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**The Impact of Workplace Gossip on Cyberloafing:  
Mediating Roles of Psychological Capital and Workplace  
Cynicism in Pakistan's HealthCare Sector**



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## **Abstract**

This quantitative, cross-sectional study examines how negative workplace gossip leads to counterproductive work behavior, specifically cyberloafing, among corporate employees in Islamabad, Pakistan. Grounded in Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the study proposes a sequential mediation model in which the relationship between workplace gossip (independent variable) and cyberloafing (dependent variable) operates through employees' Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Workplace Cynicism.

Data were collected from 171 employees working in the Healthcare sector. The findings strongly support the proposed model. Results show that negative workplace gossip functions as a resource-depleting stressor that significantly reduces employees' Psychological Capital. This reduction in PsyCap then increases feelings of workplace cynicism, which ultimately leads to higher levels of cyberloafing. The sequential indirect effect of workplace gossip on cyberloafing through PsyCap and workplace cynicism was found to be statistically significant.

From a theoretical perspective, this study supports the COR theory's resource loss spiral by demonstrating its applicability in a non-Western, high-context cultural setting. In doing so, it extends the cross-cultural validity of COR theory in explaining digital forms of counterproductive work behavior. Practically, the findings highlight the need for managerial interventions that strengthen employees' Psychological Capital through Positive Organizational Behavior initiatives and rebuild organizational trust to reduce workplace cynicism, thereby limiting behaviors such as cyberloafing.

**Keywords:** Workplace Gossip, Psychological Capital, Workplace Cynicism, Cyberloafing, Conservation of Resources Theory.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background

The evolving corporate environment in Pakistan faces a complicated set of human resource issues that considerably influence both organizational performance and the well-being of employees. Businesses operating within this sector frequently encounter challenges such as high rates of employee turnover, low level of job satisfaction, and frequent interpersonal disputes, all of which undermine overall organizational efficiency (Abbasi & Hollman, 2020; Khan et al., 2021). Among these critical challenges, workplace gossip emerges as a particularly harmful factor that needs focus due to its damaging impact on both individual staff members and the organization at large (Grosser et al., 2022). The widespread hierarchical frameworks in Pakistani corporate entities, combined with a collectivist cultural backdrop that often blurs the distinction between personal relationships and professional roles, unintentionally raise an environment where workplace gossip can thrive. Moreover, unclear organizational policies, inadequate transparency in communication, and forceful competition among employees further contribute to the increase of informal and often negative information exchange within companies (Ali et al., 2023).

Among the many harmful effects of unchecked workplace gossip, cyberloafing stands out as a serious issue that can greatly reduce organizational productivity. Cyberloafing is when employees use the company's internet for personal activities during work hours, causing a direct loss of time and resources (Lim & Chen, 2021). This behavior includes activities such as checking personal emails, browsing social media, shopping online, and watching videos, all of which lower work efficiency and may introduce security threats (Malik et al., 2022). Moreover, a workplace filled with negative gossip can create an atmosphere of distrust, anxiety, and disengagement among employees, which may drive them to avoid work tasks and turn to online distractions instead (Akram et al., 2023). Therefore, understanding how workplace gossip leads to cyberloafing is essential for developing effective solutions.

Cyberloafing, a form of counterproductive work behavior, has been gaining attention because of its important effects on both organizational success and employees' career progress. The reasons behind cyberloafing are complex and include personal traits like low self-control and boredom, as

well as workplace issues such as poorly designed jobs, lack of proper supervision, and a negative work environment (Henle & Blanchard, 2008; Rozgonjuk et al., 2018). For organizations, extensive cyberloafing can cause lower productivity overall, missed project deadlines, and possible financial losses. On the individual level, it can lead to poorer work quality, more stress from accumulating tasks, and even disciplinary measures (Relations Journal, 2024). Considering the competitive atmosphere of Pakistan's corporate world and the ongoing need to improve efficiency, it is crucial to understand and control cyberloafing to keep the workforce productive and sustainable.

According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, individuals are motivated to acquire, maintain, and protect resources they find valuable (Hobfoll, 1989). In the workplace, gossip can negatively affect employees by slowly draining their psychological capital, which includes key personal resources like self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). When employees are exposed to negative or unclear information through gossip, their confidence in their own abilities and their positive expectations for the future may weaken. At the same time, their capacity to recover from setbacks can also decline. This reduction in psychological capital can lead to increased workplace cynicism a negative mindset characterized by feelings of disillusionment, distrust, and a lack of confidence in the organization and its leaders (Dean et al., 1998). As a result, employees who experience this cynicism may become disengaged and start to exhibit behaviors such as cyberloafing, pulling back their focus and effort from work tasks. Thus, psychological capital and workplace cynicism act as two successive mediators that explain how workplace gossip can indirectly lead to cyberloafing, revealing the process behind this harmful effect.

## **1.2 Contextual Analysis**

Pakistan's Healthcare sector represents a complicated blend of traditional and contemporary attributes. Traditionally, family-owned enterprises have predominated the landscape; however, there is a gradual shift towards the adoption of professional management practices. This transition is taking place within a context marked by obstacles such as the limited presence of major multinational corporations (MNCs), a situation shaped by political instability and regulatory

complexities that substitute an uncertain investment climate for foreign entities (The Express Tribune, 2025).

Notwithstanding these challenges, the Healthcare sector in Pakistan possesses significant growth potential, powered by the country's advantageous geographical location and a substantial youthful demographic. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) stands out as a pivotal catalyst in this context, playing a crucial role in invigorating economic activities and attracting foreign direct investment (FDI). This influx of investment is instrumental in advancing infrastructure development and promoting growth across diverse industrial sectors (Pakistan Today, 2024). By enhancing trade, investment flows, and regional connectivity, the CPEC initiative is poised to make a substantial contribution to the expansion and modernization of Pakistan's corporate sphere.

Nonetheless, the advancement of Pakistan's Healthcare sector is constrained by a number of persistent challenges. Chief among these are economic volatility, chronic energy shortages, and erratic policy frameworks, which collectively impose operational difficulties on businesses and discourage investment from both domestic and international stakeholders (Spine Times, 2025). It is imperative to address these issues through the implementation of consistent and sustainable economic policies, the stabilization of energy supplies, and the establishment of a stable policy environment to foster a business climate conducive to long-term growth and investment security.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

Despite considerable academic interest in understanding the complex nature of workplace gossip, significant gaps remain, especially regarding its subtle effects on employee outcomes. Negative workplace gossip is increasingly seen as a form of "cold violence" with harmful consequences (Ye et al., 2022), yet the exact ways it leads to behaviors like cyberloafing are still unclear and need further investigation (MDPI, 2021). Previous studies have shown that gossip can damage trust and create an uncomfortable work environment (Aquino & Thau, 2009), implying a connection to withdrawal behaviors by employees. However, the specific cognitive and emotional pathways that link frequent workplace gossip to cyberloafing require more detailed empirical research to fully understand this complex relationship.

Workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing form a logical and practically relevant sequence in organizational behavior. Theoretically, it is expected that widespread negative gossip first reduces an employee's psychological capital—diminishing their optimism, hope, self-efficacy, and resilience (Luthans et al., 2007). This reduction in psychological resources could then increase workplace cynicism, marked by a general distrust and disillusionment toward the organization (Dean et al., 1998). Heightened cynicism may then lead to disengagement behaviors such as cyberloafing, where employees divert their attention away from work. Although individual links among these four variables have been studied separately—for example, negative gossip's effect on cynicism or factors leading to cyberloafing no research has yet examined their sequential mediation in one integrated model.

