. Accordingly, the third hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H3: Performance pressure has a statistically significant positive effect on job performance.

The study by Tan et al. (2021) also concluded that performance pressure mediates the relationship between the spread of negative organizational gossip in the workplace and job performance positively. Accordingly, the fourth hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H4: Performance pressure mediates the relationship between negative gossip in the workplace and job performance.

2.5 The Moderating Role of Coping in the Relationship Between Performance Pressure and Job Performance

Coping represents a necessary aspect of all human lives and is an essential part of managing daily tensions and challenges. Coping reflects the cognitive and behavioral efforts to control, reduce, or endure internal and/or external demands arising from stressful interactions (Folkman, 1984).

The meaning of coping varies depending on the subject and field of research. If we consider negative gossip in the workplace as a form of work stress caused by verbal attacks, we can say that the coping strategy involves adopting certain interactive behaviors to avoid the threat caused by stress and harm. To prevent this threat and harm, individuals use coping and resolution methods on the level of cognitive therapy. According to Collins et al. (1999), coping strategies are classified into three categories: the first are positive

strategies related to efficiently solving problems and rational analysis; the second is a neutral stance that maintains internal emotional balance; and the third includes negative strategies that avoid and withdraw from the problem. Generally, positive problem-focused coping strategies can reduce the threat and damage caused by stress by focusing on professional work or highlighting individual strengths to counter false accusations associated with negative gossip, commenting that such negative gossip is too boring to spread (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Thus, positive coping can be considered an active coping approach, while negative coping strategies rely on avoiding the harm of stress. Therefore, emotion-focused coping can be seen as negative, for example, attempting to ignore the problem (known as "selective coping") or managing one's emotional state to reduce the negative impact of stress (referred to as "resigned coping") (Lee et al., 2019).

The Lazarus & Folkman (1987) model of stress and coping relies on two theoretical aspects: appraisal and coping. Appraisal reflects the individual's evaluation of their situation from a personal perspective, involving two types of appraisal:

- Primary appraisal: This is the initial evaluation related to relevant motives that call for coping, consisting of three types: harm, threat, and challenge. Challenge reflects the evaluation of tensions and obstacles and mobilization and preparation to deal with them to achieve positive outcomes.
- Secondary appraisal: This reflects the individual's ability to achieve positive outcomes.

Based on self-assessment theory, individuals conclude coping through confrontation. Performance pressure can be used as a means of exercising social control and attempting to understand ambiguous situations. The Lazarus & Folkman transactional model includes that anyone's daily life involves various stressful experiences that cause some kind of tension. Coping here plays a role through two aspects: first, perceiving stress as a problem and attempting to change the relationship with the environment that includes sources of stress—such as annoyances/negative gossip—and second, focusing on managing the emotional distress associated with stress according to its type, context, and magnitude.

In this regard, Carver (1997) sees coping as achieving the individual's decision to eliminate or overcome the source of annoyance. He also sees the need to have dialogues with other employees to support their position by getting them to join and align with him in the ongoing conflict. Here, the employee stops addressing the issue and focuses on providing suggestions on how to deal with the stress. Additionally, the active step of listening to workplace gossip provides vital information about workplace culture and coping mechanisms (Hewett et al., 2016).

According to Social Information Processing (SIP) theory, it can be assumed that employees fear this exchange of information from the perspective of anticipating that they will be the subject of gossip sooner or later, meaning they are potential gossip targets. This creates a sense of pressure at work since the employee's attention is directed toward monitoring others or living in a state of being monitored by others. They strive to deal with this contradiction according to Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT), which provides a mechanism to reduce dissonance through coping strategies. Dissonance reflects a feeling of tension or discomfort arising from the contradiction between two incompatible cognitions, motivating individuals to change their attitudes or behaviors. Conversely, consistency arises when an individual's cognition is aligned with another's (Zou et al., 2020). Georganta et al. (2014) concluded that negative gossip provides a coping mechanism used by care professionals. Additionally, previous studies influenced by cognitive appraisal theory (e.g., Zou et al., 2020; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) have examined coping as a mediator between stressors and outcomes, including job performance (Hewett et al., 2016). Based on this, the fifth hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H5: Coping moderates the relationship between performance pressure and job performance.

2.6 Positive Gossip and Job Performance

Positive gossip refers to the acceptance, satisfaction, and support of an absent third party (Ellwardt et al., 2012c). The behaviors associated with positive gossip include:

- Positively affecting others' reputations.
- Spreading positive news about others.
- Reporting socially acceptable behaviors of others.

Additionally, positive gossip involves praising and commending someone's performance or acknowledging and appreciating the help someone provided to another colleague not involved in the gossip. Positive gossip functions as a form of social support for the target of the gossip (Dunbar, 2004). Despite the extensive literature on workplace gossip, which often focuses on its "dark side" (Zhou et al., 2019; Spoelma and Hetrick, 2021; Zong et al., 2021), some previous research has highlighted the positive relationship between workplace gossip and work-related outcomes, such as information exchange (Ellwardt et al., 2012c), reducing social loafing (Spoelma and Hetrick, 2021), and providing a means of relieving stress (Grosser et al., 2012). Several studies have confirmed the positive impact of positive gossip on individual performance (e.g., Dlamini et al., 2019; Bai et al., 2020).

