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Article

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RESEARCH

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Impact of grit on voice behavior: mediating role of organizational commitment

Asma Nisar¹, Tahira Hassan Butt^{2*}, Ghulam Abid², Saira Farooqi¹ and Tehmina Fiaz Qazi³

Abstract

Employee voice is the voluntary, non-formal and upward communication of ideas, concerns or solutions to work associated problems by an employee. Drawing on conservation of resources theory, our study investigated the direct impact of two antecedents of behavioral outcomes (i.e., grit and organizational commitment) on voice behavior. Moreover, study also examined the mediating influence of organizational commitment in the relationship between grit and voice behavior. Data were collected in two waves time over a 2-month time period from public sector employees and their immediate supervisors. PROCESS macro by Hayes was used on actual sample of 300 employees and 19 supervisors from different job functions. All the direct as well as indirect hypothesized relationships are empirically supported. The results of the study add to the improved understanding of one of the most evolving construct, namely, voice behavior. Theoretical and practical implications alongside recommendations have also been given for future empirical research on voice behavior.

Keywords: Voice behavior, Organizational commitment, Grit, Conservation of resources

Introduction

The concept of employee voice comes from Scholar [1] view that if employees come across dissatisfying work circumstances, they get inclined toward exiting the workplace or staying and voicing their concerns. Researchers [2] explained voice behavior as a way leading toward organizational citizenship behavior which encompasses “constructive, change-leading communication planned for the betterment of the situation.” Employee voice behaviors come under the broader genre that classifies responses to job dissatisfaction and is an amalgamation of two dimensions: constructiveness and activeness. Voice behavior characterizes the positive and energetic response to dissatisfaction [3]. This kind of voice behavior in return leads to increased levels of employee dedication [1], employee retention [4] and joint learning [5, 6].

Employees can give their contribution toward the effectiveness of the organization by adopting voice

behaviors, in a way that they make suggestions about how to improve the present situation of the organization [7, 8]. Raising voice is important for both the organization and employees because it provides ideas for inculcating positive change in the organization [9], increases employees’ motivation and satisfaction [10, 11], adds to their advancement of career [12], and also improves their capacity required for meeting job demands [13, 14]. For instance, by adopting problem-specific or prohibitive voice behavior, the employee tends to describe about particular areas containing issues or shortcomings present in the organization [15], as a result this creates a need to highlight solutions to present organizational problems [16]. Though voice behaviors lead to various advantages, but raising voice regarding different problems may also be taken as troublesome or upsetting by others [17, 18], specifically if the benefits enjoyed by other organizational members are threatened by this voice behavior [14]. Therefore, many times when employees feel that their voice would not be heard then they avoid such behavior [19] thus keeping their valuable suggestions to themselves due to negative consequences [20]. There is a chance that employees may feel at risk and go through

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psychological conflicts as a result of raising their voice because of the contradictory feature of voice behavior that can benefit the organization [21]. Since there are different advantageous outcomes of voice raising, therefore, scholars are now paying tremendous attention toward encouraging voice behavior at workplaces [22, 23].

For the successful achievement of goals that spreads across diverse contexts, there is a very important characteristic of individual nature known as Grit which comprises of “passion and perseverance for achieving long-term objectives” [24, 25]. Comparatively, a new construct in behavioral sciences [26], grit is considered to be important for individual and company’s success [27, 28]. The concept of grit and tenacity is quite similar, and tenacity leads to voice behaviors that are problem specific [16]. Therefore, gritty individuals are most prone to raise constructive voice. Based on conservation of resources (COR) theory, people work hard to preserve, guard and create resources, because there are limited resources available [29, 30]. COR theory describes as there are few resources available so people take care in not wasting these resources and adopting behaviors that protects extra resources for the future [31]. According to the theory, people adopt constructive behaviors, e.g., voice only when they know their personal resources could be increased by attaining extra resources [29, 32].