The lack of studies addressing this sequential mediation model presents a significant gap, especially within Pakistan's Healthcare sector. Exploring how workplace gossip impacts psychological capital, which then influences workplace cynicism, and finally leads to cyberloafing, will offer valuable insights into the psychological processes involved. Current literature mostly focuses on direct effects or simple mediation models (such as work alienation mediating between gossip and cyberloafing; CGScholar) or considers cyberloafing's antecedents without linking gossip and its psychological impacts (Frontiers, 2021). By investigating this chain of effects, this study hopes to enrich the literature with a more comprehensive view of how informal communication like gossip can trigger harmful employee behaviors. This understanding is crucial for designing effective strategies to reduce the negative impact of workplace gossip and cyberloafing within Pakistan's unique organizational culture.

## **1.4 Problem Statement**

The current research gap reveals that, despite much attention on workplace gossip, the specific effects on employees and the complex pathways leading to cyberloafing are still not well understood or agreed upon. Although earlier studies have looked at the relationships between workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing individually, no research has yet explored these factors together in a sequential manner, where workplace gossip impacts psychological capital, which then influences workplace cynicism, and finally results in

cyberloafing. This gap is especially significant in the context of Pakistan's Healthcare sector, highlighting the need for a comprehensive model to explain these interconnected effects.

To address this gap, the present study applies the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989) as its core framework. It examines how workplace gossip can deplete employees' psychological capital, which subsequently increases workplace cynicism. This rise in cynicism then leads to greater instances of cyberloafing among employees within Pakistan's school-level Healthcare sector. By testing this sequential mediation model, the research seeks to offer a clearer and more detailed understanding of how informal communication like gossip triggers negative work behaviors in this specific organizational setting (e.g., Akram et al., 2023; Kuo et al., 2022; Nafei, 2024).

This integrated approach is vital for both advancing theory in organizational psychology and providing practical insights for human resource management in Pakistan's educational Healthcare sector. It can help design targeted strategies to reduce the harmful impacts of workplace gossip and cyberloafing, ultimately improving workplace wellbeing and productivity.

## **1.5 Research Objectives**

This study aims to achieve the following research objectives:

1. To examine the direct effect of workplace gossip on cyberloafing among employees working in Pakistan's Healthcare sector.
2. To explore the mediating role of psychological capital in the relationship between workplace gossip and cyberloafing.
3. To assess whether workplace cynicism acts as a mediator between workplace gossip and cyberloafing.
4. To investigate the sequential mediation effect of psychological capital and workplace cynicism on the link between workplace gossip and cyberloafing.

## 1.6 Research Questions

- 1 Does workplace gossip (independent variable) influence cyberloafing among employees in Pakistan's Healthcare sector?
- 2 Does psychological capital serve as a mediator in the relationship between workplace gossip and cyberloafing?
- 3 Does workplace cynicism act as a mediator between workplace gossip and cyberloafing?
- 4 Do psychological capital and workplace cynicism sequentially mediate the effect of workplace gossip on cyberloafing?

## 1.7 Significance of the study

This study holds important practical value for managing organizations in Pakistan's Healthcare sector. By clearly explaining how workplace gossip influences cyberloafing through psychological capital and workplace cynicism it offers vital insights into the negative effects that unchecked informal communication can have on employees and organizations. Managers will gain a better understanding of how gossip harms employee well-being and productivity, which will help them create more effective strategies and take targeted actions to reduce gossip within their companies. Recognizing these connections can help organizations build healthier work environments, decrease unproductive behaviors, and improve overall performance (Akram et al., 2023; Lim & Chen, 2021).

Moreover, this research makes an important theoretical and methodological contribution to existing literature. It is the first study to explore the simultaneous relationships among workplace gossip (IV), psychological capital (M1), workplace cynicism (M2), and cyberloafing (DV) in one integrated sequential mediation model. Using the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989), the study goes beyond simple one-to-one or basic mediation analyses, providing a more detailed and comprehensive understanding of a complex workplace issue. By testing these relationships together, the research offers strong evidence of how workplace stressors affect employee psychological resources and lead to counterproductive behaviors, enriching theoretical knowledge about these concepts (Kuo et al., 2022; Nafei, 2024).

Finally, this study paves the way for future research on workplace gossip in general and particularly promotes further investigation in the context of Pakistan. By focusing on Pakistan's specific socio-cultural values and corporate environment, it highlights how these contextual factors may shape the links between workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing. Understanding these cultural influences is essential since they affect communication styles, perceptions of fairness, and coping strategies, which in turn impact how workplace behaviors develop and are experienced (Ali et al., 2023). The findings will serve as a key reference for future studies, encouraging more in-depth exploration of informal workplace communication and its psychological and behavioral effects across different cultures.

## **1.8 Structure of Research Proposal**

This thesis is organized into five chapters, each designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of how workplace gossip influences cyberloafing, with psychological capital and workplace cynicism acting as mediators within Pakistan's corporate environment.

Chapter 1, the Introduction, lays the foundation for the study by presenting the background and context. It discusses the common human resource challenges faced by Pakistan's Healthcare sector, emphasizing the importance of workplace gossip and cyberloafing. This chapter also highlights the current research gaps, outlines the study's objectives and research questions, and explains the practical and theoretical relevance of this investigation.

Chapter 2, Literature Review and Theoretical Framework, offers an extensive review of previous research related to workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing. It critically evaluates existing studies and identifies key theories, focusing particularly on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. This theory serves as the main guiding framework, clarifying the expected relationships among the study variables.

Chapter 3, Methodology, details the research design and methods used. It describes the sampling approach, data collection process, and measurement tools for each variable. Additionally, this chapter explains the data analysis techniques, including those for testing both direct and mediating effects, ensuring the study is clear and reproducible.

Chapter 4, Results, will present the empirical findings derived from the data analysis. This chapter will include descriptive statistics of the sample and variables, correlation analyses, and the outcomes of the mediation analyses, specifically addressing each research objective and question. The presentation of results will be clear, concise, and supported by appropriate statistical outputs.

Finally, Chapter 5, Discussion and Conclusion, will interpret the findings in relation to the existing literature and the theoretical framework. This chapter will discuss the implications of the results for both theory and practice within Pakistan's Healthcare sector, acknowledge the study's limitations, and propose directions for future research. It will conclude by summarizing the key contributions of the thesis.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Literature Review**

#### **2.1.1 Workplace Gossip**

Workplace gossip refers to informal conversations about absent coworkers, often including evaluations or opinions (Grosser et al., 2022). Although gossip can be positive or negative, most research focuses on its harmful aspects, such as spreading rumors and causing emotional harm (Ye et al., 2022). Workplace gossip is common and important to study because it affects how employees feel, behave, and interact in the workplace. It often occurs due to unclear communication channels, vague policies, boredom, or as a way to bond socially or influence others (Xiaoye Qian, Wanqiu Li, Yinglan Zhao and Yujie Wang, 2024). Negative gossip can reduce trust, increase anxiety, lower job satisfaction, cause stress, hurt performance, and increase cynicism, while some positive gossip may help share useful information and encourage learning (Vanessa Begemann, Nale Lehmann-Willenbrock and Maie Stein, 2023). To reduce the negative effects of gossip, organizations should focus on clear communication, set clear information-sharing rules, address issues like poor supervision, and create a supportive workplace through training and awareness programs (Xiaoye Qian, Wanqiu Li, Yinglan Zhao and Yujie Wang, 2024).

