Does LMX always promote employee voice? A dark side of migrant working in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract

Purpose: Drawing on the self-consistency theory, we tested a model where employees' supervisor-based self-esteem (SBSE) is positively related to their promotive and prohibitive voice and mediates the positive relationship between leader-member exchange social comparison (LMXSC) and an employee's promotive and prohibitive voice, but only for local rather than migrant workers.

Design/Methodology: To test our hypotheses, multi-source data were collected from 341 matched supervisor-supervisee dyads working in a diverse range of organizations in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

Findings: As predicted, employees' SBSE is positively related to their promotive and prohibitive voice and mediates a positive relationship between their LMXSC and their promotive and prohibitive voice, but only for local workers. Our findings provide support for our self-consistency theory perspective on LMX, and new insight into the 'dark side' of migrant working – a lack of voice.

Originality: Our study responds to calls for more research that explores the roles played by macro-environmental factors on employees' voice. Implications for theory and practice are discussed.

*Keywords***:** Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison; Self-Esteem; Voice; Migrant Workers; The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA).

1. Introduction

Employee voice refers to the voluntary, constructive, and often challenging, upward communication of work-related throughts, ideas and suggestions by employees to management (Liang *et al.*, 2012). Voice may be promotive, where employees proffer suggestions and ideas for improvement, or prohibitive, where employees make known their concerns for ongoing problems and issues (Liang *et al.*, 2012). In both forms, voice is acknowledged as a significant predictor of individual, team, and organizational learning, innovation and effectiveness (e.g., Cheng *et al.*, 2014; Morrison, 2014; Kong *et al.*, 2020) and, given its importance, research has explored a wide range of factors that may motivate or inhibit its emergence at work (see the meta-analysis by Chamberlin *et al.*, 2017).

The supervisor-employee relationship has received particular attention, with past studies highlighting supervisors' transformational- (Detert and Burris, 2007), ethical- (Walumbwa and Schaubroeck, 2009), and servant- (Arain *et al.*, 2019) leadership, and leader-member exchange (LMX) quality (Duan *et al.*, 2019), as potentially important mechamisms for encouraging employee voice (Lythreatis *et al.*, 2020). A recent meta-analysis by Chamberlin *et al.* (2017) sought to bring some clarity to this burgeoning body of research, comparing the effects sizes of these different leadership behaviours. Their analysis identified LMX as the most influential motivator of employee voice and, as a result, Chamberlin *et al.* (2017) called for further research exploring potential mediators and moderators of these effects.

To this end, and drawing on self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970), we test a new model where employees' supervisor-based self-esteem (SBSE) mediates the relationship between their LMX social comparison (LMXSC) and their promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors, where LMXSC refers to employees' relative LMX compared with their co-workers (Vidyarthi *et al.*,

2010) and SBSE refers to their self-evaluation of worth resulting from the relationship with their supervisor (Landry and Vandenberghe, 2009). In short, we argue that LMXSC matters as a predictor of employee voice because LMXSC positively influences their self confidence regarding their line manager relationship. In turn, this self confidence is likely to lead to more confidence in expressing one's voice at work (Landry and Vandenberghe, 2009; Sguera *et al.*, 2017).

Drawing on past research that suggests that employees' feelings of powerlessness and job insecurity may inhibit their constructive voice (Chamberlin *et al.*, 2017), we also explore whether these relationships between LMXSC and employee voice are experienced the same by local and migrant workers in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The KSA is the largest and wealthiest country in the Middle-East and the biggest oil exporter in the world (Mellahi, 2007). However, research suggests that migrant workers in the KSA are considerably less privileged than their Saudi counterparts. For example, migrant workers often have significantly reduced salaries, bargaining power, job autonomy, and job security compared to their locally-born colleagues (Arain *et al.*, 2019a). Thus, despite perceiving high LMXSC, and the resultant high SBSE that may stem from this positive interpersonal relationship, migrant workers in the KSA may be less motivated to exhibit constructive voice than their Saudi counterparts as the wider labor market context and relationship with their Saudi employers mitigate against this rather risky prosocial activity (Mellahi, 2007). We argue that the comparative experiences of LMXSC and voice of migrant and local workers is a relatively underexplored 'dark side' of migrant working in the KSA.

We propose a number of important contributions of our research. First, we respond to recent calls for more studies exploring potential mediators and moderators of the LMXSC–performance relationship (Chamberlin *et al.*, 2017). To this end, we provide a new self consistency theoretical lens and introduce SBSE as a new mediator of the LMXSC and employee voice

relationship. Moreover, we examine a new 'dark side' of migrant working in the KSA, examining the comparative experiences of promotive and prohibitive voice of local and migrant workers. In doing so, we respond to Morrison's (2014) call for more research that examines the effects of macro-level contextual factors on employees' voice behavior.

Finally, we respond to calls for more LMX research that focuses on LMXSC (Martin *et al.*, 2016; Martin *et al.*, 2018). For many, LMXSC is more closely linked to the original LMX theory (e.g., Dansereau et al., 1975), with Vidyarthi *et al.* (2010) highlighting that LMXSC significantly explained more variance in employees' work behaviors (job performance and citizenship behaviors) than LMX alone. Moreover, considering the mix of locals and migrant workers in the Saudi workforce, we argue that it is likely that employees in the Saudi work context will tend to compare their own LMX quality with those of their coworkers (i.e., LMXSC) rather than focusing on just their own LMX quality (i.e., LMX). To the best of our knowledge, we believe this is the first study to examine the relationships between employees' perceptions of LMXSC and their promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors in the KSA work context.

Following this introduction, Section 2 presents our literature review and develops the research model and hypotheses. Section 3 describes the research design, sample and data collection methods. Section 4 presents our main research findings, and Section 5 discusses these findings and our theoretical and practical contributions.