Those employees having increased amounts of organizational commitment are more work-oriented than those who show low commitment [33]. There is a positive relation among organizational commitment and job performance [34–36] and various extra-role behaviors [37]. Voice behavior is shown by employees who show increased commitment and identifies with goals and values of their workplace [38]. Grounding upon the COR, a person is able to perform tasks with very less amount of energy, without fearing the loss of energy by reducing the occurrence of emotional fatigue due to a psychological state created by affective commitment (Hobföll 2002) [39].

Voice behavior is a vital behavior as it promotes the well-being of not only the organization, but also of the employees since they get a chance to raise their concerns for the betterment of the organization. Hence, nowadays organizations stress a lot on promotion of such behaviors. This paper, therefore, would serve the management in investigating how a personality-related variable (i.e., grit) may help in raising voice directly and through the mediating effect of organizational commitment. Thus, the paper makes various theoretical contributions. First of all, it extends the literature on COR by studying that how the positive impact of grit may lead to voice behavior directly. Secondly, a model is created that explains as well as validate a different type of mechanism among

grit and voice behavior through the presence of organizational commitment as a mediator. Therefore, a novel path is created by testing these relationships. Thirdly, this study would provide valuable implications for managers as well as their organizations by focusing on the ways through which grit and organizational commitment could be increased so that employees can adopt different constructive behaviors, such as voice behavior. Finally, previous researches on voice behavior have been conducted in different western countries. This research on said variables has been conducted south Asian context to investigate how voice behavior may get affected due to various factors; therefore, this study on voice behavior is an effort to generalize and validate the findings of existing research.

Literature review and hypotheses

Grit and voice behavior

Duckworth et al. [25] came up with the term ‘grit,’ which is considered to be a trait that is non-cognitive and is defined as passion and perseverance directed toward the attainment of goals which are long-term. It is operationalized as the “consistency of interest and perseverance of effort” [40]. The consistency of interest is being consistent in attaining a goal, i.e., sticking on a long-term basis along with interest shown in a specific domain, whereas perseverance of effort is the propensity to work vigorously despite facing setbacks toward achieving goals [41]. Tenacity on the other is one individual trait that shows employees’ consistent allocation of energy that is goal specific toward achievement of tasks [42]. Tenacity is very close to the concept of grit and employees with increased levels of tenacity not only persevere, but also raise their voice despite all kinds of resistance. Therefore, it can be said that individuals having high levels of grit may indulge in voice behavior [16]. As per COR theory, employees indulge in constructive work behaviors, for example voice, only when they are able to increase their personal resources in order to achieve extra resources by employing such behaviors [29, 32]. By employing the above discussion, it could be hypothesized that;

H1 Grit is positively related to voice behavior.

Grit and organizational commitment

Individuals who rank high on grit are considered to be better able to put their capabilities to work as they are not easily diverted by goals that are short-term and are relatively less disheartened by the failures and impediments which are normally faced in various performance areas [41]. These individuals take note from negative events that took place in the past and try to convert them into

positive ones by rendering superior performance even in the face of difficulties [43]. Level of grit shown impacts the amount of contribution given by employees, whereas gritty employees tend to exert more effort in their work and give better performance as compared to others [44]. Employees who are more gritty chase the same goal and are persistent over time, and there are high chances for them to stay in the same organization and outperform their counterparts who are less gritty [41]. Grit is, therefore, related to higher chances of sticking to the same job [40, 45–47]. Organizational commitment, on the contrary, consists of feelings of pride while working in the organization, identifying with the goals of the organization, and an inclination toward making the organization successful by putting in more effort [33, 48]. The increased amount of commitment is related to reduce absenteeism, lower turnover intention, higher levels of satisfaction in life, increased prosocial behaviors (i.e., going an extra mile and performing more at work than what is expected) and better performance at job [49–53]. On the basis of the above discussion, it could be hypothesized that;

H2 Grit is positively related to organizational commitment.

