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Servant Leadership and Employee Voice Behavior in Indian Banking: The Mediating Roles of Affective Commitment and Knowledge-Sharing Behavior

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Abstract

Indian banking institutions increasingly expect employees to be supportive and advisory regarding organizational operations. A central issue, however, is whether these banks have built a culture capable of embracing individuals with strong service orientations. Such readiness must involve leadership, employee dedication, and a welcoming, people-friendly climate. The present research introduces a new perspective by integrating Servant Leadership (SL), Affective Commitment (AC), and Knowledge Sharing Behavior (KSB) as mechanisms to strengthen Voice Behavior (VB). The main purpose was to explore the extent to which servant leadership shapes employees' voice behavior. Additionally, the study assessed how affective commitment and knowledge-sharing behavior mediate the influence of servant leadership on voice behavior. Data were gathered from banking personnel via a structured survey and email distribution. Banks in the southern region of India were selected using simple random sampling. Results demonstrated that servant leadership has a positive effect on voice behavior. Moreover, AC and KSB were found to partially mediate the SL–VB association. Managerial implications, limitations, and suggestions for subsequent research were also addressed.

Keywords: Servant Leadership, Affective Commitment, Knowledge Sharing Behavior, Voice Behavior, Banking Organization

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Introduction

Encouraging employees to exhibit Voice Behavior (VB) is essential for any employer. VB contains two components: promotive and prohibitive. Promotive voice reflects actions where individuals articulate suggestions or views that can improve organizational functioning, whereas prohibitive voice refers to pointing out constraints or potential risks that may threaten the organization [1]. Despite their differences, both forms enhance employee participation in decision-making, contribute to better practices, stimulate innovation, improve procedures, address concerns, and help avert potential crises. Together, they are considered valuable by both management and staff for organizational performance [2]. Leadership that is relational and centered on people is often recommended to encourage individuals to share viewpoints with their supervisors [3]. Servant Leadership (SL) represents a well-known employee-focused leadership style rooted in developing and nurturing people through service. Because servant leaders act altruistically, followers tend to emulate such behaviors, which can elevate internal motivation and thereby heighten affective commitment to work [4]. Affective Commitment (AC) refers to employees' physical, emotional, and cognitive investment in their roles [5], cultivating an emotional bond with the organization and prompting workers to regard organizational challenges as their own [6]. This involvement helps employees observe matters more closely and encourages them to voice constructive and critical viewpoints [7].

Furthermore, SL fosters engagement and intrinsic motivation, contributing to AC [8]. In addition, Knowledge Sharing Behavior (KSB) must be strengthened to support VB, as VB is more sustainable in environments where KSB thrives. KSB has gained relevance because it facilitates an unhindered movement of knowledge among personnel [9]. However, some individuals hesitate to share information, viewing it as irrelevant, optional, or useless for themselves or others. Management must reduce such tendencies and create conditions that inspire KSB. For this purpose, employers need to identify the determinants encouraging knowledge sharing [10]. Often, eagerness to share knowledge correlates with employees' commitment to an organization's values [11]. Leadership is also recognized as a major element influencing KSB [12]. Greenleaf (1977) maintained that serving others is the core motivator capable of inspiring employees. Such leadership fosters a supportive and communal atmosphere, which in turn encourages behaviors aligned with KSB [13].

Based on the above overview, promoting any desired behavior requires a joint presence of leadership, commitment, and an environment that is open and collaborative. The uniqueness of this study lies in combining all these variables simultaneously, unlike prior research that has examined them separately. The investigation focused on the links between SL and VB through AC and KSB within Indian banking organizations.

Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Prior research has indicated that leadership style is a major determinant in encouraging VB within organizations [14]. In particular, leadership approaches that prioritize people are considered helpful in stimulating employees' VB [15]. Servant Leadership (SL), a follower-focused model, emphasizes benefiting employees rather than advancing the leader's own interests. Such altruistic conduct increases employees' involvement and connection with their workplace [16]. Consequently, scholars have argued that SL holds strong potential for shaping employee behaviors inside organizations [17]. When workers perceive genuine support and consideration from servant leaders, they become more engaged and contribute more effectively to organizational well-being [18]. Based on this logic, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: Servant Leadership has a positive and significant influence on Voice Behavior.

Affective Commitment (AC) represents a component of organizational commitment, describing the additional effort employees invest in helping the organization grow. AC develops when employees feel valued and meaningful within the workplace. Such feelings emerge when individuals sense that their presence and contributions are important to the organization [19]. SL is capable of generating this perception by providing opportunities for participation, acknowledging employees' perspectives, and considering their input in decisions [20]. This dynamic strengthens employees' belief that the organization appreciates them, leading to greater commitment. SL also provides consistent physical and psychological support, and employees tend to fully commit when such support is available [19]. Thus, SL promotes the conditions necessary to build AC. Highly committed employees often demonstrate stronger performance and competence [21]. Their commitment also motivates them to voice their ideas and concerns, thereby increasing VB. As noted by Chen *et al.* [21], SL enhances AC, which deepens employees' concern for the organization. Eventually, these employees begin discussing both favorable and unfavorable organizational matters.

