The Role of Employee Trust in the Relationship Between Leaders' Aggressive Humor and Knowledge-Sharing

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Purpose– The current paper aims to examine leaders' aggressive humor's influence on knowledge-sharing among hotel employees. Employee Trust is also tested as a moderator variable between this association. **Design/methodology–** An online questionnaire of 387 customer-contact employees of 38 five-star hotels located in Sharm El-Sheikh in Egypt provided data on the moderating role of trust in aggressive humor- knowledge-sharing relationships. Using the SEM by the PLS method by SmartPLS3 program, the data were analyzed, and the hypotheses were tested. **Findings–** Aggressive humor is negatively related to knowledge-sharing among hotel employees. Results also confirm the intervening role of trust as a moderator in the relationship between aggressive humor and knowledge-sharing. **Practical implications–** The results underscore the trust variable's benefits as a moderator in the relationship between aggressive humor and knowledge-sharing. **Originality/value –** This paper developed a model for the moderating effect of trust on the association between aggressive humor and knowledge-sharing. Thus, the study fills part of the gap dearth of studies that have examined the impact of negative humor in the workplace.

Introduction

In recent decades, the intangible resource of knowledge has overshadowed the value of conventional resources such as energy in importance and became the cornerstone of prosperity (Lee and Yu, 2011). Specifically, knowledge-sharing in the hospitality field is critical due to high costs and difficulty retaining knowledge due to the high turnover of employees (Terry Kim et al., 2013). Therefore, it is essential to understand the factors that help or hinder the spread of these intangible assets among all.

Christopher and Wan (2007) argued that although humor can seem contradictory to the seriousness of work, it is somewhat embedded into most social contexts and plays a significant role in controlling social behavior in all societies. Humor became an extremely important component of organizational culture. Leiqing *et al.* (2020) indicated that more than half of managers argue that rigorous management should be paired with humor. Humor comprises the following two main functions: amusement (i.e., producing joy and

laughter) and communication functions (i.e., conveying information). Therefore, humor can encourage workers to share knowledge.

But humor is a "double-edged sword". While humor is generally viewed as positive, it can be used for harmful and damaging reasons (Robert and Yan, 2007). Humor may also undermine knowledge-sharing. These discrepancies in the consequences of different humor styles emphasize the need to understand better when and how humor yields beneficial or negative employee results.

Unfortunately, most studies concentrate on the beneficial impact of humor (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012), and there are scarce empirical studies on the effects of using negative humor in the workplace (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2018). This omission is unfortunate because negative humor can be a crucial practice to erode trust among workers and undermine knowledge-sharing(Robert *et al.,* 2015; Long-Zeng *et al.,* 2020).

The current study seeks to bridge part of this gap by studying negative humor's effect on knowledge-sharing and examining the role of trust as a moderator in the relationship between aggressive humor and employees' sharing of their knowledge.

Positive vs negative humor
There is no real consensus on a specific definition of humor (Spielmann, 2014). Still, generally, the concept of humor includes "the use of narrative jokes, puns, witticism, irony, incongruity, or verbal skills, such as sarcasm" (Bompar et al., 2018).

Martin *et al.* (2003) created a two-by-two matrix that classifies the humor based on its aim, whether the humor is used to support the self or improve the connection with others and whether it is benign benevolent or detrimental, or harmful. According to this matrix, Martin *et al.* (2003) outlined four styles of humor as follows: **affiliative humor** enhances social ties with others in a benignly way (e.g., Individuals tell jokes and humorous stories to enjoy laughing along with others.); **self-enhancing humor** enhances the self by finding humorous or positive aspects in daily events to reduce stress by using humor as an emotion regulation mechanism (e.g., Remember funny situations to overcome stress and tension.); **aggressive humor** is other-focused and boosts the self at the expense of other people by ridiculing or putting them down; **self-defeating humor** attempts to amuse others to gain approval by saying or doing funny things while ridiculing oneself (Navarro-Carrillo et al., 2020). Referring to the above can be considered affiliative and self-enhancing humor styles are positive or constructive, and aggressive and self-defeating humor styles are negative or destructive.
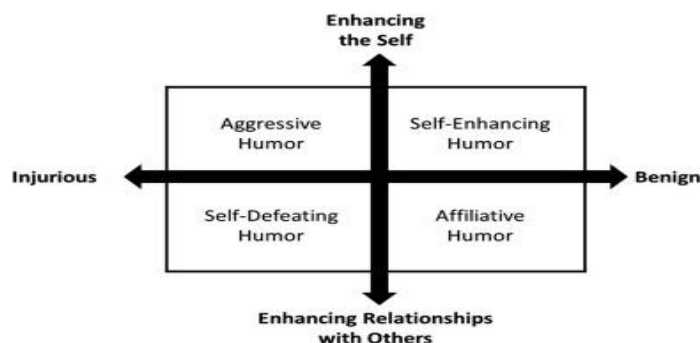

