

# The dark side of co-worker friendship in the restaurant context: roles of gender and promotion focus

Co-worker  
friendship in  
restaurant

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper investigates the focal role of close co-worker friendship in reducing incivility. Furthermore, this paper examines negative workplace gossip as a mediator and gender and promotion focus as moderators.

**Design/methodology/approach** – Using a time-lagged approach, 553 full-service restaurant front-line co-workers in Greater Cairo responded. Further, the data were analyzed using SmartPLS v.4.

**Findings** – Promotion focus weakened close co-workers' friendships, causing them to speak negatively about each other with other co-workers. Multi-group analysis showed that males were more likely to spread negative gossip about their close co-workers and thus were subjected to incivility-related behaviors by their co-workers.

**Originality/value** – This paper is an early attempt to explore the focal role of promotion focus in the full-service restaurant context. This paper adds to affective events theory (AET) with a limited understanding of explaining and predicting co-worker incivility.

**Keywords** Co-worker friendship, Affective event theory, Gender, Negative gossip, Promotion focus, Incivility

**Paper type** Research paper

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## Introduction

Over the past 50 years, restaurant businesses have experienced significant growth (Khan *et al.*, 2023a), contributing billions of dollars to every country's global economy by employing millions of people in the restaurant network (Yadav and Dhar, 2021). International financing organizations from developing countries see investment in this sector as a viable strategy (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). However, restaurant practitioners recognize that in a highly competitive market (Selem *et al.*, 2023c). While some restaurant practitioners prioritize commercial outcomes over civilized behaviors of front-line employees, there is growing interest in creating an environmentally friendly work environment in the restaurant sector (Khan *et al.*, 2023c).

Front-line restaurant employees, particularly co-workers, are being studied for various reasons. First, the restaurant service requires constant employee-customer interaction (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022). Second, the restaurant industry is highly service-oriented, with employees' behavior changing regularly (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Co-worker friendship is an important concept that differs from other types of friendships in that it is voluntary and comprehensive (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). Hence, co-workers can establish workplace friendships, posing more interactive potential than those with individualized or highly supervised practices. The emergence of work-related problems, including problems with supervisors, leads to employees sourcing relevant support from their co-workers (Guo *et al.*, 2022), contributing to closer relationships (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022). Co-workers spend most of their time in the workplace in social discussions, where negative gossip can alter their focus (Khan *et al.*, 2023a).

In the context of co-worker friendship, gossip is a natural social phenomenon affecting people's hearts, minds, and actions (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). Gossip is an unavoidable social phenomenon affecting social settings. When two people communicate, incivility frequently arises (Khan *et al.*, 2023c), whether they are co-workers, supervisors, or customers (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022). Although empirical research on workplace incivility is expanding, the reasons behind co-worker incivility in the restaurant industry have not received much attention (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). Despite the ubiquity of unsavory behavior in the hospitality industry, workplace characteristics capable of mitigating its influence have yet to be researched. Ugwu *et al.* (2022) demonstrated that half of employees are perceived as leaving their occupations because some try to avoid troublemakers.

Despite existing studies on the moderating influence of promotion on co-worker friendship-incivility relationships (Neubert *et al.*, 2008), there is a significant gap in the literature. While previous research has highlighted the impact of a promotion-focused orientation on employee performance outcomes, particularly creativity, and willingness to assist others, it frequently overlooks the nuanced dynamics introduced by promotion focus to workplace interpersonal relationships. Our research fills this void by highlighting the potential negative impact of a promotion focus on co-worker friendships, in which individuals may prioritize personal advancement over nurturing close relationships. In addition, despite acknowledging the diversity among hotel employees (Boo *et al.*, 2013), the research landscape lacks an in-depth investigation of how gender moderates the relationship between negative gossip and co-worker incivility.

Our paper contributes to a more thorough understanding of complex workplace dynamics by introducing gender as a critical moderating factor in the co-worker friendship-incivility dynamic, paving the way for future investigations into the combined impact of promotion focus and gender on interpersonal relationships and incivility in diverse professional environments (Yadav and Dhar, 2021). The following questions are addressed in this paper: (1) To what extent does close co-worker friendship influence negative workplace gossip? (2) What role does negative workplace gossip play in developing and increasing workplace incivility? (3) To what extent does negative workplace gossip mediate the relationship between incivility and close co-worker friendship? (4) Does the relationship between co-

worker friendship and negative gossip differ depending on individual differences in promotion emphasis? (5) How does gender influence the relationship between workplace gossip and co-worker incivility?

Lastly, this paper contributes to the current knowledge on co-worker incivility influenced by negative gossip about close co-workers. First, negative gossip has rarely been discussed in other contexts. Thus, studying negative workplace gossip can predict hostile restaurant employee behavior (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022). Second, adding promotion focus and gender as moderators is the potential contribution of the study due to the increased importance of better service under the umbrella of affective events theory (AET). Accordingly, this paper adds to AET with a limited understanding of explaining and predicting co-worker incivility.

