

Narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism in the hotel industry: the role of employee silence and negative workplace gossiping

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Abstract

Purpose – Building on leader-member exchange and social cognitive theories, this paper aims to propose a model of the influence of narcissistic leadership on hotel employees' behavioral cynicism through the mediating roles of employee silence and negative work-related gossiping on this relationship.

Design/methodology/approach – The model was examined using covariance-based structural equation modeling using data collected from 468 employees working in several different departments in Italian hotels.

Findings – The findings illustrate that narcissistic leadership positively affects behavioral cynicism. Furthermore, employee silence and negative work-related gossiping are shown to have a significant mediating effect on this relationship.

Practical implications – The study may be of use for hotel managers as it demonstrates how narcissism can be very damaging to their organizations and employees.



Originality/value – To date, this study is the first to examine negative work-related gossiping and employee silence as mediator variables in the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism in the hotel industry. Further, this research makes a significant contribution to the hospitality literature as the topic of narcissistic leadership has not, to date, been adequately investigated in the sector.

Keywords Narcissistic leadership, Behavioral cynicism, Employee silence, Negative work-related gossiping

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the past decade, the hospitality industry has witnessed a dramatic increase in toxic leadership styles being used, which are believed to be linked to destructive outcomes. When asked to describe “bad managers,” employees highlighted perceptions of abusive leadership as a common indicator (Hight *et al.*, 2019). Research by Yu *et al.* (2020) also uncovered pervasive abusive behavior on the part of leaders in hospitality organizations. Vučetić (2018) looked particularly at the hotel sector and found that malevolent behaviors displayed by leaders were mostly found in the transitional hotel sector. Furthermore, a study by Nyberg *et al.* (2011) revealed that destructive managerial styles such as self-centered leadership styles were positively related to high levels of behavioral stress, poor mental health and low vitality among employees working at Swedish, Polish and Italian hotels.

Although positive leadership styles such as servant leadership (Chon and Zoltan, 2019; Elche *et al.*, 2020; Nazarian *et al.*, 2020; Ye *et al.*, 2019), empowering leadership (Hassi, 2019), authentic leadership (Kaya and Karatepe, 2020; Wang and Xie, 2020) and ethical leadership (Dimitriou and Schwepker, 2019) have received particular attention in hospitality research, there has been a recent increase in attention from hospitality scholars on toxic leadership, which can have harmful effects at both individual and organizational levels (Pan *et al.*, 2018; Zhao and Guo, 2019). These adverse effects on both individuals and organizations have been well-documented in the hospitality sector (Xu *et al.*, 2018) including decreased service performance (Lyu *et al.*, 2016), low levels of engagement (Wang *et al.*, 2020), low levels of helping behaviors (Zhao and Guo, 2019), decreased job satisfaction (Pan *et al.*, 2018) and service sabotage (Park and Kim, 2019).

Different terms have been used in the hospitality literature to discuss negative leadership styles, for instance, abusive leadership (Yu *et al.*, 2020), destructive leadership (Nyberg *et al.*, 2011) and leaders from hell (Hight *et al.*, 2019). Nevertheless, narcissistic leadership as a form of destructive leadership style is a new topic that has not, to date, been adequately studied in hospitality research. A recent literature review on narcissistic leadership (1921-2016) by Braun (2017) demonstrated an absence of empirical investigation of narcissistic leadership in the hospitality sector, and the hotel industry in particular. A review of the narcissistic leadership studies in hospitality between 2016 and 2019 uncovered only one study. In this study, Erkutlu and Chafra (2017) found that narcissistic leadership negatively affects the embeddedness of employees working in five-star hotels in Turkey.

Although there is an overlap between narcissistic leadership behaviors and abusive supervision in terms of abuse of power (Braun *et al.*, 2018), narcissistic leaders normally do not use the same techniques as the typical abusive leader, such as public humiliation, shouting, bullying and aggression toward employees (Wisse and Sleebos, 2016). Narcissistic leaders generally dislike criticism; they can be arrogant; they lack empathy and are manipulative (Campbell *et al.*, 2011). They frequently abuse their power, which takes the

form of withholding or hiding information, denigrating the opinions of others and being less truthful than they otherwise should be to promote their own views (Sankowsky, 1995).

In general, the literature demonstrates that narcissistic leadership negatively influences employee voice behavior (Yao *et al.*, 2019), decision-making comprehensiveness (She *et al.*, 2019) and task performance (Sudha and Shahnawaz, 2020). Guided by Deluga (1998), the leader-member-exchange theory can explain these adverse effects, which narcissistic leaders can create for their organization and employees alike. The relationship between the leader and the member is developed over time based on interactions between them. Leaders develop different types of relationships with different followers and may do this consciously or subconsciously (Graen and Cashman, 1975). Kim *et al.* (2017), in discussing the hospitality industry, showed that when the quality of social exchange in this dyadic relationship is good, it encourages commitment to the organization and reduces the likelihood of employees leaving. On the other hand, when supervisors are rude, unprofessional or condescending or show no interest in the opinions of employees, this leads to emotional exhaustion among frontline restaurant staff and a decline in service performance (Cho *et al.*, 2016).

Purpose

Given the previous discussion, and the fact that narcissism is growing among individuals in modern societies and in the tourism sector in particular (Canavan, 2017), our paper proposes a research model of the effects of narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism using data from Italian hotels. In this model, both employee silence and negative work-related gossip were theorized to serve as intervening mechanisms in the aforementioned relationship. The aims of this paper are to examine: the impact of narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism; the impact of narcissistic leadership on employee silence and negative-work-related gossiping; and employee silence and negative work-related outcomes as mediators.