Fig. 1. The humor styles model developed by Martin *et al.* (2003).

Humor in the workplace

Managers can use positive humor to break down barriers (McManus and Delaney, 2007). It correlates to well-being moods, such as self-esteem and positive emotions (Samson and Gross, 2012). Lee (2015) emphasized that self-enhancing humor can improve the subordinate's creativity. Generally, when leaders use positive humor styles, the levels of work engagement, positive emotions (Goswami et al., 2016), job satisfaction, and organizational commitment among subordinates become stronger (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2018). A meta-analysis of 37 studies pointed out that positive humor styles are positively correlated with psychological and mental health (Schneider et al., 2018). positive humor is also considered an important element in management communications (Cooper et al., 2018). It is used to enhance employees' relationships and reduce the negative effects of workplace stress by easing stressful social interactions (Chen and Ayoun, 2019). And when workers use positive humor in stressful situations, they are more likely to engage in innovative practices (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2019).

On the other hand, Mesmer-Magnus *et al.* (2012) indicated that most research on humor at work has only considered positive humor styles. So, he called for additional research to examine the effects of negative styles of humor at work. Frequently, leaders use negative humor to maintain power differences, accentuate hierarchical differences between leaders and subordinates, and create social distance (Robert and Yan, 2007) by putting them down or mock them (Martin et al., 2003). This may establish destructive relationships between a leader and employees. Negative humor also negatively correlates to poor work attitudes, decreased morale, and damaged interpersonal relationships (Romero and Cruthirds, 2006). Romero and Arendt (2011) Romero and Arendt (2011) also found that aggressive humor style negatively allied satisfaction with co-workers and team cohesion. Similarly, Vrabel *et al.* (2017) indicated that aggressive humor correlated to spitefulness, which is a willingness to incur a cost to inflict harm on another individual. While using self-defeating humor increases psychological distress over time (Fritz et al., 2017), so it is associated with greater health difficulties (Fritz, 2020). Additionally, it may be acceptable to say that negative humor styles may have the opposite effects of positive humor benefits.

In contrast to what was mentioned in negative humor, Terrion and Ashforth (2002) argued that negative humor might promote a sense of identity and community. Therefore, Christopher and Wan (2007) defined it as "a tool or device used to help send certain types of negative messages more effectively". This humor style sends negative messages but might soften an offensive and destructive message that might generate an aggressive employee's reply. Hence, it can support team cohesion and workplace fun from both supervisor and coworker sides (Robert and Wilbanks, 2012). In line with these arguments, Robert *et al.* (2015) stated that negative humor might lose its negative effect and gain positive humor characteristics in stable relationships. Also, Chen and Ayoun (2019) indicated that some studies argued that many hospitality employees use aggressive workplace humor -it depends on trusting a supervisor -for fun and coworker socializing. They view sarcastic criticism is funnier and less abusive and has a less negative effect on bonds. Hospitality personnel may also use aggressive humor, which uses sardonic situations, to demonstrate that they consider their peers as part of their team (Chen and Ayoun, 2019).