Organizational commitment and voice behavior

Organizational commitment describes a bond that is shared between a person and his organization [33, 48]. Employees carrying high levels of affective commitment to put more energy to work so that organizational functioning could be made better, even in the face of difficulties [14]. Affective commitment is considered to have a correlation that is very strong with extra-role behaviors [37]. Employees showing increased levels of affective commitment establish a connection with the organizational goals and values by exhibiting voice behavior [38, 54], and it is this behavior that makes utilization of employees’ input possible [55]. The COR theory refers

to the commitment as a resource that is personal. Therefore, employees who increase their commitment along with personal investment in the job that they are doing can easily facilitate in maintenance of resources [56, 57]. Based on the above discussion, it could be hypothesized that;

H3 Organizational commitment is positively related to voice behavior (Fig. 1).

Mediating effect of organizational commitment

Organizational commitment is the amount of participation and recognition a person carries for the organization in which he/she is employed [58]. It is also considered to be an attitude of employees toward different tasks [59]. Affective commitment arises as a result of feelings of emotions that a person has in his organization and largely depends upon work experiences [60]. Affective commitment comprises of having pride of working in the organization, be able relate to the organizational goals, and having an inclination toward putting in extra effort for the organization to be successful [33, 48]. Commitment is considered to be negatively associated with withdrawal behaviors such as turnover [61]. Moreover; Satoh et al. [62] identified affective commitment has a positive relation with the intention to remain with the organization (e.g., nursing). Gritty employees, on the other hand, show consistency in sticking to the same goal, and there are more chances for them to stay in the same job and give more work contribution as compared to their counterparts who rank low on grittiness along with observing effective mutual obligations [63]. Therefore, affective commitment is related to grit in a way that both lead to a decrease in turnover intention and a feeling to contribute more on the job. Furthermore, there are chances for voice behavior to take place when individuals can control their work by having personal authority and by endorsing their activities [64], have a feeling of emotional bond to their place of work [65, 66], and consider their workplace to be

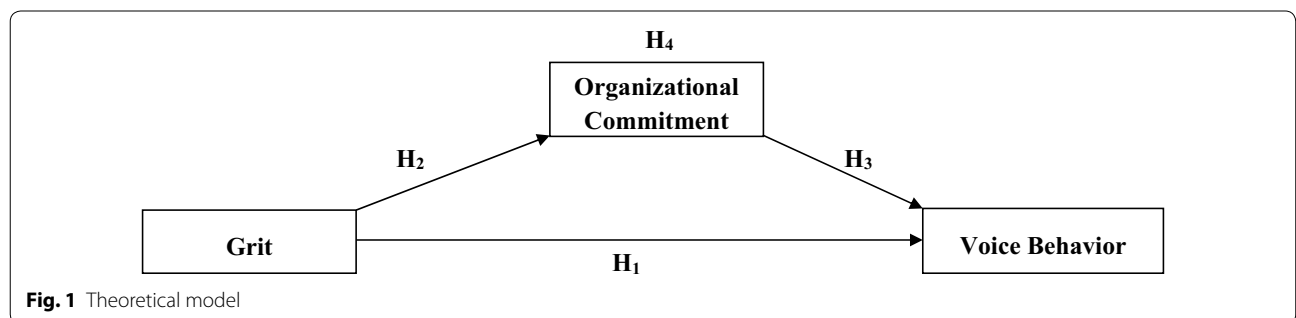


Fig. 1 Theoretical model

honest [67]. Based on the given arguments, it can be said that organizational commitment, autonomy and organizational justice are positively related to voice behavior [68]. Build on the above discussion, it can be said that organizational (affective) commitment acts as a mediator among the relationship between grit and voice behavior. On the above given discussion, it could be hypothesized that;

H4 Organizational commitment mediates the relationship between grit and voice behavior.