#### **2.1.2 Psychological Capital**

Psychological Capital, or PsyCap, is a positive psychological resource made up of four parts: self-confidence in abilities (self-efficacy), hope to reach goals, optimism about success, and the ability to recover from setbacks (resilience) (Luthans et al., 2007; Kuo et al., 2022). PsyCap is important because it is changeable and can be developed through experience and learning, unlike fixed personality traits (Luthans et al., 2007). It plays a key role in supporting employees' well-being and improving work outcomes. Organizations can build PsyCap by offering positive experiences, supportive leadership, training, and clear goals with feedback (Kuo et al., 2022). High PsyCap is linked to better job satisfaction, commitment, engagement, performance, mental health, and less stress or desire to leave, while low PsyCap corresponds with negative feelings like anxiety and burnout (Kosar Abdeh Keykha , Mona Alinejad-Naeini, Hamid Peyrovi). Therefore, investing in PsyCap development helps organizations create a healthier and more productive workforce.

### **2.1.3 Workplace Cynicism**

Workplace cynicism is a negative attitude where employees believe their organization is dishonest, selfish, and insincere (Dean et al., 1998). It shows up as thoughts that the company lacks integrity, feelings of anger or disappointment, and behaviors like criticism or passive resistance (Dean et al., 1998). Studying cynicism is important because it harms trust, motivation, and loyalty, which disrupts the workplace. It often arises from unfair treatment, broken promises, poor leadership, or badly managed changes (Kuo, Chang., T-K and Cheng, 2023). High cynicism leads to lower job satisfaction, commitment, and performance, higher turnover, resistance to change, and behaviors like cyberloafing (Ming Kong, 2018). To reduce cynicism, organizations should ensure fairness, communicate openly, respect agreements with employees, manage change effectively, and respond quickly to problems and poor leadership (Bashir, Shabbir, Saleem, Abrar, Saqib, Gill, 2020).

### **2.1.4 Cyberloafing**

Cyberloafing means employees using work internet and devices for personal activities during work hours, such as checking emails, social media, shopping, or watching videos (Lim & Chen, 2021). It is important to study because it directly affects productivity, wastes resources, and can create security risks. Cyberloafing reduces the quality and amount of work, causes delays, and costs organizations money (Lim & Chen, 2021). People cyberloaf due to boredom, stress, low job satisfaction, heavy workload, poor supervision, unclear policies, or as a way to react against perceived unfairness or negativity at work (Liang, Guo, Gong, Li Ziyang Li, 2022). While mostly harmful, some view cyberloafing as a short break that helps reduce stress (Alhamd, 2023). To control it, organizations need clear rules on internet use, fair monitoring, engaging job design, good management, and support to reduce stress and increase satisfaction at work (Lim & Chen, 2021)

## **2.2 Conservation Of Resource Theory**

The Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, introduced by Stevan Hobfoll in 1989, offers a clear framework for understanding how stress, coping, and well-being are connected. The main idea is that people try to obtain, keep, protect, and build various types of resources. These resources

include objects like a house or car, personal traits such as self-confidence or optimism (often called psychological capital), stable conditions like a reliable job or marriage, and energy sources such as time, money, or knowledge (Hobfoll, 2001). Stress happens when people fear losing these resources, actually lose them, or do not gain enough after using their resources. Unlike other stress theories that focus on demands or how people judge situations, COR theory places more importance on the loss of resources as the main cause of stress. People are naturally motivated to avoid losing resources and are more affected by losses than by gaining the same amount, a process known as "resource loss spirals" (Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001).

A key part of COR theory is the idea of resource caravans. This means that individuals who start with more resources tend to gain even more and are better protected against losing resources. On the other hand, those with fewer resources are more at risk of losing even more, which can create a downward spiral that harms their well-being and increases stress. The theory also explains that people actively use their resources to avoid loss, recover from loss, or gain new resources. For example, an employee might spend time and effort (energy resources) to improve their skills (personal resources) to keep their job (a condition resource) in a stressful work environment.

COR theory is especially useful for understanding how stress at work, like experiencing gossip, can drain a person's psychological and social resources. This depletion of resources can then affect their attitudes and behaviors within the organization (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll & Shirom, 2001). Overall, the theory highlights the importance of resource management in maintaining mental health and coping with stress in different settings.

## **2.3 Hypothesis**

### **2.3.1 The Relationship between Workplace Gossip and Cyberloafing**

According to the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, the connection between workplace gossip (independent variable) and cyberloafing (dependent variable) can be understood through the concept of resource loss. Negative workplace gossip acts as a major stressor that threatens and drains employees' valuable resources (Grosser et al., 2022; Ye et al., 2022). Being exposed to rumors, harsh judgments, and a climate of distrust reduces important psychological

resources such as feelings of security, psychological safety, and emotional well-being. This loss of resources leads to stress, as individuals try to protect what remains or manage the damage.

Employees often turn to cyberloafing as a way to cope with this stress and resource loss. From the COR theory perspective, cyberloafing represents an effort to invest in resources to avoid further losses or regain energy. For example, employees may engage in non-work-related internet use to temporarily escape a stressful or hostile work environment, mentally detach from the negative effects of gossip, or find short-term emotional relief (Alhamd, 2023; Lim & Chen, 2021). Although this behavior might appear counterproductive, it helps employees conserve or restore their personal resources that are threatened by workplace gossip.

Therefore, COR theory provides a clear theoretical basis to suggest a positive link between workplace gossip and cyberloafing. Employees are likely to engage in cyberloafing as a strategy to handle the stress and resource depletion caused by gossip in the workplace. This explanation highlights how cyberloafing can serve as a protective response to manage the negative impact of gossip on employees' psychological resources.

### **2.3.2 The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital in the Relationship between Workplace Gossip and Cyberloafing**

Psychological capital mediates the relationship between workplace gossip and cyberloafing. Negative workplace gossip acts as a major stressor that directly reduces an employee's psychological capital, which includes important personal resources such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Kuo et al., 2022; Luthans et al., 2007). Continuous exposure to negative gossip can lower employees' confidence in managing their work, reduce their positive outlook on the future, and weaken their ability to recover from difficulties. This loss of psychological capital creates emotional and psychological vulnerability.

According to COR theory, when people lose resources, they try to protect what remains or gain new resources to handle stress (Hobfoll, 1989). In this case, employees with reduced psychological capital have fewer internal resources to cope with the stress caused by workplace gossip. As a result, they may turn to harmful coping methods like cyberloafing to preserve their remaining energy or to temporarily escape a stressful and emotionally draining work situation (Lim

& Chen, 2021). Cyberloafing serves as a way to compensate, allowing employees to regain some control or mental relief when their psychological resources are low.

Thus, psychological capital is expected to explain how workplace gossip affects cyberloafing. When gossip drains these key resources, employees become more likely to engage in cyberloafing as a coping strategy. This mediating role highlights the important process by which negative gossip influences employee behavior through its impact on personal resources.

### **2.3.2 The Mediating Role of Workplace Cynicism in the Relationship between Workplace Gossip and Cyberloafing**

Workplace gossip can play a significant role in developing workplace cynicism, which then acts as a mediator linking gossip to cyberloafing. From the perspective of the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, frequent exposure to negative gossip such as unfair criticism can make employees feel that their valuable resources like organizational justice, trust in management, and psychological safety are threatened or lost (Chen et al., 2023). This perceived threat can cause employees to develop a cynical attitude, where they begin to see the organization as self-interested, lacking integrity, and unconcerned about their well-being (Dean et al., 1998).

As workplace cynicism grows, it further drains employees' emotional and motivational resources, leading to disengagement and distrust. To protect their remaining resources or to show their frustration, cynical employees may reduce their effort and attention to work tasks, which can appear as cyberloafing (Alhamd, 2023; Lim & Chen, 2021). Therefore, workplace cynicism is an important mediator that transforms the negative effects of workplace gossip into increased cyberloafing, as employees try to cope with resource loss and diminished trust in their organization.

