

DISENTANGLING EMPLOYEE'S VOICE BEHAVIOR PROCESS

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Abstract : Over the years great deals of research have been devoted to understand how to promote employee's voice behavior. However, existing studies did not yet full examine voice behavior process, and take the mediating role of cognitive and mental process into consideration. In order to fill the gap, this study attempts to disentangle the subordinate's voice behavior by developing and testing a theoretical model highlighting the mediating mechanism on psychological safety between social exchange relations and voice. Data were collected from 685 employees from a large trucking company in Taiwan. The empirical results showed that supervisor relations influence employee's voice behavior via psychological safety. Moreover, psychological safety partially mediated the relationship between coworker relations and voice behavior.

Keywords: supervisor relations, coworker relations, psychological safety, voice

Introduction

In today's changing and uncertain organizational environment, the organizations need employee input of ideas for "doing things better" (Harrington, 2001), promoting their employees to work harder and to seek out opportunities for constructive change (Fuller, Barnett, Hester, Relyea, & Frey, 2007). Employee upward voice of ideas for improving a process, task, or solving work-related problems can play a central role in effective organizational functioning (Detert & Burris, 2007; LePine & Van Dyan, 1998). For practicing managers, it is critical to understand how to promote employee's voice behavior in hypercompetitive environment. Thus, voice behavior is particular issue and we intend to explore and understand more potential value information by disentangling employee's voice behavior. As voice behavior is an important criterion of improvement, over the years great deals of researchers have been devoted to analyses factors affect employee's voice behavior, until now, the theoretical and empirical voice literatures have demonstrated individual differences (Janssen, De Vries, & Cozijnsen, 1998), employee attitude (LePine & Van Dyan, 1998), and organizational context (Detert & Burris, 2007) were major predictors. Nevertheless, several research argued that needed to extend and examine other variables in predict voice process (Withey & Cooper, 1989; LePine & Van Dyan, 1998; Saunders, Sheppard, Kight & Roth, 1992). Social exchange relations have been suggested alternative influence on employees' work attitudes, behavior and performance (Seers, 1989; Sherony & Green, 2002), in this study, we take supervisor-employee relations and coworker relations effects into consideration. Besides, May, Gilson, & Harter (2004) noted psychological safety is a crucial mediator role between situational and work outcomes. Employee may perceive costs prior to speaking up, they will fear substantial risk and upset interpersonal losses from voice behaviors (Detert & Burris, 2007; LePine & Van Dyan, 1998; Stamper & Van Dyne, 2001) may lead not to provide constructive viewpoints to improve team effectiveness. In a word, employees choose to voice or silence in any given situation prior to either of antecedent factors are mediated by cognitive and affective processing. Hence, the purpose of this article extends previous research by investigating the mediating effect of psychological safety in the relationship among supervisor relations, coworker relations and voice. Our contributions are twofold in this study. First, although a number of scholars were devoted to contributions on voice literatures (Fuller, et al., 2007; LePine & Van Dyan, 1998; Whitey & Cooper, 1989), existing studies did not yet full examines voice behavior process, and take the mediating role of cognitive and mental process into consideration to link voice behavior process. This paper address this gap by examining the subordinate's voice from develops and tests a theoretical model

highlighting the mediating mechanism on psychological safety among supervisor relations, coworker relations and voice. Therefore this study finds out subordinate's voice behavior process that provide team leader to understand the perception of psychological safety role in an organization. Second, several scholars who had great interests in exploring antecedent primarily on voice behavior base on different perspective(Choi, 2007; Detert & Burris, 2007; Janssen, et al., 1998; LePine & Van Dyan, 1998). For example, Full, et al.(2007) from impression management perspective to explore voice behavior. Detert & Burris (2007) used leadership and power theory conduct a two-phase study to argue transformational leadership and managerial openness in voice research. Janssen et al.(2004) adopted adaption-innovation perspective to investigate how personality and environment interact to affect voice behavior. However, little attention has been given to social exchange relationships perspective, especially the perceptions of supervisor relations and coworker relations predict in voice behavior. Moreover, voice literatures have not actually examined how social exchange relations influence on employee's voice behavior. Our research attempts to examine supervisor relations and coworker relations as important antecedent to voice. Thus, results of this study could extend the existing voice knowledge and let manager concern how to promote voice behavior in workplace.