The Affective Events Theory (AET) by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996) provides a framework for understanding the relationship between gossip and

individual outcomes, as well as explaining the seemingly contradictory results from previous literature. AET posits that negative emotional events lead to negative outcomes, while positive emotional events lead to positive outcomes. According to AET, events that occur or dominate in the workplace, such as workplace gossip, evoke individual emotional responses, which subsequently shape individual attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, employees may experience positive or negative emotional reactions depending on the nature of workplace events; events perceived as positive can evoke positive emotions in employees, and vice versa. Thus, an employee may perceive positive gossip as beneficial because it involves praise, support, or defence of the absent third party (Ellwardt et al., 2012b). Therefore, employees may experience a greater positive impact when positive gossip is prevalent in the workplace.

Furthermore, the Social Exchange Theory (SET) by Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) provides a framework for explaining the impact of positive gossip on relationships between colleagues or even supervisors as exchange partners. When an actor provides a benefit to their exchange partner, which is reciprocated with another benefit, this positively affects job performance. Based on this, the sixth hypothesis can be formulated as follows:

H6: *Positive gossip in the workplace has a statistically significant positive effect on job performance.*

Therefore, the proposed study model can be envisioned as illustrated in Figure 1.

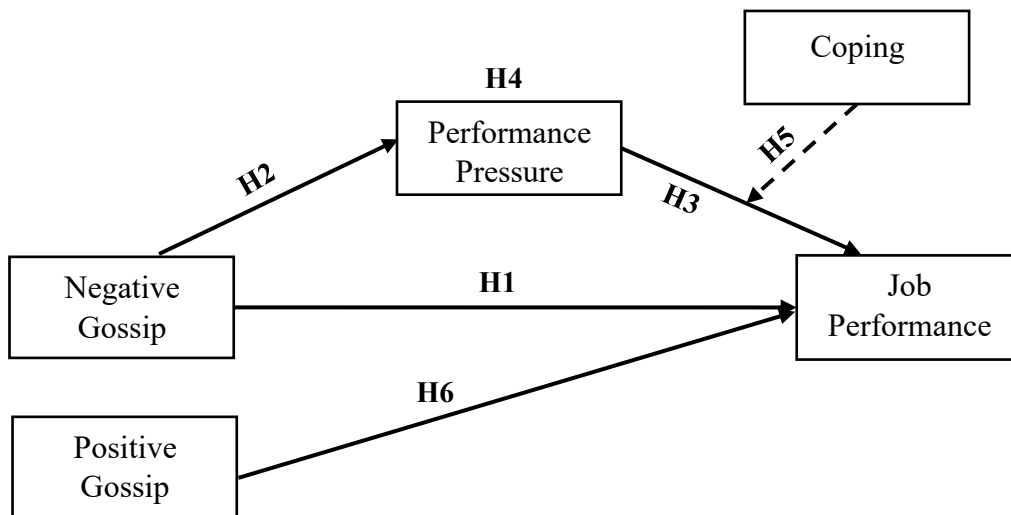


Figure 1. The conceptual model and hypothesized relationships

Source(s): Author's work

3. Methodology

The study followed a deductive approach and employed quantitative methods to test its hypotheses. Utilizing the partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) technique, facilitated by the Warp PLS package (7.0.9.9) as outlined by Ringle et al. (2015), was central to conducting the analyses. PLS-SEM was deemed suitable due to its capacity for concurrently estimating numerous relationships among various independent variables and one or more dependent variables (Hair et al., 2016). This modeling technique, being variance-based, offers several advantages: firstly, it accommodates flexible assumptions regarding multivariate normal distributions; secondly, it efficiently handles both reflective and formative constructs; thirdly, it enables analysis of intricate models even with limited sample sizes, thereby reducing measurement errors. Additionally, it provides a more robust estimation of structural constructs and, notably, serves as a predictive tool for theory development, commonly employed in management and business research to discern intricate relationships between constructs (Mikalef et al., 2020).

3.1 Measurements

This study used validated and established scales that have been found reliable time and again in previous studies. Organizational Gossip was measured based on a 10-item scale adapted from an existing measure of workplace gossip (Kuo *et al.*, 2015), the original scale consists of two five-item subscales, each measuring the positive and negative gossip. The 4-element scale of Mitchell *et al.* (2018) used in the study of Arun Kumar & Lavanya, (2024) was adapted to measure Performance Pressure. Coping adoption was measured based on 10-item adoption by Schreurs *et al.*, (1993) and Lechner *et al.*, (2007). Lastly, Job Performance was measured using the 3-item scale adoption by Peterson et al. (2011) used in the study of Tummers, (2017). All measurement items were measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree 5(1) and strongly agree 5(5). A face validity check of the questionnaire was conducted. Moreover, the questionnaire was pretested on the target group of respondents as well as on experts from academia. This resulted in some minor modifications.

