

## Article

# The Effect of Workplace Friendship on Hotel Employees' Intention to Leave: Moderating Role of Psychological Contract Violation

Shao-Chuan Wu <sup>1</sup>, Yuan-Chiu Chen <sup>2</sup> and Wen-Long Zhuang <sup>3,\*</sup> 

<sup>1</sup> Department of Sports and Leisure, Hungkuang University, Shalu District, Taichung City 433304, Taiwan; chuan7258@gmail.com

<sup>2</sup> Ph.D. Program in Strategy and Development of Emerging Industries, National Chi Nan University, Puli, Nantou 54561, Taiwan; valentine.chen@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup> Department of Culinary Arts and Hotel Management, Hungkuang University, Shalu District, Taichung City 433304, Taiwan

\* Correspondence: abow38@yahoo.com.tw

**Abstract:** Sustainability is a universal value of running a business. This study examines the influence of workplace friendships among hotel staff on their intention to leave, while considering the moderating effect of psychological contract violation. The sample group of the questionnaire is the employees in the five-star hotels in Taiwan. This study employs the purposive sampling method to collect questionnaires. For this research, 450 questionnaires were handed out to hotel staffs, with 150 questionnaires distributed, respectively, in Northern, Central, and Southern Taiwan. A total of 368 valid questionnaires were collected, resulting in an effective response rate of 81.78%. The results indicate that: (1) Friendship opportunities and friendship prevalence can significantly decrease workers' intention to leave their jobs; (2) Psychological contract violation moderates the negative influence of friendship opportunity / friendship prevalence on one's intention to leave. Finally, the paper proposes theoretical implications, practical implications and future research directions in accordance with the findings.

**Keywords:** sustainability; workplace friendship; psychological contract violation; intention to leave



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## 1. Introduction

Employees leaving an organization is an important management issue in the hospitality industry [1–3]. As a result of the frequent turnover of front-line staff, the operating costs of hospitality organizations will rise, compelling operators in tourism and hospitality organization to pay greater attention to this critical issue [4]. The hotel industry is even more negatively affected by employee turnover, as employees are the catalyst for creating and delivering services [5]. The high staff turnover rate in the hospitality industry is attributed to the high requirements, as well as the typically low working conditions and salary levels, compared to other industries. Additionally, work shifts and peak hours in the hospitality industry are quite different to those generally seen in other industries, which is another reason for the high turnover. The antecedents of employee turnover in the hospitality industry have been evaluated by many scholars. These antecedents include long working hours and work-life conflicts [6], emotional exhaustion [7], interpersonal tension [5], low wages, heavy workload, and work environment [5,8,9], as well as career development [5,10]. Therefore, finding ways to reduce employee turnover may be the most pressing problem for hotel organizations.

An employee typically expects to build friendships by exchanging and enjoying precious results and benefits together with co-workers [11]. Tekleab et al. [12] found that social exchange in relationships could predict employees' attitude and behavior. Friendship is a type of social exchange relationship. Whether workplace friendship can reduce hotel

employees' turnover intention appears to be a topic worthy of exploration. In the past, scholars have discussed the issue of workplace friendship or the turnover intention of hotel organizations [1,2,13]. However, it appears that there is still no relevant research exploring the influence of workplace friendship on hotel employees' intention to leave.

Although workplace friendships may influence hotel employees' intention to leave, will the mentioned relationship vary based on situational factors? In the employment relationship, the organization's ability to fulfill the psychological contract is a very crucial factor for success [14,15]. For example, during the recruitment process, the information provided by the interviewer may create anticipation for the new colleagues regarding the job. If the interviewer assures the new colleagues that the company does not require overtime, but upon starting work they discover it is not possible to leave on time, it can easily lead to a sense of violation of the psychological contract. Relevant literature holds that the destruction of the psychological contract (referring to its non-fulfillment) has negative effects, such as increased intention to leave [16,17]. Furthermore, these negative behaviors (such as workplace deviance) are further fueled by psychological contract violation [15]. When employees experience non-fulfillment, they often react with emotions of disappointment, depression, and anger [16]. However, we wish to inquire whether psychological contract violation is an important situational variable in the relationship between hotel employees' workplace friendship and their intention to leave. It appears that previous studies have not extensively discussed or explored this particular topic.