Methods

Sample and procedure

To investigate the hypothesized relationships, data were taken from a renowned public sector organization FBR in South East Asia. The questionnaires were distributed in two big divisions of the organization existing in Lahore and Islamabad. A total of 200 responses were collected from Islamabad Large Tax Payers Unit (LTU) and 120 responses from the Lahore Regional Tax Office (RTO). The questionnaires were handed to supervisors of grade 17–19 in both the cities having a staff of 50–70 employees working under them. Out of the total 15 supervisors contacted, only 7 agreed to take part in the survey after taking consent from their staff. The supervisors then handed over the questionnaires to their employees who were required to fill questions regarding grit and affective commitment. The questionnaires were filled with minimal interference as the respondents were handed over the questionnaires personally and were asked to fill them based on their understanding. The respondents were ensured that their identity would not be disclosed. In order to make the study more authentic, data were both self-report and multi-source. The study was also time-lagged with three different questionnaires distributed at a regular interval of 1 week each in order to strengthen the study design [69]. At the time period 1 (T1), responses regarding grit were collected. A total of 320 complete responses were received, then after a gap of 1 week at time period 2 (T2), questionnaires were again distributed to those 320 employees personally via the support of their supervisors to collect the responses regarding organizational commitment. A total of 300 complete responses were received at T2. Finally, after a gap of 1 week at time period 3 (T3), again questionnaires were distributed, but this time to the supervisors of those 300 employees whose responses were complete. The supervisors were asked to analyze the constructive voice behavior (performance) of the employees who works under them and give responses regarding their voice behavior. At the end, 300 questionnaires with complete responses

from both the staff and the supervisors were analyzed for the final study's results (93.75% response rate).

Of the 300 respondents who provided usable surveys, 279 were male (93%) and 82.9% respondents had at least a bachelor's degree. The mean age was 39.37 years ($SD = 11.29$) and worked with their present employer for an average of 14.61 years ($SD = 11.78$ years).

Measures

All the items were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

Grit was measured using a 6 item scale for consistency of interest and 5 item scale for the perseverance of effort taken from Duckworth et al. [25]. A sample item was "I often set a goal but later choose to pursue a different one." The Cronbach alpha for the items of grit turned out to be 0.80.

Organizational commitment was measured using affective commitment 3 item scale developed by Mowday et al. [58]. A sample item was "I am proud to tell people who I work for." The Cronbach alpha for the items of organizational commitment turned out to be 0.87.

Voice behavior was measured using a 5 item scale of Van Dyne and LePine [2]. A sample item was "This particular subordinate develops and make recommendations concerning issues that affect this work group." The Cronbach alpha for the items of voice behavior turned out to be 0.96.

Results

The bivariate correlations of the three study variables are discussed in Table 1. The coefficients of correlation offer initial support for the study hypotheses. Consistent with the given hypothesized relationships, correlations indicated that grit is significant as well as positively related to voice behavior ($r = 0.21, p < 0.01$), which is in accordance with our H1. The relationship among grit and organizational commitment is positively associated ($r = 0.31, p < 0.01$), thus providing support for H2. The relationship between organizational commitment and voice behavior is significant and positive ($r = 0.17, p < 0.01$), thereby providing support for H3.

Hypotheses testing

Maximum-likelihood estimation was used by conducting a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). A hypothesized model was tested that comprised of three-factors grit, organizational commitment and voice behavior with alternative two factors and one factor model. Results demonstrated that the three-factor model was found to be a good fit in the given study ($\chi^2/df = 1.44$, $TLI = 0.98$, $CFI = 0.98$, $RMR = 0.06$). As per Table 2, the