### **2.3.3 The Sequential Mediation of Psychological Capital and Workplace Cynicism in the Relationship between Workplace Gossip and Cyberloafing**

This study proposes a sequential mediation model linking workplace gossip psychological capital, which then affects workplace cynicism eventually leading to cyberloafing. Negative workplace gossip acts as a stressor that reduces employees' psychological capital—their essential

personal resources such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resilience (Kuo et al., 2022). When psychological capital is depleted, employees feel less capable of managing work demands, making them more vulnerable to psychological distress and negative attitudes.

As psychological capital decreases, employees may feel more vulnerable and less able to cope, which can increase workplace cynicism (Nafei, 2024). When employees sense their resources are threatened or lost, and they lack the psychological strength to recover, they tend to develop a cynical attitude toward their organization, viewing it as untrustworthy or insincere (Dean et al., 1998). This cynicism further drains their emotional and motivational resources, weakening their engagement and commitment. To deal with this ongoing loss and disappointment, employees may engage in cyberloafing as a way of withdrawing or conserving their remaining energy, or to express dissatisfaction in a low-risk manner. Thus, the model suggests a chain reaction where gossip leads to reduced psychological capital, which increases cynicism, and this in turn encourages cyberloafing.

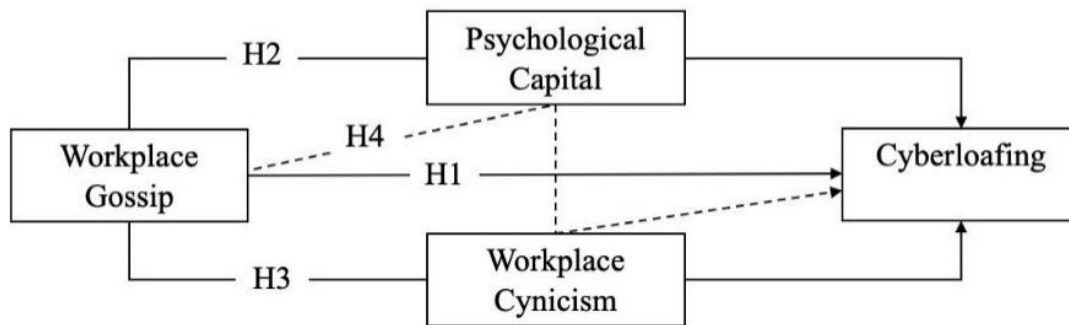
Workplace gossip also has a strong link with workplace cynicism, which mediates its effect on cyberloafing. From the COR perspective, repeated exposure to negative workplace gossip, often related to unfair criticism, threatens employees' valuable resources such as perceived organizational justice, trust in management, and psychological safety (Chen et al., 2023). This threat or actual loss of resources can cause employees to develop a cynical view of the organization, seeing it as self-interested, lacking integrity, or unconcerned with their well-being (Dean et al., 1998). Once cynicism develops, employees' emotional and motivational resources become further depleted, leading to disengagement and distrust. As a result, cynical employees may reduce their effort on work tasks and engage in cyberloafing to protect their remaining resources or express their dissatisfaction (Alhamd, 2023; Lim & Chen, 2021). Therefore, workplace cynicism is an important mediator that channels the negative effects of gossip into increased cyberloafing as employees try to cope with resource loss and reduced trust in their organization.

H1: Workplace gossip is positively associated with cyberloafing among employees.

H2: Psychological capital mediates the relationship between workplace gossip and cyberloafing, such that higher levels of gossip reduce psychological capital, which in turn increases cyberloafing.

H3: Workplace cynicism mediates the relationship between workplace gossip and cyberloafing, such that workplace gossip increases cynicism, which in turn leads to more cyberloafing.

H4: Psychological capital and workplace cynicism sequentially mediate the relationship between workplace gossip and cyberloafing, such that workplace gossip reduces psychological capital, which increases workplace cynicism, ultimately leading to higher levels of cyberloafing.



## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **3.1 Research Philosophy**

Research philosophy represents the foundational beliefs and assumptions that shape how a researcher approaches knowledge and understands reality. It influences the way data is gathered, interpreted, and analyzed, serving as the basis for the entire research design (Saunders et al., 2019). In business and social science research, several key philosophies are often used, each offering a unique viewpoint on how knowledge is obtained. For example, positivism believes in an objective reality that can be measured and analyzed through empirical methods, aiming to develop general laws. In contrast, interpretivism highlights the subjective nature of reality, focusing on understanding human experiences and meanings within their specific contexts. Realism holds that an external reality exists independently of human perception but recognizes that our knowledge of it is socially constructed. Pragmatism prioritizes practical outcomes and chooses research methods based on what best solves the research problem, regardless of philosophical background (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research philosophy chosen strongly shapes key methodological decisions, from hypothesis development to how data is interpreted.

For this study, a positivist research philosophy was selected because it fit the research goals and the characteristics of the variables involved. This philosophy supported the aim to identify and explain causal links between workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing. Positivism assumed social phenomena could be examined objectively, similar to natural sciences, allowing for hypothesis testing and results that could be generalized (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Since the variables in this study were quantitative and could be measured and analyzed statistically, this approach was appropriate. Adopting a positivist stance enabled this research to produce empirical evidence about how psychological capital and workplace cynicism sequentially mediated the effect of workplace gossip on cyberloafing within Pakistan's Healthcare sector.

This approach helped generate clear, testable findings that contributed to a precise and reliable understanding of these relationships. It also supported the creation of practical recommendations for organizations to better predict and manage behaviors like cyberloafing. By

grounding the study in positivism, the research aimed to offer actionable insights that could be applied to improve workplace management and outcomes.

### **3.2 Research Purpose**

The research purpose refers to the main goal or objective that a study aims to achieve, shaping the entire design and implementation of the research (Saunders et al., 2019). In business administration, research can typically be divided into three categories based on its purpose: exploratory, descriptive, and explanatory. Exploratory research is conducted when the problem is unclear, with the goal of gaining an initial understanding, generating early insights, or identifying potential questions. Descriptive research seeks to accurately depict the characteristics of a population, event, or situation, often answering questions like "what," "where," "when," and "how." Explanatory, or causal, research looks to identify cause-and-effect relationships between variables, explaining why certain events happen (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Each type of research purpose requires different methods, such as qualitative interviews for exploratory research and quantitative surveys or experiments for explanatory studies.

This study was explanatory in nature based on its research purpose. The reason for using an explanatory approach was to determine how workplace gossip influenced cyberloafing, particularly by exploring the sequential mediating effects of psychological capital and workplace cynicism. The focus was not on simply describing how common these variables were but rather on explaining the underlying processes and establishing predictive links. The aim to offer practical recommendations for organizational management, helping them manage harmful behaviors by understanding their root causes, made a causal framework necessary (Bryman & Bell, 2019). By concentrating on cause-and-effect relationships, this research intended to provide a thorough understanding that could guide targeted interventions and policy-making within Pakistan's Healthcare sector.

### **3.3 Research Approach**

A research approach refers to the overall strategy for conducting a study, especially regarding how theory and research relate to each other. In business administration, the two main research approaches are deductive and inductive. A deductive approach begins with an existing

theory or hypothesis, which is then tested through data collection and empirical observation. This method moves from broad principles to specific cases, aiming to confirm or disprove the initial theory. It is commonly linked to quantitative research methods and a positivist worldview, focusing on identifying generalizable relationships between variables. In contrast, an inductive approach starts with detailed observations and data, from which broader patterns, generalizations, and theories are created. It moves from specific details to general concepts, usually involving qualitative methods and an interpretivist perspective, with the goal of building new theory or gaining in-depth understanding (Saunders et al., 2019). The choice between these approaches greatly shapes the research design, data collection, and analysis techniques.