To sum up, this work intends to examine the effect of workplace friendship on hotel staffs' turnover intention, as well as the moderating effect of psychological contract violation on this relationship. In theory, this work aims to fill the research gap in the literature on the hospitality industry, given the limited existing literature on topics such as turnover intention, workplace friendship, and psychological contract violation. The practical implications of the findings of this study could serve as a guide for hospitality organizations in their efforts to create a more friendly workplace.

## 2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

### 2.1. Intention to Leave

Intention to leave can be defined as an individual's subjective assessment of the likelihood of the departing from the organization within a relatively short period of time [18]. Miller [19] and Tett and Meyer [20] propose that the intention to leave refers to the active consideration of leaving one's current organization and seeking employment opportunities elsewhere. Mobley's [21] model of intention to leave aimed to elucidate employees' turnover behavior by utilizing intention to leave as a metric to assess such behavior. Prior research has also pointed out that intention to leave is the most powerful predictor and precursor of an employee leaving the organization [22,23]. Over the past few years, scholars have been increasingly focusing their attention on the issue of intention to leave among hotel employees [24–26], given the well-known high turnover rate associated with this particular industry [27]. The turnover of employees in the hospitality industry is significant because the industry faces numerous challenges, such as intense competition, high costs, and unstable policies and so on. Many hoteliers operate with limited resources and strive to provide services at the lowest cost, placing significant pressure on employees and driving them to leave.

Wright [28] pointed out that workplace friendship is a voluntary or unforced interaction among organizational members. In other words, they perceive one another as individuals rather than mere packages or discrete attributes, or simply as role occupants. Berman, West, and Richter [29] mentioned that workplace friendship is unofficial, discretionary, and person-to-person interactions among members in the organizational environment. This study argues that workplace friendship is a colleague relationship in which intimacy, companionship and responsiveness are anticipated. Jobs in the hospitality organization demand a remarkably high level of human interaction, thereby creating

opportunities for fostering friendships [30]. In recent years, the literature on hospitality continues to emphasize the significance of employee workplace friendship. For example, Omuris [31] established a workplace friendship scale for hospitality organizations, and Ahmad et al. [32] examined the impact of workplace friendship on employee behavior.

Social exchange theory integrates perspectives from economics, anthropology, and the sociology of conflict. Homan [33] pointed out that the conceptualization of social exchange is based on the idea that individuals engage in exchange behavior because both parties anticipate receiving positive rewards. Positive returns are not limited to a specific form, price, or unit, and they are not determined by the individual but by another party [34]. From the perspective of social exchange theory, individuals tend to exchange promises in order to maximize their benefits. Therefore, cultivating workplace friendships can help reduce turnover since friendships foster loyalty among employees. Friendships make employees more confident and helpful, and motivate them to exert greater effort in their work. In addition, friendship can also increase mutual trust among employees and foster greater support among them. Finally, friendships can also offer employees increased support and understanding, thereby giving them more confidence to remain with the company and ultimately reducing turnover.

Accordingly, hotel staff and colleagues may be able to receive positive rewards through the formation of friendships. In a hotel work environment where staff can collaborate on tasks, troubleshoot challenges, communicate openly, and engage in informal conversations, individuals may believe that establishing friendship will help them obtain subsequent benefits from each other. In the work scenario mentioned above, hotel employees will naturally reduce their turnover intention. Similarly, hotel workers who develop strong friendships with co-workers, build trust, and participate in social activities outside of work, anticipate receiving mutual benefits in the future. In the above-mentioned amicable hotel work environment, employees will worry about their colleagues in every aspect, thus reducing their turnover intention. In summary, this work proposes the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1.** *More friendship opportunities will lower the hotel employees' intention to leave.*