Table 1 Descriptive statistics and correlation matrix

Variables	Correlations							
	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Age	39.37	11.29	–					
2. Gender	1.07	0.25	–0.23**	–				
3. Education	15.10	2.22	–0.14*	0.15*	–			
4. Grit	3.64	0.61	0.08	–0.03	0.09	(0.80)		
5. Commitment	4.11	0.88	0.07	–0.01	0.12*	0.30**	(0.87)	
6. Voice behavior	3.65	0.96	0.01	0.01	0.13*	0.21**	0.17**	(0.96)

n = 300. Cronbach's α in parenthesis

**p* < 0.05 (two-tailed)

***p* < 0.01 (two-tailed)

Table 2 Results of confirmatory factor analysis

Model	χ^2	<i>df</i>	TLI	CFI	IFI	RMR
Hypothesized three factor model	217.44	150	0.98	0.99	0.99	0.06
Two factor model ^a	1587.65	169	0.64	0.68	0.68	0.23
One factor model ^b	2399.5	170	0.44	0.50	0.50	0.26

n = 300, All models are compared with the full measurement model

χ^2 Chi square, *df* degrees of freedom, TLI Tucker–Lewis Index, CFI Comparative Fit Index, IFI Incremental Fit Index, RMR root mean square residual

^a Combine grit and organizational commitment into one latent factor

^b Combine items of all variables into one latent factor

Table 3 Results of mediation analysis

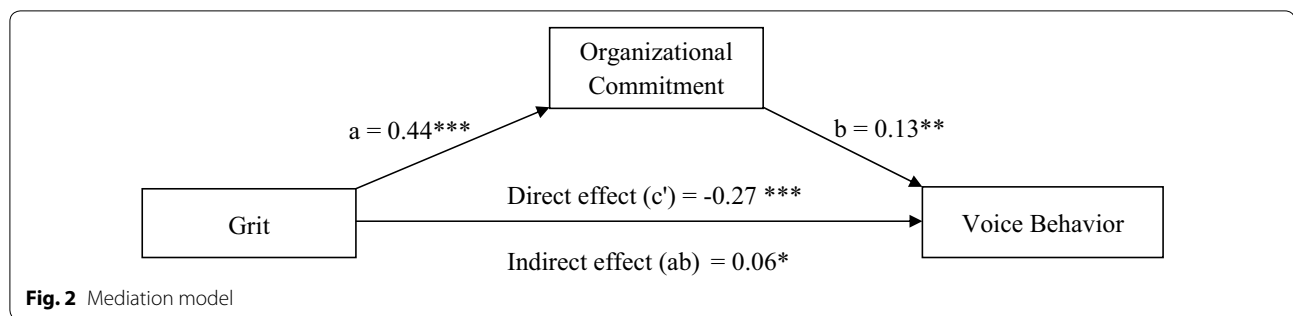
Variables	β	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>		
Direct and total effects						
Voice behavior regressed on grit	0.32	0.09	3.64	0		
Organization commitment regressed on grit	0.44	0.08	5.52	0		
Voice behavior regressed on organization commitment, controlling for grit	0.13	0.07	1.96	0.051		
Voice behavior regressed on grit, controlling for organization commitment	0.27	0.09	2.88	0.004		
	Value	SE	LL 90% CI	UL 90% CI	<i>z</i>	<i>p</i>
Indirect effect and significance using the normal distribution						
Sobel	0.06	0.03	0	0.15	1.82	0.069
	<i>M</i>	SE	LL 90% CI	UL 90% CI		
Bootstrap results for indirect effect						
Effect	0.06	0.04	0			0.15

n = 300

β unstandardized regression coefficient, SE standard error; bootstrap sample size = 1000, LL lower limit, CI confidence interval, UL upper limit

three-factor model was a fairly good fit for the data as compared to all the alternative models [70, 71]. Therefore, the individuality of the three constructs used in the study was supported. Based on the outcome, for further analyses all three constructs were employed.

Table 3 and Fig. 2 provide the results of the direct and indirect effects calculated with the help of SPSSPROCESS macro provided by Hayes [72]. The empirical findings suggested that grit is positively related to voice behavior ($\beta = 0.27, p < 0.01$) and organizational commitment ($\beta = 0.44, p < 0.01$), hence supporting our H1 and H2,



respectively. The results also showed that organizational commitment is positively associated with voice behavior ($\beta = 0.13, p < 0.05$), hence supporting our H3.