Contribution

This study aims to fill several gaps in the hospitality literature. First, after reviewing the literature concerning narcissistic leadership, we found only one study, which examined the links between leader narcissism and followers' embeddedness in Turkish hotels (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2017).

Second, employees in today's working environment seem to be remarkably cynical because of the opportunistic behaviors typically practiced by either the leader or the organization. A poor working environment (e.g. bad supervision) results in employees feeling victimized (Jin *et al.*, 2020), which can cause cynicism among them as a result of frustration, disappointment and exhaustion (Simbula and Guglielmi, 2010). On the other hand, the negative consequences of employee cynicism included lower levels of job satisfaction, job performance, commitment and intention to remain (Dean *et al.*, 1998). Taking this into account, it is very important to understand what causes cynicism in the hotel industry as its success relies heavily on the positive attitudes and commitment of its personnel (Nolan, 2002). Finally, little research to date has examined the antecedents of cynicism (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013), particularly, in the hospitality sector.

Third, employee silence has been closely related to several failures in the organization, such as the demise of Enron in 2001 and the Columbia space crash in 2003 (Brinsfield *et al.*, 2009; Premeaux and Bedeian, 2003). Moreover, the effects of silence can go beyond restricting the flow of the information to directly influencing employees themselves and their ability to provide services. According to Al-Hawari *et al.* (2020), antecedents and consequences of employee silence in hospitality research need to be examined. Given this

discussion, there is a strong need to further enrich the hospitality literature with regard to the drivers and the outcomes of employee silence.

Fourth, in the hospitality setting, deviant behaviors, including gossiping, pose multiple degrees of risk for operational efficiency and can exert a negative impact on the organization's image and reputation (Lugosi, 2019). Hospitality organizations offer a rich space for involvement in gossiping actions because of the high levels of interaction among employees (Babalola *et al.*, 2019). Babalola *et al.* (2019) found that that negative gossiping reduces customer service performance. Yet, negative work-related gossiping has received limited attention in the hotel sector, and more studies are needed in this regard.

Hypotheses development

A narcissistic individual usually has no tolerance for critique or sympathy for others, demonstrates high levels of psychological superiority, is highly arrogant and is able to exploit others (Asad and Sadler-Smith, 2020). Narcissistic leadership is a leadership style, which is "principally motivated by leaders own egomaniacal needs and beliefs, superseding the needs and interests of the constituents and institutions they lead" (Rosenthal and Pittinsky, 2006, p. 631). Therefore, narcissistic leaders pursue their self-interest rooted in their self-egomaniacal beliefs (O'Reilly and Chatman, 2020; Ouimet, 2010).

Narcissistic leadership is considered a "mixed blessing" style (Campbell *et al.*, 2011), which may also have a positive impact on organizations as they possess visionary and charismatic attributes (Braun, 2017), and because of this charisma and vision, narcissistic leadership can be quite effective during chaotic situations (O'Reilly and Chatman, 2020). Nevertheless, in the long term, narcissistic leadership generally has negative consequences as it erodes trust and exploits relationships with followers (Fatfouta, 2019).

Cynicism has been reported to be an outcome of negative leadership, such as through abusive supervision (Kuo *et al.*, 2015). Dean *et al.* (1998, p. 345) defined organizational cynicism as:

- A belief that the organization lacks integrity (cognitive).
- Negative affect on the organization (affective).
- Tendencies to show disparaging and critical behavior toward the organization that is consistent with these beliefs (behavioral).

In our study, we focus on the behavioral aspect of cynicism, which is a negative tendency toward expressing severe criticism of one's organization.

In our study, we predict that narcissistic leadership will contribute to behavioral cynicism among followers for the following reasons. First, the ego-nurturing behavior of the narcissistic leader usually creates an atmosphere of frustration and disillusionment due to the bias it introduces, which affects managerial interactions and decisions (Hochwarter and Thompson, 2012). This will create a culture that is characterized by lower levels of integrity in the organization (O'Reilly and Chatman, 2020), and thus, higher levels of distrust will be generated. A consequence of the associated lack of trust and sensations of frustration is cynicism (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013). Second, the egocentric behavior of the narcissistic leader restricts the development of quality-exchange relationships, which minimizes followers' accumulation of performance-improving feedback (Hochwarter and Thompson, 2012). Moreover, other characteristics of the narcissistic leader, such as an expansive self-concept, self-importance, superiority, lack of empathy and grandiosity (O'Reilly and Doerr, 2020), can negatively affect social exchange relationships (El Akremi *et al.*, 2010). As a result, this deterioration of exchange relationships, in particular, leads to followers seeking fewer opportunities to contribute to the organization in a positive manner (Hochwarter and

Thompson, 2012). Third, as narcissistic leaders lack integrity and behave unethically (O'Reilly and Doerr, 2020), they take the credit for others' success (Asad and Sadler-Smith, 2020) and exploit and deceive others (Braun *et al.*, 2018); hence, followers tend to develop negative feelings, beliefs and attitudes that are subsequently reflected in terms of negative behaviors (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2017) such as behavioral cynicism. To this end, and building on the leader-member exchange theory, we posit the following hypothesis:

H1. Narcissistic leadership is positively associated with behavioral cynicism.

Employee silence can be defined as a behavior in which an employee withholds important information in a purposeful and conscious manner (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020). Silence is seen as an act of restraint, requiring a constant physiological effort to control the emotions of frustration and hope. The motivation of employees to stay silent is usually linked to their assumption that revealing information will not change their work environment (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020) or the need to cope with negative emotions (van Dyne *et al.*, 2003).