3.2 Sampling and data collection

For this study, the data was collected from faculty members^(*) at Zagazig University because they play a vital role in the educational and research processes at the university. They are often in direct contact with students and faculty members and are striving for promotions and job security. This environment can be fertile ground for the emergence and circulation of

^(*)This description concerns the teaching assistants and lecture assistants who work in all the 17 faculties of Zagazig University.

organizational gossip, making it important to study the impact of this gossip on job performance.

The final questionnaire was distributed to the faculty members at Zagazig University for four months from February until the end of May 2024. The research sample was determined with 327 participants from a population of 2,172 faculty members, they were selected according to the random stratified sample method due to the variation in the functional field of the faculties at Zagazig University. Besides, the sample size was calculated using a method proposed by Sekaran and Bougie, (2016). The size of the sample units was distributed among the 17 faculties using a proportional distribution method.

Data was obtained using Google Docs, and the questionnaire link was e-mailed with an explanation of its purpose to faculty members, requesting their participation and ensuring complete confidentiality of the data. Additionally, research participation was voluntary. A total of 312 responses were received. However, when aggregating, some responses had to be deleted from the analysis due to the missing data. Thus, the final sample size was 300 (response rate 91.7%).

The respondents were predominantly female 64% while the proportion of male respondents was 36%. As for job degree, the percentage of teaching assistants was 45%, while lecture assistants were 55%. The average age of the respondent was 28.65 years. The respondents had 6.55 years of experience, as shown in Table 1. To assess the common method bias (CMB) in our study: we randomized the questions in the survey to make the determination of independent and dependent variables difficult. We also performed Harman’s single factor test, which is one of the most popular CMB tests, and the first factor explained 43.60% of the total variance, which is less than 50%, and therefore CMB is not a critical issue in this study (Podsakoff et al., 2003).

Table 1. Profile of the respondents

Variable	N (300)
Gender	
Male	36%
Female	64%
Job Degree	
Teaching Assistants	45%
Lecture Assistants	55%
	Years (Mean)
Age	28.65
experience	6.55

Source(s): Authors’ own calculation

4. Data analysis and results

4.1 Measurement model

The measurement model was evaluated to determine its effectiveness in testing the reliability and validity (convergent and discriminant) of the constructs. When analysing reliability, Cronbach's alphas (CA), ranged from 0.729 to 0.880 (see Table 2), all of which were above the cut-off point of 0.700 proposed by Hair et al. (2022). This shows that all constructs were internally consistent.

Hair et al. (2022) provided criteria for a satisfactory measurement model, which include factor item loadings (above 0.7), composite reliability (CR) (above 0.70), and average variance extracted (AVE) (above 0.500), which were employed to assess convergent validity. In this investigation, all three criteria were successfully met, with factor item loadings ranging from 0.704 to 0.926, composite reliability spanning from 0.781 to 0.965, and AVE values ranging from 0.586 to 0.695 (refer to Table 2). Consequently, these findings indicate that the measures of the constructs exhibit adequate convergent validity. Discriminant validity was evaluated to ensure that the square root of AVE surpassed the correlations between the constructs and that the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratios were below 0.850, as recommended by Fornell and Larcker (1981), Hair et al. (2022), and Henseler et al. (2015). As presented in Table 3, the square root of the AVE values exceeded the highest correlation coefficient ($r = 0.672$). Additionally, the HTMT ratios yielded values below the threshold of 0.850. Therefore, the findings affirm the establishment of discriminant validity.

Table 2. Reliability and convergent validity

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	CA	CR	AVE
Negative Gossip	NG1	0.725	0.880	0.965	0.695
	NG2	0.751			
	NG3	0.749			
	NG4	0.839			
	NG5	0.833			
Positive Gossip	PG1	0.735	0.753	0.874	0.659
	PG2	0.704			
	PG3	0.910			
	PG4	0.926			
	PG5	0.918			
Performance Pressure	PP1	0.910	0.794	0.824	0.604
	PP2	0.941			
	PP3	0.838			
	PP4	0.837			
Coping	CO1	0.829	0.798	0.781	0.610
	CO2	0.725			

Construct	Items	Factor Loading	CA	CR	AVE
	CO3	0.720			
	CO4	0.777			
	CO5	0.748			
	CO6	0.785			
	CO7	0.776			
	CO8	0.884			
	CO9	0.841			
	CO10	0.876			
Job Performance	JP1	0.745	0.729	0.803	0.586
	JP2	0.854			
	JP3	0.857			

Source(s): Author's work

Table 3. Discriminant validity (HTMT criterion)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1- Negative Gossip	0.628				
2- Positive Gossip	-0.545	0.712			
3- Performance Pressure	0.509	-0.647	0.777		
4- Coping	-0.543	0.650	-0.470	0.781	
5- Job Performance	-0.591	0.593	-0.672	0.670	0.785

Note(s): Bold numbers indicate the square root of AVE

Source(s): Authors' own calculation

4.2 Structural model assessment

The evaluation of the proposed model for the study and the testing of study hypotheses includes the following:

4.2.1 Model Fit of the Proposed Model

According to this approach, the quality of fit of the proposed model is first ensured, followed by the testing of relationships between study variables. Model fit assessment is crucial in structural equation modeling because it allows us to ascertain the degree of alignment between the theoretical model of the study and the empirical findings. There are three indicators of model fit quality: Average Path Coefficient (APC), Average R-squared (ARS), and Average Variance Inflation Factor (AVIF). Acceptable values for the average path coefficient and average correlation coefficient are considered when the p-value is less than 0.05, while the average variance inflation factor is acceptable if its value is less than 5. The results indicated that the values of AVIF, ARS, and APC were (APC=0.389, P<0.001), (ARS=0.556, P<0.001), and (AVIF=3.831) respectively, indicating acceptable model fit quality. Therefore, it can be concluded that the overall model of the proposed framework explains the relationships between the study variables to a high degree, demonstrating efficiency and reliability (Hair et al., 2021).