Based on the pros and cons of humor mentioned above, humor could be a "double-edged sword." And since there is a gap in the study of the impact of negative humor styles at work, this paper will focus on studying the effect of negatives humor on sharing knowledge through trust as a moderator to bridge a part of this gap.

Knowledge-sharing

Knowledge is defined as the "information processed by individuals, including ideas, facts, expertise, and judgments relevant for an individual, team, and organizational performance" (Wang and Noe, 2010). Whereas knowledge-sharing is defined as the "provision of task information and know-how to help others and to collaborate with others to solve problems, develop new ideas or implementing policies or procedures" (Zhang et al., 2020). It is the process when employees reciprocally exchange their (implicit and explicit) knowledge and jointly produce new knowledge (van den Hooff and de Ridder, 2004). In short, according to Akram *et al.* (2020), knowledge-sharing is an effective tool for gaining and create knowledge at the workplace. It considers the central element of knowledge management. The definition of knowledge-sharing generally implies that each knowledge-sharing process includes (1) knowledge donating process, which is communicating to others what one's intellectual capital is, and (2) knowledge collecting process, which is discussing co-workers to persuade them to reciprocate their own intellectual capital (Lin, 2007).

Logically, knowledge power and value are enhanced when only knowledge is shared with and transferred to others (Al-Kurdi et al., 2020). Unshared knowledge will become orphaned knowledge (Caddy et al., 2001). Accordingly, (Engström et al., 2003) indicated in his study of 13 Radisson SAS hotels that the concept of knowledge-sharing in hotels should be studied for its prominent role in achieving competitive advantage. Furthermore, Yang (2010) stated that the advantages of knowledge-sharing include mitigating the possible intellectual capital losses of workers leaving, Improving job performance and employee satisfaction by enabling all employees to obtain the knowledge they need, utilizing the available organization's resources more strategically, achieving high service innovation performance in the hospitality and tourism industry, thus, providing better service to hotel guests (Chen and Cheng, 2012; Hussain *et al.,* 2016). Besides, knowledge-sharing can reduce production costs, Improve decision-making, coordination of results, innovating, and boosting profits from new products. (Allameh, 2018), helping build social relationships between employees (Zhang et al., 2020).

Despite this vital value of knowledge-sharing, partial knowledge transfer is found to be more common (Hu, 2009). Many hospitality industry employees are reluctant to share their knowledge for fear of hindering them from moving up or losing job opportunities. They are sure that "knowledge is power."(Bock *et al.,* 2005; Chen and Cheng, 2012). Employees feel fear from the loss of dominance and ownership of knowledge after sharing their uniqueness. On the other hand, some employees aren't interested in sharing knowledge, prefer to work alone, and don't like to learn from others (Yang, 2010).

Generally, if there is hoarding knowledge in the organization, managers need to start dealing with the issue from this management level. Here, Yang (2007) said that organizations need to foster interpersonal skills, support their employees, and build a working environment based on collaboration and trust that promotes knowledge-sharing

and learning activities. Employee-supervisor relationships that are marked by shared trust, commitment, reverence, and responsibility usually contribute to the core benefit of enhanced knowledge-sharing (Lee and Yu, 2011). Also, Formal interactions, such as work teams and training classes, help workers exchange information, but more sharing of knowledge happens in informal interactions (Chen and Cheng, 2012).

Trust

Trust is a significant element of social ties. Pedro and Gökhan (2020) described trust as the willingness to place oneself in a position of vulnerability to another party's actions based on the assumption that the other party may behave with one's own interests in mind. That is, members of the organization trust each other's ability to complete their tasks and expect that the other group members can help them solve their problems (Kim and Lee, 2006).

Employees, based on the actions and practices of their leaders, draw the nature of their relationship, which is either characterized by trust in leadership or a loss of it (Neves and Karagonlar, 2020). When employees and their leaders are in a mutually trustworthy social sharing relationship, they tend to reciprocate positive treatment, and vice versa (de Jong et al., 2015). Pedro and Gökhan (2020), based on the trust framework emanating from social exchange theory, argues that employees use humor styles to determine their supervisors' level of trust. Affiliative humor describes that the leader is humble, self-confident, and has strong moral principles; self-enhancing humor indicates that the leader trusts in him/herself, keeps a "glass-half-full" approach; aggressive humor shows a lack of empathy about others, the approval of manipulative approaches, and an effort to escape blame; Self-defeating humor shows a loss of self-confidence and an inability to cope with challenges and doubts the leader's worth.