H2: Servant Leadership has a positive and significant influence on Affective Commitment.

H3: Affective Commitment has a positive and significant influence on Voice Behavior.

H4: Affective Commitment mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Voice Behavior.

Knowledge Sharing Behavior (KSB) refers to employees' readiness to exchange valuable information with colleagues. This voluntary action is shaped by an organization's open and cooperative climate [9]. Literature has suggested that such a climate can be cultivated by implementing SL within the workplace. Therefore, to strengthen KSB, organizations may need to adopt servant leadership practices. As VB fundamentally involves employees expressing ideas openly [14], KSB becomes a crucial foundation: employees with strong KSB tend to express a wider range of positive and negative opinions, while those lacking KSB share far fewer views [22].This makes it evident that fostering KSB is essential for improving VB. Additionally, SL is seen as an important trigger for KSB, enabling leadership to encourage employees' VB [23]. Hence, SL creates supportive surroundings where KSB grows and, through it, VB is strengthened.

H5: Servant Leadership positively and significantly influences Knowledge Sharing Behavior.

H6: Knowledge Sharing Behavior positively and significantly influences Voice Behavior.

H7: Knowledge Sharing Behavior mediates the relationship between Servant Leadership and Voice Behavior.

According to Social Exchange Theory (SET), employees' Affective Commitment (AC) emerges partly in response to how leaders treat them [24]. SL is particularly powerful in fostering AC because it helps build a caring and relational culture within organizations. Past studies have described how strong emotional bonds are cultivated by servant leaders, thereby reinforcing AC [25]. Irfan and Rjoub [26] noted that SL helps reduce negative perceptions about the organization, a sign of increased AC. This environment also supports open dialogue between employees and leaders, enabling both groups to express their opinions freely [27]. Such interpersonal exchanges form the groundwork for encouraging VB in organizations [23].

Thus, SL is believed to strongly affect employees' VB, primarily through elevating AC and KSB.

H8: Affective Commitment positively and significantly influences Knowledge Sharing Behavior.

H9: Affective Commitment and Knowledge Sharing Behavior mediate the relationship between Servant Leadership and Voice Behavior.

Conceptual Model

Drawing from the earlier arguments, a conceptual framework was devised. This framework captures the central premise of the study by mapping how Servant Leadership (SL), Affective Commitment (AC), and Knowledge Sharing Behavior (KSB) collectively relate to the development of Voice Behavior (VB). The model presents these variables as interacting elements that jointly contribute to VB. The proposed framework is illustrated in **Figure 1**.

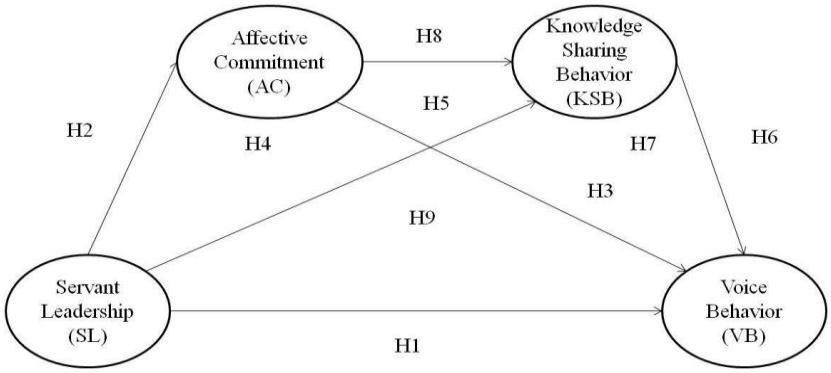

Figure 1. Hypothesized Model

Research Methodology

The research targeted mid-level banking personnel (office staff) from public and private banks situated in southern India, specifically in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka. Only employees stationed in major branch offices within tier-1 cities were included. The sampling frame comprised 3254 banks, and staff from these institutions formed the study population. A simple random sampling approach was used, resulting in the selection of 1235 banks (Approx 35%) across both sectors, calculated using a 50% population proportion, 95% confidence interval, and a 5% margin of error. Of the 1235 institutions contacted by email describing the purpose and procedure of the study, roughly 124 (10%) replied. Out of these, 107 (86%) approved the request to share employee details. This process yielded information for 535 staff members. A structured questionnaire was emailed to all 535, and 327 (62%) completed it. During data screening, 22 responses were excluded [28], producing a final dataset of 305 (93%) valid cases. The sample size was consistent with the guidelines suggested by Schmidt *et al.* [29]. Data collection was conducted over approximately 60 days, between February 2023 and March 2023.