Narcissistic leaders' behaviors create a toxic atmosphere in which employees will not only be affected by the toxic environment but also respond to their leaders with envious and detrimental behaviors (Braun, 2017). Given this, we believe that when narcissistic behaviors cause workplace tension (Campbell *et al.*, 2011), frustration and disappointment (Hochwarter and Thompson, 2012), where followers will likely remain silent as a coping strategy to prevent further instances of abuse (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020). Burris *et al.* (2008) indicated that bad leadership behaviors of general managers were negatively associated with supervisors' voices in restaurants in the USA. Furthermore, Wang *et al.* (2020) reported that abusive leaders cause hotel employees in Taiwan to be less engaged. Taking this into account, we posit the following:

H2. Narcissistic leadership is positively associated with employee silence.

Gossiping is often viewed as casual, informal or unrestricted discussion, usually with information that is not definitely true (Kurland and Pelled, 2000). Workplace gossiping, which reflects the feelings, beliefs and attitudes of employees about work or organizational life, can be either positive or negative. Negative workplace gossip is "negative, informal and evaluative talk in an organization about another member of that organization who is not present" (Kurland and Pelled, 2000, p. 429). It is regarded as a form of detrimental behavior as gossipers spread their malicious evaluations and/or opinions about their organization, colleagues and/or supervisors (Grosser *et al.*, 2010).

In the context of our study, when narcissistic leadership takes place in terms of exhibiting a strong sense of psychological superiority, willingness to manipulate followers and lack of organizational empathy (O'Reilly and Doerr, 2020), employees appear to disparage their organization's image and withhold from pro-social behavior at work. Based on this logic, it can be argued that with the presence of narcissistic leaders, employees may develop an adverse attitude toward their supervisors and colleagues, which ultimately can be translated into negative behaviors such as gossiping. Moreover, when employees deal with such leaders, they display high levels of psychological distress (Bhandarker and Rai, 2019), and they are more likely to use strategies to cope with their negative emotions. These strategies may involve displays of disruptive behavior, which may harm organizational operations (Bhandarker and Rai, 2019), such as negative work-related gossiping. Therefore, we anticipate that such a negative atmosphere may lead to employees using gossiping as a coping mechanism. Under the lens of the leader-member exchange theory (Deluga, 1998), we assume narcissistic leadership can be related to negative work-related gossiping as narcissistic leadership creates a sense of inconsistency between employees and their

organization. This state of inconsistency then transforms into fuel for gossiping. Given the previous arguments, we posit the following hypothesis:

H3. Narcissistic leadership is positively associated with negative work-related gossiping.

Employees' silence can have serious consequences, notably in the hospitality sector, as employees in this sector usually have the opportunity to discover problems and propose possible solutions (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020) because of their daily interactions with co-workers, customers and leaders. Evidence from previous research has demonstrated that employee silence predicts turnover intentions (Burriss *et al.*, 2008) and lower levels of commitment (Vakola and Bouradas, 2005). At the individual level, silent employees experience negative states of emotions, namely, higher levels of lack of motivation, dissatisfaction and stress (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020). On this basis, it can be argued that silent employees are more prone to develop negative emotions such as frustration and stress. To cope with stressed affective states, silent employees may display cynical behavior as acts of vengeance or to relieve their tension. Given the previous discussion, the following hypothesis can be posited:

H4. Employee silence is positively associated with behavioral cynicism.

Negative gossiping can damage organizations in various ways. These include affecting the organization's reputation and credibility (Foster, 2004) and one's social interactions with others. In general, gossiping has been viewed as a form of deviance in the workplace (Lawrence and Robinson, 2007). Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1988) helps us to clarify the relationship between negative work-related gossiping and cynicism. According to this model, cognitive, behavioral and other environmental factors all function as interacting predictors, which bidirectionally influence each other. Kuo *et al.* (2015, p. 2292) explain this in the sense that:

[. . .] people do not learn new behaviors solely by trying them and either succeeding or failing, but rather people learn and behave by watching what others do, by listening to what others say.

Negative gossiping produces a hostile working environment and reflects weak interpersonal relationships for the individual involved in the gossip (Grosser *et al.*, 2010). The more negative the gossiping that takes place in an organization, the less likely employees are to identify with it. Therefore, when the affection, cognition and interaction toward the organization is negative and disconnected, the more likely it is that cynicism will develop (Kuo *et al.*, 2015). Empirically speaking, negative gossiping was found to be detrimental to work productivity (Akande and Odewale, 1994) and creates a climate of mistrust and amorality (Burke and Wise, 2003). Furthermore, negative gossip has been demonstrated to decrease organizational citizenship behavior and proactive service performance (Wu *et al.*, 2018) and increase cynicism (Kuo *et al.*, 2015) among employees. Therefore, in line with the previous discussion, we believe that negative gossiping in hotels will increase the chance that employees will be involved in cynical behaviors. Based on this, we posit the following:

H5. Negative work-related gossiping is positively associated with behavioral cynicism.

Given the previous discussion, we propose that employees who perceive their leadership to be narcissistic are more likely to remain silent at work, and consequently exhibit a greater level of behavioral cynicism. Leader behaviors constituting arrogance, manipulation, hypersensitivity and self-interest will be negatively perceived by employees in terms of the leader-member relationship being unbalanced. This, in turn, will lead employees to be silent and consequently lead to other adverse work-related outcomes. This imbalanced

relationship is due to the low quality of the exchange relationship. Thus, we believe that silence is an intentional behavior, which may drain employees' cognitive and emotional resources, causing high levels of stress, which can be released through engaging in cynical behavior. Empirically, silence was found to be a significant mediator between abusive supervision and capacity to satisfy customers (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020) and between abusive leadership and work engagement (Wang *et al.*, 2020) in the hospitality industry. Given this discussion, we posit the following hypothesis:

H6. Employee silence mediates the positive association between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism.

