

The relationship between negative workplace gossip and organizational citizenship behavior: An explanation from social exchange theory

Ziyan Cui

Beijing Normal University, Beijing, China

201711260249@mail.bnu.edu.cn

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Abstract: Negative workplace gossip is a common workplace violence in Chinese organizational situations, but scholars have not paid enough attention to the relationship between negative workplace gossip and the employees' attitude and behavior from the target's perspective. Applying social exchange theory, this study examined the relationship between negative workplace gossip and organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) by focusing on the mediating role of target's affective commitment and the moderating role of target's independent self-construal. 257 employees from 8 Chinese companies were investigated for empirical analysis, and results showed that: (1) Negative workplace gossip was negatively related to OCB; (2) Affective commitment mediated this relationship; (3) Independent self-construal moderated both the relationship between negative workplace gossip and affective commitment and the indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on OCB via affective commitment. These findings explain the underlying mechanism and boundary condition of the effect of negative gossip on the target, and provide useful practical implications for managers.

1. Introduction

Nowadays, workplace violence has become an increasingly frequent and serious problem in organizations with the fierce competition. Workplace "cold violence", such as workplace ostracism and workplace incivility, does not include obvious direct offense, but negatively affects the target's health conditions and work performance (Lim et al., 2008). Negative workplace gossip, as a kind of workplace "cold violence", constitutes an important part of organizational life (Kniffin and Wilson, 2010). It refers to the informal and evaluative discussion of negative personal information or the spreading of rumors about another member in the organization who is not present (e.g., discussing a colleague's poor performance) (Kurland and Pelled, 2000; Chandra and Robinson, 2009). Negative gossip can be quickly spread and become more twisted and malicious (Bok, 1989). Employees can easily sense that they have become targets of negative gossip because they perceive an unnatural behavior or attitude of others, but it is difficult for them to identify the source due to their absence in the discussing or spreading process. (Robinson and Bennett, 1995; Foster, 2004; de Gouveia et al., 2005). Therefore, negative workplace gossip is an issue managers and researchers should pay great attention to.

Existing literature of negative workplace gossip mainly focus on its antecedents (McAndrew et al., 2007; Ellwardt et al., 2012) and its influence on gossipers (Waddington and Fletcher, 2005; Grosser et al., 2010), with little attention devoted to its impact on targets. Based on reputation theory and organizational-based self-esteem theory, Chandra and Robinson (2009) found that targets of negative workplace gossip suffer emotional distress and damaged reputation. Recently, scholars have begun to pay attention to the influence of negative workplace gossip on positive work behavior of the targets. Social identity theory (Ye et al., 2019), self-verification theory (Wu et al., 2018; Kong, 2018), conservation of resource theory (Wu et al., 2018) have been applied to explain the impact of negative workplace gossip on organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) and proactive behavior. However, the relationship between negative workplace gossip and positive work behavior still needs to be

further examined, and there are still many potential mechanisms to be explored. For example, social exchange theory can be applied to enrich the literature on negative workplace gossip and provide a deeper insight for management practice.

According to social exchange theory, there are economic exchange and social exchange relationship between individuals and organizations (Blau, 1964). As an important content and result of social exchange, affective commitment can be regarded as the cost of employees which can be affected by the emotional reward from the organization. Studies have pointed out that emotional state plays an extremely important role in individual behavior (Dong et al., 2014). For example, damaged affective commitment can predict employees' negative work behavior (Meyer et al., 1993). Negative workplace gossip is likely to reduce the quality of target's affective commitment and further decrease the motivation to engage in OCB. Therefore, this study will examine the mediating role of affective commitment.

Self-construal reflects how individuals view the relationship between themselves and others. Individuals with independent self-construal tend to pay more attention to themselves and ignore others' evaluation (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). The millennial generation, the main force in today's organizations, shows higher self-consciousness and achievement motivation in terms of personality trait (Ng et al., 2010), so they are more likely to have independent self-construal. Does independent self-construal affect how employees react to negative workplace gossip? This study will examine the moderating role of independent self-construal.

In sum, this study makes three contributions to the literature. First, by drawing on social exchange theory, this study extends the literature on negative workplace gossip and provides a new theoretical framework to explore the influence of negative workplace gossip on targets' work attitude and behavior. Second, the investigation of the mediating role of affective commitment enriches the underlying mechanism through which negative workplace gossip affects OCB. Finally, by examining the moderating effect of independent self-construal, this study reveals a new boundary condition for the effects of negative workplace gossip and enrich the study of self-construal.