2. Theoretical framework and research hypotheses

2.1 Employee constructive voice

Liang *et al.* (2012) categorized employee constructive voice into its promotive and prohibitive forms. Although both promotive and prohibitive voice are forms of constructive voice behaviors

that challenge the status quo and benefit the organization (Liang *et al.*, 2012), the ways in which they each do so differ. Promotive voice is future-oriented and, therefore, more likely to be recognized and interpreted by others, including a supervisor, as a positive behavior. Prohibitive voice, on the other hand, is past-oriented, and focused on raising concerns over harmful work-related issues that are affecting the organization. It is less certain, therefore, that others, including supervisors, will always interpret these behaviors positively, because of the heightened potential for interpersonal conflict and negative emotions that may stem from these contributions (Liang *et al.*, 2012).

Recent voice literature suggests that social media technologies provide a very effective platform for promotive-prohibitive voicing both within (internal voicing) and outside (public voicing) the organization (Bhatti *et al.*, 2020). Holland *et al.* (2016) have highlighted that younger generation employees are likely to use social media for non-work related activities. Specifically, they found a significant and positive relation between job dissatisfaction and voicing, via social media use. There is also evidence that employees use external social media, such as Twitter, to exhibit promotive and prohibitive voice issues by posting positive, neutral, and negative tweets (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2016). Social media as an external voicing tool may be more salient when an organization's internal processes are not effective enough – especially in SMEs where knowledge creation tends to be facilitated by more informal voice mechanisms (Miles and Mangold, 2014; Papa *et al.*, 2018b).

Given the growing empirical evidence for the effectiveness of employee constructive voice for promoting positive change in organizations – particularly in organizations using social media and other open channel communications (Scuotto *et al.*, 2017) – it is of significant theoretical and practical importance to explore the potential antecedents of employees' promotive and prohibitive

voice in modern day organizations. In meeting this challenge, our research, examines employees' LMXSC as an untapped antecedent of employees' promotive and prohibitive voice.

2.2 Leader-member exchange social comparisons

While most leadership theories suggest that a leader influences their followers' attitudes and behaviors through the collective and equal treatment of all followers, LMX theory (Dansereau *et al.*, 1975) suggests that leaders or supervisors form relationships with their followers, and that these relationships differ in terms of quality (Liden and Graen, 1980; Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995). According to Liden and Graen (1980), a supervisor's differing low-quality or high-quality relationships with their followers motivates followers to engage in social comparisons with each other to identify their precise relative standing with their supervisor. Despite this early focus on the social comparison component of LMX, most of the subsequent LMX research, including studies exploring the outcomes of LMX, have tended to focus on individual perceptions of LMX quality. As Henderson *et al.* (2008) state, "although individual-level perceptions of LMX quality are reflective of interpersonal social exchange behaviors and motives in the leader-member dyad, they do not capture how the social context arising through within-group LMX differentiation, and the social comparisons occurring in this context, further influence employee attitudes, and behaviors" (p. 1208).

Thus, to capture this within-group LMX differentiation, Henderson *et al.* (2008) measured relative LMX (RLMX), or the degree of difference between one's own LMX and that of their coworkers, and reported that RLMX was positively related to psychological contract fulfillment and subsequent OCBs, after controlling for the effects of individual-level LMX. Similarly, Vidyarthi *et al.* (2010) measured LMX social comparison (LMXSC), or the comparison between

one's own LMX and those of their coworkers, and reported that LMXSC explained around 9% of the additional variance in job performance and OCBs than the variance explained by LMX and other control variables[1]. Validating these findings, more recent research has also found a significant and positive effect of LMXSC on employee performance (Xiao *et al.*, 2015), and OCB (Arain *et al.*, 2017) (see also, Xiong *et al.,* 2019).

2.3 Leader-member exchange social comparison and supervisor-based self esteem

Extant LMX research has tended focus on social exchange theory (Blau, 1964), which suggests that employee perceptions of LMX quality create a feeling of reciprocal obligation to balance the positive exchange with their leaders through increased positive work behaviors (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). However, balancing positive social exchange with the leader is not the only motivational mechanism through which LMX/LMXSC quality may translate into positive employee behaviors, rather other potential explanatory mechanisms, such as self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970), may also provide useful insight (Martin *et al.*, 2018). Thus, in extending this line of inquiry further, we draw attention to employees' supervisor-based self esteem (SBSE), as an alternative and under-explored explanation for the relationship between LMXSC and employees' promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors.

Self-esteem refers to an individual's self-evaluation of his/her worth and competence (Rosenberg, 1965). Prior research suggests that self-esteem is a hierarchical and multifaceted phenomenon that can be built around any social, physical, and moral self, both at the individual

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[1] Whereas LMXSC and RLMX are both social comparison-based measures of within-group LMX differentiation, the former is a direct and subjective measure (i.e., one's self-evaluation of one's LMX as better than those of others within one's team), while the latter is an indirect and objective measure (i.e., one's LMX minus team mean LMX). Considering that LMXSC is a direct measure of one's subjective judgements of LMX differentiation Vidyarthi *et al.,* (2010), it is likely to be a better predictor of individual level outcomes than RLMX (Martin *et al.,* 2018). As the outcomes of our study, that is, SBSE and employee promotive and prohibitive voice, are measured at the individual level, we chose to use LMXSC to capture the effect of LMX differentiation on these outcomes.

and group levels (Pierce *et al.*, 1989; Bowling *et al.*, 2010). Pierce *et al.* (1989) introduced the construct of organization-based self-esteem to refer to, "the degree to which an individual believes him/herself to be capable, significant, and worthy as an organizational member" (p. 25). Bowling *et al.* (2010) found that this specific form of self-esteem explained greater variance in work attitudes and behaviors, including performance than the general form of self-esteem.

While it is useful within an organizational context, the focus of organization-based self-esteem is still broad because it covers all aspects of one's organizational work-life (Landry and Vandenberghe, 2009). Over time, therefore, organizational research has begun to identify more specific forms or sources of self-esteem. Given a supervisor's status and power within work units, much attention has been paid to employees' potential to make evaluations of their self-worth based on this key agent and relationship (Lord and Brown, 2001). Thus, in parallel to notions of organization-based self-esteem, Landry and Vandenberghe (2009) drew upon the self-consistency theory and conceptualized SBSE as employees' self-evaluations of their worthiness resulting from the relationship with their supervisor.

