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THE EFFECTS OF COLLECTIVISM ON EMPLOYEE VOICE BEHAVIOR IN VIETNAM - THE MEDIATING ROLE OF PROSOCIAL MOTIVATION

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Abstract: *This study examines the impact of collectivism on the voice behavior of lecturers in higher education institutions in Vietnam. The results of a survey of 424 university lecturers show that collectivism is positively related to lecturers' voice behavior. Furthermore, prosocial motivation partially mediates the relationship between collectivism and employee voice behavior. This research advances the literature by highlighting prosocial motivation as a crucial construct linking collectivism to voice behavior. Based on these findings, the authors propose practical recommendations for universities and organizations in general to foster collectivism, prosocial motivation, and employee voice behavior.*

Keywords: *collectivism, employee voice behavior, prosocial motivation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Although there is an extensive body of literature on employee voice in Western countries, particularly in regions like Europe, there is relatively less understanding of the state of employee voice in the Asia Pacific, including Vietnam, where this gap pertains to the influence of cultural factors (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Morrison (2014) previously highlighted the limited understanding of how national culture affects employee voice, aside from Botero and Van Dyne's (2009) finding that power distance is negatively related to voice, and asserted that cultural differences in voice likely extend beyond power distance. In response to Morrison's (2014) call for further research on cultural differences in employee voice beyond power distance, Kwon and Farndale (2020) explored the influence of four additional national cultural values: uncertainty avoidance, in-group collectivism, performance orientation, and

assertiveness. The integrative framework proposed by Farndale and Kwon (2020) could be beneficial for studying employee voice across various contexts; however, we are also eager to see studies that examine potential differences between individual-level variables and employee voice in different cultures (Wilkinson et al., 2020). Indeed, this eagerness is supported by the reality that few studies examine the effects of cultural factors at the individual level on employee voice behavior. Most research on individualism-collectivism (I-C) has approached the topic from a cross-cultural or cross-national perspective, treating I-C as a culture or country-level variable rather than an individual personality characteristic (Perrewé and Spector, 2002). Therefore, this gap will be addressed by investigating the impact of cultural factors on employee voice behavior, specifically on individual-level collectivism in a collectivistic society like Vietnam (which scores 30 on the individualism dimension

according to the Country Comparison Tool from The Culture Factor). This research also responds to the calls made by Wilkinson et al. (2020) and Morrison (2014), as noted earlier.

This study makes several contributions to the existing literature. First, it offers new insights into the cultural factors influencing voice behavior, particularly collectivism, within the context of higher education institutions in Vietnam, which is a collectivistic nation. This addresses the gap in research on these factors (Morrison, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020). Second, our model incorporates both the direct effect of collectivism and the mediating role of prosocial motivation in explaining employee voice behavior. Third, we adapt the scale of prosocial voice developed by Van Dyne et al. (2003) by modifying the items to reflect key characteristics of discretionary behavior, specifically its proactive and voluntary nature. Finally, we employ motivated information processing theory to elucidate this behavior. This theoretical framework has rarely been applied in this area, thus enriching our understanding of the theories that explain employee voice behavior.

2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND AND HYPOTHESIS

2.1. Employee voice behavior (EVB)

Although the concept of employee voice can be traced back more than two centuries (Mowbray et al., 2015), Hirschman's (1970) Exit–Voice–Loyalty theory is consistently regarded as the foundational work in the field, as no prior scholar had seriously engaged with the idea (Kaufman, 2013). As a result, Kaufman (2013) recognized that Hirschman deserves credit for being the first to develop a formal theory of voice, a recognition that remains valid today. Farrell (1983), building

on Hirschman's (1970) model and the contributions of Kolarska and Aldrich (1980), as well as Rusbult, Zembrodt, and Gunn (1982), expanded the field by introducing "Neglect" as a fourth dimension. Alongside Exit, Voice, and Loyalty, this dimension forms distinct responses to employee dissatisfaction. Mowbray et al. (2015) noted that Farrell (1983) was the first to apply Hirschman's (1970) model to the employee context.

