Relationship Between Factors and Effects on Grapevine Phenomenon among Staffs in Public Higher Education Institutions

[1]Miharaini Md Ghani, [1]Mohd Nizam Osman and [2]Nur Farah Fadhliah Mahmud

[1]Department of Communication, [2]Department of English Language,
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia

Abstract: An effective communication is required by an organization in order to avoid any ambiguity of information disseminated. Any understanding or interpretation of information in a communication phenomenon can cause grapevine. When grapevine is out of control in universities, the parties involved will always find a way to manage ethically to enhance professionalism and quality of work. In addition, it shows more barriers in communication among elites because of their status in practising autocratic leadership which makes the situation worse because the lower classes are not given a chance to speak. As such, administrative and support staffs in Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEI) have no exception to feel stress and depress caused by the problems and conflicts that arise. The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship between factors and effects on grapevine phenomenon among staffs in PHEI. The method of collecting primary data using questionnaires which were distributed to 346 respondents in this study was based on a quantitative method which was survey. Respondents were chosen through purposive sampling from five faculties of public universities in Malaysia. Based on the results, the major factor that affect spread of the grapevine among staffs is due to incomplete information from formal sources while the major effect affects staff relationship, strained which can cause negative effect like dispersion.

Key words: Organization · Communication · Grapevine · Public Higher Education Institutions

INTRODUCTION

Grapevine was introduced in an informal communication up to today as a result of its spread through word of mouth from one person to another, even though it is still questionable until now. While the information disseminated is more on oral form, it has also been found in written form. In line with the current technology, grapevine has been spread widely because it is transmitted through the electronic medium that is familiar to staffs in an organization. Along with that, from a different angle, ancient studies have proved through the word of Allah in verse Al-Hujurat Paragraph 6 regarding the grapevine or rumour that says:

Oh people who believe! If a wicked to you with any news, verify it (to determine) the truth, lest ye harm people with undesirable - because of ignorance about it - that cause you regret what you have done [1].

The above verse clearly detailed out all that whatever received or heard about any information, whether from the right or otherwise source, shall be scrutinized, examined, investigated or in other words, not to be fooled to accept it blindly. This is due to the avoidance of any doubt about a fact to be true.

Everything that happens is likely to have a positive or negative element between right or wrong about anything [2]. This is due to the nature of news or rumour grapevine itself which encourages a person to deliberately falsify the initial information then pass it to distort the facts on an issue to achieve their original goal [3]. Therefore, an effective communication is required by an organization in order to avoid any ambiguity of information disseminated.

When grapevine is out of control in universities, the parties that involved will try to find a way to manage ethically to enhance their professionalism and quality of work. In addition, it shows more barriers in communication

Corresponding Author: Miharaini Md Ghani, Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages
and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia, 43400 UPM Serdang, Selangor Darul Ehsan.

in terms of status where the elite classes adopt autocratic leadership style and makes the situation worse and serious because the lower classes are not given a chance to speak.

As such, administrative and support staffs in Public Higher Education Institutions (PHEI) have no exception to be stressed and depressed by the problems and conflicts that arise. Furthermore, it involves the grapevine to be spread easily without limits. Some of the problems arising from grapevine phenomenon is that rumour news tends to imply bad implication and makes people feel worried and distressed by the validity of the information delivered [4]. Depressed mood will also give an impact in a long term and make the staffs' enthusiasm to work to drop and job performance to decline.

Thus, the grapevine phenomenon can happen anywhere regardless of any rank or position held by the staffs. Ineffective communication is also a factor of grapevine. If the problem is not dealt immediately, it will lead to a more chronic problem. Therefore in this study, the researchers of this study aim to explore and determine the factors and effects of the grapevine among staffs in the organization.

Literature Review: Grapevine is something globalized which can effect an organization either in government or private sector. An individual is very easy to believe and spread the news to their nearest friends because grapevine is a combination that contains facts and perceptions. [5] noted that among 80% to 90% of information that was heard through grapevine are certified true and correct. In another study, [3] discovered that respondents chose grapevine as a second accessible information source and showed almost 20% of the respondents obtained information about an issue from other people or their friends through conversations.