The researchers tested the predictive validity of the proposed model for the study. Q^2 value is used to test the predictive validity of the model, where a structural model has predictive validity if Q^2 values are greater than zero. The Q^2 values in the structural model of this study were 0.663 for performance pressure, and 0.658 for job performance, indicating high predictive capability of the proposed model. The predictive capability of the structural model is also measured by the coefficient of determination (R^2), and it can be stated that the current study model has appropriate predictive power as the R^2 values for the aforementioned variables were 0.670, and 0.531 respectively (Hair et al., 2021).

4.2.2 The results of hypothesis testing

The structural model was evaluated to examine the hypothesised relationships shown in Figure 2 by bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples (Hair et al., 2016). Table 4 shows the results of path coefficients (β), effect size (f^2), and variance inflation factors (VIFs). As all VIF values were below the threshold of 5.00, the collinearity between the latent variables was acceptable for the structural model. Consequently, an evaluation of the remaining tests was conducted. Specifically, negative gossip had a significant negative impact on the job performance of the faculty assistants at the faculties of Zagazig University ($\beta_1 = -0.480$, $p < 0.000$); thus, H1 was supported. Next, H2 was also supported by confirming that negative gossip had a significant positive impact on performance pressure ($\beta_2 = 0.818$, $p < 0.000$). For H3, the value of $\beta_3 = 0.105$ at $p < 0.05$, reflecting the relationship between performance pressure and job performance of the faculty assistants at the faculties of Zagazig University as positive and significant. Consequently, H3 was also confirmed. Next, H6 was also supported by confirming that positive gossip had a significant positive impact on job performance ($\beta_6 = 0.254$, $p < 0.000$).

A further assessment of the effect size (f^2) of the exogenous latent constructs on the endogenous latent constructs was conducted using Cohen's (1988) guidelines (large effect = 0.35; moderate effect = 0.15; small effect = 0.02). As can be seen in Table 4, the effect of both negative gossip and positive gossip on the job performance of the faculty assistants at the faculties of Zagazig University was moderate, with the respective values of F being (0.331, 0.161) in order. Meanwhile, the effect of performance pressure on job performance was small ($f^2 = 0.061$), and the effect of negative gossip on the performance pressure of the faculty assistants at the faculties of Zagazig University was large ($f^2 = 0.669$) (Hair et al., 2022).

4.3 Mediation effect of Performance Pressure

The mediating effect of performance pressure on the relationship between negative gossip and job performance was tested using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) bootstrapping method for indirect effects. This method works for

single and multiple mediator models and allows simultaneous testing of the relationship between variables (Hair et al., 2022; Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Table 4 shows an indirect relationship between the negative gossip and the job performance through performance pressure ($\beta_4 = 0.146$, $p < 0.01$). The indirect effect of Boot CI Bias Corrected did not straddle a zero in between, which means that a mediation effect would be in place (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). While the direct relationship between the negative gossip and the job performance is significant, this confirms the partial mediation of the performance pressure in this relationship. Therefore, H4 was confirmed.

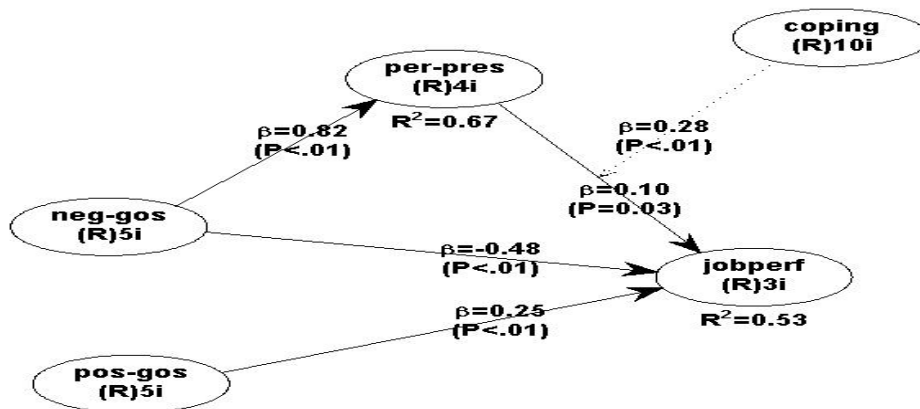


Figure 2. Structural model of PLS analysis
Source(s): Authors' own work

4.5 Moderation effect of coping

The interaction effect was conducted by calculating the mean-centred indicator values before multiplying the moderator variables by the predictor variables via the PLS bootstrapping method with 5,000 resamples for the structural model. The results (i.e. path estimates and p-values) are presented in Table 4. Notably, coping increases the positive relationship between performance pressure and job performance of the faculty assistants at the faculties of Zagazig University ($\beta_5 = 0.285$, $p < 0.01$), supporting H5. Figure 3 illustrates the interaction effect diagrams of the relationship between the independent and dependent variables. The diagrams show that the positive effect of the relationships was stronger when the coping was high.