In a comprehensive review of employee voice research, Mori et al. (2022) indicated that most recent voice scholars regard the formal definition and operational measure provided by Van Dyne and LePine (1998) as the foundational starting point for voice research in organizational behavior (Morrison, 2011; Mowbray, Wilkinson, & Tse, 2015; Wilkinson, Barry, & Morrison, 2020). Van Dyne and LePine (1998) built on the framework developed by Van Dyne, Cummings, and Parks (1995) to assess the construct and predictive validity of two forms of extra-role behavior in their typology: helping and voice.

While there are various classifications of voice, they consistently include at least one type of voice as a form of extra-role behavior, which is often seen as having the greatest potential benefits for organizations. In this study, we adopted Van Dyne et al.'s (2003) definition and scale of prosocial voice. Van Dyne et al. (2003) defined prosocial voice as the expression of work-related ideas, information, or opinions based on cooperative motives. This voice behavior is intentional, proactive, and other-oriented, primarily focusing on benefiting others, such as the organization.

2.2. Collectivism (C)

Although most recent studies have adopted a cross-cultural approach, evidence suggests that distinctions between collectivists and individualists may manifest as individual differences within the same culture (Moorman and Blakely, 1995). As Hui and Triandis (1986) observed, cultures labeled as collectivistic or individualistic are simply those in which most individuals display the corresponding individual differences. This observation aligns with Dorfman and Howell's (1988) note that all analyses based on Hofstede's work rely on mean scores aggregated at the national level. Triandis (1995) defined collectivism as the tendency for individuals to view themselves as members of social groups or collectives, prioritizing and being motivated by the goals and norms of these groups. In contrast, individualism refers to the tendency for individuals to see themselves as independent from groups or collectives, with their motivation and priorities centered on personal goals. Collectivists are more likely to submerge personal goals for the good of the group and maintain relationships with the collective, even when personal costs exceed the rewards (León et al., 2011). Triandis (2001) prefers to consider these constructs as an element of personality. In this study, we adopt Triandis's (1995) definition of collectivism and consider it as an aspect of personality.

2.3. Prosocial motivation (PM)

Prosocial motivation is defined as the desire to protect and promote the well-being of others (Grant & Berg, 2012). Grant and Berg (2009) have clarified that prosocial motivation typically encompasses three core psychological processes: direction (toward various beneficiaries such as individuals,

groups, or larger social collectives, with the benefits provided spanning different domains including physical, developmental, psychological, or material well-being), intensity (strong or weak), and persistence of effort (short or long duration). Bolino and Grant (2016) indicated that some scholars have conceptualized prosocial motivation as either a trait or disposition, while others have viewed it as a state influenced by situational or contextual factors. Despite the acknowledgment that prosocial motivation can be both a trait and a state, the research we reviewed has predominantly focused on trait-like other-orientation (Bolino and Grant, 2016). In this study, prosocial motivation was conceptualized as a trait. Prosocial motivation is differentiated from intrinsic motivation. At least three key distinctions between these forms of motivation include self-regulation (autonomous vs. introjected/identified), goal-directedness (process vs. outcome), and temporal focus (present vs. future) (Grant, 2008). Grant and Berg (2009) provided further details into levels of autonomy in self-regulation, noting that prosocial motivation can vary in its intrinsic (autonomous) and extrinsic (controlled) origins. Employees may autonomously choose to be prosocially motivated based on its identification with or integration into their values, or they may feel pressured into prosocial motivation due to feelings of guilt, obligation, or external control.

2.4. Direct effect of collectivism on employee voice behavior

According to social identity theory (Turner, 1987a), humans are not merely individuals, nor are our minds solely individualistic. Individuals, groups, and intergroup relations coexist. Human beings embody individual and group identities, possessing both personal and social

identities. Moreover, individuals can define or categorize themselves at varying levels of abstraction. Salience elucidates how a specific situation (including the self) is categorized and assigned meaning, which the situation is categorized and understood by the perceiver will influence both self-perception and behavior.