2. Problem analysis

2.1 Negative workplace gossip and organizational citizenship behavior

According to social exchange theory, when individuals gain trust, respect and support in the process of interpersonal interaction, they will give back based on the principle of reciprocity, otherwise they will not (Cropanzanp and Mitchell, 2005). Negative workplace gossip, as a workplace "cold violence", is a negative factor which can damage the exchange relationship between employees and organization, and therefore has negative impact on employee behavior. For example, negative workplace gossip damages their social image and reputation in the organization with invasion of privacy, so targets will feel ostracized or hostile by other group members (Duffy et al., 2010). Besides, targets will lose their trust to others, which will lead to mutual suspicion and non-cooperation among employees. In this case, employees will be immersed in negative feelings towards the organization and its members.

Organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) refers to the discretionary behavior of employees that is not explicitly or directly recognized by the organization's formal reward system and that is beneficial to the promote effective functioning of the organization (Bateman and Organ, 1983). Since the targets of negative workplace gossip are generally impossible to exactly identify which members of the organization initiated or participated in the spread of negative gossip, their response to negative gossip would aim at the organization instead of specific gossipers. Compared with reducing job performance, withholding OCB is preferable, as the latter can reduce the risk of organization punishment (Zellars et al., 2002).

Studies have shown that negative workplace gossip is negatively related to positive work behavior in organizations. Wu et al. (2018) apply COR theory to suggest that negative workplace gossip is a work stressor which requires the targets to use their resources to cope with. The loss of resources will lead to the decrease of proactive behavior. Wu et al. (2018) propose that negative gossip in the

workplace can reduce OCB by affecting the target's self-concept. Ye et al. (2019) find that negative workplace gossip negatively influences OCB in the hospitality industry based on social identity theory. Therefore, based on the above analysis and existing researches, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

H1: Negative workplace gossip has a negative impact on organizational citizenship behavior.

2.2 The mediating role of affective commitment

The relationship between employees and organization can be regarded as a kind of social exchange relationship. As a dimension of organizational commitment, affective commitment reflects the degree of employees' emotional attachment to, identification with and involvement in the organization (Allen and Meyer, 1990). It also implies the existence of a positive social exchange relationship (Colquitt et al., 2007). Studies have found that affective commitment to the organization depends on the quality of the reciprocal exchange relationship between employees and the organization, and that the communication and interaction between employees can influence affective commitment (Meyer et al., 2002). Since employees being frequently gossiped cannot identify the source of negative workplace gossip, they will generate negative emotions and psychological impressions to the whole organization, which will break their positive exchange relationship with the organization. Existing studies also conclude that negative workplace gossip can lead to emotional exhaustion of the targets (Chandra and Robinson, 2009; Wu et al., 2018). Hence, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

H2a: Negative workplace gossip negatively influences employees' affective commitment to the organization.

If employees have a high degree of affective or emotional attachment to the organization, they will psychologically establish a bond with the organization, highly connect themselves with the organization and be willing to make contributions to the organization. In order to achieve the organizational goals, employees will try their best to perform tasks and put in extra efforts to help others, in other words, to perform organizational citizenship behavior (Meyer et al., 1993). On the contrary, if the employee's affective commitment is low, the emotional bond will be damaged. In this case, even if the employee continues to stay in the organization, he/she is not willing to contribute to the organization's goals or take the initiative to do something spontaneous for the organization. Studies have shown that affective commitment is related to employees' sense of connection with the organization and sense of responsibility, therefore influencing their OCB (Taylor et al., 2012). Hence, this paper proposes the following hypothesis.

H2b: Affective commitment to the organization positively influences employees' organizational citizenship behavior.

As perceived negative workplace gossip affects the quality of the reciprocal relationship between employees and the organization, employees' negative emotions towards the organization will be enhanced. Consequently, they will feel less emotional attachment and sense of belonging to the organization, which represents a reduction of affective commitment. This would further lead to the decrease of the targets' willingness to contribute to the organization and perform OCB. The model of workplace behavior based on a meta-analysis of panel studies suggests that job attitudes occur before and have a direct impact on job performance (Riketta, 2008). Yang (2012) finds that affective commitment mediates the relationship between human resource management practice and employees' OCB. Therefore, this paper proposes the following hypothesis.