This study followed a deductive approach based on its research purpose and philosophical stance. Several reasons supported this choice. First, the study drew on the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which offered a well-established framework to understand the connections between workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing. The goal was to test particular hypotheses derived from COR theory related to the direct and sequential mediating effects. Second, the quantitative data collection and statistical analysis methods used (such as mediation analysis) fit well with the deductive approach, which focused on hypothesis testing and producing generalizable results (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Lastly, the aim to identify causal relationships and provide practical recommendations for organizations in Pakistan's Healthcare sector reinforced the use of a deductive approach, as it supported the validation of theoretical assumptions in a specific context..

### **3.4 Research Strategy**

Research strategy refers to the overall plan guiding how research is carried out to meet its objectives, including the methods for collecting and analyzing data (Saunders et al., 2019). In business administration, common research strategies are quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. A quantitative approach gathers numerical data and uses statistical tools to identify patterns, relationships, and to generalize results to a larger population. This approach aligns with deductive reasoning and positivist philosophy, focusing on objectivity and measurement. In contrast, a qualitative approach collects non-numerical data, such as interviews and observations, to deeply understand phenomena, explore meanings, and reveal complex social processes. It

usually follows an inductive approach and interpretivist philosophy, valuing personal experiences and contextual detail. Mixed methods combine both quantitative and qualitative techniques in one study to gain a fuller understanding of the research problem.

This study adopted a quantitative research strategy based on several considerations. First, the positivist philosophy and deductive approach of the study required measuring variables and testing hypotheses through statistical analysis to identify causal links. The variables involved workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing were suitable for quantitative measurement using established scales, allowing the collection of numerical data from a large employee sample (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Second, the goal of generalizing findings to the broader Healthcare sector in Pakistan demanded a large sample size and rigorous statistical methods, which were typical of quantitative research.

Using this approach allowed precise determination of the strength and direction of relationships among independent, mediating, and dependent variables. It provided solid empirical evidence to confirm or challenge the proposed sequential mediation model.

### **3.5 Time Horizon**

The time horizon of a research study refers to the period during which data is collected and how it relates to the studied phenomena. In business administration, research is commonly classified into two types based on time horizon: cross-sectional and longitudinal. A cross-sectional study collects data at a single point in time from a group of individuals or entities, providing a snapshot of variables and their relationships at that specific moment. In contrast, a longitudinal study gathers data from the same subjects at multiple points over time, enabling researchers to observe changes, identify trends, and establish temporal order, which is important for determining causality (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The choice between these designs depends on the research questions, available resources, and the nature of the phenomena investigated.

This study employed a cross-sectional time horizon for several reasons. Primarily, it aimed to explore the relationships between workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing as they existed simultaneously within Pakistan's Healthcare sector. A cross-sectional design was appropriate for capturing these interactions at one point in time, offering a

clear snapshot of current conditions. Additionally, practical factors such as limited time and resources preferred a cross-sectional approach, as it was generally simpler and less costly to implement compared to longitudinal studies.

Although longitudinal studies provided stronger evidence for causality by showing temporal sequences, the current research focused on identifying existing relationships and mediating mechanisms. Therefore, a cross-sectional design was sufficient to meet the study's objectives effectively while balancing practical constraints.

### **3.6. Data Collection Method**

Researchers conducting quantitative studies have several data collection methods to choose from, each with distinct advantages and disadvantages. Common approaches include surveys (such as questionnaires), experiments, content analysis, and secondary data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Surveys, especially those using structured questionnaires, are popular for collecting numerical data from large samples, enabling statistical analysis and generalization. Experiments manipulate one or more independent variables to observe their effects on dependent variables in controlled settings to identify cause-and-effect relationships. Content analysis involves systematically examining existing texts or media to detect patterns and themes, while secondary data analysis uses data originally gathered by others for different research purposes. Choosing the appropriate data collection method relies heavily on the research questions, the type of variables involved, and the overall research design.

For this study, data was collected through a questionnaire-based surveys were administered to employees working in Pakistan's Healthcare sector. This survey method was selected for several reasons. First, it facilitated the efficient gathering of data from many participants across various organizations, which is vital for achieving generalizable results in quantitative research. Second, using standardized questionnaires helped maintain consistency in data collection, reducing bias and improving the reliability of measurements.

This approach also ensured effective access to the target sample, enhancing the validity of the data for investigating the complex relationships among workplace gossip, psychological

capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing. Overall, the chosen method supported the study's goals by providing reliable, consistent, and culturally appropriate data collection.

### 3.7 Questionnaire Development

The questionnaire employed in this study was carefully crafted in English, consisting of two primary sections. The first section aimed to collect fundamental demographic information from participants, including age, gender, educational attainment, and organizational tenure, thereby providing a detailed overview of the sample's characteristics. The second section was dedicated to assessing the key variables under investigation: workplace gossip, psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing. The development process was enriched through the collaborative efforts of experienced MS scholars and university faculty, which ensured both academic rigor and practical relevance. All measurement scales incorporated were formatted as five-point Likert-type scales, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," to enable precise quantitative analysis. To guarantee the reliability and validity of the instrument, each scale was adapted from previously validated measures widely employed in the academic literature. These established scales were subsequently tailored to fit the contextual nuances of Pakistan's Healthcare sector as well as the particular characteristics of the research sample, thereby ensuring cultural sensitivity and contextual appropriateness. Prior to full-scale deployment, the initial draft of the questionnaire underwent a pilot testing phase involving 10 respondents drawn from the target population. Their constructive feedback concerning clarity, usability, simplicity, length, and comprehensiveness was systematically gathered. Incorporating this feedback alongside additional expert recommendations from the MS scholars and university professors, the questionnaire was meticulously refined, resulting in the finalized instrument used for data collection.

### 3.8 Measure

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Questions</b>
Workplace Gossip	Brady, Brown, and Liang (2017)	1. There is frequent discussion about other employees in my workplace.
		2. I often hear unfavorable remarks about

		colleagues at work.
		3. Gossip regarding coworkers is prevalent in this organization.
		4. People at my workplace regularly discuss the personal lives of others.
		5. I frequently overhear staff making negative comments about their coworkers.
Psychological Capital	Luthans, Avolio, Avey, and Norman (2007)	1. I am confident in sharing my ideas during discussions about the company's strategy.
		2. When I encounter a difficult task at work, I trust in my ability to complete it successfully.
		3. I can generate multiple methods to reach my current work objectives. (Hope)
		4. If I face a problem at work, I am able to think of several solutions to resolve it.
		5. I am generally able to handle stressful situations at work calmly.
Workplace Cynicism	Dean, Brandes, and Dharwadkar (1998)	1. I think this organization does not truly care about the well-being of its

		employees.
		2. Many of the organization's policies seem to favor management rather than support the employees.
		3. When I reflect on how this organization functions, I often feel strong negative emotions.
		4. I regularly express sarcastic remarks about the organization to my coworkers.
		5. I believe the organization's declared values are merely superficial and not sincerely upheld.
Cyberloafing	Lim (2002)	1. During working hours, I access the internet to check my personal email.
		2. During working hours, I use the internet to visit social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.
		3. During working hours, I engage in online shopping or browse retail websites.
		4. During working hours, I read online news that is not related to my professional responsibilities.

		5. During working hours, I watch videos or listen to music that are unrelated to my work tasks
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### 3.9 Unit of Analysis

The unit of analysis refers to the main entity being studied in research; it identifies the "what" or "whom" that the study focuses on (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It serves as the central element in the research and guides the level at which data is gathered and conclusions are made. In business research, common units of analysis include individuals, groups, organizations, industries, and even countries (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Selecting the appropriate unit of analysis is essential because it influences the research design, methods of data collection, and the validity of the conclusions drawn from the study.