Theory and Hypotheses

Employee's voice Behavior

Voice is a term that originated in Hirschman's (1970) model of exit, voice, and loyalty. From the idea that employee recognize some source of dissatisfaction or opportunity for improving their organization's well-being. The important of voice behavior have emerged. Over the past 30 years, scholars have recognized the important issue in organization, and still developing stage (Fuller, et al., 2007). Several scholars indicted that past studies have had difficulty explaining voice behavior (Full, et al., 2007). Three possible reasons explanation included exclusively upon main effects, criticism behavior, and inaccurate and loose operationalization in research (LePine & Van Dyan, 1998; Whitey & Cooper, 1989). In this study we add psychological mediating factor to reduce fail result in predicting voice for improving exclusively upon main effects, then we adopt LePine & Van Dyan(1998; 2001)'s voice operational definition focus on speaking out and challenging the status quo with the intent of improving the situation rather than criticizing status quo, and different from that used by some researchers to avoid questionable construct validity. Accordingly, this research should more appropriate than with that in previous works for the existence of the effect of voice behavior. In sum, an aim of the present study is to investigate the potential psychological mechanism via which supervisor and coworker relations link to voice behavior.

Supervisor relations→ Voice behavior

Leaders have a crucial impact on fostering subordinate's perception and behavior of the work condition in distinct ways(May, Gilson & Harter, 2004), such as satisfaction with leader (Cheng, Huang & Chou, 2002), commitment (Avolio, Zhu, Koh & Bhatia, 2004), task performance(Wang, Law, Hackett, Wang, & Chen, 2005), voice(Detert & Burris, 2007). Social exchange theory asserted that leader give tangible and intangible rewards to employee in expectation of receiving benefits of equivalent value from them in return (Blau, 1964). According this perspective, Dansereau, Graen, & Haga(1975) indicted that high-quality relationships with supervisor tends to be characterized by feeling supportive managerial environment and mutual respect, liking, and trust climate, which in turn reflects social exchange within the organization (Cropanzano, Prehar, & Chen, 2002; Masterson, Lewis, Goldman, & Taylor, 2000), and allowed themselves more fully to contribute to organization in constructive ways (Blau, 1964).In Deci and Ryan's(1987) survey, examined that supervisors who reinforce a supportive work environment typically display concern for employee and provide positive feedback and promote them to voice their concerns and solve work-related problems. Bettencourt (2004) sampled 183 sales in retail setting and found supervisor-subordinate relations has a significant positive relationship with change-oriented OCBs. Van Dyne, Kamdar & Joireman(2008) conducted two studies, demonstrated employees were more likely to engage in helping and voice behavior,

when they perceived a high-quality relationship with their supervisor. The findings from Bhal & Ansari (2007), divided supervisor-subordinate relations into contribution and affect, both of the results reported positive relationship between supervisor-subordinate relations and voice. In Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin's(2003) qualitative research, interview 40 employees and found relationship with supervisor was influence voice. That is to say, in highly supervisor-subordinate relations lead to greater motivation to participate their jobs well and engage in voice in order to maintain reciprocity benefits of equivalent (Ilies, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). According to this logic, we claim that when subordinates perceived higher quality relations with their immediate manager, they would feel willing to involve team affairs and to invest greater time and effort(Brown & Leigh, 1996), and more likely to feedback voice behavior to facilitate team effectiveness and efficiency. According the above-mentioned, we propose higher supervisor relations in the team increase employee's voice behavior, we expect that a positive relationship exists between supervisor relations and voice.

Hypothesis 1: Supervisor relations will be positively linked to voice behavior.