The moderating role of Trust in aggressive humor- knowledge-sharing relationships

Knowledge-sharing cannot be coerced or mandated but can be promoted and facilitated (Zhang et al., 2020). According to the leader-member exchange (LMX) theory, which is based on the notion that subordinate attitudes and behaviors are influenced by the leader–subordinate relationship. So, negative humor may stop employees' knowledge-sharing. The role of negatives humor in preventing knowledge-sharing can also be undermined by building trust and cooperation between employees and each other and their supervisors. Thus, it can be said that trust can overcome the negatives of aggressive humor and encourage workers to share knowledge. Confirming this, a leader's negative humor early in the relationship may have a devastating effect on a subordinate's perception of the relationship. Still, in contrast, the same humor might be brushed off after building trust among them (Robert et al., 2016). Gupta (2008) stated that knowledge-sharing occurs better among employees who have greater mutual trust. Trust makes them more willing to share knowledge. Chen and Ayoun (2019) pointed out that, based on trusting a supervisor, many hospitality employees use aggressive workplace humor for fun and coworker socializing. In conclusion, it can be assumed that trust may moderate the relationship between aggressive humor and knowledge-sharing

Method
Research model overview
In this study, the theoretical framework and relationships between the model variables are extracted from the extant literature. **Fig 2** illustrates the study model. According to the suggested model, there are two-hypotheses to examine, as follows:

H1. Aggressive humor has a negative effect on knowledge-sharing.
H2. The impact of Aggressive humor on knowledge-sharing is positively moderated by Trust.
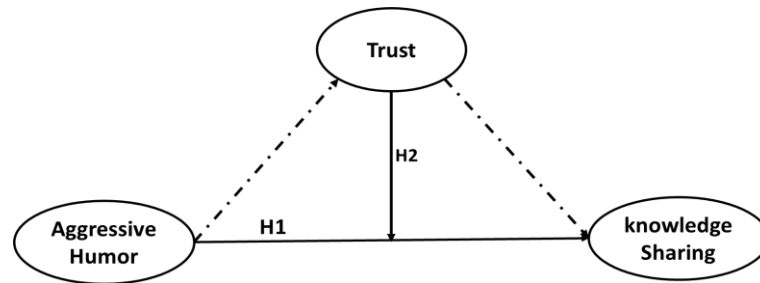

Fig.2. The proposed conceptual framework

The sample and design
To examine these proposed hypotheses, A questionnaire was developed, consisting of 13 questions that contain Aggressive humor, Trust, Knowledge-sharing, and demographic data. Data collected from customer-contact employees of 38 five-star hotels (Out of 44 five-star hotels in total) located in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, agreed to participate in the study. Since the five-star hotels have well-developed human resource management structures, they were chosen as the analysis unit for this study. Customer contact employees are often more stressed and need to knowledge. The researcher connected with human resources managers and general managers in the study's selected hotels to obtain their agreement to send the electronic survey to them, then they send it to the employees in order for the questionnaire to gain more importance. A total of 500 questionnaires were distributed to a random sample of Employees in the study hotels and 387 valid samples were collected with a recovery rate of 77.6%. This sample consisted of 73.4% male and 26.6 females between the ages of 22 and 68. According to Krejcie and Morgan (1970), a sample size of 384 is suitable for a population of 100,000. Accordingly, the study sample is valid.