Table 4. Hypothesis testing of direct effects, mediating effect, and moderating effect

Relationships		β	P-value	f^2	VIF	Decision
Direct effects						
H1	NG \longrightarrow JP	-0.480	< 0.000	0.331	2.089	Accept
H2	NG \longrightarrow PP	0.818	< 0.000	0.669	1.073	Accept
H3	PP \longrightarrow JP	0.105	0.033	0.061	2.059	Accept
H6	PG \longrightarrow JP	0.254	< 0.000	0.161	1.574	Accept
Mediating effect of Performance Pressure						
H4	NG \rightarrow PP \rightarrow JP	0.146	0.007			Accept
Moderating effect of Coping						
H5	PP \times CO \longrightarrow JP	0.285	0.000			Accept

Note(s): NG = Negative Gossip, PG = Positive Gossip, PP = Performance Pressure, CO = Coping; JP = Job Performance

Source(s): Authors' own calculation using PLS analysis

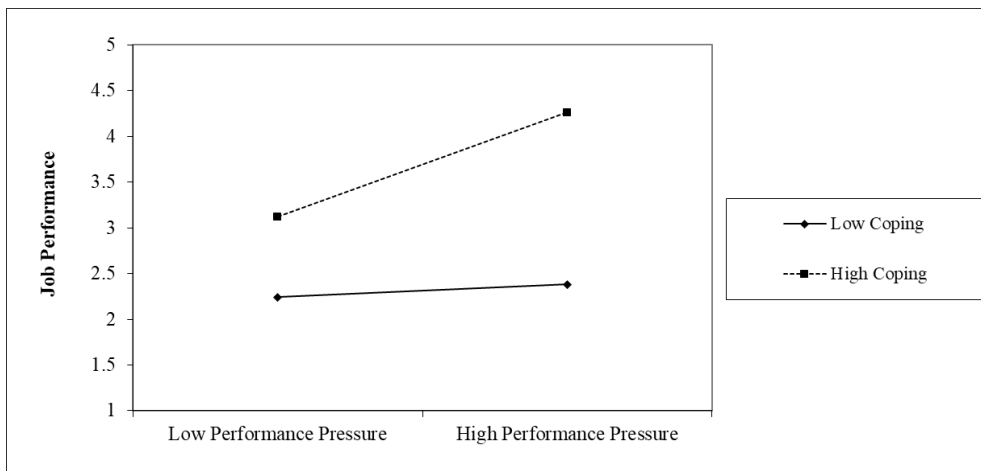


Figure 3. Interaction effect on Job Performance
Source(s): Author's work

5. Results discussion

The research results support the study's hypotheses. According to the findings, negative gossip negatively affects job performance (H1). It can be concluded that negative gossip, which includes insults, criticisms, and defamation, undermines the dignity and reputation of the employee at work, leading to psychological and physical stress that adversely affects job performance (Chandra & Robinson, 2009; Grosser et al., 2010). According to the conservation of resources theory, when an employee is subjected to negative gossip in the workplace, significant efforts are required from the employee to convince their colleagues that they are not like the subjects of the gossip. Because personal resources are limited, this results in the depletion of the employee's resources, negatively impacting their job performance (Chandra & Robinson, 2009). This finding aligns with the results of Grosser et al. (2010) and Spector & Fox (2002), who confirmed that verbal aggression in the workplace leads to frustration, which in turn leads to poor performance.

The study also found that negative gossip has a direct positive effect on performance pressure (H2). The prevalence of negative gossip makes individuals concerned about their reputation and the potential loss of promotion opportunities, which may extend to financial entitlements. These concerns are processed internally, creating pressure on their performance as they feel insecure and lose confidence in the evaluation of their performance due to the damaged reputation. They find themselves in an internal conflict between continuing as if they were not harmed (resulting in resource depletion and performance pressure) or considering the negative gossip and reducing their performance because the damage has already occurred. This internal conflict constitutes performance pressure on the individual. This result is consistent with the findings of Tan et al. (2021), which indicated that the relationship between negative workplace gossip and performance pressure is positive.