The study employed four variables: SL, AC, KSB, and VB. A five-point Likert scale (1 = “Strongly Disagree,” 5 = “Strongly Agree”) was applied for all items.

SL was measured using Ehrhart’s [20] 14-item instrument, though only 12 items were retained because 2 were unsuitable for the current context. AC was assessed using the scale by Allen and Meyer [5], originally comprising eight items; 6 of these were used after face validity checks. KSB was evaluated using the four-item scale by De Vries *et al.* [11]. VB was measured with a 10-item tool created by Liang *et al.* [1], and all 10 items were applied.

To analyze the relationships among variables, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was selected. SEM is suited for examining interconnected pathways, including mediation. It consists of two components: (a) the measurement model and (b) the structural model. SMARTPLS (Trial Version) was utilized due to its accessibility and efficiency for SEM-based studies.

Evaluation of Measurement Model

The measurement model was assessed to ensure that each construct met reliability and validity standards in PLS-SEM. The evaluation focused on:

(1) Construct Reliability,

(2) Convergent Validity, and

(3) Discriminant Validity

Table 1. Construct Reliability and Convergent Validity

	CA	CR	AVE
SL	0.927	0.927	0.553

AC	0.885	0.886	0.636
KSB	0.85	0.85	0.689
VB	0.958	0.962	0.726

Note: CA = Cronbach's Alpha; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted

Table 1 outlines the reliability and validity checks for every construct in the study, evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha (CA), Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE).

To begin, confirming construct reliability requires both CA and CR to exceed the 0.70 threshold. In this research, Cronbach's Alpha values ranged from 0.85 to 0.95, indicating strong consistency across all latent variables. Likewise, Composite Reliability values fell between 0.85 and 0.96, surpassing the accepted minimum. As such, reliability criteria were satisfied, with details provided in **Table 1**.

Following this, convergent validity must be demonstrated to verify that each construct adequately reflects the concept it represents. AVE serves as the key indicator for this purpose. According to Fornell and Larcker [30], AVE scores must be above 0.50. In this investigation, all AVE values met this requirement, confirming adequate convergent validity; the corresponding figures also appear in **Table 1**.

Beyond this, the distinctiveness of the constructs was evaluated by testing discriminant validity. This was primarily examined via cross-loadings, where each item should load highest on its own construct compared to the others [31]. The findings show that all indicators loaded strongly onto their respective constructs and displayed clear differences relative to unrelated constructs, establishing discriminant validity. These outcomes are summarised in **Table 2**, which displays the cross-loading values and highlights the strongest loadings.

Table 2. Cross-Loadings

	AC	KSB	SL	VB
AC1	***0.805***	0.715	0.746	0.69
AC2	***0.780***	0.654	0.700	0.673
AC3	***0.785***	0.664	0.703	0.705
AC4	***0.760***	0.676	0.685	0.704
AC5	***0.835***	0.725	0.723	0.704
AC6	***0.818***	0.690	0.695	0.674
KSB1	0.690	***0.812***	0.696	0.684
KSB2	0.708	***0.826***	0.732	0.694
KSB3	0.727	***0.841***	0.743	0.687
KSB4	0.739	***0.841***	0.757	0.719
SL1	0.656	0.689	***0.772***	0.646
SL2	0.652	0.644	***0.746***	0.664
SL3	0.678	0.668	***0.741***	0.667
SL4	0.628	0.643	***0.747***	0.615
SL5	0.645	0.607	***0.734***	0.592
SL6	0.64	0.63	***0.732***	0.638
SL7	0.679	0.668	***0.753***	0.664
SL8	0.649	0.645	***0.716***	0.617
SL9	0.665	0.668	***0.745***	0.622
SL10	0.678	0.641	***0.734***	0.653
SL11	0.676	0.67	***0.733***	0.648
SL12	0.688	0.694	***0.770***	0.681
VB1	0.713	0.683	0.696	***0.756***
VB2	0.753	0.756	0.764	***0.825***
VB3	0.774	0.748	0.778	***0.858***
VB4	0.697	0.688	0.707	***0.825***
VB5	0.681	0.665	0.698	***0.828***
VB6	0.73	0.694	0.728	***0.839***
VB7	0.715	0.703	0.722	***0.851***
VB8	0.704	0.661	0.679	***0.863***
VB9	0.692	0.658	0.680	***0.835***
VB10	0.760	0.719	0.738	***0.850***

Note: Highest loadings on each construct are formatted in bold, italicised, and shaded.