According to self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970), individuals derive their self-worth from their daily experiences of social interactions with significant others at work. The key agent or significant other in most organizations is the immediate supervisor, given the supervisor's direct and indirect influence over employees through the giving and withholding of resources, rewards, and opportunities (Sguera *et al.*, 2017). Thus, given the salience of this relationship, when an employee has a supervisor who encourages, supports, and treats them well, they tend to evaluate themselves as worthy of him/her. The limited extent of SBSE-focused research has tended to support these proposals. For example, Sguera *et al.* (2017) reported a significant and positive relationship between employees' perceptions of supervisory support and their SBSE. Arain *et al.*

(2017) suggested that employee perceptions of LMX quality have a positive and significant association with their leader-based self-esteem. In line with the self-consistency theory, therefore, we posit that employees' perceptions of high LMXSC – where they feel that they have a better relationship with their supervisor than most others in their workgroup (Vidyarthi *et al.*, 2010) – will result in them holding more positive SBSE. The following hypothesis is thus proposed:

H1: Employee perceptions of leader-member social exchange are positively related to their supervisor-based self steem.

2.4 Supervisor-based self esteem and employee promotive and prohibitive voice

Self-consistency theory also suggests that once positive self-esteem becomes a part of an employee's self-concept, the employee tends to "engage in and find satisfying those behavioral roles which maximize their sense of cognitive balance or consistency" (Korman, 1970; p. 32). The self-esteem literature suggests that employees with positive self-esteem, both organization-based (Pierce *et al.*, 1989) and supervisor-based (Sguera *et al.*, 2017), tend to engage in positive work behaviors that help them remain consistent with their positive self-esteem (Pierce and Gardner, 2004). Thus, Bowling *et al.* (2010) indicated that organization-based self-esteem had a positive association with a variety of employee work attitudes and behaviors. Although based on a more limited body of research, SBSE has also been reported to have a positive association with positive employees' work attitudes and behaviors such as OCBs (Sguera *et al.*, 2017) and in-role performance (Arain *et al.*, 2017), and a negative association with negative behaviors such as counterproductive work behaviors (Sguera *et al.*, 2017).

Building on self-consistency theory, and these empirical findings, we suggest that employees' SBSE will be positively related to their promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors, and will explain the relationship between their perceptions of LMXSC and their promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors. In short, we argue that the self-belief and self-worth stemming from the relative quality of their supervisory relationship (Landry and Vandenberghe, 2009) encourages employees to voice their work-related ideas and suggestions (promotive voice) and concerns and fears (prohibitive voice) to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of their team and organization. We propose the following hypothesis:

H2: Employee's SBSE is positively related to their promotive and prohibitive voice and mediates the positive relationship between LMXSC and their promotive (H2a) and prohibitive voice (H2b).

2.5 Moderating role of migrant versus local employee status

Morrison's (2014) review of the literature on voice and silence identified a number of potential inhibitors of employee constructive voice, including a climate of fear, perceived job futility, career risks, and high power distance. Many of these voice inhibitors are potentially pertinent to the working experiences of migrant workers in Saudi organizations. For example, migrant workers are not eligible for Saudi nationality, they cannot have their own businesses, and they cannot change their jobs without the consent of their Saudi employers or sponsors (Arain *et al.*, 2020). These contextual factors potentially make migrant workers powerless against the frequently reported abuse by their employers, for which limited or no protection is provided by the country's legal system. An ongoing strict compliance with the *Saudization* programs has also created a climate of

job insecurity and uncertainty for many migrant workers, with many reporting little hope of finding (alternative) work in other Saudi organizations (Mellahi, 2007).

Given that prior research suggests that employees' feelings of powerlessness and job insecurity may inhibit their constructive voice, particularly prohibitive voice (Chamberlin *et al.*, 2017), we expect that despite perceiving high LMXSC and the resultant high SBSE that may stem from this positive interpersonal relationship, migrant workers in the KSA may be less motivated to exhibit constructive voice than their Saudi counterparts. After all, these wider labor market conditions, and the fraught relationship with their Saudi employers, may make voice a rather risky prosocial activity (Mellahi, 2007). Indeed, prior empirical studies that compare employee voice among samples of locals and migrants have consistently highlighted the fact that migrant employees are less likely to engage in constructive voice than are local employees (Loi *et al.*, 2014). Thus, considering that migrant workers in the KSA have lesser job security, benefits, and career progression opportunities than their local counterparts, we expect that the mediation effect of SBSE in the relationship between LMXSC and promotive and prohibitive voice will be stronger for local Saudis than for migrants. We propose the following hypotheses:

H3: Employees' SBSE is positively related to their promotive and prohibitive voice and mediates the positive relationship between LMXSC and their promotive (H3a) and prohibitive (H3b) voice, but this is only significant for local Saudi nationals.

Insert Figure 1 Here

3. Research design and methods

Using convenience sampling and a supervisor-employee dyadic design, business undergraduate students personally distributed 630 supervisor-supervisee questionnaires to several public and private organizations operating in the telecommunication, oil and gas, manufacturing, tourism, and hospitality sectors in the KSA. As we collected data from both Saudis and migrants, the questionnaires were produced in both English and Arabic. Arabic translation of our chosen measures – that were all originally validated in English – was carried out using both forward and backward translation. The supervisors' questionnaire comprised measures of their employees' promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors. The employees' questionnaire consisted of measures of LMXSC and SBSE. Both questionnaires were coded so that they could be "matched" later. We propose that collecting data from both the supervisor and employee enabled the most valid and reliable assessment of each variable, while also reducing the threat of common method variance and self-report bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012)

All particiapnts were working in professional white collar jobs, i.e., having supervisory and managerial level positions in their respective organizations. We first contacted and recruited employees who completed the employee's questionnaire and named their supervisors in their responses. We then approached the named supervisors and asked them to complete a survey that rated their (named) employees' promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors. Once both questionnaires were completed, we used the codes to pair them. Each supervisor rated only one employee's promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors. We used this strategy (1) to avoid placing an undue burden on supervisors who were completing questionnaires for multiple employees, which may have affected the quality of their response, and (2) to rule out the possibility of within-group differences in voice rating for multiple employees rated by the same supervisor. All the

participants provided the requested data voluntarily, and the research team assured them of the confidentiality of their responses.