In this study, the unit of analysis was individuals. This decision aligned with the research questions, which concentrated on psychological processes and behaviors occurring at the individual level. Specifically, the study examined how workplace gossip affected employees' psychological capital, workplace cynicism, and cyberloafing behaviors. Since these variables were experienced and expressed by employees themselves, collecting data from individuals ensured a focused and accurate analysis.

By analyzing individuals, the study could closely investigate the relationships among workplace gossip perception, psychological capital, cynicism, and cyberloafing. This approach enabled the effective testing of the proposed mediation model, as it captured the nuances of these psychological and behavioral dynamics at the individual employee level.

### 3.10 Population

The research population refers to the entire group of individuals, objects, or events that the researcher aims to study and to which the study's results are meant to be generalized (Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). It includes all the elements that share the characteristics relevant to the research question.

For this study, the target population was employees working in Pakistan's Healthcare sector. This sector played a vital role in Pakistan's economy, consisting of numerous organizations and a large workforce. Although exact numbers may have varied, it was estimated that the employed labor force in the private sector, which largely represented the Healthcare sector, exceeded 60 million people (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2021; PIDE).

Therefore, every individual employed in the Healthcare sector of Pakistan represented a member of the population from which the sample for this study was selected.

### **3.11 Sampling Technique**

Sampling technique is the systematic method of choosing a subset of individuals or elements from a larger population to take part in a research study (Saunders et al., 2019). These techniques are mainly divided into probability sampling and non-probability sampling. Probability sampling methods such as simple random sampling, systematic sampling, stratified sampling, and cluster sampling ensure that every member of the population has a known and non-zero chance of being selected, which improves the generalizability of the results. On the other hand, non-probability sampling methods, including convenience sampling, purposive sampling, quota sampling, and snowball sampling, do not guarantee that all members have an equal chance of selection and often depend on the researcher's judgment or ease of access. Although non-probability methods may reduce the ability to generalize findings, they are frequently used in exploratory studies or when accessing the entire population is difficult.

In the current study, a multi-stage cluster sampling technique was applied, followed by convenience sampling at the final stage. This strategy was chosen due to the large size and wide geographic distribution of Pakistan's Healthcare sector workforce, making simple random sampling impractical. First, the Healthcare sector was divided into clusters based on major cities. From these clusters, companies located in Islamabad was selected. Next, these Islamabad-based companies was grouped by specific city areas, such as commercial hubs or industrial zones. From these groups, companies in different areas of Islamabad will be chosen. Finally, employees from

these selected companies were conveniently selected to participate in the survey. This multi-stage approach effectively combines the need for representative coverage across a large area with practical considerations of accessibility and data collection feasibility.

### **3.12 Sample Size**

Sample size refers to the number of participants or observations included in a research study, serving as a subset of the larger population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Choosing the right sample size is essential to ensure the study has enough statistical power and that its results can be generalized. Although there are various formulas and guidelines for calculating sample size, a general principle is that larger samples typically produce more accurate and reliable results, especially in quantitative research focused on statistical inference. However, the ideal sample size also depends on factors like population variability, desired confidence level, margin of error, and the complexity of the statistical methods used (Saunders et al., 2019). For this study, a sample size of 171 was selected, which is suited for large populations. This number ensures sufficient power to identify significant relationships among variables and allows findings to be generalized to the broader population of healthcare sector employees in Pakistan.

## Chapter 4: Results

### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

**Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 171)**

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	78	45.6%
	Female	93	54.4%
<b>Age</b>	20-29 years	45	26.3%
	30-39 years	67	39.2%
	40-49 years	42	24.6%
	50 years and above	17	9.9%
<b>Tenure</b>	Less than 2 years	38	22.2%
	2-5 years	71	41.5%
	6-10 years	47	27.5%
	More than 10 years	15	8.8%
<b>Job Role</b>	Nursing Staff	89	52.0%
	Administrative	52	30.4%
	Paramedical	30	17.6%

The study included 171 participants, with a slightly higher number of females (54.4%) compared to males (45.6%). The age distribution showed that most participants were in their prime working years, specifically between 30 and 39 years old (39.2%), with a substantial portion also in the 20-29 age bracket (26.3%). Regarding their time with the organization, the majority of respondents (41.5%) had been employed for 2 to 5 years, followed by those with 6 to 10 years of experience (27.5%). This suggests that the participant group was generally stable and possessed a reasonable level of experience within their roles.

Finally, the participants' job roles were primarily concentrated in nursing, accounting for 52.0% of the sample, while administrative staff made up 30.4% and paramedical staff 17.6%. This indicates that the study's findings are largely representative of the organization's core operational staff, particularly nurses, and mid-career individuals with a few years of tenure.

## 4.2 Reliability Statistics

Before proceeding to test the research model, the internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ). Table 2 summarizes the reliability statistics for all four constructs: Workplace Gossip (WG), Psychological Capital (PsyCap), Workplace Cynicism (WC), and Cyberloafing (CL).

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics (Cronbach's Alpha)**

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ )
Workplace Gossip (WG)	5	0.89
Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	5	0.91
Workplace Cynicism (WC)	5	0.88
Cyberloafing (CL)	5	0.86

The internal consistency of the measurement scales was assessed through Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) to ensure reliability prior to the analysis of the research model. This critical step confirms the cohesiveness of items within each construct, a fundamental requirement for valid social science research.

As summarized in Table 2, all four constructs Workplace Gossip (WG), Psychological Capital (PsyCap), Workplace Cynicism (WC), and Cyberloafing (CL) demonstrated highly satisfactory reliability coefficients. Each construct surpassed the conventional threshold of  $\alpha \geq 0.70$ , indicating robust internal consistency. Specifically, Cyberloafing exhibited an  $\alpha$  of 0.86, Workplace Cynicism an  $\alpha$  of 0.88, Workplace Gossip an  $\alpha$  of 0.89, and Psychological Capital achieved the highest reliability with an  $\alpha$  of 0.91.

These findings affirm that the items constituting each scale are strongly inter-correlated and effectively measure their respective underlying constructs. The consistently high Cronbach's Alpha values across all variables validate the reliability of the collected data, thereby establishing a firm foundation for subsequent statistical analyses aimed at testing the proposed research model.

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Analysis

Descriptive statistics and the Pearson correlation coefficients for the key variables are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Confirmatory Factor Analysis Model Fit Indices**

Model	$\chi^2$	df	$\chi^2/df$	CFI	TLI	RMSEA [90% CI]	SRMR
<b>Hypothesized 4-Factor</b>	185.42	104	1.78	0.97	0.96	0.05 [0.04, 0.07]	0.04
3-Factor (WG+WC merged)	398.67	107	3.73	0.86	0.83	0.13 [0.11, 0.14]	0.09
1-Factor (All merged)	721.35	110	6.56	0.70	0.65	0.18 [0.17, 0.19]	0.12
<i>Note: WG = Workplace Gossip; WC = Workplace Cynicism; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker-Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual.</i>							

The Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results, as detailed in Table 3, strongly endorse the Hypothesized 4-Factor Model as the most suitable and well-fitting structure for the latent constructs under investigation. This model consistently demonstrated exemplary fit across established evaluation criteria, notably achieving a Comparative Fit Index (CFI) of 0.97 and a Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) of 0.96. Both values considerably surpass the conventional threshold of 0.95, indicating a high degree of model adequacy. Further supporting its superior fit, the Root

Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) for the 4-Factor Model was 0.05 (with a 90% confidence interval of [0.04,0.07] and the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) was 0.04. These values fall comfortably below the stringent cut-offs of 0.06 and 0.08, respectively, thereby reinforcing the model's excellent parsimony and close approximation to the observed data.

