
Passion as the Pathway: Empowering Gen Z to Speak Up

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of work passion as a psychological mechanism linking psychological empowerment and voice behavior among Gen Z employees. A cross-sectional survey was conducted involving 360 respondents using validated measures of psychological empowerment, work passion, and voice behavior. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was employed to examine both the direct and indirect relationships among the variables. The findings indicate that psychological empowerment positively predicts voice behavior. In addition, work passion partially mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and voice behavior, suggesting that empowerment may foster voice behavior not only directly but also through the development of stronger motivational attachment to work. These findings highlight the importance of fostering internal motivation to support empowerment-driven voice behavior among young professionals. This study contributes to the literature on motivation and voice behavior while also offering practical implications for organizations seeking to create supportive work environments for Gen Z employees.

Keywords: *gen Z, psychological empowerment, voice behavior, work passion*

Introduction

In today's rapidly evolving work environments, employees are increasingly expected to contribute not only through task performance but also by voicing suggestions, concerns, and innovations (Burriss & Sohn, 2021). This proactive communication, referred to as voice behavior, is essential to organizational learning and adaptation (Liang et al., 2012). Among younger generations, particularly Generation Z, individuals born after 1995, this expectation is both promising and challenging. Gen Z employees tend to value autonomy, meaningful work, and psychological safety (Benítez-Márquez et al., 2022). However, many workplaces, including those in Indonesia, which is characterized by relatively high power distance, continue to reflect hierarchical work relationships (Hofstede, 2001) that may discourage younger employees from openly expressing ideas or concerns. In such contexts, concerns about authority, seniority, and interpersonal risk may inhibit voice behavior, particularly among employees with limited organizational tenure (Burger et al., 2021).

One critical psychological factor associated with voice behavior is psychological empowerment, defined as a sense of meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact at work (Spreitzer, 1995). Previous studies have consistently shown that empowered individuals are more likely to engage in both promotive and prohibitive voice behavior (Hasan & Kashif, 2021; Seibert et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2016). However, establishing a direct relationship alone may not fully explain how empowerment is translated into voice behavior, particularly among younger employees. Understanding

the psychological processes underlying this relationship is important because speaking up often requires not only capability and autonomy but also a strong internal motivational attachment to one's work. In this regard, work passion may provide a more relevant explanatory mechanism than related constructs such as job satisfaction or work engagement, as it emphasizes identity-related internalization and enduring motivational investment in work activities (Vallerand et al., 2024). This perspective may be particularly relevant for Gen Z employees, who tend to place greater value on meaningful work, self-expression, and personal alignment with their jobs. Despite this relevance, the role of work passion in linking psychological empowerment and voice behavior remains underexplored, especially among digitally native younger workers (Oraibi et al., 2025).

This study addresses both a theoretical and a population gap. While previous research has explored the outcomes of empowerment, fewer studies have investigated how empowerment translates into action, particularly through intrinsic motivational pathways such as work passion (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Vallerand, 2008). Additionally, the relevance of these mechanisms among Gen Z workers in the Indonesian context remains underexamined. This reflects a practical knowledge gap in understanding how organizations can design motivational systems that foster voice behavior among new workforce entrants.

To address these gaps, this study draws on self-determination theory to examine work passion as a psychological pathway between psychological empowerment and voice behavior. Work passion, characterized by a strong inclination toward activities that individuals find meaningful and enjoyable, has been associated with persistence, energy, and proactive behavior (Curran et al., 2015; Philippe et al., 2009). Integrating self-determination theory with the voice behavior literature contributes both theoretically and practically (Chih Ho, 2017; Zhao et al., 2022): theoretically, it explains the motivational basis of voice behavior, and practically, it provides organizations with guidance on how to engage younger workers more effectively (Open Knowledge, 2021; Oraibi et al., 2025).

This study addresses a theoretical gap in the motivation literature and a practical knowledge gap in workforce engagement, particularly among Gen Z employees in Indonesia. Therefore, this study aims to examine whether work passion mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and voice behavior among Gen Z employees.

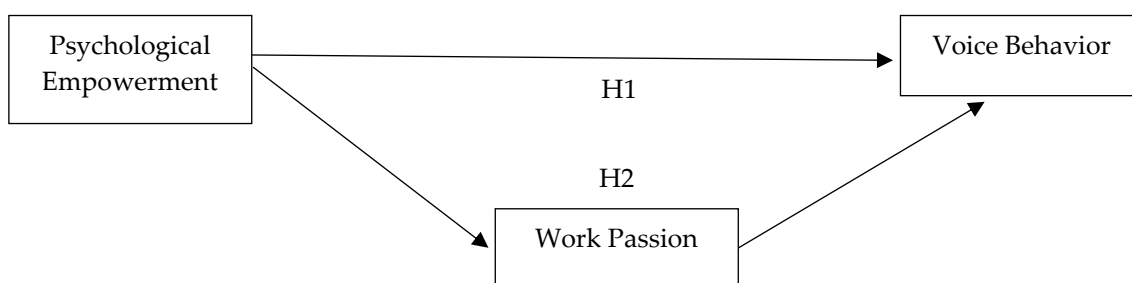


Figure 1.
Conceptual Model

Accordingly, the research hypotheses used in this writing are formulated as follows:

H1: Psychological empowerment positively influences voice behavior, and

H2: Work passion mediates the relationship between psychological empowerment and voice behavior.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the role of work passion in mediating the relationship between psychological empowerment and voice behavior among Generation Z employees. The core variables in this study were psychological empowerment (independent variable), work passion (mediating variable), and voice behavior (dependent variable).

Participants

The participants were 360 Generation Z employees aged 20 to 30 years, working across various industrial sectors in Indonesia. Data were collected from February to March 2025 through an online questionnaire distributed via the Jakpat survey platform, an Indonesian-based research platform commonly used for survey-based research and market studies. The platform provides access to registered respondents across Indonesia, allowing researchers to target participants based on predefined demographic criteria. Participants were selected using convenience sampling. All responses were anonymous and voluntary, and the inclusion criteria were based on age and active employment status at the time of participation.

Measures

Three psychometric instruments were used to measure the core constructs. Psychological empowerment was assessed using a 12-item scale developed by Spreitzer (1995), which covers four dimensions: meaning, competence, self-determination, and impact. Each subdimension consists of three items. A sample item is, "The work I do is meaningful to me." Work passion was measured using the Passion Scale developed by Vallerand (2008), consisting of 14 items divided into two subscales: harmonious passion and obsessive passion, each containing seven items. A sample item for harmonious passion is, "This activity is in harmony with the other activities in my life," and for obsessive passion, "I have difficulties controlling my urge to engage in this activity." Voice behavior was measured using the 10-item scale developed by Liang et al. (2012), which comprises two dimensions: promotive and prohibitive voice, each consisting of five items. A sample item for promotive voice is, "I proactively suggest new projects that are beneficial for the organization," while a sample item for prohibitive voice is, "I speak up honestly about problems that might cause serious issues in the workplace." All responses were rated using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Research Procedure

The research procedure included an informed consent form presented at the beginning of the questionnaire. Participants were informed that their participation was entirely voluntary and anonymous, and that they could withdraw at any time without consequences. This study adhered to established ethical standards in psychological

research involving human participants, including respect for autonomy, confidentiality of responses, and protection of participants' rights and well-being.

Data Analysis

Confirmatory Factor Analysis was conducted to assess the validity and reliability of all instruments. All standardized loadings exceeded 0.50 and were statistically significant ($p < .001$), confirming acceptable convergent validity. Given that this study used Structural Equation Modeling, internal consistency and measurement reliability were evaluated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis rather than Cronbach's alpha. Statistical analysis was conducted using JASP 0.18.3.1. Structural Equation Modeling was applied to examine direct and indirect effects. The mediation model was tested using parameter labeling and manual estimation of indirect and total effects. Model fit was evaluated using multiple indices, including CFI, TLI, RMSEA, and SRMR.

Results

This study tested two models using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) with a total of 360 Generation Z employee participants. Prior to hypothesis testing, descriptive statistics were computed for each main variable. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the main variables in this study. The mean score for psychological empowerment was 45,42 (SD = 7,48), for voice behavior was 35,28 (SD = 6,87), and for work passion was 46,97 (SD = 8,84). The minimum and maximum scores for each variable were within theoretical expectations, indicating appropriate response variability. Kurtosis values for all variables ranged from -0,364 to 0,43, with standard errors of kurtosis around 0,26, suggesting no significant deviation from normality. These results support the assumption of univariate normality for subsequent structural analysis.

Table 1.
Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
Psychological Empowerment	360	45,42	7,48	23,00	60,00	-0,364	0,26
Voice Behavior	360	35,28	6,87	10,00	50,00	-0,051	0,26
Work Passion	360	46,97	8,84	14,00	70,00	0,43	0,26

Prior to hypothesis testing, the assumptions for structural equation modeling were evaluated. Univariate normality was supported, as the skewness and kurtosis values for all main variables were within the acceptable ± 2 threshold. Multicollinearity was assessed through the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF), with all values ranging between 1,63 and 2,50, which were well below the recommended cutoff value of 5, indicating no multicollinearity concerns among the independent variables.

Table 2.
Collinearity Statistics of Predictor Variables

Predictor Variable	Tolerance	VIF
Psychological Empowerment	0,521	1,920
Voice Behavior	0,401	2,496
Work Passion	0,613	1,632

Prior to structural testing, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was conducted to ensure construct validity. All standardized factor loadings were above 0,50 and statistically significant ($p < 0,001$), indicating acceptable convergent validity.

