

Research Article

The Effect of Gossip Tendency on Political Skill

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Abstract: The purpose of this research was to examine the association between gossip tendency and political skill. Gossip Tendency Questionnaire and Political Skill Inventory were used for data collection. A sample of sixty undergraduate students in management program agreed to participate in this study by completing a survey questionnaire. Simple linear regression analysis indicated that gossip tendency could explain 26.9 percent of variance to political skill ($R^2 = .269$, $F(1, 60) = 21.351$, $p < .01$). This suggested that there were other factors that could explain political skill of undergraduate student that had been included in this study. In sum, gossip tendency had a positive influence on political skill ($\beta = .519$). This study was noteworthy to be a preliminary study that attempted to investigate the relationship between gossip tendency and political skill in particular Thai context.

Keywords: Gossip tendency, Political skill, Gossip Tendency Questionnaire, Political Skill Inventory.

INTRODUCTION

Gossip is viewed as a negative social phenomenon appeared when people attempted to exchange information about an inattentive third party that is transferred in an evaluative manner (Chua & Uy, 2014). The past study of Levin and Arluke (1987) conversely indicated that the quantity of gossip between individuals was conveyed both positive and negative information. Nevo *et al.*, (1993) pointed out that gossip tendency is dependent upon individual differences in terms of gender, age, social desirability, and occupational choices. Although gossip is perceived as one of deviant behaviors in a society, this behavior is prominent part of sociality particularly politics relevance (Besnier, 2009).

Politics inevitably exists in an individual's life regardless of fondness. In particular, people in organizations cannot avoid being involved in organizational politics as organizations are made up with individuals who have a distinctive value, goals, and interests leading to the emergence of conflicts over resources. Organizational politics refers to informal exertions to influence whoever in the organization including the organization itself to benefit one or others to accomplish desired goals (IEduNote, 2017). To achieve targeted objective, individuals need to possess political skill. Political skill is defined as: "The ability

to effectively understand others at work, and to use such knowledge to influence others to act in ways that enhance one's personal and/or organizational objectives" (Ferris, *et al.*, 2005)

Gossip tendency and political skill have broadly received attention in the field of organizational behavior and human resource management. However, prior research has overlooked to examine the relationship between these two topics despite gossiping demonstrates a forms of politics in an organization (Sun & Xu, 2018). When individuals engaged in gossiping process through informal groups, the manifestation of politics exists as they can exchange information, get entertainment from their interaction, improve their understanding of others and building friendship, and use information to control others' actions (Aghbolagh & Ardabili, 2016). Based on the literature reviews, this present study aimed at exploring the association between gossip tendency and political skill in order to enhance the body of knowledge in organizational behavior field.

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Literature Reviews

Gossip Tendency

Gossip is a social phenomenon that has been often perceived as a negative behavior as witnessed by term “small talk”, “shop talk”, or “idle talk” (Chua & Uy, 2014). In fact, gossip can have positive or negative social impacts (Levin & Arluke, 1987). Foster (2004) defined gossip a discussion of individual information about an absent third party that is delivered in an evaluative way. Gossip plays a fundamental role in social interaction and has been conceded between individuals who have common background or shared interest (Rosnow & Foster, 2005). Nevo *et al.*, (1993) were one of the first groups of researchers that constructed the scale measurement to assess gossip tendency or behaviors of individuals. This scale measurement demonstrated a high internal consistency and admitted as a reliable instrument to be widely used in related topics in gossip in the past two decades. In Thailand, Promsri (2015) conducted a comparison study of gossip tendency between male and female students in Thai university. Data were collected from 166 students from different levels of study program using a 5-point scale version of Tendency to Gossip Questionnaire. Results of independent t-test analysis demonstrated that female students had a higher gossip tendency in terms of physical appearance dimension than male students.

Political Skill

Pfeffer (1981) initially coined the term political skill in a literature and suggested that this skill is essential for success in an organization. Even though political skill was considered as a vital key for career success, prior research ignored to construct the reliable scale measurement to assess the political skill of influencer (Ferris *et al.*, 2007). In the light, Ferris *et al.*, (2005) constructed the valid and reliable scale, namely The Political Skill Inventory to evaluate political skill of individuals in the workplace. The study of political skill in Thai context has been limited. A few studies in political skill have been investigated in the past several years. This instrumentation has widely been utilized in scholarly research more than a decade, and appeared to be a pervasive scale in measuring politic skill in organizations. In Thai context, many research attempted to employ this instrument for measuring political skill of individuals in different settings. Promsri (2014) examined the effects of educational level and military ranks on political skill through the use of The Political Skill Inventory (PSI). Participants

of this study were 176 military officers of a selected military unit including both commissioned and non-commissioned officers. Two-Way ANOVA was used to analyze the effects of these two variables on political skill. Results demonstrated no significant effects of educational level and military officers’ ranks on political skill.