Additionally, the results indicated that performance pressure has a positive effect on job performance (H3). This may be because individuals, feeling targeted by gossip, assume that their performance might be monitored by others. Therefore, they strive to prove otherwise by improving their performance, which enhances their image. Furthermore, according to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, job resources can mitigate the harmful effects of job demands. Consequently, individuals engage in more performance to maintain job resources in the face of performance pressure, which is a job requirement (Arun Kumar & Lavanya, 2024). The individual believes that by benefiting the organization through increased performance, an implicit obligation for reciprocal treatment from relevant superiors is created, as suggested by social exchange theory, leading them to enhance their performance in response to performance pressure. This result aligns with

Gardner's (2012) findings that high-performance pressure leads to higher team performance levels, as well as Wagenaar & Groeneweg's (1987) study, which found that social performance pressure affects job performance as employees perceive their work to be under scrutiny and tangible. Similarly, Tan et al. (2021) reached the same conclusion. The results also indicated that performance pressure mediates the relationship between negative gossip and job performance (H4), reflecting that the indirect relationship between negative gossip and job performance is positive, whereas the direct relationship is negative. This finding aligns with Tan et al. (2021).

The results also showed that coping has a positive moderating role in the relationship between performance pressure and job performance (H5). This can be explained by the stress-coping theory, where coping is the second step after identifying the stress as a threat or challenge, prompting the individual to achieve the required performance. The findings confirm that when coping mechanisms are available, performance improves. The direct relationship between performance pressure and job performance is weaker ($\beta = 0.10$), while the moderated relationship through coping is stronger ($\beta = 0.28$). This result is consistent with Hewett et al. (2016), who found that coping mediates the relationship between stress and job performance. Moreover, the pressures experienced by individuals, such as feeling monitored by others, lead them to resolve this conflict according to cognitive dissonance theory, which provides a mechanism to reduce dissonance through coping strategies.

The results also indicated that the relationship between positive gossip and job performance is positive (H6), suggesting that spreading positive news, sharing information about socially acceptable behaviors, praising and commending individuals, acknowledging their contributions compared to non-participants, and even engaging in casual chats to break the monotony are all forms of social support that enhance job performance. This can be naturally explained based on Affective Events Theory, which posits that positive emotional events lead to positive outcomes. It can also be explained in light of Social Exchange Theory, where individuals who receive social support through positive gossip seek to reciprocate by providing better performance. This result can also be attributed to the Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions, which emphasizes that positive emotions expand individuals' momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources (including physical, intellectual, social, and psychological resources), thus renewing their energy and driving them towards higher performance. This finding is consistent with Bai et al. (2021), who found that positive gossip positively impacts individual performance, as well as Dlamini et al. (2019).

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to empirical research on the link between organizational gossip and performance pressure that supports job performance besides the moderating role of coping between performance pressure and job performance. The study outcomes provide a comprehensive vision of how the faculties of Zagazig University can benefit from organizational gossip in providing a performance pressure that enhances job performance. The study emphasizes the importance of the faculties of Zagazig University consciously analyzing working conditions, which urges them to make more efforts to take advantage of organizational gossip in providing a performance pressure that achieves high job performance of faculties members in Zagazig University.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

The current study contributes to several aspects:

First: The study employed various theories to develop and interpret the results. It used the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, under which individuals exposed to negative gossip strive not to exhaust their limited resources, thereby lowering their job performance. According to the Social Processing Theory, the spread of negative organizational gossip leads to increased work pressure due to employees' fear of eventually becoming gossip targets. This is positively related to job performance as employees aim to protect and maintain their job positions. Furthermore, the Social Information Processing (SIP) Theory provides employees with useful signals for interpreting reality. When employees receive and process these signals, it helps them adjust their behavior to meet job demands, as explained by the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model. This model suggests that job resources—such as physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects—can help employees achieve their goals and develop personally, mitigating the stress caused by job demands like workload and time pressure, as well as workplace gossip, which is a component of the work environment. Hence, job resources can offset the harmful effects of job demands, leading employees to engage in higher performance to preserve job resources in response to performance pressure, which is a job demand. Social Exchange Theory (SET) reinforces the principle of reciprocity: when one party benefits another, an implicit obligation of reciprocal benefit arises in the future. Thus, SET complements COR by preventing the depletion of individual internal resources and enabling future resource exchange between the individual and the organization.

Performance pressure and job performance are also connected by the Stress-Coping Theory, where the individual assesses cognitive pressure and determines coping mechanisms through two processes: primary appraisal,

which identifies whether the pressure from negative gossip constitutes a threat or a challenge and evaluates its impact on their well-being, and secondary appraisal, which evaluates how to cope with the pressure using various strategies, positive or negative (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Both primary and secondary appraisals are crucial intermediaries in stressful relationships between individuals and their environment and their immediate and long-term outcomes (Hilal, 2023).

Cognitive appraisal theory, a significant perspective for generating emotional experiences, suggests that emotions arise in response to the appraisal of the implications of circumstances for personal well-being (Smith & Kirby, 2009). This theory is based on self-assessment when faced with negative actions, considering it an indicator of threat evaluation. Therefore, viewing oneself as a target of negative gossip is likely to mitigate the impact of experiencing negative actions, and it is better when the individual perceives no threat, allowing the experience to pass without effect (Magley et al., 1999). The significance of the attribution individuals make to negative actions is crucial, especially when the action's interpretation is ambiguous (Bowling & Beehr, 2006). For example, targets of repeated work-related criticisms may see it as an aspect of performance management (Samnani et al., 2013). This may lead to increased performance to avoid such criticisms, as confirmed by Hewett et al. (2016), who noted that some negative work-related actions might lead to higher performance if individuals do not perceive the actions as bullying. Conversely, the Theory of Emotional Events suggests that positive gossip leads to positive job performance outcomes. Additionally, COR theory supports this effect as positive signals and meanings in positive gossip can compensate for the resources depleted during job performance. The Broaden-and-Build Theory of Positive Emotions also supports this by emphasizing that positive emotions expand individuals' momentary thought-action repertoires and build their enduring personal resources (physical, intellectual, social, and psychological), renewing their energy and driving them towards higher performance.