H2: Affective commitment mediates the negative relationship between negative workplace gossip and organizational citizenship behavior.

2.3 The moderating role of independent self-construal

Self-construal, as a personality trait, refers to how individuals understand, define and construe themselves (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Self-construal can be divided into independent self-construal and interdependent self-construal according to individuals' view of themselves as independent individuals separated from others or as part of social network (Liu, 2011). Self-construal can influence a wide range of individual perceptions, processes and responses to situation (Holmvall

and Bobocel, 2008; Johnson et al., 2006). Previous studies have also shown that different targets will respond differently to gossip (Foster, 2004). Therefore, this study explores whether employees' independent self-construal influences the relationship between negative workplace gossip and OCB.

Individuals with high independent self-construal pursue uniqueness and self-actualization, behave in a distinctive way, and do not care about other people's evaluation. Their self-representation involves personal needs, rights and capacities (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, negative workplace gossip will not have a significant negative impact on their emotions, and employees may still maintain their original attitudes and behaviors, thus weakening the negative impact of negative workplace gossip on affective commitment to some extent. On the contrary, employees with low independent self-construal pay attention to the connection with others and seek the sense of belonging. Their self-representation is generally based on social relationship and interpersonal interaction. Therefore, negative workplace gossip will have a greater impact on their identification with and emotional attachment to the organization, thus greatly damage the exchange relationship with the organization. Empirical studies have found that in threatening situations, individuals with interdependent self-construal are more likely to generate fear of negative evaluation compared with those with independent self-construal (Li et al., 2018). Therefore, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

H3: Independent self-construal moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and affective commitment, such that the relationship is stronger for employees with low levels of independent self-construal than for those with high levels of independent self-construal.

Aligned with the arguments outlined above, this study proposes a model in which affective commitment serves as a mediator between negative workplace gossip and the targets' OCB. Moreover, the harmful effect of negative workplace gossip on affective commitment is stronger among targets who have a lower independent self-construal. When employees have a low independent self-construal, they care more about others evaluation are more likely to be influenced by negative workplace gossip, which will break their exchange relationship with the organization and decrease their affective commitment. This then reduces their OCB. Accordingly, this study proposes the following hypothesis.

H4: Independent self-construal of moderates the mediating effect of affective commitment on the relationship between negative workplace gossip and organizational citizenship behavior, such that the mediating effect is stronger for employees with low levels of independent self-construal than for those with high levels of independent self-construal.

A graphical representation of the hypotheses is illustrated in Figure 1.

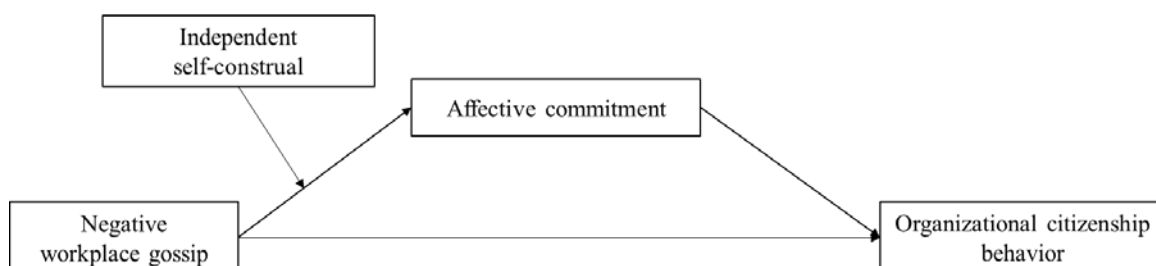


Figure 1 The conceptual model of this research

3. Model Establishment

3.1 Sample and procedures

The data for this study were collected from 8 Chinese enterprises in 3 major cities in China, among which 3 are financial enterprises, 2 are Internet enterprises and 2 are communication service enterprises, and 1 is aerospace science and technology enterprise. Questionnaires were distributed and collected online. Three waves of data were collected to reduce the likelihood of common method bias (Podsakoff et al. 2003). In the first-wave survey (T1), the employees provided demographic information, and rated their perceptions of workplace negative gossip and independent self-construal.