Measures
Aggressive humor was chosen to represent negative humor because it is other-focused and is, therefore, more influential than the self-defeating humor style. Short Humor Styles Questionnaire (swHSQ) -Three items- was used to measure hospitality employees' aggressive humor style (Scheel et al., 2016). The study adopted the four-item scale from Choi et al. (2008) to measure the trust variable. Knowledge-sharing was rated by employees using a four-item scale from Pool *et al.* (2014). All items are measured on a five-point Likert scale ranging from disagree (1) to agree (5). The sentences were encoded as follows: (Table 1)

Results

This current study utilised SEM via the "Partial least squares PLS" technique to test the hypotheses of the study with SmartPLS-3.0. The proposed theoretical model was examined using a two-step approach suggested by (Leguina, 2015), As follows;

Assessment of outer measurement model

To evaluate the outer model's reliability and validity, internal consistency reliability, indicator reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity were tested. First, as displayed in **Table 1**, the structures' internal consistency reliability was tested with Cronbach's alpha (α) changing from 0.779 to 0.906, and the composite reliability (C.R) ranging from 0.855 to 0.934. Second, indicators' reliability was acceptable as all loading values of the structure indicators were higher than 0.70. Third, convergent validity was evaluated by the average variance extracted (AVE) values exceeding the satisfactory value of 0.50 (Henseler et al., 2009).

Table I

Assessment of the formative measurement model

The model items	Outer Loading	α	C.R	AVE
Aggressive Humour		0.865	0.917	0.787
Aggr_humor_1	0.892			
Aggr_humor_2	0.906			
Aggr_humor_3	0.863			
Knowledge-sharing		0.906	0.934	0.780
Know_sharing_1	0.842			
Know_sharing_2	0.920			
Know_sharing_3	0.897			
Know_sharing_4	0.872			
Trust		0.779	0.855	0.597
trust_1	0.703			
trust_2	0.845			
trust_3	0.823			
trust_4	0.710			

Finally, three criteria were implemented to assess the discriminant validity of the constructs. They were cross-loading, Fornell-Larcker criterion, and heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) (Leguina, 2015). As indicated in Table (2), the outer-loading for each latent variable - underlined- was higher than the cross-loading with other measurements.

Table 2
Cross loading results

	Aggressive Humor	Knowledge-sharing	Trust
Aggr_humor_1	**0.892**	-0.456	0.173
Aggr_humor_2	**0.906**	-0.447	0.027
Aggr_humor_3	**0.863**	-0.366	0.134
Know_sharing_1	-0.384	**0.842**	0.147
Know_sharing_2	-0.437	**0.920**	0.197
Know_sharing_3	-0.442	**0.897**	0.186
Know_sharing_4	-0.431	**0.872**	0.147
trust_1	0.108	0.085	**0.703**
trust_2	0.110	0.157	**0.845**
trust_3	0.087	0.155	**0.823**
trust_4	0.087	0.171	**0.710**

As shown in Table 3, the bolded values of the AVEs in the diagonals are higher than the correlation between variables. According to Gold et al. (2001), HTMT values need to be less than 0.90. The study's values of HTMT were lower than this (Table 3). According to the results, the model structure has adequate discriminant validity. Consequently, the outer measurement model outcomes were deemed strong enough to continue to evaluate the structural model.

Table 3
Inter-construct correlations, the square root of AVE, and HTMT results

	AVEs values			HTMT results		
	Aggressive Humor	Knowledge-sharing	Trust	Aggressive Humor	Knowledge-sharing	Trust
Aggressive Humor	**0.887**					
Knowledge-sharing	-0.481	**0.883**		0.538		
Trust	0.124	0.193	**0.773**	0.156	0.217	

Assessment of the structural model

The hypotheses were then tested by a structural equation analysis. In particular, the model's predictive capacity and the explanatory power were analyzed (Hair Jr et al., 2016). With the VIF values of the manifest indicators changing from 1.218 to 3.695 below 5, the multicollinearity of the structural model has been verified as inexistent. Next, Chin (1998) indicated that the lower limit for the R^2 values is 0.10. Therefore, the R^2 values for the variables of knowledge-sharing being 0.510 are acceptable (**Table 3**). Besides, The Stone-Geisser Q^2 test indicates a knowledge-sharing value greater than zero (**Table 3**), indicating adequate predictive validity of the model (Henseler et al., 2009). Accordingly, enough predictive validity for the structural model was also confirmed.