After discarding 29 cases with mismatched dyads and missing values, we had collected 341 matched dyads, which presented a response rate of approximately 59%. The names of the respondents were erased during the data entry process to ensure anonymity. Among the participating supervisors, 69% were local Saudis and 31% were migrants. Among the local Saudi supervisors, 76% were male, their average age was 37.51 years, and the average supervisor-employee relationship tenure was 3.13 years. Among the migrant supervisors, most respondents were from Egypt (19%), the Philippines (14%), Pakistan (12%), India (11%), Lebanon (10%), and Yemen (10%). Of these, 80% were male, their average age was 37.22 years, and the average supervisor-employee relationship tenure was 3.03 years. Among the employees who participated, 54% were local Saudis and 46% were migrants. Among the local Saudi respondents, 65.6% were male, the average age was 31 years, and the average experience was 4.57 years. The migrant workers were from Yemen (20%), the Philippines (18%), Egypt (15%), Pakistan (13%), and India (12%). Of these, 77% were male, the average age was 33 years, and the average experience was 4.57 years. Please see Table 1 for a summary of the sample demographic breakdown.

Insert Table 1 Here

3.1 Measures

Unless stated otherwise, all questions were measured on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great extent).

LMXSC was measured using the 6-item scale developed by Vidyarthi *et al.* (2010). This scale measures employees' subjective judgment of the social comparisons of their LMX quality with those of other members of their group/team. The alpha reliability value reported for this scale was .94.

SBSE was measured using the 8-item scale developed by Landry and Vandenberghe (2009) and then further validated in a recent study by Sguera *et al.* (2017). The alpha reliability value reported for this scale in this study was .95.

Promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors were measured using the 5-item scales for each developed by Liang *et al.* (2012). The alpha reliability value reported for both voice behaviors was .94.

Supervisor age, gender, nationality (Saudi or migrant), and the relationship tenure with the reported employee were collected as potential *control variables*. Supervisee gender, age, nationality, and work experience were also collected as potential control variables because of their likely effect on employees' voice (Liang *et al.*, 2012; Morrison, 2014). Employee promotion-prevention regulatory focus – the two strategic orientations that regulate an employee's cognition and behavior toward the achievement of positive outcomes and the avoidance of negative outcomes, respectively (Higgins, 1998), were reported as significant dispositional predictors of promotive and prohibitive voice (Lin and Johnson, 2015). Therefore, we measured employee promotion and prevention focus using 4- and 3-item scales, respectively. These scales were developed by Lockwood *et al.* (2002). We also controlled for their effects on employees' promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors.

4. Results

4.1 Confirmatory factor analysis

Before testing our main hypotheses, we carried out CFA on the main model variables to confirm their independence by using the structural equation modeling software AMOS version 23. In line with convention, we used a combination of fit indices – Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR), and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) – to assess the adequacy of our model and compared our hypothesized model with a number of reasonable alternative measurement models (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). The CFI and TLI scores above .90 and SRMR and RMSEA scores below .07 were judged as confirming a model with good fit (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

We tested four alternative models. Model 1 is our hypothesized 4-factor model comprising separate scales for LMXSC, SBSE, and promotive and prohibitive voice. Model 2 is a 3-factor model where promotive and prohibitive voice are combined into a single factor. Model 3 is an alternative 3-factor model where LMXSC and SBSE are combined into a single factor. Model 4 is a 1-factor solution where all items for all scales are loaded onto a single factor. Table 2 confirms that our hypothesized model (Model 1) provides an excellent fit for the data (CFI = .97, TLI = .96, SRMR = .04, and RMSEA =.06) and all other alternative models provide a poor fit for the data. Given these results, and the good Cronbach alpha reliability scores across all our measurement scales, we proceeded with the rest of our analysis.

Insert Table 2 Here

4.2 Descriptive statistics

All subsequent analyses were conducted using SPSS version 25 and the PROCESS macro version 2.16.3 (Hayes, 2018). Table 2 presents the means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of our model variables. As expected, our key independent and dependent variables correlated in the predicted directions. For example, employees' perceptions of LMXSC were positively correlated with their SBSE (r^2=.42, p<.01), and promotive (r^2=.18, p<.01) and prohibitive voice (r^2=.25, p<.01). Employees' SBSE were positively correlated with their promotive (r^2=.32, p<.01) and prohibitive voice (r^2=.18, p<.01). As a result, we continued to test our model.

Table 3 provides a summary of our potential control variables and their associations with our main dependent variables, namely SBSE and promotive and prohibitive voice. It seems, in our sample at least, that only employees' and supervisors' ages and employees' promotion focus are positively correlated with one or more of our dependent variables. Consequently, to test the most parsimonious model, we only controlled for these three variables in the rest of our analysis.

Insert Table 3 Here

4.3 Model testing: Mediation model (H1 and H2)

As predicted, employees' perceptions of LMXSC were positively related to their SBSE (B=.23, t=7.21, p<.001). It appears that as employees' comparative evaluations of their supervisor relationship improved, so did their SBSE. Hypothesis 1 was thus supported. In turn, employees' SBSE was positively related to their promotive voice (B=.37, t=3.71, p<.001) and mediated the relationship between their perceptions of LMXSC and their promotive voice (γ=.08, [.03, .15]). Hypothesis 2a was thus supported. Against expectations, employees' SBSE was not significantly

related to their prohibitive voice (B=.17, t=1.27, *ns*) and consequently did not mediate the relationship between their perceptions of LMXSC and their prohibitive voice (γ=.04, [-.02, .10]). Hypothesis 2b was not supported. (See Table 4)

As employees' comparative evaluations of their relationships with their supervisors improved, so did their willingness to engage in constructive feedback and suggestions to enhance organizational effectiveness (promotive voice) and, at least in part, this was explained by a greater SBSE. Conversely, while these positive LMXSC perceptions also had a similar – if not stronger – relationship with employees' engagement in more critical feedback to the organization on their current failings and problems (prohibitive voice), this was not explained by their SBSE. Whereas recent research has suggested that employee core self-evaluation (i.e., SBSE) would be less strongly related to employees' prohibitive voice behavior than their promotive voice behavior, it still suggested a significant relationship (e.g., Chamberlin *et al.,* 2017). Our findings suggest more significant differential effects of core self-evaluations such as SBSE on employees' promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors.