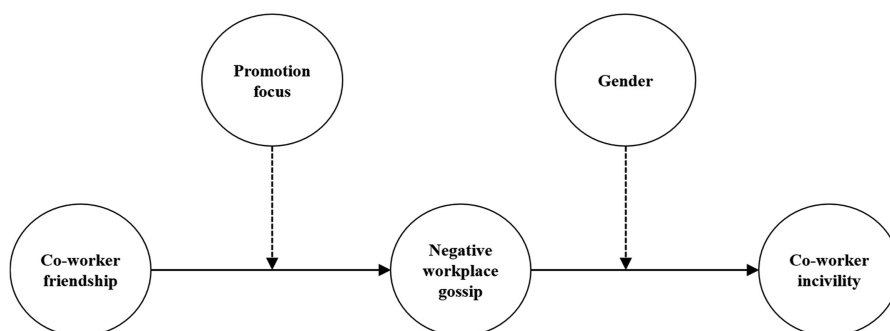
## Literature review

### *Underpinning theories*

In supporting our hypotheses, we utilized the AET introduced by Weiss and Cropanzano (1996). This theoretical framework has been previously applied in diverse contexts. While AET has been extensively employed in organizational studies to explain employee behavior, its application as a standalone theory for understanding individual behavior within the hospitality sector is relatively uncommon. AET posits that individuals' emotional states fluctuate over time, with work-related activities as immediate precursors. Moreover, it suggests that changes in a person's emotions can play a pivotal role in shaping behavioral responses (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). AET underscores the interplay between dispositional traits, situational factors, work-related events, and affective responses.

AET is also instrumental in examining co-worker friendship relationships and incivility in the hospitality industry (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). According to AET, the reciprocal relationship between individuals and their circumstances significantly influences their responses to events (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Previous research has demonstrated that co-worker friendship can induce lifestyle changes and foster social bonding, resulting in civil behaviors (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022). In our study, Employees who are the subject of unfavorable rumors at work struggle with an unethical workplace culture and run into unethical behaviors from close co-workers. Figure 1 illustrates the proposed links in our model, aiming to elucidate how co-worker friendship influences negative gossip and incivility among close co-workers in a restaurant setting.

Even though emotions play a crucial role in AET, this paper aimed to investigate how interpersonal dynamics and work-related events might cascade into negative workplace behaviors (Khan *et al.*, 2023a). Although our study does not explicitly measure emotions, we



Source(s): Prepared by authors

Figure 1.  
Proposed model

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believe that emotions are intrinsically linked to the notions being studied. For example, negative workplace gossip can elicit various emotional reactions, and co-worker incivility is probably affected by the emotional states of those engaged in the workplace (Selem *et al.*, 2023c).

#### *Co-worker friendship*

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Recognition of the significance of workplace relationships to organizational processes within the hospitality domain is well-established in hospitality scholarship (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022; Yang *et al.*, 2021). Co-worker friendship, a pertinent aspect of these relationships, emerges as workplace interactions between co-workers evolve into meaningful connections (Sias *et al.*, 2012). Potgieter (2019) diligently explored the initiation and progression of workplace friendships, emphasizing the impact of individual and environmental factors.

Khan *et al.* (2023c) assert that a combination of individual and environmental factors influences the development of co-worker friendships. Individual features, such as personality traits and perceived similarities, are crucial in forming these connections (Khan *et al.*, 2023a). Individuals naturally gravitate towards others with similar interests and exhibit admirable personalities (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). Furthermore, co-worker relationships often deepen when employees seek support from their colleagues during work-related challenges, fostering a more robust bond (Chen *et al.*, 2021).

This paper defines co-worker friendship based on individual characteristics (e.g. personality and perceived similarities) and environmental factors (e.g. work-life events, shared activities, and socializing). Throughout different phases of relationship formation, personal and contextual factors influence workplace friendships (Khan *et al.*, 2023a). Noteworthy elements contributing to initiating workplace relationships encompass proximity, perceived resemblance, shared tasks, personality traits, and social interactions—all relevant to this study's scope (Sias *et al.*, 2012).

#### *Negative workplace gossip*

In the absence of a third party, workplace gossip involves official and informal co-worker conversations (Sias *et al.*, 2012). Gossip is “evaluative” and maybe both positive and negative (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). A social comparison technique called gossip evaluates a person's characteristics. As a result, employees are said to utilize gossip as one of the fundamental techniques for empowering informal ties in organizations.

The severity of these informal interactions may promote or discourage cooperation inside formal work teams and across the whole business (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022). This paper focuses on negative workplace gossip since co-workers gossip negatively about each other due to the competition among them (Wu *et al.*, 2018; Potgieter, 2019). Negative workplace gossip is more about ridiculing co-workers and disrespecting their opinions through gossip.

Otherwise, negative workplace gossip can have comparable implications to victimization, such as restricting organizational achievement and sabotaging the basic psychological urge to belong (Cheng *et al.*, 2022). Employees who have been victimized often struggle to cognitively regulate their social surroundings by trusting other people (Brady *et al.*, 2017). Negative workplace gossip is an informal discourse about another co-worker who is not there.

Gossip and interpersonal friendship links are fundamental to informal organizational relationships (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). These links are vital to formal organizations since prior studies have shown that employees are more collaborative and effective when informal ties follow official contacts (Yang *et al.*, 2021). Drawing on AET, this relationship holds significant importance since negative workplace gossip is caused by negative emotions (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996); however, negative emotions may be reduced in the presence of a co-worker's friendship. Hence, this paper proposes that:

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H1. Close co-worker friendship negatively affects negative workplace gossip.

#### *Co-worker incivility*

Workplace incivility is characterized or defined as an increase in the exchange of activities between employees (Khan *et al.*, 2023c), leading to more severe behaviors like abusive behaviors, violence, noncompliance, or antisocial behaviors (Cortina *et al.*, 2001). While most examples of unproductive workplace behaviors focus on the perpetrators, research on workplace incivility focuses mainly on victims' negative job-related psychological and physical effects (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). However, research on antecedents is scarce.