Coworker relations→ Voice behavior

Coworker relations based on Team Member Exchange (TMX) theory, described as individual perceptions of the quality of peer exchange relationships (Seers, 1989; Seers, Petty, & Cashman, 1995), this theory asserted an employee's exchange relationship to peer group, and assessed the reciprocity between a member and their team with respect to the member's contribution of ideas, feedback, and assistance to other members for team (Seers, et al., 1995). Reviewing of empirical research suggested that coworker relations enhances members performance and team functioning because individuals who are in high-quality relationships with coworkers are more willing to assist each other and to share information, ideas, and feedback within work teams (Liden, Wayne, & Sparrowe, 2000; Seers 1989). For instance, Team member exchange relations capture an employee's willingness to "exert extra-role behaviors that help other team members and the team accomplish their goals" (Cole, Schaninger, & Harris, 2002). Seers (1989) indicated that team member relations contributed significantly influence in predicting job satisfaction and performance. Seers, et al.(1995) attributed the emphasis on these relationships to the belief that these reciprocity-based exchanges are predictive of employees exhibiting positive work behaviors (e.g., extra-role behaviors). The finding from Love & Forret(2008), using a matched set of 235 supervisor-subordinate dyads from six companies indicted perceptions of the exchange relationships among coworkers was positive related to civic virtue OCBs. Van Dyne & Lepine(1998) argued voice can be viewed as types of OCBs. As previous noted, we claimed that while employees work in a team with higher-quality coworker relations, members will mutual supportive, appreciation, respect and cooperative reaching to task goal, these perceptions may be important to developing a group identity, lead to greater job satisfaction and more willing to do extra-role behavior such as speak up or reflect constructive voice to solve work-related problems. Thus, we infer high-quality coworker relations will enhance employee's voice behavior, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 2: Coworker relations will be positively related to voice behavior.

Supervisor relations→ Psychological safety→ Voice behavior

Psychological safety was originally from organizational change, in which Schein and Bennis (1965) discussed the need to create psychological safety for individuals if they are to feel secure and capable of changing. Psychological safety can be defined as employee's "sense of being able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career"(Kahn, 1990). Because supervisor usually represent the organization's agent(Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski & Rhoades, 2002), when employee perceived higher-quality relationship with their supervisor, they were likely to feel supportive, trust, and safer in their work environment. More recent studies found higher supervisors' relations will raise the perception of psychological safety with employee. For example, May et al(2004) conducted field study in an insurance company, that showed supportive supervisor relations was stronger positive related to psychological safety. Similarly, Edmonson (1999) mentioned supportive and good relations with supervisor should enhance perceptions of safety. As to the linkage between psychological safety and voice, past empirical research has generally results that asserted the perception of psychological safety is a significant cognition linking to voice behavior (Detert & Burris, 2007). That is to say, individuals feel when they perceive risk or threatening situations lead unwilling to voice behaviors. In contrast, when employee's psychological states perceived that their workplace supported new ideas and change, they loss their fear of willing speaking up suggestions to the group. Few evidences suggested that

psychological safety influence employee's tendency to engage themselves in the job (Kahn, 1990). Moreover, Nembhard & Edmonson (2006) examined the effect in health care team, then found psychological safety was a key antecedent of voice and learning behavior.

As described above, we claim that when subordinate perceived high-quality relations with supervisor in a work team will facilitate share cognition and communication system, and feel supportive environment, then with personally nonthreatening psychological conditions, then lead to more likely to take risk of proposing new ideas and constructive suggestions behavior, therefore, we posit that psychological safety will mediate the relationship between supervisor relations and voice behavior, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 3: Psychological safety will mediate the relationship between supervisor relations and voice behavior.

Coworker relations→ Psychological safety→ Voice behavior

Team members with interpersonal relationship that are supportive and trusting could promote perception of psychological safety(Kahn, 1990). The perceptions of psychological safety reduce employee's nonthreatening sensitivity and increase the willingness to enthusiastic about improvement and feedback constructive viewpoints in job (Nembhard & Edmonson, 2006). In related studies in different organizational setting, findings by May, et al., (2004) suggested coworker relations was positive associated with psychological safety, then influence on engagement. Edmonson (1999) from learning perspective to test the effect in two urban hospitals, the results showed that the quality of relations climate in work units had an influence on employee's psychological safety. In addition, Kahn(1990) conducted two quality studies of summer camp counselors and members of an architecture firm, found interpersonal relations among team members that are supportive, trusting and mutual respecting each other should also enhance psychological safety(Kahn, 1990), and in turn willing to share or constructive voice without fearing the consequences. To summaries, we expect that high-quality coworker relations in a team will increase employee's psychological safety, and then facilitate voice behavior. The following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 4: Psychological safety will mediate the relationship between coworker relations and voice behavior.