Insert Table 4 Here

4.4 Model testing: Moderated-mediation model (H3)

To test Hypothesis 3, we ran PROCESS Model 14. As predicted, the relationship between employees' SBSE and their promotive voice behavior was only significant for local Saudi employees (B=-.35, t=-2.12, *p*<.05) (see also Figure 2). In turn, the indirect relationship between employees' perceptions of LMXSC and their promotive voice via their SBSE was only significant for local KSA employees (γ=-.08, [-.18, -.00]) (see Table 5). Hypothesis 3a was thus supported.

Insert Table 5 Here

Insert Figure 2 Here

As predicted, the relationship between employees' SBSE and their prohibitive voice behaviors was also only significant for local KSA employees (B=-.56, t=-2.50, *p*<.05) (see Figure 3). In turn, the indirect relationship between employees' perceptions of LMXSC and their prohibitive voice, via their SBSE, was only significant for local Saudi employees (γ=-.13, [-.25, -.03]) (see Table 6). Hypothesis 3b was also supported.

Insert Table 6 Here

Insert Figure 3 Here

5. Discussion

Our research set out to test hypotheses that were derived from the self-consistency theory (Korman, 1970). We examined whether employees' SBSE mediated a positive relationship between their perceptions of LMXSC and their promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors, and whether these indirect relationships are the same for nationals and migrants working in the KSA. We found strong support for our model. As predicted, employees' perceptions of LMXSC are positively related to their SBSE. In line with the self-consistency theory, it appears that positive relations with the supervisor and, more importantly, the perception that one has of a particularly good relationship with one's supervisor when compared with their colleagues' supervisory relationships, promotes

a self-belief in employees that their supervisor relies on them and that they are worthy of this attention (Landry and Vandenberghe, 2009).

We found that employees' SBSE is positively related to their promotive voice behavior. However, we did not find a similar relationship with employees' prohibitive voice behavior. SBSE is an important predictor of employees' voice behavior associated with the communication of new and creative ideas to improve individual, team, and organizational performance, but not of voice behavior associated with more critical feedback on negative individual, team, and organizational norms and practices that may threaten the performance and survival of the firm. These differential effects of SBSE on promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors support the recent propositions of Chamberlin *et al.,* (2017), who suggested that employee core self-evaluation would be a more important predictor of promotive rather than prohibitive voice. It seems that core self-evaluations such as SBSE are more promotion-oriented and are thus more likely to strongly influence more promotion-oriented behaviors such as promotive voice. Our findings support the ongoing calls for additional research to explore the differential antecedents of promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors.

Finally, as predicted, we found that the indirect relationship between employees LMXSC – SBSE – and both promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors were only significant for the local Saudis in our sample. While migrant worker perceptions of LMXSC did have a positive effect on their SBSE, it did not translate into higher promotive or prohibitive voice behaviors. It appears that the wider work and labor market context facing migrant workers in the KSA may be inhibiting their desire and/or opportunities to raise their voice in whatever form, supporting the findings of earlier studies on these effects (e.g., Loi *et al.*, 2014). We argued that the Saudi context, where the work experiences and expectations of migrant workers may be negatively affected by the ongoing

national policy to promote more Saudis to key jobs and professions (Mellahi, 2007), is likely to inhibit their willingness to engage in voice behaviors irrespective of their perceptions of the comparative quality of their relationships with their supervisors. When it comes to promoting migrant worker voice, it seems that the quality of interpersonal relationships that they have with their supervisors cannot overcome a work climate that is insecure, uncertain, and (potentially) discriminatory.

5.1 Theoretical and empirical contributions

This study makes a number of important theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature on LMXSC and constructive voice. We provide, to the best of our knowledge, the first empirical test of the effects of LMXSC on both promotive and prohibitive forms of constructive voice behaviors, thus extending LMX-constructive voice research. Drawing on early definitions and conceptualizations of LMX, we add to the growing body of work that highlights the importance of comparative LMX and its potential predictive influence, over and above individual perceptions of LMX, on important employee attitudes and behaviors (Henderson *et al.*, 2008). It seems that within-group differences in LMX ratings – in addition to actual LMX ratings – constitute a key antecedent of employees' voice, and future research needs to keep recognizing this (Vidyarthi *et al.*, 2010).

Second, we contribute to the growing voice literature that demands research on the differential effects of supervisor or leader behavior on promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors (Chamberlin *et al.*, 2017). In line with Chamberlin *et al.,* (2017), we found that LMXSC was positively related to both employees' promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors. However, counter to Chamberlin *et al.,* (2017), it appears that the employees' LMXSC in our study is more

strongly related to their prohibitive rather than promotive voice. It appears, therefore, that prohibitive voice – in this context at least – is viewed as a similarly positively orientated behavior as a promotive voice (perhaps even more so) and is thus as likely to be predicted by positive leadership behaviors such as LMXSC.

Finally, we extend the research on the potential mediators and moderators of the LMXSC and constructive voice relationship. As expected, employees' SBSE mediated the relationship between employees' LMXSC and both their promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors – but only for local Saudis. Thus, to the best of our knowledge, we provide the first application of and support for a new self-consistency theory lens for understanding the relationships between employees' LMXSC and their voice behaviors. Given the specific context of our findings – that is, the rather complex KSA labor market – we call for more research in different national and industry contexts to explore the role of employees' SBSE in the relationships between their LMXSC and voice, and thus test the salience of the self-consistency theory as an alternative theoretical lens to understand the implications of positive supervisor-employee interpersonal relationships.