Low-level interpersonal mistreatment constitutes impoliteness (Selem *et al.*, 2023a). Incivility would be at the lower end of a spectrum of psychological deviance's level or intensity if such a continuum existed (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). Accordingly, moderate-intensity hostility, such as unpleasant remarks and condescending language against a co-worker, would be considered impolite, while higher-intensity aggression would not. Cheng *et al.* (2022) argue that negative workplace gossip activates co-worker disparagement and increases stress. The AET principles can help us comprehend how an individual's internal variations of work-related event experiences (i.e. negative workplace gossip) throughout a day may potentially influence their subsequent behaviors (i.e. co-workers' incivility) (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). Hence, this paper proposes that:

H2. Negative workplace gossip positively affects co-worker incivility.

To answer the question, "How does co-worker incivility behave when friendship among front-line co-workers of a restaurant increases in the presence of negative workplace gossip?" We employed AET with various justifications to allow front-line restaurant employees to partake in workplace gossip depending on their relationships and interactions. We argue that employee behaviors are shaped by social settings, particularly those based on some event. These social situations include employee interpersonal relationships based on emotions (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). The hospitality sector is a competitive industry, and tasks are completed through interactions between people (Yang *et al.*, 2021). Employees come from various backgrounds, resulting in friendly exchange among multiple stakeholders (Ugwu *et al.*, 2022).

Co-worker friendships are established based on shared interests and lifestyles in these situations. This friendship in the hotel sector allows employees to engage with one another, and it is through this interaction that workplace gossip occurs (Chen *et al.*, 2021). Yang *et al.* (2021) argued that co-worker friendship significantly affects hotel employee behaviors. Most workplace gossip concentrates on the effect of a particular aspect of gossip on behavioral outcomes (Khan *et al.*, 2023c).

Chen *et al.* (2021) proposed that negative gossip about close co-workers has severe effects, such as undermining the fundamental psychological need to belong and encouraging co-worker incivility. According to Guo *et al.* (2022), employees subjected to gossip were less likely to have strong working connections with their co-workers and were more likely to quit their jobs. Therefore, this paper proposes that:

H3. Negative workplace gossip mediates the co-worker friendship-incivility relationship.

#### *Promotion focus and gender as moderators*

Our study hypothesizes moderating effects at two links to investigate the temporal dynamics of co-worker friendship and incivility. This choice is based on the contemporary nature of workplace processes and how different moderating factors may exert influence at various stages (Chang and Teng, 2017; Yadav and Dhar, 2021). Schabram *et al.* (2023) emphasize the importance of considering temporal variations in moderating effects within dynamic workplace settings.

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Self-regulation theory can explain the relationship between promotion focus and negative workplace gossip (Higgins, 1997). Promotion-seeking individuals are motivated by aspirations for advancement. A promotion-focused mindset in co-worker friendships may lead individuals to gossip to promote their goals or gain a competitive advantage (Ferris *et al.*, 2008). According to the literature on self-regulation and workplace behaviors, promotion focus can shape interpersonal interactions, including the spread of negative workplace gossip.

Schabram *et al.* (2023) and Yadav and Dhar (2021) argue that promotion-focused employees offer various potential solutions, whereas prevention-focused employees want to prevent destructive workplace behaviors. In sum, employees with a promotion focus evaluate the issue from different angles and develop various ideas to address it. For instance, promotion-focused co-workers may create negative emotions (e.g. selfish behaviors to get promotions) (Schabram *et al.*, 2023), leading them to gossip negatively with others about their immediate co-workers. Hence, we assume that:

*H4.* Promotion focus moderates the association between co-worker friendship and negative gossip.

Gender as a potential moderator of incivility stems from research on gender differences in communication styles and conflict resolution strategies (Selem *et al.*, 2023a). Gender may influence the perception and expression of incivility in workplace interactions, according to these studies. We believe that by including gender as a moderator, we can better understand how gender dynamics shape the occurrence and consequences of incivility among restaurant employees. Recent scholars argue that gender can influence individual appraisals of emotional reactions (Boo *et al.*, 2013; Yadav and Dhar, 2021). Men and women have distinct perspectives on work and life, which causes differences in their actions, accomplishments, and outputs (Guo *et al.*, 2022). Men are considered analytical, risk-taking, and choosy, while women are deemed unselfish, caring, and all-inclusive (Boo *et al.*, 2013).

Similarly, these gender variances are reflected in how people approach their work, formulate their strategies, and handle grievances (Selem *et al.*, 2023a). Generally, it is empirically supported that women tend to be more frequently subjected to uncivil behaviors than men (Cortina, 2008); however, organizational culture can play a crucial role in shaping the uncivil behaviors between men and women (Greer and Peters, 2022). For instance, organizations that actively embrace female participation may demonstrate lower incidences of uncivil behaviors compared to male-dominated environments (Saxena *et al.*, 2019). Hence, we assume that:

*H5.* Gender moderates the linkage between negative gossip and co-worker incivility.

## Methods

### *Research context*

Egypt is distinguished by its hospitality business and unique institutional environment characteristics (Selem *et al.*, 2023c). However, prior crises posed unprecedented obstacles to managing restaurants in Egypt, most related to employee behaviors (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). For instance, the negative approach to dealing with co-workers, such as bullying, gossip, ostracism, and moral harassment, whether verbal or sexual (Yang *et al.*, 2021), is still pending to address them as they stem from the inherent friendship among close co-workers in the Egyptian restaurant context.