In addition, [6] examined that the transmission of information is 74.9% which represents a large number of tweet on data sets of rumour makes the strong behavior to the negative direction and feel the spread of grapevine is an interruption. It is parallel with the statement proposed by [7] which concluded that the existing of grapevine in some organization is like a 'ghost' because everyone aware of his presence but quite difficult to detect and it is necessary to examine deeply from where the source of its infection.

[8] concurred that four common factors that lead to the widespread of grapevine: i) the interest and desire to interact among staff, ii) the degree of vagueness and vague information conveyed through formal channels, iii) the sense of insecurity at work environment and iv) the

atmosphere of threats and the organization itself that cause the staff to not trust the formal communication channels. According to [9], the grapevine is the result of someone's selfishness and ulterior aims. In addition, one of the factors to the spread of grapevine is also likely due to the aim of pleasure and safety which are not guaranteed. Individuals who are concerned with their future will feel insecure and over excited about the uncertainty of information and have them fall into the grapevine. Sometimes this expansion factor is due to the information submitted, whether the information is too secret, different and unusual. Those who spread such information promptly and instantly share it out so that the information is stale.

Many researchers have argued that grapevine phenomenon give more negative impact whether to organization, staffs or personal. In organization area, grapevine can affect activity of employment, staff productivity, reputation or image of organization [10, 11]. Furthermore, the grapevine can also provoke a movement and social anxiety such as the disintegration, abuse of power, embezzlement, internal political problems, dissatisfaction, scandal and crisis leadership [12]. Similarly, [13] found that grapevine involving personal of someone will cause them become victim to uncomfortable condition and very depressed until the relationship between staffs will become estranged and give rise to negative effects.

Method: In discussing the communication between staffs and administration at PHEI, this study has applied the theory of Uncertainty Reduction Theory (URT) which introduced by [14] in 1975 which includes several internal and external elements to further strengthen this theory. This theory is also known as Interaction Initiation Theory (IIT). Based on Uncertainty Reduction Model, the model used is consistent with the concept of this study which involved the grapevine. Researchers associated this model with the study because some elements in this model were used.

This study used quantitative method. A total of 346 respondents from five selected faculties such as Faculty of Agriculture, Faculty of Veterinary Medicine, Faculty of Forestry, Faculty of Science and Faculty of Engineering, which involved administrative and support staffs at PHEI in Malaysia were sampled. Questionnaires at pre-test level were distributed in order to test respondents' understanding regarding the questions and their answers towards it. The researchers of this study took approximately two and a half months to collect the actual data in stages.

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha

Variable	Total Items	Reliability (alpha)
Spreading factors	11	0.912
Impact to staff	13	0.946

The establishment and development of this questionnaire using the concept of 'adopt and adapt' based on reading of the literature, adopt and adapt to the requirements of this question study. In the factors of grapevine section, this construct was consisted of 11 items; 4 of them were adopted from [8]; 1 item was adopted from [9], whereas the other 6 items were created by the authors. While in the effects from grapevine section, this construct was consisted of 13 items; 6 items were adopted from [12]; 1 item was adopted from [10] and [11]; 2 items from [13], whereas the other 4 items were created by the author. The construct in this study were measured using five point Likert scale which were SD=strongly disagree, D=disagree, SLA=slightly agree, A=agree, SA=strongly agree.

The questionnaire was divided into five sections and the data were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Ver. 22. The procedure involved was descriptive statistics which were frequencies, percentages and Pearson correlation r.

Reliability Test: To evaluate the coherence and internal consistency of the items, a reliability test should be predetermined. The test was based on the calculation coefficient of Cronbach's alpha (Table 1). Some researchers suggested that a variable was reliable and internally consistent when the alpha was 0.70 and above [15], 0.6 and above [16], 0.65 to 0.95 [17] or 0.50 and above [18]. Thus, the higher the value of Cronbach's alpha which approach 1, the more reliable the generated scale is [19]. Table 1 presents all the Cronbach's alpha score for the variables were greater than 0.90. The highest alpha obtained by effect of grapevine to staffs ($\alpha = 0.946$), followed by factors of grapevine ($\alpha = 0.912$).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents: Table 2 shows the demographic profile of the respondents from five faculties at PHEI in Malaysia. The study involved a total of 346 students from five faculties at an Institute of Higher Learning. The selection of faculties was carried out by simple random sampling at the Institute of Higher Learning and the selection of respondents was conducted based on purposive sampling. In the respondent demographics section of the questionnaire,