**Hypothesis 2.** *Higher friendship prevalence will lower the hotel employees' intention to leave.*

## 2.2. The Moderating Role of Psychological Contract Violation

The psychological contract is subjective and may not be agreed upon by all parties, making it distinct from other frameworks such as implicit contract, which is regulated by common understanding or shared expectations in society [16,35]. Psychological contract violation is defined as the failure of an organization to fulfill its obligations to the individual within the psychological agreement [36,37]. Morrison and Robinson [16] believed that this definition emphasizes the individual's fulfillment of obligations towards the perceived organization, and is based on emotional and psychological assessments of the violation. The psychological contract of employees is very important for business operations. It can ensure an effective, fair, and reliable working relationship between the company and employees, and encourage employees to make significant contributions to the company. The psychological contract of employees can also ensure that the enterprise has sufficient incentive mechanisms in place to continuously enhance employee performance.

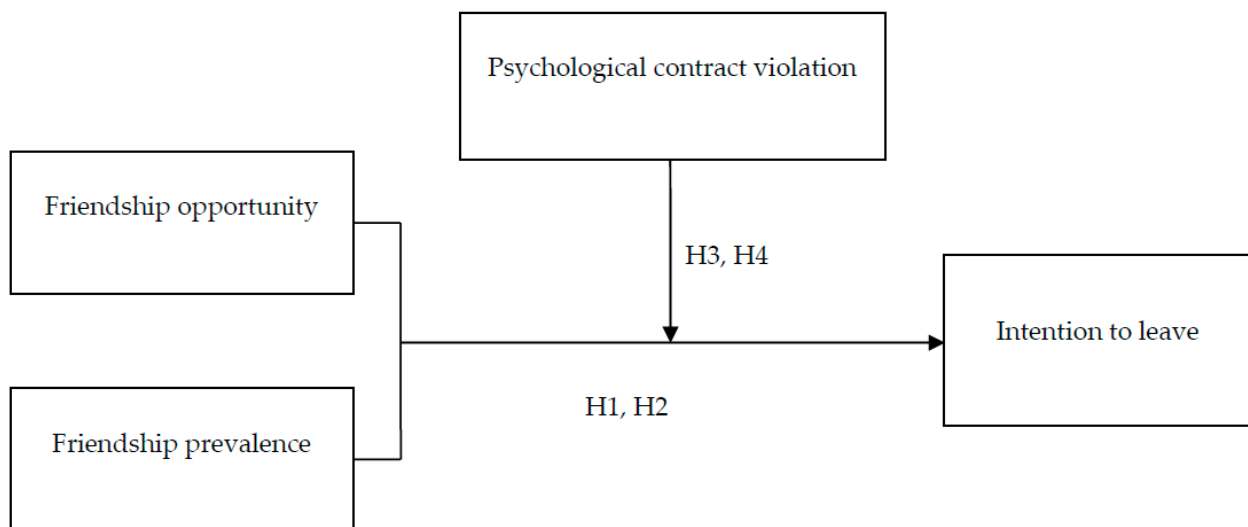
If hotel employees believe that the hotel cannot fulfill its promises (such as salary, benefits, etc.), it is likely that they do not have a favorable opinion of the organization. Under the condition of high psychological contract violation, it is expected that hotel employees would feel dissatisfied with the company. In the meantime, friendship opportunities become crucial in the situation. Even if one is dissatisfied with the company, considering the potential opportunities to cultivate friendships with colleagues will still reduce the intention to leave.

In addition, under the circumstances of high psychological contract violation, the experiences of employees who have already established friendships with their colleagues may vary significantly. When they realize that the organization has not treated them according to the originally agreed conditions, they may decide to change the working environment. For them, the friendship of colleagues will help maintain the relationship in the future as they leave their company. Overall, this study would suggest the following hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 3.** *Psychological contract violation can moderate the negative influence of friendship opportunities on hotel employees' intention to leave.*

**Hypothesis 4.** *Psychological contract violation can moderate the negative influence of friendship prevalence on hotel employees' intention to leave.*

Through literature review and hypothetical inference, this work proposed the conceptual framework, as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Conceptual framework.