Given the fact that narcissistic leadership creates tension, irrationality and lack of empathy in the workplace (O'Reilly and Chatman, 2020), negative behaviors can be generated in which employees are increasingly motivated to engage in gossiping through negative evaluative talks to recover the negative emotions, disappointment and stress caused by such circumstances (Kuo *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, those employees who engage in such negative evaluative talk find the gossip more credible and may extrapolate information about the negative atmosphere and the poor working environment in the organization, which will ultimately lead to reinforcing negative attitudes toward their organization through developing higher levels of cynicism (Kuo *et al.*, 2015). In general, disappointment from work and a poor work environment (Simbula and Guglielmi, 2010) were found to trigger cynicism among employees. Finally, a recent study by Kuo *et al.* (2015) demonstrated that job-related gossip mediated the relationship between abusive leadership and organizational cynicism. To this end, we propose the following:

H7. Negative work-related gossiping mediates the positive association relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism.

Methods

Procedures and participants

The relationships were examined using data collected from employees working in three-star hotels in the city of Milan (Figure 1). The researcher selected this category of hotels as access to them is easier than four- and five-star hotels, especially in Milan, as it is a key

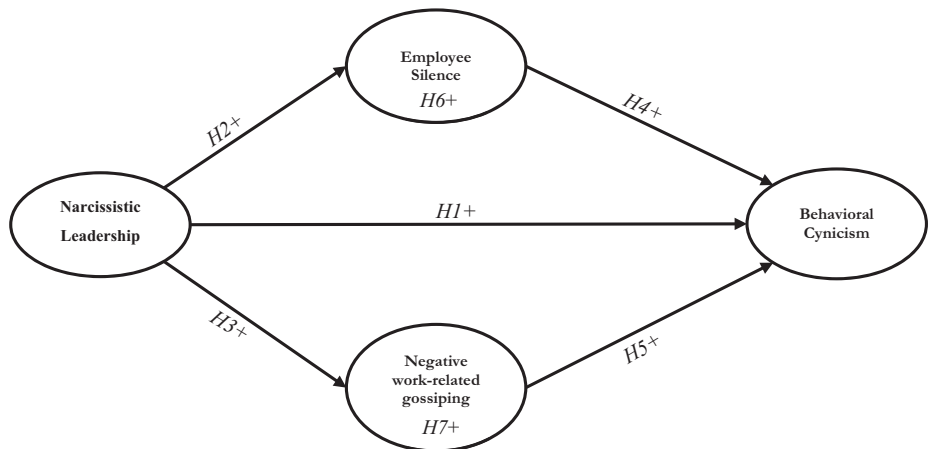


Figure 1.
Research model

international tourist destination in which not all categories of hotels are willing to give flexible access to the researcher. The researcher prepared a list of (142) 3-star hotels operating in Milan and contacted them by telephone to determine their willingness to participate in the study. The majority of the hotels (125) gave their permission to distribute and collect the questionnaire. The drop-off and pick-up method was adopted to increase the response rate (Lovelock *et al.*, 1976). Each hotel received five paper-and-pencil self-administered questionnaires to be completed by its employees. The researcher also hired two research assistants (July and August 2019) with master's degrees to help with the distribution and collection of the questionnaire. Of the 625 questionnaires distributed, 470 were returned, of which two were discarded due to missing information, leaving 468 usable for the purposes of statistical analysis. This represented a reasonable response rate of 74.88%. Table 1 provides information on the characteristics of the respondents.

The questionnaire was translated from English to Italian by a bilingual professional translator using the back-translation technique. A cover page to the questionnaire was attached, which included information on the purpose of the questionnaire, information about the researcher and the researcher's contact address. On another note, certain techniques were used to minimize the social desirability bias. For instance, the questionnaire was made more participant-friendly to encourage respondents to participate. This process entailed shortening it so it could be completed easily within 10–15 min, using clear language to avoid confusion, and encouraging honesty in the answers. All respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their answers. These techniques were in line with previous research in the hotel industry to minimize the social desirability bias (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Ruiz-Palomino, 2019).

Category	Frequency	% of total (N = 468)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	179	38.25
Female	289	61.75
<i>Organizational tenure</i>		
1 to 5 years	214	45.73
6 to 10 years	191	40.81
10 to 15	55	11.75
More than 15	8	1.71
<i>Age</i>		
20–25 years old	66	14.10
26–30 years old	97	20.73
31–35 years old	199	42.52
more than 35 years old	106	22.65
<i>Education</i>		
Specialized diploma	73	15.60
Three years degree	167	35.68
Four years degree	92	19.66
Five years degree	136	29.06
<i>Department</i>		
Reception	127	27.14
Restaurants/bar	111	23.72
Kitchen	70	14.96
Room service	88	18.80
Accounting	22	4.70
Cleaning service	50	10.68

Table 1.
Respondent's profile

Constructs

Narcissistic leadership was measured using a five-point Likert scale (1 = absolute disagreement to 5 = absolute agreement). Employee silence, negative-work-related gossiping, and behavioral cynicism were similarly measured on a five-point Likert scale (1 = never and 5 = always).

Narcissistic leadership. Respondents' perceptions of their leaders' narcissism were operationalized using a 10-item scale proposed by Hochwarter and Thompson (2012) and Hendin and Cheek (1997). Respondents were asked to respond to 10 statements by rating them on a five-point Likert scale. A sample item is "my boss brags about him/herself to get positive strokes from others." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.908.