In the second-wave survey (T2), which was conducted 1 month after T1, the employees reported their affective commitment in the past month. In the third-wave survey (T3), which was conducted 1 month after T2, the employees reported their OCB in the past month. To keep in touch with respondents, the questionnaire collected their phone number and e-mail address.

323 valid employee questionnaires were collected in the first wave of the survey. In the second wave, which took place 1 month later, 292 valid employee questionnaires were collected. The effective response rate for the wave-two survey was 90.40%. Finally, in the third wave, which took place 1 month after the wave-two survey, 257 valid employee questionnaires were collected, which constituted the basis for the analysis. The effective response rate for the wave-two survey was 88.01%. The basic information statistics of the sample are shown in the table 1.

Table 1 Sample basic information statistics (N=257)

Category	Feature	sample size	proportion (%)
Gender	male	128	49.81
	female	129	50.19
Age	Under 25	36	14.01
	26-30	158	61.48
	31-35	63	24.51
Organizational tenure	<1 year	41	15.95
	1-4years	76	29.57
	4-7years	72	28.02
	7-10years	36	14.01
	>10years	32	12.45
Education	Junior college degree or below	21	8.17
	Bachelor degree	191	74.32
	Postgraduate degree or above	45	17.51

3.2 Measures

In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement tools, this study selected the mature scales published in foreign top journal papers. Because all measurement scales used in this study were created in English, this study translated all measurements into Chinese using Brislin (1980) translation procedure to ensure equivalency of meaning. All responses were measured on a 6-point Likert-type scale with strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (6) as the anchors.

(1) Negative workplace gossip: Chandra and Robinson's (2009) three-item scale was adopted. A sample item was: "In the past six months, others (e.g., coworkers and/or supervisors) communicated damaging information about me in the workplace." Cronbach's alpha was 0.95.

(2) Affective commitment: Allen and Meyer's (1990) six-item scale was adopted. A sample item was: "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me." Cronbach's alpha was 0.97.

(3) Organizational citizenship behavior: The twenty-item scale developed based on Chinese organizational situation by Farh et al. (1997) was used. A sample item was: "I am willing to stand up to protect the reputation of the company." Cronbach's alpha was 0.95.

(4) Independent self-construal: Independent self-construal was measured with twelve-item scale developed by Singelis (1994). However, in this study, it was found that the CITC value of the two reverse questions was less than 0.5, and Cronbach's alpha if item deleted was greater than the current overall value. This may be because the two reverse questions are the common value orientations

observed in Chinese culture, and individual characteristics cannot be distinguished. In order to improve the reliability of the research results, this study measured the independent self-construal with the 10-item scale. A sample item was: “I believe that people should be unique and different from others.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.86.

(5) Control variables: Besides key variables, this study took employees’ gender, age, tenure and education as control variables.

3.3 Research Results

3.3.1 Common method bias test and confirmatory factor analysis

First, the Harman single-factor test was used to test common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). The exploratory factor analysis was conducted and the explained variance 31.69% (less than 40%) by the first factor is within the acceptance range (Ashford and Tsui, 1991). Therefore, there is no serious common method bias in this study.

Then, a series of confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to examine the discriminate and convergent validity of key variables. The baseline model included all four variables. the fit indices indicated that the four-factor model was a good fit for the data ($\chi^2/df=2.38$, CFI=0.93, GFI=0.94, IFI=0.93, TLI=0.91, RMSEA=0.08), and confirmed that it was significantly better than alternative models. The discriminate validity of the four constructs in this study was thus demonstrated. The convergent validity was verified by the significance of all factor loadings. As Table 2 shows.

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis for the measures of variables studied

model	χ^2	df	χ^2/df	RMSEA	RMR	CFI	GFI	IFI	TLI
Four-factor model	363.79	153	2.38	0.08	0.08	0.93	0.94	0.93	0.91
Three-factor model	469.59	154	3.05	0.09	0.09	0.88	0.87	0.86	0.83
Two- factor model	825.10	171	4.83	0.14	0.14	0.78	0.78	0.78	0.75
One- factor model	1365.05	176	7.76	0.18	0.18	0.64	0.64	0.64	0.62

Note: Four-factor model (negative workplace gossip, affective commitment, OCB, independent self-construal); Three-factor model (negative workplace gossip and affective commitment were combined into one factor); Two-factor model (negative workplace gossip and affective commitment were combined into one factor, OCB and independent self-construal were combined into another factor); One-factor model (All variables were combined into one factor).