Furthermore, the simple mediation model (Table 3) illustrated that grit has an indirect influence on voice behavior. This indirect effect was positive ($\beta = 0.06$) as we hypothesized (H4). The formal two-tailed significance test (assuming normal theory) also specified that the indirect effect was significant (Sobel $z = 1.82, p < 0.10$). Bootstrap results with a bootstrapped 90% CI confirmed the Sobel test around the indirect effect containing no zero (0.00, 0.15). Therefore, H4 is also supported.

Discussion

A theoretical model has been proposed that gives an explanation of how employees who are grittier may put a positive impact on their voice behavior. Grit and organizational commitment were examined as the indicators that lead to voice behavior, and then, organizational commitment was also investigated as a potential mediator among grit and voice behavior.

The results provide a strong support for the theoretical proposition that grit and organizational commitment are strong indicators for voice behavior at the workplace. Grit is considered to be a personality trait that ensures working hard toward challenges, despite facing failure not letting go of effort and interest and a constant increase in progress [25]. Therefore, only those employees who rank high on this trait may show more inclination toward adopting voice behavior. As grit is an amalgamation of consistency of interest and perseverance of effort so employees who show these traits may take the risk of speaking up for the betterment of themselves and the organization despite all challenges and resistance that they faced.

The study findings also indicate that grit is positively related to organizational commitment. High levels of grit increase chances of remaining in the same organization [41] thus, increasing commitment toward the place of work. This is due to fact that gritty employees put in more effort they do not lose hope despite facing difficulties; therefore, their commitment and loyalty toward their organization are much higher as compared to that of less gritty employees.

Another finding of the study is that organizational commitment has a positive connection with voice behavior. Those employees who show greater amounts of organizational commitment exhibit more extra-role behaviors [37]. Voice behavior being one kind of extra-role behavior can only be performed provided employees feel more committed. This is because committed employees are more concerned about the well-being of other employees and their organization; therefore, they are ready to take risks and put in more effort by raising their voice for the improved functioning of the organization.

Organizational commitment acts as a mediator between grit and voice behavior, and the results of the study indicates that voice behavior may take place due to different factors apart from the satisfaction [14]. Organizational commitment is an attitude that is developed due to various job-related factors, but has a significant impact on a person's behavioral outcome. If the employees are very committed to the organization, they would feel going an extra mile for its betterment by raising the voice. Thus, supporting our contention that organizational commitment acts as a mediating mechanism between grit and voice behavior.

Theoretical implications

The findings of the study make various theoretical contributions. This study focuses on the antecedents of voice behavior and how it gets affected. Previous studies have investigated the relationships of the role of leadership with voice behavior. However, in the given study the positive effect of grit on voice behavior has been investigated by looking at the mediating position of organizational commitment which has been taken as a voice behavior antecedent. This study is among the first in a few studies to observe such a relationship. As De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia [16] explained, a lot of closeness between the concepts of grit and tenacity so individuals who are tenacious indulge in voice behavior. This holds true for grit too, as proved by the results that grit is positively associated with voice behavior. At the same time, gritty employees have high chances of staying in the same organization [41]. Moreover, Vandenberghe and Bentein

[61] also showed that commitment has a negative connection with turnover intention; therefore, the study has confirmed through its results that grit is positively related to commitment because based on the past literature both grit and commitment are related. Moreover, organizational commitment also increases chances of adopting voice behavior since Wang et al. [38] also identified a positive relationship between commitment and voice behavior. One major contribution made by this study is drawn on COR [30] for grounding its results. According to COR theory, the only reason people adopt constructive behaviors example voice is that such behaviors may help them in increasing resources [29, 32]. Whereas, grit and organizational commitment are two such behaviors that definitely helps in protecting, maintaining and enhancing employee resources.