Employee silence. We measured this construct using a five-item scale adapted from the survey developed by Tangirala and Ramanujam (2008). A sample item is "I remain silent when you have information that might help prevent an incident." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.923.

Negative work-related gossiping. This scale was gauged using the five-item scale developed by Kuo *et al.* (2015) to measure work-related gossiping. These five items represent negative work-related gossiping in the workplace. A sample item is "at my work, I gossip about colleague's/supervisor' poor job performance." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.814.

Behavioral cynicism. We measured this construct using the four-item scale originally developed by Dean *et al.* (1998). A sample item is "I talk with other employees about how work is being carried out in the organization." The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was 0.796.

Control variables. In line with previous research on narcissistic leadership and other types of negative leadership and supervision (She *et al.*, 2019; Zhao and Guo, 2019), we controlled for gender and organizational tenure. Gender was coded as 1 = male and 2 = female. Organizational tenure was measured in four categories as 1 = 1 to 5 years; 2 = 6–10 years; 3 = 10 to 15 years; 4 = more than 15 years.

Data analysis

In our paper, we used SPSS 22.0 to calculate the descriptive statistics, reliability values and intercorrelations among variables. We have followed the approach of Anderson and Gerbing (1988), though relying on the maximum likelihood technique for both measurement and structural equation model. Convergent and discriminant validity, in addition to composite reliability (CR) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981), were calculated through the estimation available from confirmatory factor analysis using AMOS 22.0. Direct effects were tested in the structural model, whereas mediating effects were estimated using the 5,000-sample bootstrapping technique using the "user-defined estimands" function in AMOS.

Data normality

In our study, univariate and multivariate normality were checked before we estimated our research models. First, considering the absolute values of kurtosis and skewness for our 29 observed items, our results suggest that kurtosis ranged from 0.001–0.899, whereas skewness ranged from 0.30–0.571. These results are in line with the cut-off point suggested by Kline (2011), whereby kurtosis must be less than 8 and skewness less than 3. These results suggest the absence of univariate non-normality. Second, Mardia's (1970) coefficient of multivariate kurtosis was calculated to check for multivariate normality. We assume the presence of multivariate normality when this coefficient is lower than $p(p + 2)$ (Raykov and Marcoulides, 2008). Our Mardia's multivariate kurtosis was 168.04, which is less than 899 (i.e. $29(29 + 2)$), indicating that our data are free of multivariate non-normality.

Variable	Item	Loading	T sat.	AVE	CR
Narcissistic leadership	My leader is a very self-centered person	0.672	14.09	0.485	0.904
	My leader has an inflated view of him/herself	0.654	13.69		
	My leader brags about him/herself to get positive strokes from others	0.751	F		
	My leader will do one favor as long as he/she gets two or more in return	0.669	16.57		
	My leader will go out of his/her way to cause me harm to get ahead	0.721	15.16		
	My leader always has to be the center of attention no matter what	0.690	14.47		
	My leader dislikes being with a group unless he/she knows that he/she is appreciated by at least one of those present	0.692	14.59		
	My leader dislikes sharing the credit of an achievement with others	0.718	15.11		
	My leader easily becomes wrapped up in his/her own interests and forget the existence of others	0.713	14.99		
	My leader often interprets the remarks of others in a personal way	0.682	14.37		
	Employee silence	I choose to remain silent when I have concerns	0.796		
Although I have ideas for improving my work unit, I do not speak up		0.899	28.05		
I say nothing to co-workers about problems I notice		0.893	F		
I keep quiet instead of asking questions when I want to get more information		0.814	23.13		
I remain silent when I have information that might help prevent an incident		0.766	20.71		
Negative work-related gossiping	At my work, I gossip about colleague's/supervisor's poor job performance	0.635	12.52	0.469	0.815
	At my work, I gossip about colleague's/supervisor's poor work engagement	0.708	13.89		
	At my work, I gossip about colleague's/supervisor's poor job knowledge	0.631	12.45		
	At my work, I gossip about colleague's/supervisor's poor interpersonal skills	0.711	13.95		
	At my work, I gossip about colleague's/supervisor's lack of demonstration of job morality	0.733	F		
Behavioral cynicism	I talk with other employees about how work is being carried out in the hotel	0.735	15.00	0.507	0.803
	I complain to my friends outside the hotel about the goings-on in the hotel	0.799	F		
	I criticize the applications/policies of the hotel that I work for with other employees	0.687	14.07		
	I find myself mocking my hotel's slogans and initiatives	0.613	12.53		

Notes: ($\chi^2 = 558.998$, $df = 241 = \chi^2/df = 2.319$, $p < 0.001$, $RMSEA = 0.053$, $TLI = 0.939$, $CFI = 0.946$, $IFI = 0.947$, $SRMR = 0.049$). *F*: to fix the scale of the latent variable, loading was initially set to 1. All loadings were significant at 0.01 level. AVE = average variance extracted; CR = composite reliability; RMSEA = root mean square error of approximation; TLI = Tucker-Lewis coefficient; CFI = comparative fit index; IFI = incremental fit index; SRMR = standardized root mean square residual