Table 2: Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	143	41.3
	Female	203	58.7
Faculty	Agriculture	72	20.8
	Veterinary Medicine	65	18.8
	Forestry	55	15.9
	Science	70	20.2
	Engineering	84	24.3
Service scheme	Permanent	258	74.6
	Contract	70	20.2
	Part-time	10	2.9
	Temporary	8	2.3
Working Experience	Less than 1 year	12	3.5
	1-5 year	77	22.3
	6-10 year	107	30.9
	11-15 year	82	23.7
	16-20 year	24	6.9
	More than 20 year	44	12.7
Average Monthly	Less than RM1000	16	4.6
	RM1000-RM1999	99	28.6
	RM2000-RM2999	138	39.9
	RM3000-RM3999	82	23.7
	RM4000-RM4999	9	2.6
	RM5000 and above	2	0.6

the researchers discussed about the respondents' gender and age, ethnicity, marital status, faculties, grades and posts, service schemes, highest level of education, work experiences at the Institute of Higher Learning and the monthly income. The results obtained were analysed based on the objectives set by the researchers at the beginning of the study.

Factors of Grapevine: Respondents were asked to respond to 11 items, Likert scale type questionnaire dealing with their factors of grapevine at PHEI in Malaysia. Factors of grapevine were demonstrated by a mean score on a five point Likert scale where 1 (strongly disagree) represents the minimum score of the scale and 5 (strongly agree) represents the maximum score. Table 3 indicates the frequency of respondents' feedback to the factors of grapevine.

Table 3 indicates the majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the spread of grapevine is because of incomplete information from formal sources (73.4%), organizational culture itself (71.7%) and the working environment is not guaranteed (47.1%) Furthermore, a given workload that is not balance which

Table 3: Frequency Percentages on the Factors of Grapevine

N	Factors of Grapevine	SD (%)	D (%)	SLA (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
1	I spread grapevine because of incomplete information from formal sources	2.9	5.8	17.9	36.4	37.0
2	I spread grapevine because of the organizational culture itself	3.8	7.5	17.1	34.1	37.6
3	A given workload is not balance and results in dissatisfaction	2.9	4.3	39.3	31.2	22.3
4	I spread grapevine for my own personal advantages	2.6	11.0	23.4	49.4	13.6
5	Slow acting in the management makes grapevine spread quickly	4.3	11.3	20.5	50.6	13.3
6	I felt less motivated from higher party	3.8	8.1	35.3	37.0	15.9
7	I spread grapevine because the working environment is not guaranteed	4.9	8.4	39.6	41.6	5.5
8	I accept the information without any motion check	7.5	9.5	52.9	24.3	5.8
9	I easily believe with the information presented	4.0	5.8	60.4	26.3	3.5
10	I spread information without any motion check	8.7	30.1	31.8	20.5	9.0
11	I like to hear something negative rather than from positive word mouth	10.7	18.5	42.5	24.9	3.5

Scale: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, SLA=Slightly Agree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

Table 4: Frequency Percentages on the Effect from Grapevine

N	Effect from Grapevine	SD (%)	D (%)	SLA (%)	A (%)	SA (%)
1	Grapevine may concern staff	1.4	2.3	13.3	27.5	55.5
2	Grapevine can cause affected staff relations, strained and cause negative effects (dispersion)	1.2	3.2	13.9	27.5	54.3
3	Grapevine can cause staffs to act unexpectedly	2.6	6.1	13.6	28.0	49.7
4	Grapevine could provoke a split among the staff	0.6	4.6	17.3	35.5	41.9
5	Staff will feel depressed and uncomfortable with any form of grapevine	0.6	6.6	15.6	34.4	42.8
6	Grapevine may affect the productivity of work and organizational reputation	0.3	7.8	15.6	40.5	35.8
7	Grapevine can lower the morale of the staff	1.2	9.0	17.6	38.4	33.8
8	Grapevine may cause dissatisfaction among staff	2.3	3.8	18.2	50.9	24.9
9	Grapevine may cause irregularities among staff	4.3	7.8	30.3	39.9	17.6
10	Grapevine may cause political problems of internal organization	2.9	7.2	37.6	38.7	13.6
11	Grapevine can increase the rate of skipping work	4.0	15.6	24.9	38.4	17.1
12	Grapevine cause abuse of power in an organization	6.6	15.3	28.0	31.2	18.8
13	Grapevine may cause conflicts and crisis	5.5	14.2	33.2	41.3	5.8

Scale: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, SLA=Slightly Agree, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

results in dissatisfaction (53.5%) contributes to the spread of grapevine which was consistent with the findings from [8].