Collectivism as an individual difference variable refers to a continuum that ranges from a disposition to see the self in collective, interdependent terms (i.e., “we”) and to prioritize collective interest to a disposition to see the self in individualizing, independent terms (i.e., “I”) and to prioritize individual interests (Knippenber et al., 2015). Although employee voice behavior raises risks to relationships and potential drawbacks for the individual voicing concerns, it also holds the potential to benefit both the organization and other members (Dyne et al., 1995). Consequently, individuals with a strong tendency toward collectivism are likely to engage in such behavior because they prioritize collective interests (Knippenberg et al., 2015), are more inclined to subordinate personal goals for the welfare of the group, and strive to maintain relationships within the collective, even when personal costs outweigh the rewards (León et al., 2011). Several empirical studies support this assertion. For example, Moorman and Blakely (1995) examined individualism-collectivism (IC) within a single culture, and their findings suggest that individuals who endorse collectivistic values or norms are more likely to engage in citizenship behaviors. Knippenberg et al. (2015) also demonstrated that collectivism moderates the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational citizenship behavior. Accordingly, it is reasonable to hypothesize the following:

H1: Collectivism is positively related to employee voice behavior.

2.5. The mediating role of prosocial motivation

Based on motivated information processing theory (Kunda, 1990), motivation can influence reasoning by shaping the cognitive processes individuals rely on, affecting which information is considered during the reasoning process. As a result, individuals are more likely to reach conclusions that align with their desired outcomes. Individuals with prosocial motivation are more likely to search, encode, and retrieve information consistent with and conducive to group rather than personal goals and to preserve harmony (De Dreu et al., 2008). Thus, they have more opportunities to identify work-related problems and corresponding solutions. They are more likely to engage in employee voice behavior because they desire to benefit others or expend effort out of concern for others (Bolino & Grant, 2016). Given that employee voice behavior represents a form of challenging organizational citizenship behavior (Van Dyne, 1995) and prosocial motivation implies an orientation toward others, Grant and Mayer (2009) demonstrated that stronger prosocial motives in employees are associated with higher levels of challenging citizenship behaviors. Similarly, De Dreu & Nauta (2009) provided evidence supporting the hypothesis that variations in other orientations moderate the relationship between group-level attributes, such as perceived justice climate, and both prosocial behavior and personal initiative. Moreover, drawing from a review of prior studies, Grant (2009) identified at least three distinct mechanisms by which prosocial motives can increase the likelihood of citizenship behavior. First, employees with prosocial motives tend

to direct their attention outwardly rather than inwardly, thereby enhancing the likelihood of identifying opportunities to contribute to others and their organizations. Second, these employees generally place a higher value on and experience a stronger sense of responsibility for improving the welfare of others and their organizations, which increases their commitment to citizenship behavior. Third, employees motivated by prosocial concerns often prioritize collective interests over personal ones. It is reasonable to argue that prosocial motivation positively affects employee voice behavior.

Additionally, the manifestations of prosocial motivation are consistent with individuals who tend to perceive themselves in collective, interdependent terms (i.e., “we”) and prioritize collective interests, as previously mentioned. León et al. (2011) identified collectivism as a significant antecedent to other-oriented motives for engaging in organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), the development of a citizen role identity, and OCB itself. Furthermore, Hnippenberg (2000), drawing on social identity theory, noted that identification fosters a sense of psychological oneness with the identification target. This psychological connection with the group or organization encourages individuals to adopt the group’s perspective and perceive its goals and interests as their own (Dutton et al., 1994). Consequently, identification is typically associated with a motivation to achieve group goals and act in the group’s best interest.

Based on the comprehensive theoretical framework and the empirical evidence as discussed above, we propose the following hypotheses:

H2: Collectivism is positively related to prosocial motivation.

H3: Prosocial motivation is positively related to employee voice behavior.