Methodology

Participants and Procedures

The research design was a field study using survey methodology. Participants for this study are deliverymen from a large trucking company in Taiwan. The reason of we choose participants that the characteristic of it primary focus on teamwork orientation, organizational work team have clearly defined membership, members are likely to share responsibility for group performance, especially these deliverymen are boundary spanner. These deliverymen not only deliver commodities to customer but also collect firsthand data, if they willing to share and integrate the customer information to feedback to team increased team effectiveness and performance. Base on these features, deliverymen as our participants. We contact headquarter of sample firm to ascertain their willingness to participants, after receiving this consent. During the process we guaranteed that the participant's response would remain anonymity to ensure confidentiality. Data were gathered from 800 questionnaires. After deleting incomplete response, finally we obtain 685 valid responses to test these measures. Participants for this study were 583 male(86.5%), majority age between 26 to 35 years(56.2%),the married of were 61.8%, majority(59.6%) had high school education degree, and average of organization tenure of 77.63 months.

Measures

Since the original survey instrument were developed in English, all scale items will translate into Chinese and back-translated to ensure the semantic equivalency of the scale-item contents (Brislin, 1980). All instrument measures were self-reported from team's employees. All items were rated on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree).

Supervisor Relations

Supervisor relations is selected from the three items developed by May, et al(2004). Sample items included "my supervisor helps me solve work-related problems", "my supervisor keeps informed about how employee think and feel about things", "I trust my supervisor". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .94.

Coworker Relations

Three items from May, et al.,(2004)'s coworker relations scale adopted to this context were used to assess the extent to which respondents interpersonal relations. Sample items included "my interactions with my coworkers are rewarding", "I feel a real kinship with my coworkers", "I trust my coworkers". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .93.

Psychological Safety

We measure psychological safety with a seven-item scale that derived from Brown & Leigh (1996). Example items are "My manager is supportive of my ideas and ways of getting things done", "The feelings I express at work are my true feelings", "The amount of work responsibility and effort expected in my job is clearly defined". The Cronbach's alpha for this measure was .86.

Voice Behavior

To measure employee's voice behavior, we adopt six indicators developed by Van Dyne & LePine (1998). Sample items included "I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this work group", "I speak up and encourage others in this group to get involved in issues that affect the group", "I speak up in this group with ideas for new projects or changes in procedures". The Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .91.

Analysis

Two-step procedure of analysis by Anderson & Gerbing(1988) with structural equation modeling(SEM) by using LISREL 8.51 (Joreskog & Sorbom, 2001) with maximum-likelihood estimation to test our hypotheses. First, a series of confirmatory factor analyses to ensure distinct factors assessed the discriminate validity of the supervisor relations, coworker relations, psychological safety and voice scales. The convergent validity of the measurement scale was examined via average variance extracted (AVE) tests. Second, we used model comparison procedure to evaluate our structural model. In this study we assessed convergent and discriminant validity with AVE for each construct (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998 ; Netemeyer, Johnston & Burton, 1990). Our AVE range from .72 to .91, and all item loadings were significant at the p less than .05 level, providing strong support for convergent validity. In addition, all average shared variance were greater than square interconstruct correlations, thus, this result suggested that the supervisor relations, coworker relations, psychological safety and voice are empirically supported for discriminant validity.

Results

Descriptive statistics, correlations and reliability coefficients for all measures are shown in table 1. Supervisor relations correlated significantly ($p<.01$) positive with psychological safety and voice($r=.67$ and $.52$, respectively). Coworker relations correlated positive with psychological safety and voice($r=.56$ and $.58$, respectively). The hypothesis model, psychological safety could partially mediate the influence of supervisor relations and coworker relations on voice behavior. Against our baseline model,

Hayduk(1987) suggested testing and comparing other alternative models while conducting structural equation analysis. As a result, we estimated the plausibility of three other alternative models. In alternative model 1, we tested one alternative structural model by removing direct path from supervisor relations to voice. In alternative model 2 we removed the direct link from coworker relations to voice. In alternative model 3, it is possible that psychological safety could fully mediate the influence of supervisor and coworker relations on voice behavior. Under these comparison suggested that alternative model 1 ($X^2=742.03$; CFI=.95; GFI=.90; NFI=.93; RMSR=.05) better than that of our hypothesized model. The results of comparison model were shown in table 2. Figure 1 depicted the revised model result of supervisor relations, coworker relations, psychological safety and voice behavior.