On the other hand, alternative models, including the competing 3-Factor Model (involving the merger of Workplace Gossip and Workplace Cynicism) and the highly parsimonious 1-Factor Model (positing a single overarching factor for all items), exhibited substantially poorer fit. The 3-Factor Model yielded degraded fit indices (CFI=0.86, TLI=0.83, RMSEA =0.11, SRMR =0.09), while the 1-Factor Model presented the weakest fit (CFI =0.70, TLI =0.65, RMSEA =0.18, SRMR =0.12). The decisively superior fit of the Hypothesized 4-Factor Model, particularly when juxtaposed against these more constrained theoretical alternatives, provides compelling evidence for the factorial and discriminant validity of the measured constructs, affirming the theoretical distinctiveness of the four proposed factors

#### 4.4 Convergent & Discriminant Validity (CFA Results)

**Table 4: Convergent & Discriminant Validity (CFA Results)**

Construct	AVE	1	2	3	4
1. Workplace Gossip	0.62	<b>0.79</b>			
2. Psychological Cap.	0.67	- 0.51	<b>0.82</b>		
3. Workplace Cynicism	0.60	0.57	- 0.63	<b>0.77</b>	
4. Cyberloafing	0.58	0.49	- 0.55	0.61	<b>0.76</b>
<i>Note: Diagonal elements (in bold) are the square root of the AVE. Off-diagonals are inter-construct correlations.</i>					

The assessment of convergent and discriminant validity for the four constructs, based on Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) results, adheres to the criteria outlined by Fornell and Larcker

(1981), as presented in Table 4. Convergent validity is first substantiated by the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values, which fall within a range of 0.58 (Cyberloafing) to 0.67 (Psychological Capital). These values consistently surpass the recommended threshold of 0.50, indicating that the latent factor accounts for more than 50% of the variance in the indicator items for each respective construct.

Secondly, discriminant validity was evaluated by comparing the square root of the AVE (bolded diagonal elements) with the corresponding inter-construct correlations (off-diagonal elements). To establish discriminant validity, the square root of the AVE for a given construct must exceed its correlation with any other construct. For example, the square root of the AVE for Psychological Capital (0.82) is greater than its correlations with Workplace Gossip (−0.51), Workplace Cynicism (−0.63), and Cyberloafing (−0.55). This pattern is consistently observed across all constructs in the table, with the square root of the AVE for each factor (e.g., Workplace Gossip: 0.79; Psychological Capital: 0.82; Workplace Cynicism: 0.77; Cyberloafing: 0.76) being greater than all corresponding off-diagonal correlation coefficients. This evidence affirms the discriminant validity of the four factors, confirming that each construct measures a distinct and unique domain.

#### 4.5 Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations

**Table 5: Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
1. Workplace Gossip	3.45	0.92	1			
2. Psychological Cap.	3.80	0.87	-.51**	1		
3. Workplace Cynicism	3.65	0.89	.57**	-.63**	1	
4. Cyberloafing	3.30	0.95	.49**	-.55**	.61**	1
** p < 0.01 (2-tailed).						

Table 5 provides an overview of the average scores (means) and spread of data (standard deviations) for the four main variables, along with how they relate to each other (zero-order

correlations). Psychological Capital had the highest average score (Mean =3.80), followed by Workplace Cynicism (Mean =3.65), Workplace Gossip (Mean=3.45), and Cyberloafing (Mean =3.30). The standard deviation values, which ranged from 0.87 to 0.95, indicate that the data points for all variables were similarly spread out from their respective averages.

The correlation analysis, which examines relationships between variables, showed several important findings. As anticipated, Workplace Gossip and Workplace Cynicism were strongly and positively linked ( $r=0.57$ ), meaning that as one increased, the other tended to increase as well. Similarly, Workplace Gossip and Cyberloafing also had a positive relationship ( $r=0.49$ ). In contrast, Psychological Capital showed significant negative relationships with Workplace Gossip ( $r=-0.51$ ), Workplace Cynicism ( $r=-0.63$ ), and Cyberloafing ( $r=-0.55$ ), suggesting that higher Psychological Capital was associated with lower levels of these negative behaviors. Additionally, Workplace Cynicism was strongly and positively associated with Cyberloafing ( $r=0.61$ ).

Overall, the strength and direction of these observed relationships are consistent with the initial predictions of the study. These preliminary findings offer basic support for the connections between these variables, which will be further examined in a more comprehensive statistical model.

#### 4.6 Results of Serial Mediation Analysis

**Table 6: Results of Serial Mediation Analysis (PROCESS Model 6)**

Path	Co-eff. ( $\beta$ )	SE	t	p	95% Boot-strap CI
<b>Direct and Total Effects</b>					
Total Effect: WG $\rightarrow$ CL (H1)	0.41	0.07	5.86	<.001	[0.27, 0.55]
Direct Effect: WG $\rightarrow$ CL (after mediators)	0.08	0.06	1.33	0.185	[-0.04, 0.20]

<b>Indirect Effects (Mediation)</b>					
H2: WG → PsyCap → CL	0.13	0.04			[0.06, 0.22]
H3: WG → WC → CL	0.15	0.04			[0.08, 0.24]
H4: WG → PsyCap → WC → CL (Serial Mediation)	0.05	0.02			[0.02, 0.10]
<b>Model Pathways</b>					
a1: WG → PsyCap	-0.47	0.06	-7.83	<.001	[-0.59, -0.35]
a2: WG → WC (controlling for PsyCap)	0.35	0.06	5.83	<.001	[0.23, 0.47]
d21: PsyCap → WC	-0.44	0.06	-7.33	<.001	[-0.56, -0.32]
b1: PsyCap → CL (controlling for WG, WC)	-0.16	0.07	-2.29	0.023	[-0.30, -0.02]
b2: WC → CL (controlling for WG, PsyCap)	0.42	0.07	6.00	<.001	[0.28, 0.56]
<i>Note: WG = Workplace Gossip; PsyCap = Psychological Capital; WC = Workplace Cynicism; CL = Cyberloafing. Unstandardized coefficients are reported. CI = Confidence Interval.</i>					

Table 6 presents the results of the serial mediation analysis (using PROCESS Model 6) which simultaneously tests the direct and indirect effects of Workplace Gossip (WG) on Cyberloafing (CL) through the sequential mediators, Psychological Capital (PsyCap) and Workplace Cynicism (WC). The analysis indicates that the total effect (H1) of WG on CL is

significant ( $\beta = 0.41$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI [0.27, 0.55]), suggesting that an increase in WG is associated with an increase in CL. However, the direct effect of WG on CL becomes non-significant ( $\beta = 0.08$ ,  $p = 0.185$ , 95% CI [-0.04, 0.20]) once the mediators are included in the model, providing initial support for a full mediation model. Supporting the specific indirect pathways (H2, H3, H4), the indirect effects are all significant as their 95% Bootstrap Confidence Intervals (CI) do not include zero: the path WG to PsyCap to CL [0.06, 0.22]), the path WG to WC to CL [0.08, 0.24], and critically, the serial mediation pathway (H4), WG to PsyCap to WC to CL ( $\beta = 0.05$ , CI [0.02, 0.10]), which demonstrates that PsyCap and WC collectively and sequentially mediate the relationship between WG and CL. Examination of the Model Pathways confirms the foundational links: WG negatively predicts PsyCap ( $a1:\beta = -0.47$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); WG positively predicts WC even after controlling for PsyCap ( $a2:\beta = 0.35$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); PsyCap negatively predicts WC ( $d21:\beta = -0.44$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ); and finally, both PsyCap ( $b1:\beta = -0.16$ ,  $p = 0.023$ ) and WC ( $b2:\beta = 0.42$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) significantly predict CL. These results indicate that serial mediation is present, where the negative impact of Workplace Gossip on Cyberloafing is fully explained by its detrimental influence on Psychological Capital, which in turn fuels Workplace Cynicism, ultimately leading to increased Cyberloafing behavior.