However, a high percentage (60.4%) slightly agreed with the item easily believe the information presented. Most of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the negativity stated in the items of 10 and 11, indicating that they spread information without motion check (38.8%) and they like to hear something negative from positive (29.2%). From the management viewpoint, majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that slow acting by them make grapevine quick spread (63.9%). Consistent with the past findings by [9], we found that about 63% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they spread grapevine for personal advantage.

Effects from Grapevine: As can be seen from Table 4, 55.5% of respondents strongly agreed that the spread of grapevine may concern staffs. The majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the existing of grapevine can affect staff relations, strained and cause negative effects (dispersion) (81.8%) and staff will feel depressed and uncomfortable with any form of grapevine (77.2%). These two effects reflected the findings by [13]. The findings are consistent with [10] and [11], which indicated that the majority of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the effects of grapevine which may affect the productivity of work and organizational reputations (76.3%).

From this data we can see that more than 30% of the respondents were slightly agreed that the effects from grapevine may cause irregularities among staff (30.3%), political problems of internal organization (37.6%) and also conflicts and crisis (33.2%). A high percentage of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed when they stated grapevine can cause abuse of power in an organization (21.9%). Furthermore, the effects from grapevine phenomenon can provoke a split among the staff (77.4%) and dissatisfaction among staff (75.8%). The above findings were consistent with the study by [12].

Relationship of Factors in the Spread of Grapevine and Its Impact on Staffs at Institutes of Higher Learning: Pearson correlation test was used to analyse the relationship between the factors that caused the spread of grapevine and its impacts among staffs at the universities. It was conducted based on the independent variables and the dependent variable in order to see whether it has a relationship or not, whether the relationship is strong or not and whether the relationship is significant or not. The independent variables were the factors that lead to the spread of grapevine and the dependent variable was the impacts on staffs at the universities.

Through the correlation test which was conducted on 346 respondents, the survey results showed that the correlation obtained was $r = 0.904$, with significance at $p = 0.000$ (Table 2). It was measured through Guilford Rule of Thumb to the effect that there was a strong correlation, significant among the factors that caused the spread of grapevine effects to staff at the university.

Table 2: Test Correlation Between Spreading Factor and The Impact of Grapevine on staffs at the universities

	Impact to staffs	
Independent variable	r	p
Spreading factor	0.904*	0.000

*Signficance at $p<0.05$

The value was significantly smaller as compared to the 0.05 significance level (0.001 <0.05) which led to the decision to accept the first hypothesis. This means that there was a significant relationship between factors that caused the spread of grapevine against the impact on staffs. Even so, the positive r means there was a strong positive relationship between the factors that caused the spread of grapevine against the impact on staffs.

Therefore, the factors that cause the spread of grapevine are high, which simultaneously cause the effect among staff to be high too. Consequently, an employee will put an effort to find or investigate that piece of information in order to avoid any uncertainties. The nature of this uncertainty will lead to uncertainty reduction theory which was introduced by [14] as in if a person does not know about something, he or she will be encouraged to find out more information about it. This is to prevent any dissemination of information which was not yet been proven. Parallel to the study done by [8] on grapevine, they proposed that it was quickly dispersed, not easily controlled and once it is started, it is hard to be stopped. As a result, if the information is scattered and inauthentic, it will cause the individuals to be the victims of circumstances.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it is expected that this research can meet the needs of the organization in realizing the establishment of development to produce more professional staff in handling issues and problems which involve internal and external authorities to have good identities among them. The existence of grapevine has not only create awareness among people to be more serious in disseminating and receiving information, but it also promotes the efficient and effective communication in order to create a more professional organization from the lower, middle and upper levels.

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