Table 3
Coefficient of determination (R2) and (Q2) of the model

Endogenous latent construct	(R2)	(Q2)
Knowledge-sharing	0.510	0.372

Lastly, the path coefficient and t-value of the hypothesized association were analyzed using a bootstrapping technique. **Table 4 and fig 3** below display the hypothesis test results, given the path coefficient values and the relevant significance. Aggressive humor was found to be in negative and significant correlation to knowledge-sharing at $\beta = -0.279, p < 0.01$, so **H₁** was supported. The results also confirm the moderation effect of trust on Aggressive humor towards the knowledge-sharing at $\beta = 0.447, p < 0.0$, supporting **H₂**.

Fig.3. The structural and measurement model

Table 4

Path Coefficients

	Beta (β)	t-values	P Values	Results
Aggressive Humor -> Knowledge-sharing	-0.279	4.626	0.000	Accepted
Moderating Effect 1 -> Knowledge-sharing	0.447	6.665	0.000	Accepted

On the other hand**, Fig 4** displays that aggressive humor has a negative and significant correlation to knowledge-sharing ($\beta = -0.481, p < 0.01$) before adding the trust variable as a moderator. This supports the role of trust as a moderator in this relationship. This model meets all criteria for the assessment of the outer measurement model and assessment of the structural model according to the Partial least squares PLS method.
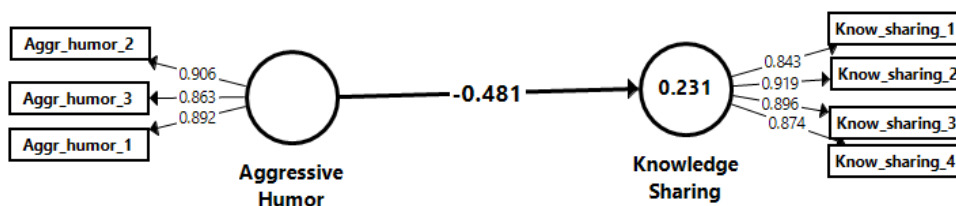
Fig.4. The structural and measurement model before adding the moderation effects

Discussion

Aggressive Humor and Knowledge-sharing

The empirical results of this study reveal that aggressive humor practices have significant negative influences on knowledge-sharing. These findings confirm with the work by Romero and Cruthirds (2006) and Romero and Arendt (2011). They said that aggressive humor style negatively allied satisfaction with co-workers and team cohesion, reducing workers' confidence levels. Pedro and Gökhan (2020) emphasized that this correlation negatively affects knowledge-sharing.

Assessing the moderating effect

The practical results validate the moderation influences of trust on aggressive humor towards knowledge-sharing. In other words, trust can dampen the negative relationship between aggressive humor and knowledge-sharing (**fig. 5**, Interaction plot).
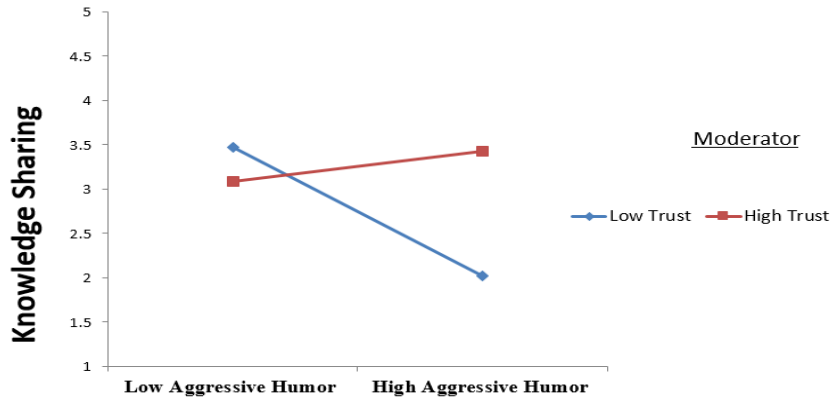