5.2 Limitations and future research

Our findings must be interpreted in light of some methodological limitations. First, our model suggests causal relationships between our core variables that cannot be tested accurately with our cross sectional survey design. As such, one may also imagine that an individual with a greater SBSE may subsequently rate their managers' LMXSC more highly. Moreover, one could imagine that an employee who is given opportunities to provide voice may rate his/her relationship with his/her line manager more positively. In short, our cross-sectional design does not allow us to reject these alternative models. Although our hypothesized model aligns with our theoretical framework,

and past LMX and LMXSC research (Martin *et al.*, 2018), we call for future longitudinal, diary-based, and/or experimental research that may be better able to test these causal relationships accurately.

Second, our study was carried out in a very specific KSA context. This was deliberate and was done so in order to test specific hypotheses pertaining to the importance of LMXSC for both migrant and local employees in the KSA. However, the KSA is a particular context and their national policies of Saudization may be fairly unique globally. Thus, our study may not be easily generalizable to other national contexts where large migrant communities work alongside nationals. The relative importance of employees' perceptions of LMXSC and SBSE for their voice behaviors in these alternative contexts is thus still unknown. We call for more research, therefore, that explores the (potential) differential effects of employees' LMXSC and SBSE on migrant and local employees' voice behaviors in different national and cultural contexts.

5.3 Practical implications

Despite these methodological limitations, our research delivers important practical benefits for organizations that employ large numbers of migrant workers alongside a national workforce. It appears from our research that while positive comparative supervisor relationships are important for migrant worker SBSE, it does not translate into their voice behaviors. This is a significant HR problem, as global competitiveness, strategic agility and organizational learning are based on organizations receiving feedback from all their employees and not just nationals (Christofi *et al*., 2021; Malik *et al*., 2017; Papa *et al.*, 2018a; Tian *et al*., 2021; Xing et al., 2020; Tian *et al.*, 2021). Migrant workers, therefore, need to feel secure in their jobs and valued by their organizations and

not just by their line managers if they are to engage in the essential voice behaviors that organizations desire (Morrison, 2014; Varma *et al*., 1999).

For nationals in the KSA, however, LMXSC is a potentially important predictor of their voice behaviors. For organizations, therefore, it is important that their managers understand the salience of this key dyadic relationship and that employees feel that they have a good relationship with their line manager when compared to their peers. Managers may be made aware of this through any number of organizational communication channels such as company handbooks, memos, and even formal training and leadership development programs. One way organizations can ensure effective communication among managers and employees is to adopt and diffuse communication technologies such as social media that ease the barriers of communication and reduce the risk of knowledge hiding at different top-down and bottom-up levels (Biswas *et al.*, 2013; Ma *et al.*, 2020). They also need to monitor the quality of this essential relationship through their ongoing communications, annual performance reviews, and other mechanisms such as annual staff surveys (Graen and Uhl-Bien, 1995).

6. Conclusion

Our study set out to examine the role of employees' SBSE in the relationship between their LMXSC and both promotive and prohibitive voice behaviors, and whether (or not) these relationships were different for migrants and locals working in organizations in the KSA. We found support for our model and for self-consistency theory as a new and important theoretical lens for examining the implications of employees' LMXSC. We recognize some limitations of our research, although we believe there are important practical insights from our findings that are potentially useful for organizations that recruit large numbers of migrant workers to work

alongside home country nationals. Of course, we call on LMX scholars to carry out new research in new contexts that can test and extend these findings further.

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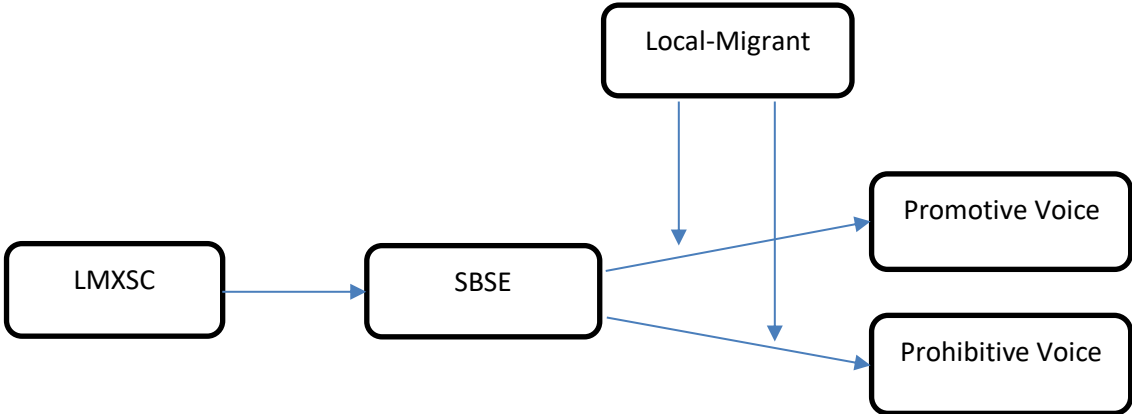
Figure 1. Hypothesized Model