Table 1 Mean, Standard Deviations and Correlations among variables (N=685)

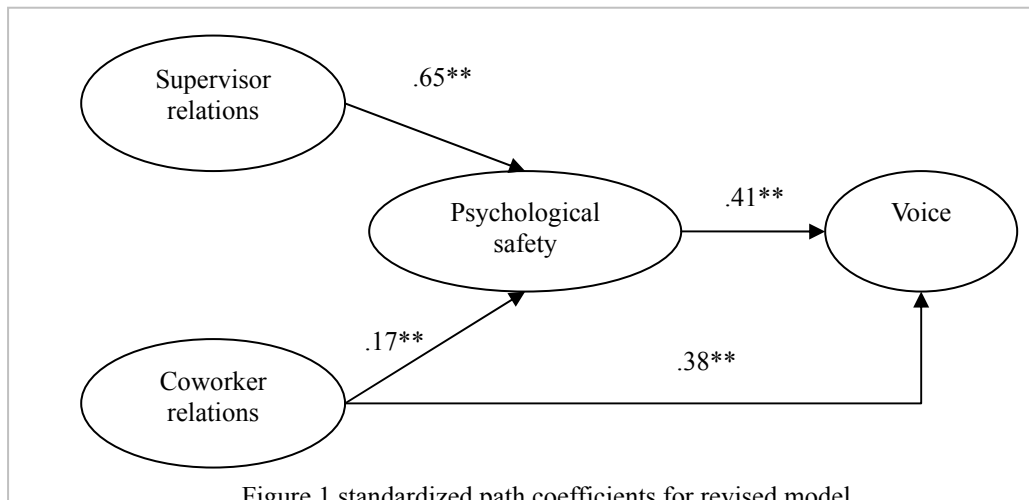
variables	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4
1.Supervisor relations	4.80	0.94	(.94)			
2.Coworker relations	4.96	0.81	.59**	(.93)		
3.Psychological safety	4.51	0.78	.67**	.56**	(.86)	
4.voice	4.76	0.76	.52**	.58**	.60**	(.91)

Note. Cronbach's α coefficient appear on the diagonal.

** $p < .01$

Table 2 Fit Indices for the Hypothesized and Alternative Models

Model	χ^2	df	$\Delta\chi^2$	GFI	CFI	NFI	IFI	RMSR
Hypothesized	741.83	146	--	.90	.95	.93	.95	.05
Alternative 1	742.03	147	.2	.90	.95	.93	.95	.05
Alternative 2	831.78	147	89.95	.89	.94	.93	.94	.07
Alternative 3	842.91	148	101.08	.89	.94	.93	.94	.07



Discussion

The present study was primarily concerned with these questions: were social exchange relations important determinants in predicting voice behavior? Do social exchange relations cause employee voice work-related concerns and suggestions via psychological safety? By empirically testing the direct and indirect effect, we intend to clarify the voice process. The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of the psychological safety role in the relationship between social exchange relations and voice at work. Consistent with our expectations, the results of this study showed that the perceptions of coworker relations were positively linked to voice behavior, H2 was supported. It expressed that coworkers' relations play a significant role in explaining employees' responses to the behavior. In addition, supervisor relations and coworker relations have influenced on employee's voice behavior through psychological safety, H3 and H4 were supported. These antecedents were demonstrated to influence voice behavior indirectly via their impact on the cognitive psychological safety process involved in the formation of employee voice behavior. However, supervisor relations have not directly significant associated with voice, this relationship was not be supported in H1.