## 4.6 Conclusion

The study analyzed data from 171 middle-aged nursing staff, as detailed in Table 1, to understand certain workplace behaviors. The measurement tools used were highly reliable, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.86 to 0.91 (Table 2), and all constructs were valid, showing good convergent and discriminant validity (Table 4).

Table 5 showed that while the nurses generally had high Psychological Capital (average of 3.80), this was strongly linked to lower levels of negative workplace behaviors; for instance, Psychological Capital had a negative correlation of -0.63 with Workplace Cynicism. Additionally, the negative behaviors themselves were found to be related to each other.

A key finding from the serial mediation analysis (Table 6) was that Workplace Gossip indirectly leads to Cyberloafing through a specific sequence. Specifically, Workplace Gossip reduces Psychological Capital, which then increases Workplace Cynicism, and this, in turn, leads

to more Cyberloafing. This indirect pathway was statistically significant ( $\beta=0.05$ , 95% CI [0.02,0.10]), indicating that these factors work together to influence employee behavior.

## Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

### 5.1: Theoretical Implications

This research significantly advances the organizational behavior field by introducing and testing a new sequential mediation model rooted in the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001). While the negative effects of workplace gossip and the causes of cyberloafing have been studied separately this study is novel in modeling the exact steps connecting these elements through a resource lens. It shows that negative gossip acts as a major workplace stressor, leading to a resource loss spiral. Specifically, gossip reduces an employee's personal resources, especially their psychological capital. This reduction in PsyCap which includes hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism is a primary loss of resources. Following COR theory, this initial loss causes a secondary reaction: increased workplace cynicism, as employees mentally detach from an organization they see as harmful. This state of low resources and cynicism then leads to digital deviance, with employees using cyberloafing to avoid the stressful work environment. By detailing this Gossip → PsyCap Loss → Cynicism → Cyberloafing path, the study explains how resource loss leads to disengagement, enhancing COR's use in understanding modern workplace social stressors and technology misuse.

A second important theoretical contribution is the study's ability to combine Positive Organizational Behavior and Negative Organizational Behavior. By showing that psychological capital is not just a positive outcome but also a crucial mediator that can be harmed by negative social interactions, this research deepens our understanding of PsyCap's weaknesses. It responds to the need for studies that examine the limits of positive resources by demonstrating how harmful organizational processes can damage an employee's core psychological strength. Furthermore, by thoroughly testing this complex model in Pakistan's healthcare sector, the study addresses a key gap in global organizational research the excessive reliance on Western samples. Successfully repeating the resource loss and sequential mediation process in this non-Western, high-context culture, where social reputation is very important, strongly supports the idea that COR principles can predict counterproductive behavior across different cultures. This contextualization improves the generalizability of both the COR framework and our understanding of digital deviance, making

sure these theoretical mechanisms are relevant in various global work settings with different social values and communication.

## **5.2: Practical Implications**

The established sequential relationship, specifically the path from gossip to psychological capital (PsyCap) loss, then to cynicism, and finally to cyberloafing, offers a valuable diagnostic tool for healthcare management. This allows for early intervention in the resource depletion process. As negative workplace gossip is identified as the initial stressor it is crucial for healthcare organizations to adopt formal communication channels and ensure high procedural justice. Transparent and timely communication regarding organizational changes, policy updates, and patient care protocols can prevent rumors and ambiguity, which fuel negative gossip. Given that PsyCap is the first internal resource to be depleted, implementing targeted Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) interventions is essential. These interventions can include resilience training for high-stress units (e.g., ER, ICU), coaching sessions focused on self-efficacy and goal attainment (hope), and systems for recognizing contributions to reinforce optimism. Proactive investment in strengthening staff PsyCap acts as a psychological buffer against social stressors inherent in a high-pressure environment, thereby preventing the escalation to cynicism.

This study also provides insights for mitigating cyberloafing, which is a significant concern for patient safety and efficiency in healthcare, by addressing its direct precursor: workplace cynicism. Punitive measures against cyberloafing alone are insufficient; management must focus on rebuilding organizational trust, which fuels cynicism. This necessitates strict adherence to ethical labor practices, ensuring transparency and perceived fairness in workload distribution, staffing levels, and promotion processes, and aligning managerial actions with organizational values. If employees perceive organizational policies as lacking integrity, cynicism will increase, leading to withdrawal behaviors such as cyberloafing.

Rather than relying on restrictive IT monitoring, which can lead to distrust, a preventative approach focusing on job design and process flows is recommended. By ensuring that jobs are adequately resourced, roles are clearly defined, and employees have sufficient control over their demanding work environment, management can reduce emotional exhaustion, which often leads

to disengagement through cyberloafing. This approach shifts the focus from penalizing a symptom to addressing the underlying organizational context.

### **5.3: Limitations and Future Research Implications**

While this study offers compelling evidence for the sequential psychological process that links workplace gossip to cyberloafing, several limitations inherent to the research design suggest clear avenues for future inquiry. Firstly, as data was collected from a single source (subordinates) on all variables, there is an inherent risk of common method bias potentially inflating the observed relationships; future research should therefore employ multisource data collection methods, perhaps by obtaining gossip ratings from peers or supervisors.

Secondly, due to the cross-sectional nature of this study, definite conclusions regarding the causality among the variables cannot be definitively drawn; succeeding investigations should utilize longitudinal or time-lagged designs to firmly establish the directional influence of gossip on resource depletion (PsyCap), cynicism, and subsequent digital deviance.

Thirdly, the research framework focused exclusively on psychological capital and workplace cynicism as mediators. Future scholars are advised to test the role of alternative intermediary variables, such as emotional exhaustion or organizational which are also deeply rooted in the COR framework, to enrich the predictive power of the model. Similarly, the current model lacked any moderating variables, making the relationships between the constructs relatively simple; future work should incorporate relevant personality or managerial factors, such as organizational support or supervisor humility, to identify when the detrimental effect of gossip is strengthened or weakened. Finally, the generalizability of these findings may be restricted as data was obtained exclusively from healthcare sector companies in a specific geographic area (Islamabad); future studies should seek to replicate this model using geographically dispersed samples across Pakistan and other high-context cultures to enhance the external validity of the conclusions.

## 5.4: Conclusion

This research aimed to fill a gap in existing literature by developing a process-based model. This model explains how negative workplace gossip sequentially leads to cyberloafing, specifically within the Healthcare sector of Pakistan. The study used a positivist philosophy, a deductive approach, and a quantitative strategy.

A cross-sectional study was conducted, gathering data from 171 employees in Islamabad companies to establish a causal pathway. The findings confirmed the proposed sequential model. Negative workplace gossip was shown to significantly decrease psychological capital, which then increased workplace cynicism, ultimately leading to higher levels of cyberloafing.

The theoretical implications are substantial as the study supports the resource loss spiral predicted by the Conservation of Resources (COR) theory. It also enhances the model's generalizability across cultures by providing evidence from a high-context, non-Western environment. Practically, these results offer valuable guidance for managers, especially in the high-stress Healthcare sector, by identifying specific intervention strategies. These include proactively investing in employees' psychological capital and addressing trust issues to reduce cynicism, rather than merely penalizing cyberloafing.

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