Fig.5. Interaction plot for the trust moderation effect on aggressive humor towards knowledge-sharing variables

Returning to **fig.4** and calculating the mediator's interaction values (-0.279+ 0.447= 0.168), we conclude that trust made the relationship between aggressive humor and knowledge-sharing positive. More specifically, the results corroborate the findings by Chen and Ayoun (2019), based on trusting a supervisor, many hospitality employees use aggressive workplace humor for fun and coworker socializing. In line with these arguments, Robert *et al.* (2015) stated that negative humor might lose its negative effect and gain positive humor characteristics in stable relationships (Trust). Perhaps what helped the trust variable change the negative effect of aggressive humor on knowledge-sharing into positive is that the Egyptians are noted for their enthusiasm for all things humorous; jokes, witticisms, the pun, and so on (Helmy and Frerichs, 2013). According to Blomme *et al.* (2010), hotel staff suffering from mistreatment of their leaders/ supervisors, Antisocial working hours (Lub et al., 2012), heavy workloads, work-to-family conflict, low salaries(García-Cabrera et al., 2018). Thus, the current study model can be used to improve the work environment by supporting trust among employees to overcome the negatives of aggressive humor and enhance knowledge-sharing.

Conclusions and recommendation

The current study's results show that there are negative effects of aggressive humor on knowledge-sharing among hotel employees. But in the presence of trust as a moderator between employees and their supervisors, this negative relationship turns into positive, and aggressive humor becomes a means to increase the team's cohesion and a mechanism that speeds up employees' coping with the work environment. To lessen the negative aggressive humor effect in hotels, the study recommends supporting trust between employees and their supervisors to overcome aggressive humor's negative impacts on knowledge-sharing. And using positive (or negative humor, provided there is confidence) in leadership as it is a recent trend in leadership systems that have proven effective in encouraging knowledge-sharing among the organization's members.

Limitations and future research

More studies on this subject need to be undertaken before the relationship between aggressive humor, knowledge-sharing, and trust is more clearly understood. Future research could adopt Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory to determine when and how to use humor in hotels' leadership. Aggressive humor can also be studied within the framework of the Egyptian personality—the Egyptian is always described as ibn-nukta, meaning son of the joke.

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دور ثقة العامل في العلاقة بين الفكاهة العدوانية للقائد ومشاركة المعرفة

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الملخص	معلومات المقالة

تهدف الدراسة إلي سد جزء من فجوة ندرة الأبحاث التي أجريت علي تقييم آثار الفكاهة السلبية في بيئة العمل داخل الفنادق كأسلوب قيادة حديث. فحصت الدراسة تأثير الفكاهة العدوانية في مشاركة المعرفة، وكذلك اختبار الثقة كمتغير وسيط معدل Moderator بينهم. وجه استبيان (387) معد إلكترونيا إلي موظفي الاتصال المباشر مع العملاء في 38 فندق فئة الخمس نجوم بمدينة شرم الشيخ. استخدمت طريق المعادلة الهيكلية SEM بطريقة المربعات الصغري الجزئية PLS عن طريق برنامج SmartPLS3 لتحليل الاستبيان واختبار فرضا الدراسة. توصلت الدراسة إلي وجود علاقة سلبية بين الفكاهة العدوانية ومشاركة المعرفة قبل إضافة الثقة كمتغير وسيط معدل، أما بعد إضافته إلي العلاقة تحولت هذه العلاقة إلي إيجابية بعد حساب معادلة التفاعل. توصي الدراسة بضرورة اتباع نمط قيادي يوفر الثقة لتجنب آثار الفكاهة السلبية والاستفادة منها بشكل إيجابي في توجيه العاملين داخل الفنادق، كما توصي بضرورة إدخال الفكاهة عموما كأسلوب قيادة في التعامل مع العاملين لما لها من فوائد جمة أثبتت نظريا وعمليا.

الكلمات المفتاحية

الفكاهة؛ العدوانية؛ الثقة؛ مشاركة المعرفة؛ PLS.