H4: Prosocial motivation mediates the relationship between collectivism and employee voice behavior.

Following the literature review and theoretical foundation presented above, the research model outlined in Figure 1 is proposed.

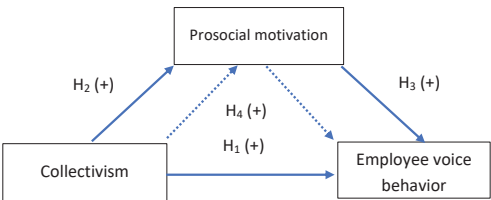


Fig 1. Research model

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sampling and data collection method

With a population of approximately 80,000 university lecturers in Vietnam, the research team used convenience and purposive sampling methods to collect data through a questionnaire-based survey. The targeted participants were lecturers working at universities, primarily in Northern Vietnam. Data were collected by distributing a Microsoft Form link to the respondents. The research team managed the survey process to ensure no data was duplicated through these methods.

3.2. Sample characteristics

424 out of the 450 collected questionnaires were eligible for analysis. Table 1 shows the profile of the respondents.

Table 1: Sample Characteristics

Nr.	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Total, of which:	424	100
2	Gender		
-	Male	153	36
-	Female	271	64
3	Age (23-69)		
-	<30	19	4
-	30 - <40	165	39
-	40 - <50	235	55
-	>=50	5	1
4	Seniority (1-35)		
-	<10	62	15
-	10 - <20	250	59
-	20 - <30	106	25
-	>=30	6	1
5	Qualification		
-	Bachelor's degree	15	4
-	Master's degree	230	54
-	Doctorate/PhD	167	39
-	Postdoctoral	12	3
6	Management position		
-	University-level management	14	3
-	Faculty-level management	62	15
-	Department-level management	81	19
-	No management responsibilities	267	63

(Source: Results of the survey conducted in 2024)

3.3. Measurements of constructs

The measures (see Table 2) were tested using a 5-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree).

Prosocial voice: We adapted Dyne, Ang, and Botero's (2003) five-item prosocial voice scale. In the original items, we replaced 'This employee' with 'I' (and adjusted the corresponding possessive adjectives) to reflect the behavior from the actor's perspective. Importantly, we added the adverbs 'proactively' and 'voluntarily' to the end of each item to distinctly highlight the discretionary nature, which is a key characteristic of this voice behavior.

Collectivism: Collectivism was measured using the scale developed by Dorfman and Howell (1988), as cited in Clugston, Howell, and Dorfman (2000). A sample item is, "Group welfare is more important than individual rewards."

Prosocial motivation: We assessed prosocial motivation using a five-item scale developed by Grant and Sumanth (2009). We introduced the prosocial motivation scale by asking lecturers to consider the groups of beneficiaries at their workplaces as the "others" referenced in the scale. A sample item is, "I get energized by working on tasks that have the potential to benefit others."

3.4. Results of reliability and validity testing

We used SMARTPLS 3 to carry out the PLS-SEM algorithm for analyzing the reflective measurement model.

First, an Outer Loadings test was conducted to examine indicator reliability. The results showed that most indicators in the research model had outer loadings greater

than 0.7, with the exception of the C2 item, which was below 0.7. Consequently, the C2 item was removed from the C indicators, and the remaining items ensured high indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2016). The results of the Outer Loadings test (after extracting the C2 item) are presented in Table 2.

Next, Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability tests were performed to evaluate the

reliability of the measurement. The test results showed that all variables (after extracting the PR6 item) in the research model achieved reliability greater than 0.7. Therefore, the measurements of the variables in the research model ensured high reliability (DeVellis, 2012; Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). The results of the Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability tests are shown in Table 3.