3.3.2 Descriptive statistics

As shown in Table 3, negative workplace gossip was negatively correlated with OCB ($r=-0.46$, $p<0.01$) and affective commitment ($r=-0.27$, $p<0.01$). In addition, affective commitment and OCB were positively correlated ($r=0.72$, $p<0.01$). The above results provide preliminary support for the hypothesis of this study. The means, standard deviations and correlations of all variables in this study are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis results of variables studied (N=257)

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Gender	1.50	0.50								
2. Age	2.11	0.61	-0.06							
3. Organizational tenure	2.77	1.23	-0.07	0.43**						
4. Education	2.09	0.50	-0.12	-0.19**	-0.10					
5. Negative workplace gossip	1.61	1.08	-0.19**	0.05	-0.04	0.06	(0.95)			
6. OCB	5.25	0.83	0.17**	0.05	0.17**	-0.09	-0.46**	(0.95)		
7. Affective commitment	4.77	1.34	0.05	0.05	0.29**	-0.11	-0.27**	0.72**	(0.97)	
8. Independent self-construal	3.98	1.03	-0.10	0.05	0.19	-0.03	-0.22**	0.57**	0.60**	(0.86)

Note: ** $p < 0.01$; Gender: 1 means male, 2 means female; age: 1 means under 25, 2 means 26-30, 3 means 31-35; Organizational tenure: 1 means under 1 year, 2 means 1-4 years, 3 means 4-7 years, 4 means 7-10 years, 5 means more than 10 years; Education: 1 means junior college degree or below, 2 means bachelor degree, 3 means postgraduate degree and above. The numbers in brackets represent

the Cronbach's alpha of the corresponding scale.

3.3.3 Hypothesis testing

In this study, hierarchical regression analysis was used to test the research hypotheses. Hypotheses 1 predicted that negative workplace gossip negatively influences employees' OCB. To test Hypotheses 1, this study first entered control variables (gender, age, education and organization tenure), followed by the independent variable (negative workplace gossip) in the second step. negative workplace gossip produced a significant negative impact on OCB (M6, $\beta = -0.421$, $p < 0.001$). Therefore, Hypothesis 1 was supported. As shown in Table 4.

Table 4 Results of hypotheses testing (N=257)

Variables	Affective commitment				Organizational citizenship behavior			
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7	M8
Gender	0.062	0.022	0.077	0.079	0.183**	0.112*	0.138**	0.098*
Age	-0.089	-0.071	-0.087	-0.088	-0.012	0.018	0.052	0.065
Education	-0.115	-0.100	-0.094	-0.095	-0.071	-0.045	0.013	0.021
Organizational tenure	0.306***	0.293***	0.222***	0.219***	0.159*	0.136*	0.062	0.056
Negative workplace gossip		-0.240***	-0.111**	-0.094*		-0.421***		-0.264***
Affective commitment							0.724***	0.657***
Independent self-construal			0.560***	0.561***				
Negative workplace gossip × Independent self-construal				-0.046**				
F	6.911***	9.151***	33.219***	28.572***	4.303**	15.368***	58.178***	62.356***
R2	0.099	0.154	0.444	0.445	0.064	0.234	0.537	0.599
ΔR^2	0.099	0.055	0.289	0.002	0.064	0.170	0.473	0.365

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relationship between negative workplace gossip and employees' OCB is mediated by affective commitment. This study tested the mediating effect of affective commitment according to the stepwise analysis method proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). As shown in Table 4, firstly, negative workplace gossip had a significant negative impact on OCB (M6, $\beta = -0.421$, $p < 0.001$); secondly, negative workplace gossip had a significant negative impact on affective commitment (M2, $\beta = -0.240$, $p < 0.001$); thirdly, affective commitment had a significant positive correlation with OCB (M7, $\beta = 0.724$, $p < 0.001$); finally, after the entry of affective commitment into regression, affective commitment had a significant positive influence on OCB (M8, $\beta = 0.657$, $p < 0.001$), while negative workplace gossip on OCB still had significant negative effects, but the effect was reduced (M8, $\beta = 0.264$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that affective commitment played a partial mediating role between negative workplace gossip and OCB, and hypothesis 2 was supported.