Table 2.
Items loadings AVEs
and CRs

Results

Measurement model

The confirmatory factor analysis showed that our hypothesized model has the best fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 558.998$, $df = 241 = \chi^2/df = 2.319$, $p < 0.001$, $RMSEA = 0.053$, $TLI = 0.939$, $CFI = 0.946$, $IFI = 0.947$, $SRMR = 0.049$). Items' standardized loading, as shown in [Table 2](#), ranged from 0.613 to 0.899 and was significant ($p < 0.01$). Moreover, in comparison to alternate models, our hypothesized four-factor model revealed a better fit to data than Model 2 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 180.420$, $p < 0.001$), Model 3 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 39.472$, $p < 0.001$), Model 4 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 95.646$, $p < 0.001$) and Model 5 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 64.634$, $p < 0.001$) and Model 6 ($\Delta\chi^2 = 89.868$, $p < 0.001$). The results for alternate models are provided in [Table 3](#). In addition, the hypothesized model showed better TFI and CFI values and lower RMSEA, which increases its superiority over the other models. In general, greater values of TFI and CFI, lower values of RMSEA and a statistically significant change in chi-square ($\Delta\chi^2$) indicate the better fit and greater parsimony of the proposed model ([Hair et al., 2017](#)). Although the differences are small, these differences are viewed as realistic following the suggestions of [Hoyle \(2014\)](#). Finally, our proposed model has the smallest AIC value and the highest CFI value, which provides evidence for its superiority following the assertions of [Schermelleh-Engel et al. \(2003\)](#) when considering competing models.

Concerning internal consistency reliability, CR were as follows: narcissistic leadership (0.904), employee silence (0.920), negative work-related gossiping (0.815) and behavioral cynicism (0.803). The values were above the cut-off point of 0.7 recommended by [Fornell and Larcker \(1981\)](#), indicating that the CR is satisfactory. Concerning validity, the average

Model	χ^2	df	P	χ^2/df	TLI	IFI	CFI	RMSEA	AIC	Δdf	$\Delta\chi^2$	ΔAIC
Proposed model	558.998	241	0.000	2.319	0.939	0.947	0.946	0.053	676.998			
Model 2	739.417	247	0.000	2.994	0.907	0.917	0.917	0.065	845.417	6	180.420	168.420
Model 3	598.470	242	0.000	2.473	0.931	0.924	0.940	0.056	714.470	1	39.472	37.472
Model 4	654.644	244	0.000	2.683	0.922	0.921	0.931	0.060	766.644	3	95.646	89.646
Model 5	623.632	242	0.000	2.577	0.927	0.923	0.936	0.058	739.632	1	64.634	62.634
Model 6	648.866	242	0.000	2.681	0.922	0.926	0.931	0.060	764.866	1	89.868	87.868

Table 3.
Alternate and competing models

Notes: Model 2 (single factor model); Model 3 (three constructs – joined mediators); Model 4 (two constructs – behavioral cynicism, employee silence and negative work-related gossiping are joined); Model 5 (three constructs – employee silence and behavioral cynicism are joined); Model 6 (three constructs – negative work-related-gossiping and behavioral cynicism are joined). AIC = Akaike information criterion

Table 4.
Correlations, descriptive statistics and square root of AVEs

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Gender	–	0.487	1					
Organizational tenure	2.94	1.093	0.228**	1				
Narcissistic leadership	3.57	0.789	0.132**	0.148**	(0.696)			
Employee silence	3.39	1.110	–0.096*	–0.043	0.110*	(0.835)		
Negative work-related gossiping	3.41	0.766	–0.047	0.040	0.282**	0.519**	(0.685)	
Behavioral cynicism	3.27	0.822	0.040	0.086	0.361**	0.363**	0.485**	(0.712)

Notes: **Significant at the 0.01 level. *significant at the 0.05 level. $N = 468$

variances extracted (AVEs) were as follows: narcissistic leadership (0.485), employee silence (0.698), negative work-related gossiping (0.469) and behavioral cynicism (0.507). Although the AVEs for some variables were slightly below the 0.5 level, these results are still acceptable. Fornell and Larcker (1981) accept that AVE may be lower than 0.50 if the CR is higher than 0.70. Finally, the results in Table 4 suggest that the root square of the AVEs were higher than the inter-correlations among the variables. The values reported were as follows: narcissistic leadership (0.696), employee silence (0.835), negative work-related gossiping (0.685) and behavioral cynicism (0.712). This implies that discriminant validity was met.

Common method bias

To check for the common method variance, we used the Harman single-factor statistical test (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). The results of this test showed that loading all items on a signal factor did not explain most of the variance. The single factor provided an explanation for only 30.94% of the total variance, which is below the cut-off point of 50% of variance explanation (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, in line with previous research (Karatepe *et al.*, 2020), the unmeasured latent method factor was created as another tool to check for common method variance. All questionnaire items were loaded on this factor and their congruent variables, with the correlation set to zero between the new factor and the research variables (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Fit indices for the unmeasured latent method factor were as follows: ($\chi^2 = 544.013$, $df = 240 = \chi^2/df = 2.267$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.052, TLI = 0.941, CFI = 0.949, IFI = 0.949, SRMR = 0.052). The difference test between the measurement model and the model of unmeasured latent common factor model was significant ($\Delta\chi^2 = 14.98$, $\Delta df = 1$, $p < 0.05$). Comparing both models, the differences between CFI, SRMR and RMSEA were below 0.5. Therefore, following the recommendations of Bagozzi and Yi (1990), we conclude that common method variance was not a threat to our study.