It is interesting to note that results demonstrated one unexpected relationship. There is no direct relationship with supervisor relations and voice. One possible reason is that high Pearson correlation coefficient of supervisor relations and coworker relations ($r=.59, p<.01$), and that this lead to multicollinearity, some variance be explained by coworker relations, cause nonsignificant between supervisor relations and voice (Cohen, Ledford & Spreitzer, 1996). Another possible explanation is that paternalistic leadership (benevolent, moral and authoritarian leadership) is the prevalent leadership style in Chinese business organizations rooted in Confucian ethics (Westwood, 1997; Cheng, Chou, Wu, Huang & Farh, 2004), paternalism is congruent with the values of collectivistic, high-power distance and consideration cultures, furthermore indeed impact on subordinate reaction (Cheng, et al., 2004). Statistical analyses generally supported the leader's authoritarian leadership led to fear in responding to the leader's requests in Chinese business organization (Cheng, 1995). In a word, there is difference in high-power distance between subordinates and supervisors, employees have to think how their supervisors will react employee's voice before they speak up (Saunders, et al., 1992). Milliken, Morrison & Hewlin's (2003) indicated the hierarchical relationship between subordinate and supervisor appears to intensify the mum effect. In this study, we ignore culture effect with paternalistic leadership, might cause unexpected findings in hypothesis 1. Future research should examine and consider paternalistic leadership in predicting voice behavior.

Practical and Theoretical Implications

The managerial implications of this study are straightforward. Our results demonstrated the importance of psychological safety considering supervisor relation, coworker relations as predictors on voice. The findings suggest that managers should also work to create where employees feel that it is safe to voice by developing supporting, trustworthy, high-quality social exchange relations, unconstrained and nonthreatening work condition, fair and formal communication procedures system, encourage participation by all employees and allow them try or fail without fear negatively consequences to express their opinions spontaneously. Moreover, developing coworker relations in team are important factors for enhancing voice. Managers encourage employees to cooperation, trust, share ideas not merely criticism, open communication with each other, and by enabling employee to speak up or solve work-related problems in job. This practical implication should be especially relevant to managers in teams are essential for organizational adaptation and survive. This study makes two significant contributions to the existing literatures. First, in most other extant work, the mediating process linking antecedents and voice have been insufficiently specified theoretically or demonstrated empirically. This paper addresses this gap by examining the subordinate's voice from highlighting the mediating mechanism on psychological safety. The result confirms the idea that the psychological safety may play a more significant role in determining voice behavior. Second, although there may be other factors influence voice behavior, supervisor relations and coworker relations rarely attention in voice literature, and there is little research that simultaneously take the perceptions of supervisor relations and coworker relations into consideration on voice behavior. We extend the voice research in take notice of supervisor relations and coworker relations in distinct way.

Limitations and Future Research

The present study is not without its limitations. First, all data of this research came from a cross-sectional field study that provided by participant a self-reported survey instrument, although recent research suggests that self-reported data are not as limited as commonly expected (Spector, 1994), the causal directions still not be unambiguously determined. Future studies could design longitudinal or multiple sources to collect the data in order to reduce the possibility effect of the common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee & Podsakoff, 2003). Second, the study sample was single large team of an trucking firm in Taiwan, and composed primarily of male members, it is difficult to specify where our results might or not might generalize in other setting. We encourage future research could usefully compare our findings with a sample of different occupations and samples with more women worker to test our theoretical framework. Third, the study based on Western theory to test our model, such as adopt supervisor and coworker relations scale, however, in unique social and culture in Eastern contexts, Guanxi (Law, Wong, Wang & Wang, 2000) or paternalistic leadership might more approximate to concerns about the effect of culture. Future research can consider Guanxi variable, or explore the antecedents such as potential paternalistic leadership in Eastern context to take account of cultural effect.

Conclusion

To summaries, the current study contributes to the voice literature by empirically demonstrated important linkages relating supervisor relations and coworker relations via perceived as psychological safe is related indirectly and directly to voice behavior. The results serve not only to clarify previously unclear relationships, but also extend our understanding of voice practices. It is important to examine the psychological and behavioral consequences of feeling able to voice employee's concerns at work. In this study, we provide new and deeper insights into detangling employee's voice behavior by strengthen the roles of psychological safety. A growing reliance on teams in changing and uncertain environments creates a managerial imperative to facilitate understanding of the factors that enable voice behavior. The results could provide applied implications and enrich voice literatures.

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