### *Procedure and data collection*

The reverse translation procedure was utilized to convert the questionnaire into Arabic two weeks before data collection to fit the Egyptian dialect of full-service restaurant personnel in

Greater Cairo. Subsequently, six language specialists and industry experts translated this survey into English. The primary data was collected from workers on the same shift to confirm the existence of workplace friendships. We used simple random sampling to gather data from employees at 46 full-service restaurants in Greater Cairo. We chose this sampling method for two reasons: first, it is an excellent sampling method for this research methodology because it ensures that each restaurant in the population has an equal chance of being chosen. This method improves the sample's representativeness, permitting more generalizable findings about the larger population of restaurants.

We increase the likelihood that the characteristics of the selected restaurants reflect those of the entire restaurant population by using a random sampling technique, which improves the external validity. Second, simple random sampling reduces sampling bias, which is essential in research involving restaurant employees. This method aids in the avoidance of systematic errors in the selection process, ensuring that each restaurant has an equal chance of being included. This reduction in bias contributes to our findings' validity because the sample is less likely to over-represent or underrepresent specific types of restaurants, resulting in more accurate and unbiased insights into the issues confronting restaurant employees.

This city was chosen for several reasons. First, this city is considered Egypt's capital and home to the most residents, with visitors expected from other domestic towns and tourist-exporting countries. Second, this city has the most significant number of full-service restaurants. Third, this city is charming; its streets and walls tell the history of the Egyptian people and their ancient civilization that has affected humanity throughout the ages. This is characterized by Egypt's most famous tourist attractions, such as the pyramids, the Sphinx, and the Cairo Tower.

Following verbal approval from restaurant management, the participants' WhatsApp groups were reached with the assistance of some restaurant managers and chefs. A link prepared for the intended questionnaire was sent to these participants via Google Forms. As a result, a time-delay approach was used to collect data across three waves. Initially, participants were informed of the need to focus on close co-workers who have the qualities of sincerity and courage and agree with them in most opinions, and vice versa. It was agreed with the participants that they should ensure that their answers related only to the friendship of the close co-worker and not to any other co-worker. Therefore, the dataset was collected for the same shift.

Although their participation was voluntary and no rewards were offered in exchange for participating, the custom author sent 46 boxes of energy chocolate to the restaurants participating in the intended survey as a noble gift for their employees after completing the data analysis process. In Wave 1, employees were questioned on the depth of their friendship with a close co-worker, and 571 responded from 10–22 October 2022. Participants were asked about their ability to talk badly about a close co-worker to another co-worker and how much they liked a close co-worker in Wave 2 from 25 October to 4 November 2022. Thus, 566 participants responded to the questionnaire items presented in this prompt.

From 9–18 November 2022, participants were asked to share their thoughts about the degree of their self-blame for the abuse they had inflicted on a close co-worker. Hence, 559 participants responded, representing Wave 3 of the data collection process. As such, outliers and missing values were checked in three waves, and a sample size free of these distorting values of 553 was reached.

### *Instruments*

The robust validity and reliability demonstrated by each instrument in previous research drove the selection of scales in our study. For example, a 22-item co-worker friendship scale



included five dimensions developed by Sias *et al.* (2012), as Table A1 shows. The negative gossip scale, consisting of five items (see Table A2) created by Brady *et al.* (2017), has demonstrated high levels of validity and reliability in capturing co-worker friendship and negative workplace gossip constructs. These scales have been widely used and validated in various organizational settings, ensuring that our study benefits from the instruments' established psychometric properties (Cortina *et al.*, 2001). The selected scales align closely with the theoretical framework of our investigation and the specific research objectives.

The co-worker incivility scale, comprised of seven items (see Table A3) adapted from Cortina *et al.* (2001), has been chosen for its comprehensive assessment of uncivil behaviors in the workplace, directly addressing our focus on co-worker incivility. Likewise, the promotion focus questionnaire, comprised of seven items (see Table A4) adopted from Neubert *et al.* (2008), is well-suited for measuring promotion focus, a critical moderating variable in our conceptual framework. The careful selection of scales that align conceptually with our research ensures that our measurements.

### *Analysis strategy*

Partial least-squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) was chosen as the analytical approach for this paper using SmartPLS v.4. Higher-order and reflective-reflective constructs (e.g. co-worker friendship) were utilized in this paper based on PLS-SEM (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019). This approach does not necessitate normally distributed data and moderation effects analysis (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). This approach may be utilized to examine the potential correlations between a set of constructs in the hospitality context (Shoukat *et al.*, 2024).

## **Results**

### *Non-response bias and respondent characteristics*

Social sciences research often has a non-response bias (Selem *et al.*, 2023c). Findings might not be relevant if the perspectives of participants and non-participants are drastically different (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019). In the current paper, the non-response bias was investigated using Levene's equality variance test; valid responses in Waves 1 (313 early and 258 late responses), Waves 2 (286 early and 280 late responses), and Waves 3 (297 early and 262 late responses) were not significantly different from each other.

G\*Power was run to identify an appropriate sample size (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). Hence, an *F*-test with multiple linear regressions for a fixed model in G\*Power 3.1 software is run with the following settings: 0.1 effect size, 0.01 error probability, 0.95 power, and eight predictors. Thus, the final sample size is adequate. Respondents' profiles showed that males comprised 53.7% and married people comprised 51.5%. Regarding age, most employees were between 21 and 29 years old (70.7%). Most respondents (47.2%) held a bachelor's degree, followed by those with a diploma (30.6%). Lastly, 36.4% of respondents had 4 to below 7 years of career experience.

### *Common-method variation (CMV)*

Two more tests were conducted in reaction to Harman's widely criticized single-factor test. First, the confirmatory factor analysis model that associated all items with a single factor was tested using the AMOS v.23 software. This model resulted in much-reduced factor loadings and inadequate fit: [ $\chi^2(139, N = 553) = 519, 731, p < 0.001$ , normed  $\chi^2 = 3.216 > 3$ , SRMR = 0.042, CFI = 0.986, RMSEA = 0.057].