As a direct effect, psychological empowerment significantly predicted voice behavior ($\beta = 0,719$, $z = 23,840$, $p < 0,001$, 95% CI [0,660, 0,778]). The R-squared value indicated that psychological empowerment explained 51,7% of the variance in voice behavior ($R^2 = 0,517$), suggesting a substantial direct effect.

As a mediation mechanism, psychological empowerment significantly predicted work passion ($\beta = 0,731$, $z = 24,536$, $p < 0,001$, 95% CI [0,672, 0,789]), and work passion significantly predicted voice behavior ($\beta = 0,263$, $z = 3,986$, $p < 0,001$, 95% CI [0,134, 0,393]). The direct effect of psychological empowerment on voice behavior remained significant ($\beta = 0,526$, $z = 8,358$, $p < 0,001$), indicating partial mediation. The indirect effect of psychological empowerment on voice behavior through work passion was statistically significant ($\beta = 0,193$, $z = 3,952$, $p < 0,001$, 95% CI [0,097, 0,288]).

The R-squared values showed that psychological empowerment explained 53,4% of the variance in work passion ($R^2 = 0,534$) and 55,9% of the variance in voice behavior ($R^2 = 0,559$) when the mediator was included.

Table 3.

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

	Estimate	z-value	p-value	Decision
H1	0,72	23,84	<0,001	Supported
H2	0,19	3,95	<0,001	Supported

These results support both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2, confirming the significant direct effect of psychological empowerment on voice behavior, as well as the mediating role of work passion in the relationship between psychological empowerment and voice behavior.

Discussion

The results of this study confirm the significant role of psychological empowerment in fostering voice behavior among Generation Z employees. Consistent with prior research (Seibert et al., 2011; Liang et al., 2012), empowered individuals who feel competent, autonomous, and impactful are more likely to engage in constructive communication in the workplace. The high effect size ($\beta = 0,719$) and variance explained ($R^2 = 0,517$) further emphasize the robustness of this relationship, particularly in the context of Gen Z workers, who are known to value meaningfulness and self-direction (Ng, 2021).

More importantly, this study highlights work passion as a significant psychological pathway linking empowerment to voice behavior. The mediation effect ($\beta = 0,193$, $p < 0,001$) supports the proposition of Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that intrinsic motivation, such as passion, arises when individuals experience psychological need satisfaction. Empowerment appears to stimulate this passion, which in turn energizes employees to speak up.

This finding aligns with previous studies linking passion with proactive behavior and persistence (Vallerand et al., 2003; Ho et al., 2018), yet it advances the literature by demonstrating that passion can act as a mediating mechanism in the relationship

between empowerment and voice behavior. Prior research has primarily treated empowerment and passion as independent predictors of performance; this study integrates them into a unified motivational process, thus contributing to both empowerment theory and the growing body of research on Gen Z in organizational contexts. These findings extend Self-Determination Theory by clarifying how psychological empowerment activates intrinsic motivation to engage in voice behavior, particularly in emerging workforce contexts.

Furthermore, the mediation is partial, suggesting that while passion is an important motivational channel, psychological empowerment also exerts a direct influence on voice behavior. This dual pathway underscores the importance of not only empowering employees structurally but also nurturing their emotional and motivational engagement with work. This study also enriches the empirical understanding of Gen Z employees by emphasizing how internal psychological states translate into organizational voice behavior.

Despite these contributions, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design limits causal inference. Longitudinal or experimental studies would strengthen claims regarding mediation. Second, the reliance on self-report data may introduce social desirability bias or common method bias. Third, the sample was drawn using convenience sampling, which may limit the generalizability of the findings beyond digitally literate Gen Z workers.

Future research should explore boundary conditions, such as organizational climate or leadership style, that might amplify or suppress the role of passion. Additionally, expanding the model to include dual forms of voice (promotive vs. prohibitive) and dual types of passion (harmonious vs. obsessive) would offer deeper insight into how motivational dynamics operate in different communication contexts.

Conclusion

This study provides empirical support for the pivotal role of psychological empowerment in encouraging voice behavior among Generation Z employees. The findings reveal that psychological empowerment not only has a strong direct effect on voice behavior but also indirectly promotes it through work passion. This highlights the significance of internal motivational mechanisms in shaping proactive communication in the workplace.

By integrating empowerment theory with self-determination theory, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of the psychological pathways that lead employees to speak up. The partial mediation observed suggests that both structural and emotional dimensions of work are important in activating voice behavior.

These insights are particularly relevant for managing Gen Z workers, who seek autonomy, meaningfulness, and engagement in their professional lives. Organizations aiming to foster a culture of openness and innovation should focus not only on empowering their employees, but also on cultivating environments that spark passion and intrinsic motivation. Future research could explore how this pathway may differ across generations, cultures, or organizational structures to enrich its generalizability.

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