Test 2: Results of the Outer Loadings test

Items	Code	Outer loadings
Employee voice behavior		
I express solutions to problems with the cooperative motive of benefiting the organization, proactively and voluntarily.	EVB1	0,846
I develop and make recommendations concerning issues that affect the organization, proactively and voluntarily.	EVB2	0,876
I communicate my opinions about work issues even if others disagree, proactively and voluntarily.	EVB3	0,781
I speak up with ideas for new projects that might benefit the organization, proactively and voluntarily.	EVB4	0,862
I suggest ideas for change, based on constructive concern for the organization, proactively and voluntarily.	EVB5	0,839
Collectivism		
Group welfare is more important than individual rewards.	C1	0,804
Employees should only pursue their goals after considering the welfare of the group	C3	0,856
Managers should encourage group loyalty even if individual goals suffer.	C4	0,765
Individuals may be expected to give up their goals to benefit group success.	C5	0,803
Group success is more important than individual success.	C6	0,844
Prosocial motivation		
I get energized by working on tasks that have the potential to benefit others.	PM1	0,805
It is important to me to have the opportunity to use my abilities to benefit others.	PM2	0,858
I prefer to work on tasks that allow me to have a positive impact on others.	PM3	0,792
I do my best when I'm working on a task that contributes to the well-being of others.	PM4	0,858
I like to work on tasks that have the potential to benefit others.	PM5	0,866

(Source: Results of the survey conducted in 2024)

Table 3: Results of Construct Reliability and Validity test

Constructs	Code	Nr of items	Cronbach's Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Employee voice behavior	EVB	5	0,897	0,924	0,708
Collectivism	C	5	0,877	0,908	0,664
Prosocial motivation	PM	5	0,892	0,921	0,699

(Source: Results of the survey conducted in 2024)

Subsequently, an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) test was conducted to determine convergent validity. The AVE for EVB, C, and PM were 0.708, 0.664, and 0.699, respectively, meeting the requirement of being greater than 0.5 (Hair et al., 2016). The results of the AVE test are displayed in Table 3.

Finally, the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) test was conducted to evaluate discriminant validity. The results showed that the HTMT values between all variables were below 0.9, thus meeting the discriminant validity requirement (Hair et al., 2016). The results of the HTMT test are reported in Table 4.

Table 4: Results of HTMT and Collinearity Statistics (Inner VIF Values)

Variables	HTMT			Inner VIF Values		
	EVB	C	PM	EVB	C	PM
EVB						
C	0,445			1,164		1,000
PM	0,617	0,350		1,208		

(Source: Results of the survey conducted in 2024)

4. FINDINGS

We utilized SMARTPLS 3 to evaluate the structural model.

Collinearity statistics were performed to assess multicollinearity among the independent variables. The results indicated that all inner VIF values were below 3. Therefore, multicollinearity did not occur among the independent variables in the model (Hair et al., 2019). The results of Collinearity Statistics (Inner VIF Values) are indicated in Table 4.

To test all hypotheses, bootstrapping (n=5000) was applied to assess the path coefficients, indirect effect. The hypotheses were tested in a structural model that included control variables such as gender, seniority, qualification, and management position (abbreviated as manager). There is only one significant relationship between the control variable, management position, and employee voice behavior ($\beta = 0.126$, $t = 3.084$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that higher management positions are associated with increased employee voice behavior. In contrast to the findings of Eibl et al. (2020) and Yan et al. (2022), gender was found to have an insignificant relationship with employee voice behavior. The results of the hypotheses tests are presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Results of Hypotheses Tests

Hypotheses	Path description	β	T-values	P-values	Conclusion
H1	C $\rightarrow$ EVB	0.388	6.875	0.000	Accepted
H2	C $\rightarrow$ PM	0.341	5.311	0.000	Accepted
H3	PM $\rightarrow$ EVB	0.479	7.798	0.000	Accepted
H4	C $\rightarrow$ PM $\rightarrow$ EVB	0.163	4.810	0.000	Accepted

$R^2=0.388, AdjR^2=0.379 (p<0,001)$

(Source: Results of the survey conducted in 2024)

The findings in Table 6 showed a positive relationship between collectivism and employee voice behavior ($\beta = 0.388$, $t = 6.875$, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 1. Collectivism was positively associated with prosocial motivation ($\beta = 0.341$, $t = 5.311$, $p < 0.001$), supporting hypothesis 2. As expected in hypothesis 3, prosocial motivation positively influenced employee voice behavior ($\beta = 0.479$, $t = 7.798$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, hypothesis 4 was supported by evidence demonstrating the mediating role of voice prosocial motivation in the relationship between collectivism and employee voice behavior ($\beta = 0.163$, $t = 4.810$, $p < 0.001$).