Second: The current study highlights the importance of a balanced view of both positive and negative gossip, filling a gap in the literature. Previous studies in organizational gossip focused primarily on negative gossip, with few addressing positive gossip separately or both together, relying on the negative bias theory. This theory suggests that if both positive and negative gossip are presented together, negative gossip tends to be more prominent due to the principle of negative dominance, which states that negative information or experiences outweigh positive ones. This is rooted in the concept that "bad is stronger than good" (Hewett et al., 2016). Negative gossip following positive gossip nullifies the positive impact. Despite positive gossip being linked to beneficial relational outcomes like trust in colleagues and effective social and emotional support, negative gossip is associated with adverse

outcomes such as withholding crucial information, engaging in abusive workplace behaviors, or excluding individuals from the group (Kuo et al., 2018). Yao et al. (2020) confirmed this by stating that trust between the gossip target and the source could be easily broken by negative gossip, regardless of the positive gossip's impact. The study calls for considering both types of gossip, and acknowledging their overall prevalence (Tan et al., 2020). The current study separately addressed both types of gossip and found that the indirect effect of negative gossip on job performance is stronger than the direct effect of positive gossip, although the difference is minimal, suggesting the need to enhance positive gossip. No organization can succeed without the exchange of encouraging and appreciative comments, as these are essential motivational tools.

Third: The study examined the impact of organizational gossip from an individual perspective. The triadic theory of gossip (Dores Cruz et al., 2021) identifies three distinct roles in gossip exchanges: the gossiper (sender), the gossip recipient (listener), and the absent colleague (target). Since all employees are involved in gossip exchange, they rotate roles within this triad. Therefore, this study and previous research cannot separate the three parties, but they can distinguish the outcomes as individual (Ellwardt et al., 2012a), relational/group (Bai et al., 2019; Langlinais & Houghton, 2019; Ellwardt et al., 2012c), and organizational levels (Grosser et al., 2012; Locklear et al., 2020). The current study focused on the individual level (job performance).

Fourth: The study found that separately considering performance pressure and coping leads to better outcomes under the Stress-Coping Theory or transactional model, as opposed to studies that treated performance pressure alone as a mediator between negative gossip and job performance (Tan et al., 2021).

6.2 Managerial Practical Implications

The current study provides important insights for officials at Al-Zagazig Governmental University, including:

1. The study found that the direct impact of negative gossip on performance is negative, while the indirect impact through performance pressure is positive. This underscores the need for officials to be attentive to the spread of negative gossip and to seek to provide controls (constraints/punishments) that undermine its dissemination opportunities and incentives, thereby allowing workers exposed to negative gossip pressure the opportunity to reconcile between succumbing to the psychological state associated with negative gossip or striving to perform their job to avoid the risks of performance decline, resulting in loss of gains (incentives). Therefore, officials should ensure, at the time of sensing the spread of negative gossip, to provide workers with additional

resources to maintain their resources that may be depleted when exposed to negative gossip (such as compensation).

2. The study found that the direct relationship between performance pressure and job performance is positive, while the indirect relationship between them is stronger and more positive through the moderated role of coping. This calls for officials to focus on supporting various coping strategies by adopting policies and procedures that facilitate positive coping opportunities, such as addressing pressures through radical solutions to reduce their intensity in some cases, and others through emotion or even ensuring the provision of compensations in the form of material and moral incentives. This is because the positive impact of performance pressure may be short-term if not accompanied by the activation of appropriate coping strategies due to resource depletion.
3. The study found that positive gossip has a positive effect on job performance, highlighting the important role of positive gossip in creating social enjoyment, and entertainment, breaking boredom, and satisfying some emotional and social needs for some individuals (Martinescu, et al., 2019). This requires managers to provide means that allow for the spread of positive gossip under the management's supervision in light of the cost-benefit theory in a manner that does not constitute a waste of time (cost) and achieves social benefits through entertainment (return).
4. The current study concluded that both positive and negative organizational gossip have a positive effect on job performance, and it is the responsibility of officials to maximize their use as tools for disseminating desirable standards among organization members, considering negative gossip sometimes warning signs for organizational change (Lee & Barnes, 2020; Giuliani, 2016). It has been strongly emphasized (Brady, et al., 2017) that the spread of rumors, carrying the opinions and intentions of circulating employees, is one of the most important reasons for officials losing their jobs due to rumors sometimes. Additionally, it can be used as a litmus test for the desire to make decisions feared by management for employees' reactions towards them, meaning employing it to serve their purposes in the organization (e.g., Lee & Barnes, 2020; Martinescu, et al., 2019; Beersma & Kleef, 2011), emphasizing the need to use and exploit gossip as a diagnostic tool for the manager, providing him with information about troubling issues on time, ultimately enhancing organizational values (Smet, et al., 2016). Furthermore, it can be used to increase learning and collaboration opportunities to maintain group standards or avoid ostracism (Wu, et al., 2015).