Second, a single-method, single-factor strategy was used, simultaneously loading all items on their respective theoretical constructs and establishing a new mutual first-order factor. According to Table 2, this common factor can only explain 25.957% of the total variance in the first factor, while the rest of the variance was loaded on the other seven factors as follows:



negative workplace gossip (14.13%), personality (9.25%), promotion focus (5.24%), shared tasks (4.28%), similarity (3.49%), socializing (3.15%), and work/life events (2.75%). In addition, VIF was conducted in PLS-SEM to assess CMV. Because the VIF values were all less than 3.3 (see Table 1), we concluded that CMV bias did not exist in the dataset.

## Co-worker friendship in restaurant

First-order constructs	Second-order constructs	Items	Factor loadings	VIF values
	Co-worker friendship (CR = 0.893; AVE = 0.627)	Personality	0.756	1.783
		Shared tasks	0.802	1.567
		Similarity	0.789	1.569
		Socializing	0.798	1.892
		Work/life events	0.811	1.871
Personality (CR = 0.890; AVE = 0.669)		PER1	0.800	1.672
		PER2	0.818	1.810
		PER3	0.821	2.090
		PER4	0.831	1.997
Shared tasks (CR = 0.937; AVE = 0.681)		SRT1	0.824	1.678
		SRT2	0.839	1.652
		SRT3	0.815	1.748
Similarity (CR = 0.895; AVE = 0.680)		SMT1	0.839	1.973
		SMT2	0.804	1.999
		SMT3	0.839	2.029
		SMT4	0.817	1.838
Socializing (CR = 0.893; AVE = 0.676)		SCZ1	0.836	2.098
		SCZ2	0.825	2.072
		SCZ3	0.811	2.142
		SCZ4	0.816	2.025
Work/life events (CR = 0.926; AVE = 0.675)		WLE1	0.827	2.257
		WLE2	0.812	2.118
		WLE3	0.833	2.308
		WLE4	0.814	2.144
		WLE5	0.832	2.327
		WLE6	0.812	2.278
Negative workplace gossip (CR = 0.911; AVE = 0.671)		NWG1	0.824	2.235
		NWG2	0.801	2.310
		NWG3	0.810	2.066
		NWG4	0.821	2.317
		NWG5	0.839	2.176
Co-worker incivility (CR = 0.924; AVE = 0.634)		CIN1	0.821	2.196
		CIN2	0.805	2.152
		CIN3	0.785	2.111
		CIN4	0.815	2.270
		CIN5	0.797	2.137
		CIN6	0.805	2.160
		CIN7	0.742	1.814
Promotion focus (CR = 0.929; AVE = 0.650)		PMF1	0.828	2.215
		PMF2	0.817	2.280
		PMF3	0.773	2.363
		PMF4	0.803	2.275
		PMF5	0.813	2.161
		PMF6	0.820	2.219
		PMF7	0.790	2.036

Source(s): Prepared by authors

**Table 1.**  
Item reliability and multicollinearity testing

Second-order construct	1	2	3	4
1. Co-worker friendship				
2. Co-worker incivility	0.455			
3. Negative workplace gossip	-0.185	-0.423		
4. Promotion focus	0.132	0.234	-0.255	

First-order construct	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Co-worker incivility								
2. Negative workplace gossip	0.209	-0.214						
3. Personality	-0.281	0.111						
4. Promotion focus	-0.175	0.198	0.482					
5. Shared tasks	-0.318	0.208	0.524	0.563				
6. Similarity	-0.266	0.177	0.519	0.584	0.389			
7. Socializing	-0.312	0.356	0.475	0.593	0.421	0.562		
8. Work/life events	-0.258	0.219	0.327	0.433	0.562	0.466	0.503	

Harman test findings for latent constructs (CMV)	Extraction sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% Variance explanation	Cumulative
Co-worker incivility	10.902	25.957	25.957
Negative workplace gossip	5.933	14.126	40.083
Personality	3.884	9.249	49.331
Promotion focus	2.202	5.243	54.575
Shared tasks	1.798	4.281	58.856
Similarity	1.464	3.486	62.342
Socializing	1.322	3.148	65.490
Work/life events	1.155	2.751	68.241

**Table 2.**  
Discriminant  
validity (HTMT)

**Source(s):** Prepared by authors

### Measurement model

Initially, composite reliability (CR) was performed to assess internal consistency reliability (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019), indicating that all CR exceeded 0.70 (see Table 1). Second, Table 2 demonstrates that all items with factor loadings exceeding 0.708 were kept. Next, the average variance extracted (AVE) values were higher than the threshold of 0.50 (see Table 1), indicating the convergent validity of all constructs. Moreover, the heterotrait-monotrait (HTMT) ratio is a more stringent discriminant validity criterion (Sarstedt *et al.*, 2019). Hence, this ratio fell below the 0.85 cut-offs for reflecting first- and second-order measures, enhancing the model's discriminant validity (see Table 2).

### Structural model

Utilizing the PLS technique, our  $Q^2$  values were more significant than 0 ( $Q^2$  negative workplace gossip = 0.234 and  $Q^2$  co-worker incivility = 0.218). According to Chin (1998),  $R^2$  also illustrates how much variance in dependent constructs can be explained. This model can explain 29.7 and 29.4% of the variance in negative workplace gossip and co-worker incivility, respectively. As a result, the structural model in this work was somewhat predictive.