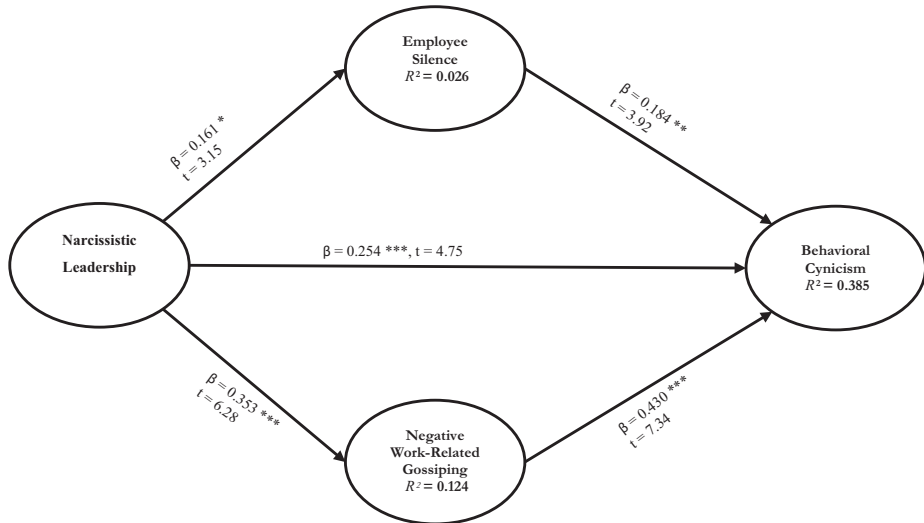
Correlations

The descriptive statistics, square roots of AVEs, and correlations of the study variables are presented in Table 4. A Pearson correlation analysis showed that narcissistic leadership was positively correlated with behavioral cynicism ($r = 0.361$, $p < 0.01$), negative work-related gossiping ($r = 0.282$, $p < 0.01$) and employee silence ($r = 0.110$, $p < 0.05$). Employee silence was positively associated with behavioral cynicism ($r = 0.368$, $p < 0.01$) and negative work-related gossiping was positively associated with behavioral cynicism ($r = 0.458$, $p < 0.01$).

Hypotheses verification

As none of the control variables showed any significance in the structural equation model built, we removed them from the model in line with previous suggestions concerning the insignificance of control variables (York, 2018). The results of structural modeling using the maximum likelihood estimation showed that the model provided a good fit to the data ($\chi^2 = 696.358$, $df = 242 = \chi^2/df = 2.878$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.063, TLI = 0.913, CFI = 0.923, IFI = 0.924). As shown in Figure 2, the results indicated that narcissistic leadership had a positive and significant effect on behavioral cynicism ($\beta = 0.254$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, they indicate that narcissistic leadership exerted a significant effect on employee silence ($\beta = 0.161$, $p < 0.05$) and negative-work-related gossiping ($\beta = 0.353$, $p < 0.001$). Furthermore, employee silence was shown to exert a positive effect on behavioral cynicism ($\beta = 0.184$, $p < 0.01$), and negative work-related gossiping had a significant positive impact on behavioral cynicism ($\beta = 0.430$, $p < 0.001$). Hence, these findings provide support for H1–H5.

A mediation analysis was conducted to examine the mediating effects of employee silence and negative work-related gossiping in the relationship between narcissistic



Notes: $\chi^2 = 696.358$, $df = 242 = \chi^2/df = 2.878$, $p < 0.001$, RMSEA = 0.063, TLI = 0.913
CFI = 0.923, IFI = 0.924.

Narcissistic leadership → employee silence → behavioral cynicism → (standardized indirect effect = 0.030**; SE = 0.013; 95% CI = 0.009–0.054).

Narcissistic leadership → negative work-related gossiping → behavioral cynicism (standardized indirect effect = 0.152***; SE = 0.031; 95% CI = 0.096–0.204).

SE = standard error; 95% CI = confidence interval at 95% level; *** significant at 0.001, ** significant at 0.01, *significant at 0.05

Figure 2.
Structural equation
model results

leadership and behavioral cynicism. In total, 5,000 bootstrapped resamples were performed with 95% bias-corrected confidence intervals (CIs). This test was conducted through the application of the “user-defined estimands” function in AMOS. The results of the 5,000 bootstraps suggest that employee silence significantly mediated the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism (standardized indirect effect = 0.030; SE = 0.013; 95% CI = 0.009–0.054). On the other hand, negative work-related gossiping was shown to exert a significant mediating effect between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism (standardized indirect effect = 0.152, SE = 0.031; 95% CI = 0.096–0.204). Accordingly, the results lend support for *H6* and *H7*.

Discussion and conclusions

Conclusions

The primary purpose of this study was to propose a model whereby employee silence and negative-work-related gossiping mediated the effect of narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism among hotel employees. On the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism, the results support the theoretical arguments embedded in the leader-member exchange theory (Deluga, 1998), in which employees react to leaders' narcissism with negative behaviors such as behavioral cynicism due to their stress, frustration and disappointment. Furthermore, the findings suggested that narcissistic leadership was positively

related to higher levels of employee silence and negative work-related gossiping, as employees use the latter as coping mechanisms to deal with their negative emotions. These results were in line with previous research (Wang *et al.*, 2018), which found that leaders' narcissism negatively affects employees' voices. Employee silence was demonstrated to have a positive effect on behavioral cynicism, which implies that employees with high levels of silence are more prone to developing unfavorable attitudes and behaviors (Donaghey *et al.*, 2011) such as cynicism. Furthermore, the results suggested that negative work-related gossiping has a positive effect on behavioral cynicism, supporting the findings of Kuo *et al.* (2019). Finally, both employee silence and negative work-related gossiping mediated the effect of narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism. This implies that when employees perceive their leaders' behaviors as manipulative, arrogant, egoistic, self-interested, etc., they are more likely to withhold important information (silence) and use negative evaluative speech to cope with their levels of emotional stress. This, in turn, will lead them to demonstrate higher levels of behavioral cynicism.