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine whether collectivism plays a role in motivating employee voice behavior in Vietnam, a collectivistic nation. Drawing on social identity theory and motivated information process theory, our study found that collectivism influences employee voice behavior in Vietnam, with prosocial motivation serving as a partial mediator in this relationship. This influence encompasses not only an indirect effect but also a direct effect on behavior. When lecturers strongly tend toward collectivism, they are more likely to exhibit prosocial voice behavior. The indirect effect of prosocial motivation indicates that lecturers have a strong tendency toward

collectivism; they are motivated more by prosocial motivation, which subsequently leads to increased participation in prosocial voice behavior. These findings support previous research demonstrating a positive relationship between collectivism and organizational behavior (Knippenberg et al., 2015; Moorman & Blakely, 1995; León et al., 2011). Notably, this study found that management positions are associated with increased employee voice behavior. In contrast, gender was found to have an insignificant relationship with employee voice behavior, contrary to the results of Eibl et al. (2020) and Yan et al. (2022).

Our study provides additional insight into cultural antecedents of voice behavior, such as collectivism, within the context of higher education institutions in Vietnam, contributing to addressing the scarcity of research on these factors (Morrison, 2014; Wilkinson et al., 2020). We incorporated the mediating mechanism and the direct effect in our model to explain prosocial voice behavior. Collectivism and prosocial motivation account for 37.9% of the variance in lecturers' prosocial voice behavior. Furthermore, we showed the adaptation of Van Dyne et al.'s prosocial voice scale to reflect the discretionary nature of this behavior better. We contributed to construct validation in alignment with the recommendations put forth by Van Dyne et al. (2003).

When individuals define themselves based on the groups they belong to, the stronger their identification with the group, the more motivated they become to engage in actions that benefit the group, as the group shapes their self-concept (Turner, 1987a; Turner & Reynolds, 2012). Therefore, managers should focus on facilitating this process effectively by fostering positive relationships with organizational members, building a positive image for the organization, etc. Additionally, they should allocate employees to roles that align with their tendencies toward collectivism or individualism. Roles that require high levels of team collaboration should prioritize individuals with a strong collectivist orientation. At the same time, those with a more individualistic disposition may be better suited to independent, highly competitive tasks.

Although this study has provided certain practical and theoretical contributions, as discussed above, it has some limitations. With a sample size of 424 lecturers, the findings may not fully represent all lecturers in higher education institutions in Vietnam, despite the research team's efforts to survey lecturers from these universities in different geographical areas. Furthermore, the measurement scale used to assess the variables in the research model is a perceptual scale, which may be influenced heavily by respondents' subjective opinions. Future studies could expand the sample size, consider additional intermediate and moderating variables in the current research model.

5. CONCLUSION

This study provides new insights into the cultural factors influencing voice behavior, particularly focusing on collectivism in the context of higher education institutions in Vietnam, a collectivist society. Drawing

on social identity theory and motivated information processing theory, we demonstrate that when employees strongly identify with collectivist values, they experience heightened prosocial motivation, which, in turn, drives prosocial voice behavior. These findings are particularly relevant for organizations in Vietnam, a collectivist nation where most employees exhibit collectivist tendencies. To leverage employees' prosocial voice, managers should prioritize strategies that enhance collectivism among employees, thereby fostering their prosocial motivation, ultimately promoting prosocial voice behavior within the organization.

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CONTENT

FOREWORD

5

GREEN GROWTH

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