### 3. Research Method and Procedure

#### 3.1. Sample

The sample subjects of this study were five-star hotels in northern, central and southern Taiwan. Employees and supervisors who were willing to cooperate with the survey were provided with questionnaires, using a type of “judgmental or purposive sampling” as the method. The reason for using purposive sampling is that it allows for the selection of representative subjects in a non-random manner [38]. The survey was conducted at the venues listed as five-star hotels in Taiwan by the Tourism Bureau in 2021. Hair et al. [39] pointed out that to construct a valid questionnaire, the number of valid samples should be five to 20 times the number of questions in the questionnaire. Since the questionnaire in this study contained 30 questions, the required number of valid samples fell within the range of 150 to 600. To account for potentially invalid questionnaires, this study distributed 450 questionnaires, with 150 distributed in each of the northern, central, and southern regions of Taiwan.

To minimize the influence of societal expectations on respondents, the research adopts the approach of Podsakoff et al. [40]. Initially, participants were informed that the purpose of this questionnaire is solely academic research. Subsequently, respondents were made aware that their completion of the questionnaire would remain anonymous, ensuring that only the author would possess knowledge of their identity. Thirdly, participants were

informed that the questionnaire constituted a comprehensive evaluation rather than an individual assessment. Fourth, respondents were given the option to discontinue their participation at any point during the response phase. Lastly, the author personally collected the complete questionnaire to eliminate the respondents' concerns regarding the exposure of their responses.

Considering the quality of the questionnaires and the number of returns, this research seeks the assistance of one to two friends in the hotel industry for each sampled hotel. The detailed method is as follows: (1) After confirming the employees who are willing to participate in each five-star international tourist hotel, the friends in the hotel industry will facilitate the distribution of the employee questionnaire (including envelopes and matching envelopes) to the respective hotels, with the assistance of friends in the industry; (2) Ask the friends in the hotel industry to explain the steps and research purpose to the respondents, aiming to reduce the doubts of the respondents; (3) Seal the questionnaire and send it back to the author after completing the answer; (4) Finally, as a token of appreciation, participants who complete the questionnaire will receive a gift valued at NT\$50 to encourage careful and thorough responses.

### 3.2. Measurement

The items measured in this study included three demographic variables: gender, age and seniority. Further, the work adopted workplace friendship (friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence), psychological contract violation, and intention to leave as research variables, and measured them using Likert's five-point scale as a basis. For workplace friendship, Nielsen et al.'s [41] Workplace Friendship Scale was used, which includes two dimensions (friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence), each with six questions. The sample items for assessing friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence included: "I have a chance to know my colleagues" and "after work, my colleagues and I engage in social activities". The Psychological Contract Violation Scale used in this study was developed by Robinson and Morrison [42], and the number of questions was four. The sample items for assessing psychological contract violation included: "I feel betrayed by my organization". The measurement of intention to leave was based on Bluedorn's [43] Intention to Leave Scale. The sample items for assessing intention to leave included: "I often want to leave this organization".

### 3.3. Data Analysis Assay

This work used SPSS 24.0 and AMOS 24.0 statistical analysis software to carry out descriptive statistical analysis and reliability analysis on valid questionnaire data, and verified the research hypotheses through regression analysis. First, the demographic background of the respondents was examined using descriptive analysis. Second, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to test the binary relationship between the variables. Third, reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were conducted to assess the applicability of the scale. Finally, multiple regression analysis was conducted to examine the hypotheses.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Descriptive Statistical Analysis

A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed in this study, to five-star hotels in northern, central and southern Taiwan, with 150 copies allocated to each of the three regions. A total of 381 questionnaires were collected from employees. Out of these, 13 invalid questionnaires were discarded, yielding 368 valid questionnaires. The validity rate of the collected questionnaires was 81.78%. The exclusion criteria for invalid questionnaires were incomplete answers, blank answers, missed answers, check-ups, inability to meet criteria of sampling, and questionnaires with identical scores filled in. Any questionnaires displaying these errors were automatically deemed invalid. The analysis results showed that most of the subjects were women (64.90%). Most of the subjects were between 19 and 24 years old



(54.10%). In term of length of service in hotel industry, most of the respondents had less than one year (30.70%).