Table 3 shows the direct and indirect path coefficients. Hence, close co-worker friendship significantly negatively affects workplace gossip ( $\beta = -0.444$ ,  $t = 9.679$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, hypothesis H1 was supported. Meanwhile, findings found that negative workplace gossip significantly positively affects co-worker incivility ( $\beta = 0.441$ ,  $t = 10.385$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), supporting hypothesis H2. Table 3 revealed that co-worker friendship indirectly affects co-worker incivility through negative workplace gossip ( $\beta = -0.196$ ,  $t = 6.359$ ,  $CI = [-0.264, -0.138]$ ), supporting

Paths	$\beta$	<i>t-value</i>	Sig	$f^2$	Decision
<i>Direct effects</i>					
H1: Co-worker friendship → Negative workplace gossip	-0.444***	9.679	0.000	0.246	Supported
H2: Negative workplace gossip → Co-worker incivility	0.441***	10.385	0.000	0.241	Supported
<i>Indirect effects</i>					
Path	$\beta$	<i>t-value</i>	Sig	Confidence interval	Decision
H3: Co-worker friendship → Negative workplace gossip → Co-worker incivility	-0.196***	6.359	0.000	[-0.264, -0.138]	Partial mediation
<i>Model fit assessment</i>					
Construct	Negative workplace gossip			Co-worker incivility	
$R^2$	0.297			0.294	
$Q^2$	0.234			0.218	
<b>Source(s):</b> Prepared by authors					

**Table 3.**  
Structured hypotheses  
testing findings

hypothesis H3. Thus, negative workplace gossip toward close co-workers achieved partial mediation.

#### Multi-group analysis

Our findings demonstrated compositional invariance by showing that the score of the constructs derived in one group perfectly correlated with the other group's constructs. Partial invariance was established nonetheless, as all variance scores fell within the confidence interval. Significant differences existed in the nexus of negative gossip and incivility among the two groups. Hence, the effect of negative gossip on co-worker incivility among males came to be more robust ( $\beta = 0.509, p < 0.01$ ) as compared with females ( $\beta = 0.395, p < 0.01$ ), supporting hypothesis H5 (see Table 4). This finding suggests that males react more negatively to a close co-worker's abusive reaction when talking negatively about him in his absence with other co-workers. In contrast, females may blame this co-worker for not repeating her actions.

#### Moderation analysis

A two-stage technique was used to calculate the moderating effect of promotion focus. Table 3 demonstrates that promotion focus significantly modifies negative workplace gossip ( $\beta = 0.277, p < 0.01$ ). Furthermore, the interaction effect of promotion focus  $\times$  co-worker friendship ( $\beta = 0.252, p < 0.01$ ) on negative gossip is statistically significant (see Table 4). The moderation slope plot (see Figure 2) proves that the negative association between friendship and negative gossip among close co-workers is weaker when they have a higher job promotion focus and thus negatively talk about their close co-workers with less related co-workers to tarnish their image in front of others for getting job promotion. Accordingly, promotion focus dampened the co-worker friendship and negative workplace gossip relationship, supporting hypothesis H4.

#### Discussion

This paper examines how friendship indirectly affects incivility among close co-workers through negative gossip. We investigated the moderation effect of promotion focus in the

*Two-stage approach*

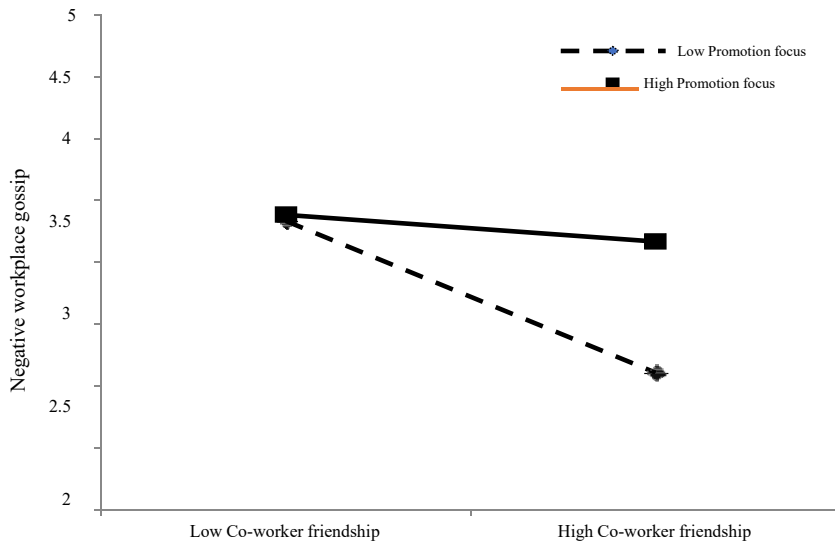
Relationships	$\beta$	STDEV	<i>t</i> -value	<i>p</i> -value	Remark
Stag1: Co-worker friendship → Negative workplace gossip	-0.361***	0.042	10.819	0.000	
Stage2: Promotion focus → Negative workplace gossip	0.277**	0.036	9.456	0.003	
H4: Promotion focus × Co-worker friendship → Negative workplace gossip	0.252**	0.029	7.435	0.007	Supported

*Multi-group analysis*

Relationship	Male	Female	<i>p</i> -value	Remark
H5: Negative workplace gossip → Co-worker incivility	0.509**	0.395***	0.008	Supported

**Source(s):** Prepared by authors

**Table 4.**  
Moderation effect and multi-group analysis



**Figure 2.**  
Moderation effect of promotion focus

**Source(s):** Prepared by authors

restaurant context. Moreover, we discussed how gender (male/female) affects the nexus between negative gossip and co-worker incivility. Over the years, workplace friendship has drawn more attention, but there has not been much study on how friendly employees are (Cheng *et al.*, 2022; Guo *et al.*, 2022). Our findings add significant theoretical support to the literature.