Figure 2. Plot of SBSE x Local-Migrant Interaction Predicting Promotive Voice
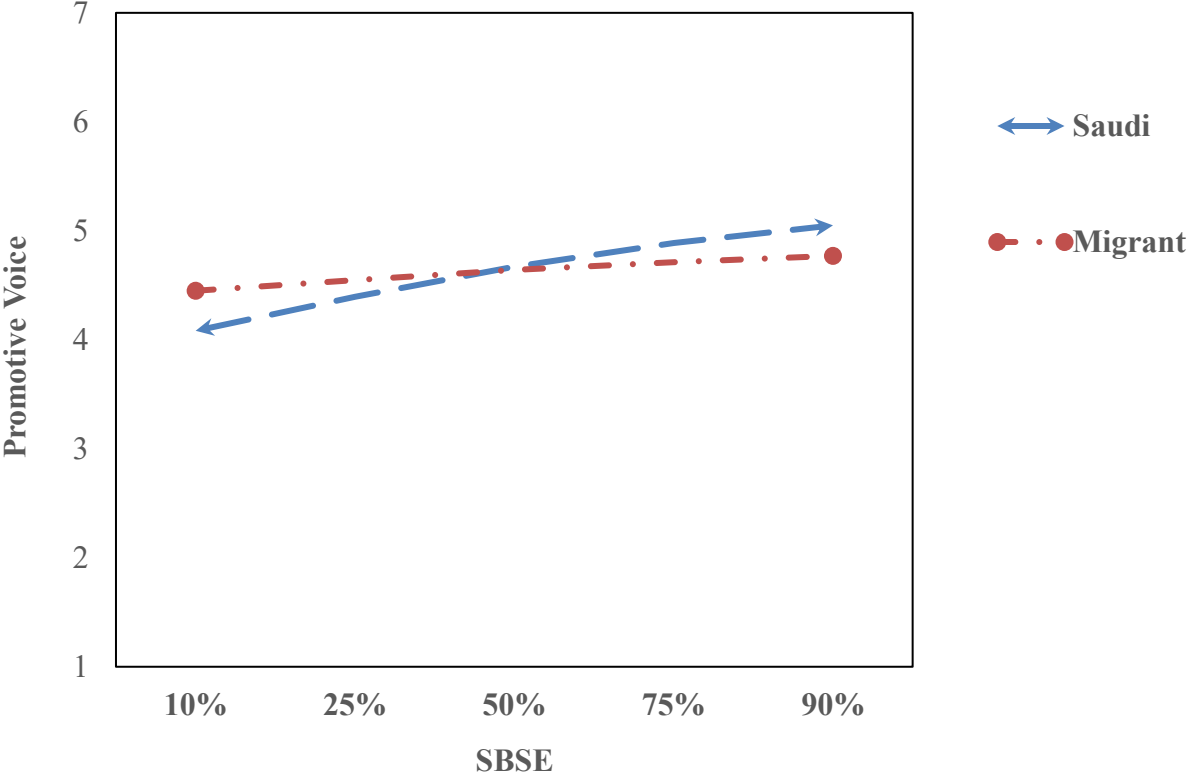
Figure 3. Plot of SBSE x Local-Migrant Interaction Predicting Prohibitive Voice
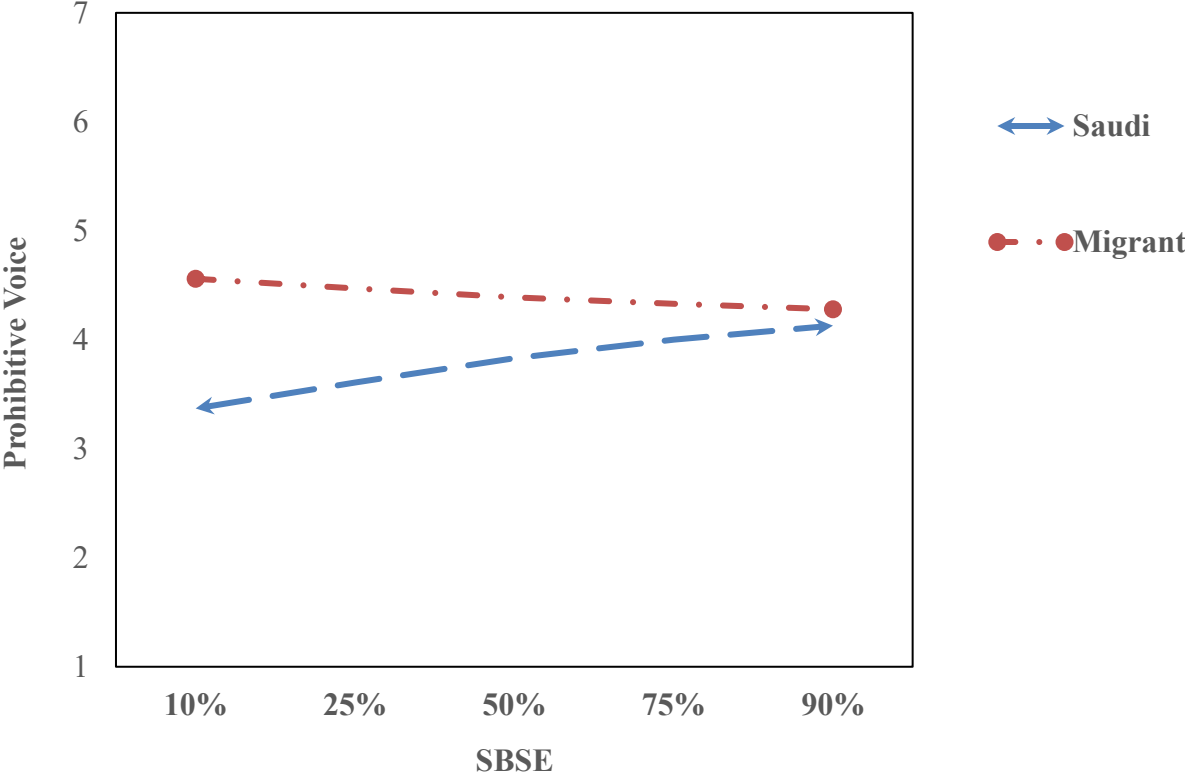
Table 1. Sample Demographics

	Local supervisor	**Migrant supervisor**	**Local employee**	**Migrant employee**
Sample	69%	31%	54%	46%
Male	76%	80%	65.6%	77%
Female	24%	20%	34.4%	23%
Average age	37.51 years	37.22 years	31 years	33 years
Average supervisory tenure	3.13 years	3.03 years	4.57 years	4.57%
Saudis	100%	NA	100%	NA
Egyption	NA	19%	NA	15%
Philippino	NA	14%	NA	18%
Pakistani	NA	12%	NA	13%
Indian	NA	11%	NA	12%
Yemeni	NA	10%	NA	20%
Lebanese	NA	10%	NA	NA

Note. N = 341.