#### 4.2. Reliability Analysis

In this study, Cronbach's coefficient  $\alpha > 0.70$  was used as the measurement standard. The reliability analysis results are: friendship opportunity with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.81; friendship prevalence (after deletion of question 6) with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.85; psychological contract violation with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.92; and intention to leave with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  value of 0.90. From the results of reliability analysis, it could be seen that the reliability tests of all aspects of this study showed good reliability.

#### 4.3. Regression Analysis

In order to verify Hypotheses 1 and 2, this study used intention to leave as a dependent variable, and gender, age and seniority were designated as control variables. Friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence were treated as independent variables in the regression equation. Table 1 lists the analysis results for Hypotheses 1 and 2. Basing on the analytical results, friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence had significant prediction influence on intention to leave ( $\beta = -0.22$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ;  $\beta = -0.20$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Therefore, both Hypotheses 1 and 2 were proven valid.

In order to verify Hypotheses 3 and 4, this study used intention to leave as a dependent variable, and gender, age and seniority were designated as control variables. Friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence were treated as independent variables. Psychological contract violation was set as a moderator variable, and the cross-multiplication of friendship opportunity, friendship prevalence, and psychological contract violation was then included in the regression equation. The results are listed in Table 2. According to the analysis results, the cross-multiplication of friendship opportunity and psychological contract violation did have a significant impact on intention to leave ( $\beta = -0.21$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). As seen in Figure 2, with limited friendship opportunities and high psychological contract violations, people are more likely to consider leaving. However, the likelihood of leaving decreases when they have greater friendship opportunities, although it remains higher compared to situations with low friendship opportunities and low psychological contract violations. Furthermore, high friendship opportunity is associated with a stronger inclination to leave when there is low psychological contract violation. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 was also proven valid. As seen in Figure 3, friendship prevalence would increase intention to leave, under the condition of a high degree of psychological contract violation. On the contrary, under the condition of a low degree of psychological contract violation, friendship prevalence would have a negative impact on intention to leave. Therefore, Hypothesis 4 was also proven valid.

**Table 1.** Multiple regression analysis of workplace friendship on intention to leave.

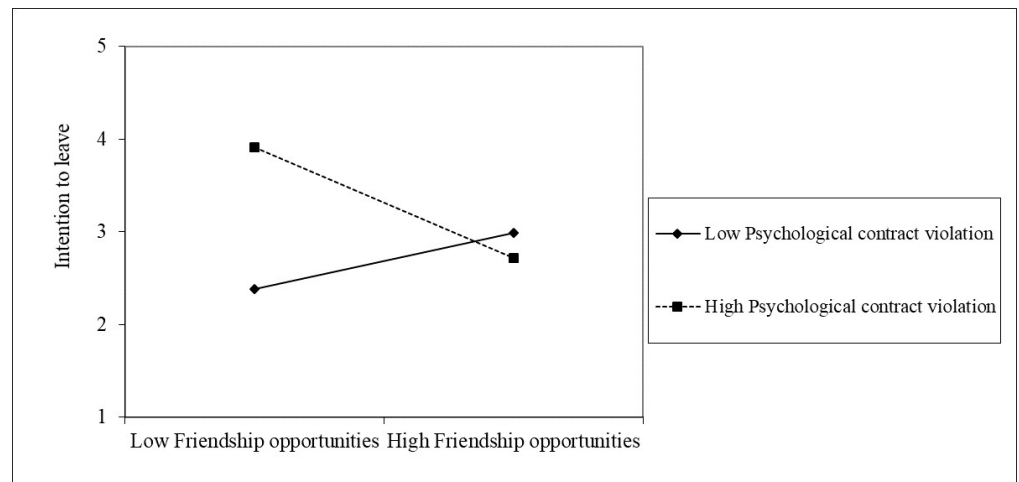
Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	
	$\beta$	Intention to Leave
Sex	-0.13 *	-0.13 *
Age	0.06	0.09
Service year (seniority)	-0.19 **	-0.22 **
Friendship Opportunity	-0.22 ***	-
Friendship Prevalence	-	-0.20 ***
R <sup>2</sup>	0.10	0.09
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>	0.09	0.08
F	9.67 ***	8.87 ***

N = 368; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .

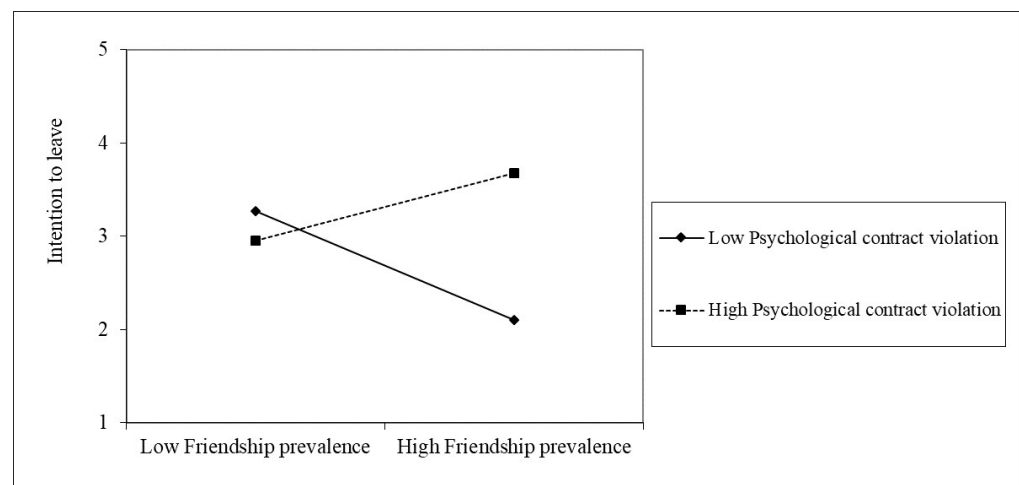
**Table 2.** Multiple regression analysis of workplace friendship and psychological contract violation on intention to leave.

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable	
	$\beta$	Intention to Leave
Sex		−0.10 *
Age		0.10
Service year (seniority)		−0.23 **
Friendship Opportunity		−0.09
Friendship Prevalence		−0.08
Psychological Contract Violation		0.27 ***
Friendship opportunity × Psychological contract violation		−0.21 **
Friendship prevalence × Psychological contract violation		0.27 ***
R <sup>2</sup>		0.22
Adj-R <sup>2</sup>		0.20
F		12.51 ***

N = 368; \*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ .



**Figure 2.** The moderation of psychological contract violation on friendship opportunity and intention to leave.



**Figure 3.** The moderation of psychological contract violation on friendship prevalence and intention to leave.

## 5. Discussion

The hospitality industry is currently facing a significant labor shortage attributed to a decline in its attractiveness to younger workers. These workers increasingly demand higher salaries and perceive hotels as an unattractive long-term working environment. Consequently, many individuals are reluctant to commit to careers in the hospitality industry. In addition, as the social climate in Taiwan undergoes change, many workers increasingly prioritize their quality of life and are more inclined to pursue professions that offer opportunities for professional growth and development, rather than simply settling for low-paying jobs. The working environment in the hospitality industry is often demanding, characterized by long working hours and inadequate benefits. Furthermore, heavy workloads and low salaries often cause a high turnover rate, as many employees tend to switch jobs frequently. It is evident that the hospitality industry must make efforts to reduce employees' turnover intentions in order to establish stable operations.

Previous studies in the hospitality literature have examined the impact of workplace friendships and intention to leave [44–46]. Similarly, this current work explores the outcome variable of workplace friendship among hotel employees, building upon the existing research in the hospitality field. This study explores the influence of workplace friendship and psychological contract violation on turnover intention from the perspective of social exchange theory. It can be seen that this study fills the literature gap in hospitality and tourism.