For hypothesis H1, co-worker friendship and negative workplace gossip have a negative association; our findings supported this notion, resulting in a negative relationship among co-workers on these two streams. According to AET, affective events play a significant role between the gossip target and gossipers in the workplace when gossipers disclose substantial data about the gossip target. This demonstrates how co-workers' behaviors are influenced by their emotions (Khan *et al.*, 2023a). Employees who think others will formally evaluate them

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become more nervous about delivering. This is because informal evaluation is comparable to involving the public (Chen *et al.*, 2021), finally presenting a chance to build connections with co-workers and significantly increasing performance pressure (Khan *et al.*, 2023a).

Additionally, AET contributes to explaining the continued fortification of these bonds by acting as a mediator between the nasty workplace gossip and the camaraderie among co-workers. This article demonstrates how emotions influence co-workers. When getting promoted, unpleasant feelings can take center stage and lead to talking about one another, eventually portraying selfish behaviors (Cheng *et al.*, 2022). Additionally, deviant behaviors such as unfavorable gossiping might harm co-worker incivility and undermine business performance in the hospitality context (Khan *et al.*, 2023c).

H2 is also accepted, indicating that negative gossip negatively affects co-worker incivility. This relationship is explained through AET, which assumes that co-workers with negative emotions tend to interact with each other. In pursuit of negative workplace gossip as an event, they tend to show deviant behaviors (Guo *et al.*, 2022), one of the major causes of poor performance in the hospitality industry (Selem *et al.*, 2023b). Being co-workers yet of massive importance in terms of front-line workers, such types of behaviors are critical (Khan *et al.*, 2023a), and incivility may cause severe damage to such organizational setups (Khan *et al.*, 2023c). Furthermore, the moderation effect of gender in linking negative gossip with co-worker incivility is substantial since males and females engaging in negative workplace gossip further strengthen co-worker incivility. Findings concur with those of Khan *et al.* (2023a), who found that workaholics are more likely to encounter more significant levels of workplace incivility.

Despite the close-fitting connection between two co-workers, gossip could be unfavorable to their interests (i.e. promotion focus). The victim of this gossip may confront the offender in various ways, depending on the gender involved. Hence, men are typically more eager to exact revenge and will do so by engaging the offender in a hostile manner, making derogatory comments in response to their co-worker's actions, or even physically and psychologically abusing them. While females are less vulnerable to each other's emotional reactions, they may only be satisfied with harsh criticism and refrain from reiterating these behaviors. This is because they believe these behaviors may have resulted from their egotism and feminism.

### *Theoretical implications*

The interactive nature of restaurants adds new dimensions to the nexus between co-workers—both friendship and incivility. The first contribution of this paper is to advance our understanding of AET by investigating several events rather than a single event, as Chen *et al.* (2021) proposed. We explored interpersonal dynamics and work-related events in AET by adding psychological variables (negative workplace gossip) as an intervening variable between co-worker friendship and incivility and discovered a significant mechanism. Though AET focuses on the interaction of dispositional traits, situational factors, work-related events, and affective responses, this paper broadens the theory by examining how interpersonal dynamics and work-related events lead to negative workplace behaviors (Khan *et al.*, 2023a). This paper focuses on how co-worker friendship influences negative gossip and incivility among close co-workers in a restaurant setting, highlighting the complexities of workplace relationships and their impact on employee behavior.

Prior studies have shown the importance of emotions in AET, and this paper goes beyond emotions to examine how interpersonal dynamics and work-related events (i.e. co-worker friendship) contribute to negative workplace behaviors (Khan *et al.*, 2023a). By focusing on the role of co-worker friendship in shaping workplace behaviors, this paper offers a more nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to negative gossip and incivility in the hospitality industry. Hence, workplace gossip significantly impacts co-worker incivility

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(Khan *et al.*, 2023c; Ugwu *et al.*, 2022). The combined effect of workshop gossip on shaping the employee behaviors of front-line restaurant co-workers in terms of their friendship-incivility relationship indicates a gap in the literature (Khan *et al.*, 2023b). By doing so, our paper addressed this gap in the literature and contributed to a psychological theory, particularly AET.

This paper's second contribution is the relatively uncommon application of AET as a standalone theory for comprehending individual behavior in the hospitality industry. AET has been widely conducted in organizational studies by previous researchers to explain employee behavior, but its use in the hospitality sector is limited (Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996). Drawing on AET, we chose gender and promotion focus as the paper's proxy factors. Restaurant settings have gained popularity as research contexts in recent decades, but little is known about the setting or its function. This study, one of the first, adds to our knowledge of the restaurant environment.

### *Practical implications*

Our findings have several implications for restaurant owners and managers. First, our results have some applications that can assist organizations and workers in managing friendships at work. To begin with, workers should understand that although friendships at work offer many advantages and can significantly improve our professional lives, they also carry some risks and negative consequences. Employees must be aware of the drawbacks of workplace friendships to manage their social relationships at work. To achieve this, it might be crucial to establish guidelines for professional interactions with co-workers. For instance, demonstrating that it is a part of one's professional duty to challenge one another in meetings can ease worries about offending a co-worker.