Theoretical implications

Although research on leadership in the hotel industry has flourished in the past decade (Ali *et al.*, 2019), narcissistic leadership as a type of toxic leadership style has remained relatively unexplored in the industry. This research was carried out in response to scholarly calls to further enrich the literature on narcissistic leadership, as the findings of empirical research on such leadership are not conclusive (Braun, 2017). Second, this research adds to the literature addressing a crucial behavioral outcome, namely, behavioral cynicism, as little research has been conducted to examine its antecedents (Chiaburu *et al.*, 2013), particularly, in the hotel industry. Third, as we employed employees' silence and negative work gossiping as mediators in the relationship between narcissistic leadership and behavioral cynicism, we contribute to the hospitality literature, as few studies have investigated the antecedents and outcomes of these mediators. To our knowledge, no study has yet investigated the effect of narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism via the mediating mechanisms of employee silence and negative work-related gossiping in the hotel industry.

Practical implications

Our study offers useful implications for three-star hotel administrators pertaining to the damaging consequences associated with the presence of narcissistic leaders. As the organizational structure is limited in these hotels, in which few supervisors are heavily involved in daily operations with their followers, the attitudes and behaviors of these supervisors will have a direct impact on social relationships in these hotels and the followers' behaviors and attitudes (Çetinel *et al.*, 2009). Nevertheless, other types of hotels (four- and five-star) can benefit from the study to minimize the adverse effects of narcissistic leadership within large departments. Given this, hotels need to pay attention to the negative atmosphere stimulated by narcissistic leaders, which may provide grounds for the generation of negative work-related outcomes on the part of employees. We alert hotel administrations that the presence of narcissistic leaders signals an unhealthy work environment, which can result in situations where employees feel high levels of stress, disappointment and frustration that might ultimately lead them to engage in negative behaviors such as silence, gossiping and behavioral cynicism. Furthermore, the study alerts hotel administrations to the fact that narcissistic leaders' attitudes may lead to a reduction in the vigor of followers' personal resources. As a result, when employees feel that their resources are depleted, lack the resources to cope with their stress and frustration levels, they show a tendency to act in such a way as will preserve their resources, such as remaining silent, getting involved in negative-evaluative talk and show a tendency to criticize the organization in a cynical manner.

As leaders' negative behaviors endanger the work climate of organizations characterized as "people-oriented" (Al-Hawari *et al.*, 2020), hotel administrations are invited to regularly assess leaders' behaviors and the overall work environment. In light of the negative consequences of narcissistic behaviors, the role of hotel administration is pivotal to halting narcissistic supervisors' behaviors. Therefore, timely, proactive actions to identify, eliminate or educate narcissistic leaders should be taken by hotel administrations. This can be done in three ways. First, taking into account that employees tend to adopt silence, cynicism and negative gossiping when they perceive their leaders to be manipulative, arrogant, egoistic and dishonest, hotels need to pay a great deal of attention to social and psychological dimensions when hiring leaders. This can be achieved through using psychological and personality assessment tests. The priority for hotel administrations need to be directed toward hiring leaders with positive personality traits, including humility, wisdom and openness to criticism and negative feedback. Second, a clear punishment system can be established and effectively implemented to minimize leaders' negative behaviors and protect employees' emotional and psychological well-being. Third, hotel administrations should convince leaders to undertake training and development programs to learn more about the importance of avoiding self-interest and abuse of power, and instruct on how to create an atmosphere characterized by integrity and teamwork.

Furthermore, hotel administrations should pay attention to negative behaviors generated by employees in response to the poor behaviors of narcissistic leaders. For instance, incentives and proposal systems could be developed through which employees are encouraged, and indeed supported, to speak out and share information regarding work-related problems. This can help to reduce employee silence, and at the same time, allow employees to give their feedback and ideas on how organizational performance can be enhanced or improved. This is important because avoidance behavior and withholding organizational information can be destructive at the individual and the organizational level (Wang *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, institutionalizing formal policies to resolve employees' complaints may be effective in minimizing the adverse effects of narcissistic leadership. Second, developing an organizational culture in hotel organizations that is characterized by integrity, moral standards, professional development and social well-being may mitigate or even negate employee behavior cynicism. Third, hotels need to raise awareness among employees of the consequences of negative work gossiping and be aware that this phenomenon is a normal occurrence. Negative work gossiping is an indication of issues to be considered within the workplace (Babalola *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, hotel managers are called upon to set out clear policies, which address such negative gossip and foster the attitude among employees that this type of behavior is destructive and, ultimately, unacceptable.

Limitations and future research

Like most studies, our research has certain inherent limitations that need to be highlighted. First, we could not form cause and effect conclusions due to the correlational nature of our study. Hence, future work could take the further step of carrying out longitudinal studies to examine the variables over time. Second, our data come from the hotel sector in Milan, in which these hotels are classified as three-star. Future research should include data from different classifications (five-star, four-star and three-star) to check for differences in employees' perceptions of narcissistic leadership. Moreover, future studies may consider gathering data from other important touristic destinations in Italy to help justify any generalization of the results. Third, the data represented self-reported measures. Although we showed that common method bias was not an issue in this study, future studies may rely on data gathered from multiple sources with time lags. Fourth, based on the data analyzed, we found that our proposed model represents the best of the available "competing" models; however, the results are not conclusive due to small differences in RMSEA and CFI values between the proposed model and

other competing models. Hence, future studies are advised to replicate the study from different hospitality sectors to validate the model. Fifth, our study was limited to investigating the effects of narcissistic leadership on behavioral cynicism only. Future studies should consider examining the effect of narcissistic leadership on affective and cognitive cynicism. Sixth, our model proposed only two variables (employee silence and negative work-related gossiping), which function as intervening mechanisms in the narcissistic leadership-behavioral cynicism relationship. Future research should highlight the role of negative non-job-related gossiping, psychological strain and psychological contract violation. Finally, our findings could be extended and replicated for other hospitality sectors, such as restaurants and airline services.

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