## 6. Practical Implications

After conducting research and analysis, we have confirmed the validity of Hypotheses 1 and 2, which suggests that friendship opportunity and friendship prevalence contribute to a decrease in intention to leave among hotel staff members. The findings of this work were reasonably consistent with the viewpoint put forth by social exchange theory. Therefore, for operators of five-star hotels, it is very important to establish an amicable working environment for staff. Five-star hotels can take two approaches to achieve this goal. First, they can foster a friendly culture. Building a culture where employees respect one another and value their own work as well as the work of others is a crucial initial step in creating an environment conducive to workplace friendship. Second, they can enhance communication. Establishing a supportive communication atmosphere enables employees to share ideas and discuss problem-solving strategies, and fosters mutual friendship among team members. If job or product can be completed together by employees, or if employees can communicate with colleagues during working hours, it will help reduce employees' intention to leave. During non-working hours, hotels can also organize events such as dinners or reading clubs to give employees the opportunity to build friendship with each other, so as to reduce employees' intention to leave.

Front-line employees in the hospitality industry often require a fast and efficient working environment to promptly address guests' needs. For front-line employees, they need to maintain effective communication with their colleagues so that they can provide mutual support in their tasks and meet the evolving demands of customers. As Hypothesis 3 has been confirmed, it suggests that friendship opportunities assist in diminishing hotel employees' intention to leave, even with high degree of psychological contract violation. Under the condition of low psychological contract violation, friendship opportunities would increase intention to leave. However, overall, the intention to leave of the subjects in the group of low psychological contract violation remained relatively low. Hypothesis 4 has been supported, indicating that friendship prevalence increases intention to leave under the condition of high degree of psychological contract violation. Under the condition of low psychological contract violation, friendship prevalence helps to reduce hotel employees' intention to leave. Therefore, hotel operators can optimize the workplace environment and consider the company's salary and welfare policies from the perspective of employees. Friendship can generally contribute to reducing intention to leave. There are two ways for five-star hotels to reduce employees' psychological contract violations. First, they can



ensure that employees are aware of the company's expectations and provide clear channels of communication through which employees can express their thoughts and concerns. Second, they can create a welcoming work environment where employees feel free to express themselves without facing threats or intimidation. Importantly, to address the retention problem in the hospitality industry, operators must improve working conditions, such as reducing long working hours and alleviating tedious tasks. Additionally, enhancing employees' compensation, such as offering higher wages, is crucial in retaining staff.

## 7. Limitations

The limited number of samples in this study represents a significant constraint on the research. According to Nazarian et al. [47], leadership style is likely to be an important antecedent of hotel staff's intention to leave in the hotel industry, making it a topic deserving further investigation. Furthermore, subsequent research can explore the research framework and identify additional significant conditional variables to improve the overall structure of the study. Moreover, the subjects of this study are specifically hotel workers in Taiwan. Therefore, conducting further research to determine the generalizability of the study results to other cultural contexts is of considerable significance. Besides, Zien-tara et al. [26] encourage further research on the turnover intention of staff in hospitality organizations, and suggest that a longitudinal design can be employed to establish causation. Notably, the collective bargaining model plays a crucial role in determining labor outcomes [48]. Subsequent research could investigate the influence of collective bargaining on intention to leave. Finally, Wang et al. [49] pointed out that rational choice theory can offer substantial theoretical support for understanding the connection between employee brand love and love behaviors, elucidating why internal brand lovers exhibit varying love behaviors in different contexts. Future research could use rational choice theory to investigate the influence of employee brand love on employees' intention to leave.

## 8. Conclusions

This study aims to examine the influence of hotel staffs' workplace friendship on their intention to leave, while also investigating the moderating effect of psychological contract violation. Through literature review and theoretical inference, this study proposes four hypotheses, all of which are supported by empirical evidence. The results demonstrate that friendship opportunities and friendship, in general, have a negative impact on hotel staff's intention to leave. Finally, psychological contract violation moderates the negative influence of hotel staffs' workplace friendship on intention to leave.

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