Table 2. CFA Model Fit Indices

Measurement Model Comparison		SRMR	CFI	TLI	RMSEA
Model 1	4-factor model: LMXSC, SBSE, promotive voice, prohibitive voice	.04	.97	.96	.06
Model 2	3-factor model: promotive voice and prohibitive voice merged.	.12	.81	.78	.13
Model 3	3-factor model: LMXSC and SBSE merged.	.13	.84	.82	.12
Model 4	1-factor model: all measures loaded on a single latent factor.	.22	.50	.45	.21

Note. N = 341; SRMR = Standardized Root Mean Square Residual; CFI = Comparative Fit Index; TLI = Tucker Lewis Index; RMSEA = Root-Mean Square Error Approximation; LMXSC = Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison; SBSE = Supervisor-based Self-Esteem.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Inter-Correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Employee Gender	-	-						
2. Employee Age	31.86	8.13	-.11*					
3. Employee Tenure	4.99	5.41	-.20**	.74**				
4. Supervisor Gender	-	-	.55**	-.02	-.07			
5. Supervisor Age	37.42	9.66	-.13*	.41**	.32**	-.15**		
6. Relation Tenure	3.10	2.92	-.17**	.53**	.61**	-.06	.51**	
7. Sup. Local-Migrant	-	-	-.06	-.03	-.03	-.05	-.01	-.02
8. Prevention Focus	3.92	1.49	-.04	-.05	-.03	-.06	.04	.01
9. Promotion Focus	5.28	.71	-.01	.09	.03	.01	.13*	-.01
10. Emp. Local-Migrant	-	-	-.18**	.12*	.08	-.02	.06	.12*
11. SBSE	4.21	.75	-.03	.07	.06	-.03	.02	-.01
12. LMXSC	3.58	1.08	-.06	.00	.00	.03	.04	.05
13. Promotive Voice	4.62	1.18	-.03	.09	.03	.02	.10*	.02
14. Prohibitive Voice	4.08	1.58	-.09	.12*	.08	-.02	.03	.07

Notes. N = 341; *p<.05, **p<.01; SBSE = Supervisor-based Self Esteem; LMXSC = Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison; Sup. = Supervisor; Emp. = Employee

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics and Intercorrelations (Continued)

Variables	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
7. Sup. Local-Migrant							
8. Prevention Focus	-.01						
9. Promotion Focus	.07	.10					
10. Emp. Local-Migrant	.37**	-.01	-.03				
11. SBSE	-.04	-.05	.48**	-.05			
12. LMXSC	.04	.14**	.23**	.04	.42**		
13. Promotive Voice	.03	.08	.08	.01	.32**	.18**	
14. Prohibitive Voice	.08	.07	.07	.21**	.18**	.25**	.39**

Notes. $N = 341$; *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$; SBSE = Supervisor-based Self Esteem; LMXSC = Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison; Sup. = Supervisor; Emp. = Employee

Table 4. Summary Regression Table of Mediation Model (H1 and H2)

Model 1	Supervisor-based Self Esteem (SBSE) (M)		
IVs	B	SE	t
Constant	1.27	.29	4.30***
Employee Age	.01	.00	1.34
Supervisor Age	-.01	.00	-1.41
Promotion Focus	.43	.05	8.82***
Local-Migrant	-.10	.07	-1.42
LMXSC (X)	.23	.03	7.21***

Model 2	Promotive Voice (Y)			Prohibitive Voice (Y)		
IVs	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Constant	1.38	.55	2.50*	.48	.74	.65
Employee Age	.00	.01	.52	.02	.01	1.81
Supervisor Age	.01	.01	1.31	-.01	.01	-.76
Promotion Focus	.17	.10	1.77	.10	.13	.82
Local-Migrant	.01	.12	.11	.63	.16	3.84***
LMXSC (X)	.08	.06	1.26	.29	.08	3.44***
SBSE (M)	.37	.10	3.71***	.17	.13	1.27
Indirect Effects	Effect(γ)	BootSE	[LLCI, ULCI]	Effect(γ)	BootSE	[LLCI, ULCI]
SBSE	.08	.03	[.03, .15]	.04	.03	[-.02, .10]

Notes. N = 341; *$p<.05$, **$p<.01$, ***$p<.001$; PROCESS Model 4; B = Unstandardized Coefficients; LMXSC = Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison

Table 5. Summary Regression Table of Moderated-Mediation Model (H3)

Model 1	Supervisor-based Self Esteem (SBSE) (M)		
IV	B	SE	t
Constant	-3.06	.28	-10.75***
Employee Age	.01	.00	1.19
Supervisor Age	-.01	.00	-1.42
Promotion Focus	.43	.05	8.85***
LMXSC **(X)**	.23	.03	7.14***

Model 2	Promotive Voice (Y)			Prohibitive Voice (Y)		
IV	B	SE	t	B	SE	t
Constant	3.07	.60	5.12***	2.30	.80	2.87**
Employee Age	.00	.01	.38	.02	.01	1.65
Supervisor Age	.01	.01	1.12	-.01	.01	-.99
Promotion Focus	.17	.10	1.78	.11	.13	.82
LMXSC **(X)**	.07	.06	1.08	.27	.08	3.24**
SBSE **(M)**	.36	.10	3.63***	.15	.13	1.17
Local-Migrant **(V)**	.02	.12	.12	.63	.16	3.89***
SBSE x Local-Migrant	-.35	.17	-2.12*	-.56	.22	-2.50*

Index of Mod-Med	Effect(γ)	BootSE	[LLCI, ULCI]	Effect(γ)	BootSE	[LLCI, ULCI]
SBSE	-.08	.04	[-.18, -.00]	-.13	.05	[-.25, -.03]

Notes. N = 341; *p<.05, **p<.01, ***p<.001; PROCESS Model 14; B = Unstandardized Coefficients; LMXSC = Leader-Member Exchange Social Comparison;

Table 6. Conditional Indirect Effects of LMXSC on Promotive and Prohibitive Voice for Local and Migrant Employees

Promotive Voice

Mediator	Employee	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
SBSE	Local	.12	.04	.06	.20
SBSE	Migrant	.04	.03	-.02	.11

Prohibitive Voice

Mediator	Employee	Indirect Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
SBSE	Local	.09	.04	.03	.18
SBSE	Migrant	-.03	.04	-.13	.05

Notes. SBSE = Supervisor-based Self-Esteem