To further confirm the existence of the mediation effect, this study adopted PROCESS developed by Preacher and Hayes (2004). Specifically, this study opted for Model 4 analysis in PROCESS with a 5000 resample bootstrap method to generate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals for indirect effects. The indirect influence of negative workplace gossip on OCB through affective commitment was significant and negative (estimate = -0.1184, 95% CI = [-0.2602, -0.1356]). Hypothesis 2 was supported again. As shown in table 5.

Table 5 Results of mediating effect analysis

The mediating path	Estimate	Direct effect 95% CI	Indirect effect 95% CI
Negative workplace gossip → Affective commitment → OCB	-0.1184	[-0.3996, -0.2330]	[-0.2602, -0.1356]

Hypothesis 3 predicted that independent self-construal moderates the relationship between negative workplace gossip and affective commitment. To examine Hypothesis 3, this study

conducted a four-step regression analysis. The control variables were entered in the first step, followed by the independent variable (negative workplace gossip) and the moderator (independent self-construal) in the second and third steps. The interaction between negative workplace gossip and independent self-construal was entered in the fourth step. As shown in Table 4, the interaction had significant negative effects on affective commitment (M4, $\beta = -0.046$, $p < 0.01$). Following the procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991), this study conducted the simple slope test and plotted a moderating effect graph. negative workplace gossip was more negatively related to affective commitment when the level of independent self-construal was low ($\beta = -0.104$, $p < 0.001$) rather than high ($\beta = -0.010$, $p < 0.001$). Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported. As shown in figure 2.

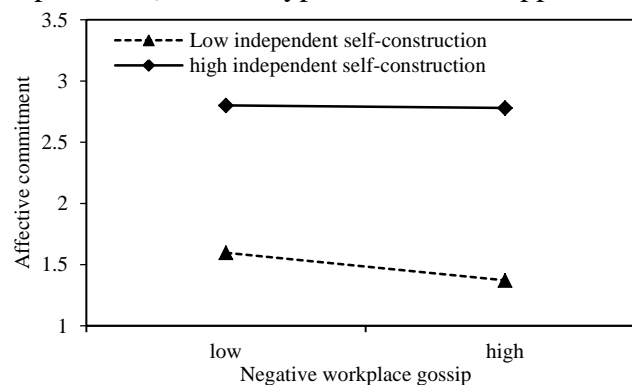


Figure 2 Interactive effects of negative workplace gossip and independent self-construal on affective commitment

Hypothesis 4 predicted that independent self-construal moderates the indirect negative effect of negative workplace gossip on OCB through affective commitment. This study examined the conditional indirect link between negative workplace gossip and OCB via affective commitment at higher (M+1 SD) and lower (M-1 SD) values of independent self-construal. The conditional association between negative workplace gossip and OCB through affective commitment was significant when independent self-construal was low ($B = -0.0640$, $SE = 0.0345$, $95\% CI = [-0.1357, -0.0507]$), which was stronger than when it was high ($B = -0.0130$, $SE = 0.0211$, $95\% CI = [-0.0781, -0.0029]$). Overall, the difference in the indirect effect was significant ($B = 0.0510$, $SE = 0.0328$, $95\% CI = [0.0115, 0.1210]$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported. As indicated in Table 6.

Table 6 Results of the moderated path analysis

Independent self-construal	B	SE	95% CI
Low independent self-construal (M -1 SD)	-0.0640	0.0345	[-0.1357, -0.0507]
High independent self-construal (M+1 SD)	-0.0130	0.0211	[-0.0781, -0.0029]
Difference between high and low	0.0510	0.0328	[0.0115, 0.1210]

4. Conclusion

In this study, a multi-phase survey was conducted to examine the effect of negative workplace gossip on target employees' OCB. Based on social exchange theory, this study found that employees' affective commitment serves as a mediator in the negative relationship between negative workplace gossip and OCB. Specifically, negative workplace gossip impairs target employees' affective commitment, which in turn undermines their OCB. Moreover, results suggest that employees' independent self-construal moderates the indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on OCB. That is, the detrimental impact of negative workplace gossip on affective commitment, and the mediating impact of affective commitment on the indirect effect of negative workplace gossip on OCB via affective commitment, such that the impact will be stronger among employees with low independent self-construal than among those with high independent self-construal.