5. The study revealed that both positive and negative organizational gossip have a positive effect on job performance. Based on the importance of gossip in shaping and organizing groups, striving to remove gossip from the organization's social environment is impractical in practice (Martinescu, et al., 2019). This calls for abandoning the negative view directed towards gossip. Thus, the real challenge seems to be the emergence of a positive intellectual school that believes in its benefits and adopts positive views about it, revealing its important role in the social organization of work and presenting positive perspectives that protect gossip in the organization (Waddington, 2011), emphasizing the necessity for management to have an appropriate level of control over it in terms of its volume and quality to avoid its negative consequences.
6. Providing mechanisms and procedures to facilitate appropriate alignment between the chosen coping strategy and pressure sources by issuing penalties for those proven to be sources of annoyance and dissemination of negative information in the workplace, considering it a lesson for others, thus collaborating with management to solve the problem. Sometimes, additional benefits may be provided to alleviate the individual's suffering from abuse, reflecting assistance to employees in emotional coping.

6.3 Limitations and Future Studies

This study contains some limitations that create opportunities for future research:

- 1- The current study examined rumors within organizational gossip using an approach that considers them synonymous. Indeed, some consider gossip and rumors interchangeable and advocate for their integration into a single category (Haeupler et al., 2015). Several researchers have indicated that many instances of social exchange can simultaneously be considered examples of both gossip and rumors. Additionally, both phenomena often pass through the same channels or parties (HİMMETOĞLU et al., 2020; Liff & Wikström, 2021). Moreover, in some instances, it is impossible to separate rumors from gossip when the rumors are from an unidentified source (Beersma et al., 2018). Some argue that gossip and rumors frequently overlap, leading to confusion between the two; thus, the interplay between these concepts cannot be ignored, as it becomes evident when citing examples of each in individuals' daily contexts, prompting some to stress the necessity of distinguishing between rumors and gossip (Ferrari, 2015). Therefore, further studies could be proposed to separately address rumors and organizational gossip.

- 2- The current study presented a model of organizational gossip based on the individual level, despite experts in organizational behavior adopting a three-level integrated model to classify and explain phenomena in organizations (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2015; Nadler & Tushman, 1980). This model, sometimes referred to as the comprehensive framework for diagnosing organizational systems, includes three levels: individual, relational/group, and organizational. The individual level is the most detailed, encompassing psychological phenomena resulting from an individual's work experiences. The relational level involves psychological phenomena based on workplace relationships, including interpersonal trust and social support. Finally, the organizational level is the most comprehensive, incorporating phenomena such as organizational climate and justice. The current study suggests further research that offers a comprehensive model across all three levels instead of focusing on a subset of organizational life, allowing for the integration of organizational phenomena at all levels. Additionally, it suggests studying its impact on overall job performance in light of the cost-benefit theory, given the positive gossip's association with potential time-wasting (cost) and increased job performance (benefit), inviting verification of the overall impact in the context of cost-benefit theory.
- 3- The current study focused on the overall impact of organizational gossip on job performance without distinguishing between its core and additional roles.
- 4- The study was limited to examining the impact of both positive and negative organizational gossip on employee performance. It could be expanded to measure its effects on cooperation and the realization of gossip's social functions (friendship, enjoyment, breaking boredom, etc.). Additionally, it could propose studying its impact on negative aspects such as intentions to leave, ostracism, or social undermining to gain a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon from various perspectives, addressing the limited scope of studies in general and within the Arab context in particular.
- 5- The current study considered performance pressure as a mediating variable in the relationship between negative gossip and job performance while neutralizing the idea of other sources of pressure such as organizational conflict and role conflict. It is necessary to consider this before generalizing the results.
- 6- The study approached coping generally as a rate in the relationship between performance pressure and job performance. However, there are various coping strategies, both positive and negative. Future studies could be proposed to determine the impact of each type of coping strategy on job performance using the same model. Furthermore, studying the

impact of different coping strategies on perceived social support could help determine the extent to which satisfaction or dissatisfaction persists in the long term.

- 7- Naturally, the current study addresses a topic where different religions agree on prohibiting its negative aspects. Thus, future studies could extend to include various cultures within the Arab world or European countries in the same field or even different fields to understand the impact of cultural differences on the results. Consequently, the study may open the door for comparative studies with Arab and European cultures, supporting the gap regarding the varying impact of different cultures on job performance, which could explain certain phenomena in multinational organizations that may employ workers from diverse cultures with different religious beliefs.
- 8- The study was limited to the assistants of faculty members at Zagazig University, one of the Egyptian public universities. Therefore, the study model could be applied in other Egyptian universities and compared or even applied in private universities and compared with the results of the model in public universities. This may contribute to increasing the chances of generalizing the results.

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