Practical implications

There are different practical implications for managers and practitioners who are keen to promote voice behavior in their organizations. First of all, organizations should install such a system of giving rewards that appreciates the contribution made by employees, thus encouraging them to raise their voice [73]. Secondly, since affective commitment is positively connected to voice behavior, so in order to increase affective commitment different strategies could be employed, such as incorporating an effective system of recruitment and employee involvement programs [74] as well as providing them career management opportunities [75]. Briefly, it could be said that organizational career growth opportunities are very useful for organizational success by raising input of employees through voice behavior [38]. There are many studies that have emphasized on good superior and subordinate relationships for spurring voice behavior [76–79]. Therefore, supervisors should value the input of subordinates, provide them with an environment where they are appreciated for raising their voice for the well-being of the organization rather than being punished. As employee grit is important in raising voice; therefore for hiring of employees, their level of grit can also be assessed apart from cognitive abilities and technical competencies. Moreover, a mentoring a program shall also be installed where mentors can increase the grit of employees by providing them encouragement and constructive feedback on their current performance level and also suggest ways to surpass the expectations [63].

Limitations and direction for future research

Although the data were collected from two sources (employees and their supervisors) thus eliminating the issues of same-source bias [69], yet the theoretical

and practical contributions in the study can be treated in terms of various limitations that may lead toward new options for future researchers. First, due to usage of cross-sectional research design in the given study causal inferences are omitted. Therefore, rolling out the possibility of reverse and reciprocal causality is inhibited [80]. Hence, the hypotheses given in the current study can be better investigated using longitudinal data or in field studies or by employing laboratory experiments in order to establish a causal relationships.

Next, the data used in the study were collected from an public sector organizations belonging to South Asian context which could limit the generalization of results. Future researches can be conducted in other cultures or private sector organizations.

Maynes and Podsakoff [81] explained different kinds of employee voice behaviors such as supportive, constructive, defensive and destructive forms of voice. For future researchers, there is an opportunity to examine the impact of different personality-related variables such as grit on these different kinds of voice or by employing different paths from grit leading to these voices. Moreover, the given study caters to the frequency of voice thus ignoring voice behavior's quality, future studies may employ mixed method research designs to determine the quality and frequency of such behavior.

Conclusion

An important contribution has been made by this research to the fields of organizational behavior and positive psychology by giving an integrated model that investigates the relationship among grit and voice behavior via the mediating impact of organizational commitment. Empirical findings of the study provide support for COR theory and states that organizational commitment mediates the positive impact of grit on voice behavior. The study further adds to the literature on voice behavior by putting attention toward direct and indirect mechanisms that affect the association between grit and voice behavior. It is believed that future researchers in this area will assist managers in understanding how to come up with different ways that may motivate employees to raise their voice for the benefit of the organization.

Abbreviations

COR: conservation of resources theory; SE: standard error; LL: lower limit; CI: confidence interval; UL: upper limit; *df*: degrees of freedom; TLI: Tucker–Lewis Index; CFI: Comparative Fit Index; IFI: Incremental Fit Index; RMR: root mean square residual; LTU: large tax payers unit.

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Authors' contributions

Conceptualization was contributed by 'AN' and 'GA'; Data curation was contributed by Asma Nisar, 'THB' and 'GA'; Formal analysis was contributed by 'AN' and 'GA'; Investigation was contributed by 'AN' and 'TFQ'; Methodology was contributed by 'THB'; Project administration was contributed by 'GA'; Resources were contributed by 'SF'; Supervision was contributed by 'GA' and 'SF'; Validation was contributed by 'THB'; Visualization was contributed by 'THB'; Writing—original draft was contributed by 'AN'; Writing—review and editing were contributed by 'THB' and 'TFQ'. All authors have read and approved the final manuscript.

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Competing interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interest.

Availability of data and materials

The datasets generated during and/or analyzed during the current study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

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