4.1 Theoretical implications

First, this study extends the literature on negative workplace gossip and provides a new theoretical framework to explore its influence on the work attitude and behavior of targets. Employees' affective commitment can predict various job attitudes and behaviors including turnover intention (Stinglhamber and Vandenberghe, 2003), innovation behavior (Ng et al., 2010) and silence behavior (Zhu and Xie, 2018). According to the relationship between negative workplace gossip and affective commitment, these job attitudes and behaviors can be potential outcome variables of negative workplace gossip. Therefore, this study offers a useful model for future research on the outcomes of workplace negative gossip and expands future research direction of negative workplace gossip.

Second, the investigation of the mediating role of affective commitment adds to the knowledge of the underlying mechanism through which negative workplace gossip affects OCB. Previous studies mainly focus on social identity theory (Ye et al., 2019), self-verification theory (Wu et al., 2018; Kong, 2018), conservation of resource theory (Wu et al., 2018) to explore the outcome variables of negative workplace gossip including job performance, proactive behavior and OCB. Based on the social exchange theory, this study shows that negative workplace gossip can inhibit OCB by damaging the affective exchange between employees and the organization, thus providing a new theoretical perspective for the future research on the relationship between negative workplace gossip and OCB.

Finally, this study identifies a boundary condition of the influence of negative workplace gossip. Independent self-construal as an individual characteristic which can affect employees' sensitivity to negative workplace gossip, has not been studied in gossip literature. This study demonstrated that when employees' independent self-construal was low, negative workplace gossip had a greater negative impact on their affective commitment and, in turn, their OCB. This helps to understand what factors might mitigate or exacerbate gossip's effects (Foster, 2004), supplement the research framework of negative workplace gossip and enrich the study of self-construal.

4.2 Managerial implications

First, this study shows that negative workplace gossip can inhibit employees' OCB, so enterprises and managers should regard negative gossip as a kind of indirect mistreatment and take measures to reduce negative workplace gossip as much as possible. Organizations should establish effective channels for information exchange and communication to prevent the spread of negative gossip, as employees to use the informal gossip to communicate and convey information in an organization lack of formal communication channels (Foster, 2004). In addition, organizational norms and culture can inhibit negative workplace gossip (Michelson et al., 2010). Therefore, managers should strengthen the supervision of employees' behavior and build a healthy and positive organizational culture.

Secondly, since employees' affective commitment plays a mediating role between negative workplace gossip and OCB, managers should pay attention to the promotion of employees' affective commitment. Therefore, enterprises should adhere to the people-oriented management concept, care about employees' feelings, treat them fairly and satisfy their needs for the sense of belonging and attachment to the organization, so that the emotional connection and bond between employees and the organization can be strengthened.

Finally, managers should pay attention to employees' individual differences and design effective management measures according to their characteristics and cognitive tendencies. Employees with low independent self-construal pay more attention to the evaluation of others on them, so managers should develop targeted psychological counseling plans for such employees to help them deal with negative emotions caused by negative workplace gossip, so as to avoid further negative impacts.

4.3 Limitations and future research directions

First, this study has limitations in the research design. Although this study adopted longitudinal study design to collect data at different points in time and tested common method bias, there are still

some problems because the data on negative workplace gossip, affective commitment and independent self-construal came from the same source (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Future research should also try to apply experimental methods to improve the accuracy and validity of results.

Second, there are other outcome variables, mechanisms and moderating variables worth exploring. In terms of outcome variables, future research can focus on other job attitudes and behaviors including emotional exhaustion, counterproductive behavior, workplace deviant behavior and innovation behavior, and consider whether negative workplace gossip has potential positive influences. In terms of mechanism, future study can apply social comparison theory, affective events theory and other theories to explore the impact of negative workplace gossip. In terms of moderating variables, other individual factors such as proactive personality, leadership factors such as authentic leadership and leader-member exchange as well as organizational factors such as justice climate can be investigated.

Third, this study only focuses on the impact of negative workplace gossip on target employees. In the future, the positive or negative influence of negative workplace gossip on the gossipers and the antecedents of negative workplace gossip (such as organizational politics) can be further explored. Exploring the forming and spreading mechanism of negative workplace gossip can also provide theoretical guidance for organizations to avoid negative workplace gossip.

Finally, since this study was conducted in the context of Chinese organizations, the findings may be China-specific and implications are mainly for Chinese employees and organizations. Different countries have differences in culture and individual characteristics. For example, western people tend to have independent self-construal instead of interdependent self-construal (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). Therefore, cross-cultural researches should be conducted in the future.

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