Gossip and Political Skill

Sun and Xia (2018) addressed that the phenomenon of gossip in the workplace appears to be part of organizational politics. In an organization, employees involved in gossiping process through establishing informal groups to fulfill their needs based on four social functions of gossip including information exchange, entertainment from their interaction, improve their understanding of others and building friendship, and use information to control others’ actions. All of these functions gained from gossiping process demonstrated the manifestation of politics in the workplace (Aghbolagh & Ardabili, 2016). Political skill refers to the ability of an individual to influence others to behave in the way that increases goals for either individual or organization (Ferris *et al.*, 2005). If individuals utilize penetration function of gossip to control or influence other people to act in the way that benefits their goals, this kind of action directly ties to political skill. Nonetheless, according to a review of literatures, an investigation on the relationship between gossip tendency and political skill has been ignored despite various studies in these two concepts have extensively been conducted in the past several years. As a result, since no previous research has placed an emphasis on scrutinizing the association between gossip tendency and political skill, this study was noteworthy to be a preliminary research that attempted to explore the relationship between these two variables. As gossip tendency was considered as a social phenomenon appeared broadly in social interaction and relationships, this research assumed that this variable might have some connection to political skill, which was also perceived as the ability utilized in social interaction as well. Based on this assumption, this present study aimed at examining the linkage between gossip tendency and political skill and proposing a research hypothesis as “gossip tendency had a positive impact on political skill.” Figure 1 illustrated the conceptual framework of this present study, which linked to a research hypothesis.



Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

METHODOLOGY

This exploratory study aimed at scrutinizing the association between gossip tendency and political skill. Participants were selected from college students in

Bangkok. A total of 60 undergraduate students from one public university were gathered for data collection. The Tendency to Gossip Questionnaire (TGQ) developed by Nevo *et al.*, (1993) was employed to

measure gossip behaviors of respondents. This instrument was a 6-point rating scale ranging from (1) never to (6) always of 19-item statement, which participants were asked to rate each item to the extent in which each characteristics described them properly. The Political Skill Inventory (PSI) initiated by Ferris *et al.*, (2005) was utilized to evaluate political skill among undergraduate students. This scale measurement contained 18-item of 5-point rating scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. To guarantee the quality of these scale measurements, validity and reliability with Cronbach’s alpha test were conducted.

Table 1 exhibited satisfactorily reliable alpha scores of Gossip Tendency Questionnaire ($\alpha = 0.944$) and Political Skill Inventory ($\alpha = 0.949$).

Table 1 Reliability Coefficients of Gossip Tendency and Political Skill

Scale Measurement	No. of Items	Alpha Score
Gossip Tendency	19	0.944
Political Skill	18	0.949

RESULTS

Prior to conducting simple linear regression analysis to test research hypothesis in this study, basic assumptions were checked to determine the suitability of using this inferential statistics. First of all, a normal P-P plot was shaped to check on normality. The plot exhibited no serious departures of dependent variable, which suggested that normality assumption was met. Also, the scatterplot showed that there was an intermediate positive linear relationship between the two variables, which was confirmed with Pearson’s correlation coefficient of 0.519. Kolmogorov-Smirnov was also checked to ensure the normal distribution of dependent variable. The value of 0.200 indicated that this variable was distributed normally. Results of regression analysis demonstrated that tendency to gossip could explain 26.9% of variance to political skill ($R^2 = .269$, $F(1, 60) = 21.351$, $p < .01$). This suggested that there were other variables that could describe political skill of undergraduate students that had been excluded in this study. Table 2 indicated that gossip tendency had a significant influence on political skill among undergraduate students ($\beta = .519$, $p < .01$).

In conclusion, the more gossip tendency undergraduate students had, the more politically skilled they were. Consequently, research hypothesis of this present study was confirmed.

Table 2 Simple Linear Regression of Gossip Tendency on Political Skill

Model	Unstandardized		Standardized	t	Sig.
	B	S.E.	Beta		
(Constant)	2.072	.277		7.478	.000**
Gossip	.389	.084	.519	4.621	.000**
n=60 R = .519 R² = .269 Adjusted R² = .256 S.E. = .586 F = 21.351 df = 1 Sig. = .000					

*Significant Level at .05, **Significant Level at .01

CONCLUSION, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Past scholarly research omitted to pay attention to the examination on tendency to gossip and political skill despite these two variables appeared to commonly have a connection as part of social interaction. This study was noteworthy to be the first study in organizational behavior that put efforts to examine the relationship between gossip tendency and political skill. Findings of this present study contributed new knowledge in this arena as the correlation between gossip tendency and political skill was found. The existence of relationship between these two variables could confirm the assumption of theoretical based in the work of Aghbolagh & Ardabili (2016) and Sun and Xia (2018) in which gossiping had been seen as part of political activities in the workplace.

Although this study contributes new knowledge in this area, it suggests investigating and paying more attention on relevant variables that can explain gossip tendency and political skill as well as mediating variables in the further study. Also, the limitation of sample sizes in this study needs to be strengthened by the increase of sample size in a future research. An examination on gossip tendency and political skill can be conducted in a repetitive method with the different settings particular employees in organizations. Generalization of this study’s findings needs to be done with the understanding of its limitations.

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