From a practitioner perspective, restaurant managers should explicitly design the local operating instructions (LOPs) for the restaurant's front-line personnel to talk and exchange positive information about co-workers while avoiding negative information about irrelevant activities during working hours. As a result, restaurant managers should implement a "zero tolerance" policy for disseminating public gossip. Providing timely and comprehensive information sharing and creating efficient channels for information exchange, such as holding frequent team meetings, setting open door rules, and promoting candid and open discussion to reduce negative gossip.

Further, restaurant managers should use an informal approach, such as fostering a warm, transparent, and inspiring workplace, rewarding and praising positive behavior, and offering professional and career growth opportunities. Moreover, managers may provide prompt psychological treatment to people who have been the targets of unfavorable workplace gossip. For instance, managers can refute rumors about them openly to give a particular employee their right to paid vacation.

Lastly, our findings suggest that pleasant co-worker friendships among front-line restaurant employees can lower incivility. Co-worker friendship is a modern phenomenon in the hospitality industry. Managers can devise measures to reduce uncivil employee conduct by establishing a healthy social environment in restaurants. This may be accomplished if managers develop and implement additional abilities to foster workplace friendship. For instance, restaurant managers should organize personality enhancement training programs and counseling to deal with challenges and workplace stress.

### *Limitations and future research*

The current paper, like previous ones, has a set of research limitations. First, the research sample consisted of front-line employees, and we employed a time-lagged technique in three separate waves to control for CMB. The same respondents measured the significant

components. However, such biases may still impact our findings (Selem *et al.*, 2023b). Respondents are likely swayed by social desirability and may struggle to respond honestly since workplace gossip and co-worker incivility are sensitive issues. Future researchers may employ other research designs, such as multi-source data (supervisors and co-workers). Moreover, although our study does not explicitly measure emotions, we believe emotions are intrinsically linked to the studied notions. Negative workplace gossip, for example, can elicit various emotional reactions, and co-worker incivility is probably affected by the emotional states of those engaged. However, we recognize that further study may explicitly explore these categories' emotional aspects and interactions in greater detail according to the AET principles.

## Conclusion

This paper's purpose was to investigate the potential hazards and consequences of workplace friendships among co-workers, how they affect office rumors, and how gossip affects co-worker impoliteness. Furthermore, the mediating function of unfavorable workplace rumors in the linkage between co-worker friendship and incivility was examined. The current study focuses on how promotion focus moderates the nexus between workplace incivility and friendship. Promotion-focused orientation has been tested as a mediator between co-worker friendship and incivility among co-workers. By helping develop interpersonal skills and team-building activities that support these positive relationships, managers can create a friendly and supportive workplace that improves their work culture and eliminates incivility.

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## Appendix

Construct	Items	Sources
Personality	PER1: My close co-worker's personality appeals to me PER2: My close co-worker is a pleasant individual PER3: My close co-worker was appealing to me PER4: I am drawn to the personality of one of my co-workers	Prepared by Sias <i>et al.</i> (2012)
Shared tasks	My close co-worker and I _____ SRT1: I have the same job SRT2: Are splitting up duties SRT3: Assist one another with duties	
Similarity	SMT1: My close co-worker and I have beliefs and interests in common SMT2: My close co-worker and I have beliefs and attitudes comparable to ours SMT3: My close co-worker and I have many interests SMT4: My close co-worker is quite similar to me	
Socializing	SCZ1: My close co-worker and I socialize after work or on weekends SCZ2: After work, my close co-worker and I socialize SCZ3: Outside the workplace, my close co-worker and I spend time together SCZ4: My close co-worker and I have begun socializing outside the workplace	
Work/life events	My close co-worker and I _____ WLE1: Are you having issues with a manager or another co-worker WLE2: Are involved in office politics/problems WLE3: Are having work-related issues WLE4: Are dealing with personal problems/issues WLE5: We have experienced significant upheavals in our personal lives WLE6: I have more personal occasions coming up	

**Table A1.**  
Measurement items of  
co-worker friendship

Construct	Items	Sources
NWG1	I asked a co-worker whether they had a bad opinion of anything my close co-worker had done	Prepared by <a href="#">Brady et al. (2017)</a>
NWG2	I questioned my close co-worker's skills while chatting with a co-worker	
NWG3	While speaking with a co-worker, I ridiculed my close co-worker	
NWG4	I told a co-worker about what my close co-worker had done	
NWG5	While talking to a co-worker, I recounted an unpleasant anecdote about my close co-worker	

**Table A2.**  
Measurement items of negative workplace gossip

Construct	Items	Sources
CIN1	My close co-worker made fun of me or was condescending to me in any way	Prepared by <a href="#">Cortina et al. (2001)</a>
CIN2	My close co-worker paid little attention to my comments and seemed uninterested in my thoughts	
CIN3	My close co-worker made insulting remarks about me	
CIN4	My close co-worker addressed me in a disrespectful tone	
CIN5	My close co-worker neglected or excluded me from business networking	
CIN6	My close co-worker questions my judgment on an issue I am responsible for	
CIN7	My close co-worker made unwelcome attempts to engage me in a personal discussion	

**Table A3.**  
Measurement items of co-worker incivility

Construct	Items	Sources
PMF1	I take chances at work to achieve my advancement objectives	Prepared by <a href="#">Neubert et al. (2008)</a>
PMF2	I frequently take chances to succeed at work	
PMF3	If I could not succeed in my current position, I would probably look for another one	
PMF4	I devote my efforts to completing work duties that will develop my career	
PMF5	I spend a lot of time thinking about how I can achieve my goals	
PMF6	A clear vision of who I want to become affects my job priorities	
PMF7	My aspirations and hopes serve as my driving forces at work	

**Table A4.**  
Measurement items of promotion focus

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