Evaluation of the Structural Model

Once the measurement model was confirmed, the structural model was assessed to examine how the constructs relate to one another. This evaluation involves determining the model's explanatory capability (R2), its predictive relevance (Q2), and the significance of relationships via path coefficients [32]. **Table 3** reports the model's R2 and Q2 values. The initial step was to inspect R2, which ranges from –1 to +1, where values nearing 1 reflect strong explanatory strength [32]. As seen in **Table 3**, the exogenous variables together explained over 82% of the variance in the endogenous constructs.

Next, Q2 values were examined to verify prediction accuracy. Q2 scores greater than zero indicate adequate predictive relevance. All Q2 values in this study exceeded that critical point, confirming acceptable predictive power, as also shown in **Table 3**.

Table 3. R2 and Q2 Values

	Q^2 values	R^2 values
SL	0.464	---
AC	0.487	0.791
KSB	0.474	0.807
VB	0.656	0.825

The subsequent stage involved analysing the path coefficients, which indicate both the magnitude and significance of the links between exogenous and endogenous constructs [32]. The effects are summarised in **Table 4**. In this study, all exogenous constructs exerted positive and significant influences on their respective outcomes.

Table 4. Path Coefficients

Original sample (O)		T statistics (|O/STDEV|)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	P values
SL → VB	0.357	6.57	0.054	0.00
SL → AC	0.889	68.815	0.013	0.00
AC → VB	0.386	6.882	0.056	0.00
SL → KSB	0.550	9.795	0.056	0.00
KSB → VB	0.202	3.763	0.054	0.00
AC → KSB	0.374	6.611	0.057	0.00

Note: Hypotheses are supported when $p \leq 0.05$.

The results reveal a significant positive relationship between servant leadership and voice behaviour, with an effect size of 0.357 ($\beta = 0.357$, $p < 0.05$), supporting H1. Additionally, the analysis shows that a one-unit shift in servant leadership corresponds to a 0.889 change in affective commitment ($\beta = 0.889$, $p < 0.05$), indicating a strong and significant link between SL and AC.

A significant association between affective commitment and voice behaviour was identified, with AC influencing VB at 0.386 ($\beta = 0.386$, $p < 0.05$). Consequently, H3 was upheld, following the earlier confirmation of H2. The analysis also showed that servant leadership plays a considerable role in shaping knowledge-sharing behaviour, producing an effect of 0.550 ($\beta = 0.550$, $p < 0.05$); therefore, H5 was verified. Knowledge-sharing behaviour, in turn, contributed positively and meaningfully to voice behaviour, with an impact of 0.202, indicating that a one-unit rise in KSB corresponds to a 0.202 shift in VB ($\beta = 0.202$, $p < 0.05$). As a result, H6 was supported. Additionally, the study found that affective commitment enhances knowledge-sharing behaviour, showing an effect magnitude of 0.374 ($\beta = 0.374$, $p < 0.05$). Thus, H8 was also confirmed.

Mediation Analysis

Mediation testing was conducted to determine overall, direct, and indirect effects among the components of the model [32]. To begin, the link between SL and VB was examined without AC or KSB, allowing the total effect to be estimated. This produced a sizeable and significant coefficient of 0.879 ($\beta = 0.879$, $p < 0.05$).

Afterwards, both mediators were included in the model, and the direct effect of SL on VB declined to 0.357 ($\beta = 0.357$, $p < 0.05$), showing that the relationship persists but at a reduced strength once AC and KSB are considered.

A further step assessed the overall indirect influence, confirming that SL affects VB through AC and KSB at 0.521 ($\beta = 0.521$, $p < 0.05$). These findings indicate partial mediation, and therefore, H9 was validated.

Table 5. summarises these total, direct, and indirect outcomes, outlining how AC and KSB function as mediators

Mediation Path	**Total Effect (SL → VB)**		**Direct Effect (SL → VB)**		**Indirect Effect (SL → VB via AC → KSB)**			
	Effect Size	p-value	Effect Size	p-value	Effect Size	SD	T-value	p-value

Results	0.879	0.000	0.357	0.000	0.521	0.005	10.362	0.000
Conclusion	Partially Mediated (through AC → KSB)							

Note: hypotheses are retained when $p < 0.05$.

Three separate mediation routes were identified:
1. SL → AC → VB,
2. SL → KSB → VB,
3. SL → AC → KSB → VB,

with effect estimates of 0.343, 0.111, and 0.067, respectively, all of which reached significance. The first path demonstrates that AC partially transmits the influence of SL on VB, supported by $\beta = 0.343$ ($p < 0.05$), leading to acceptance of H4. The second pathway shows that KSB also acts as a meaningful mediator, producing a value of 0.111 ($\beta = 0.111$, $p < 0.05$), and hence H7 was confirmed. These pathway-specific outcomes appear in **Table 6**, which reports the indirect impacts associated with AC and KSB.

Table 6. Specific Indirect Effect

	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	P values	T statistics (|O/STDEV|)
SL → AC → KSB→ VB	0.067	0.019	0.001	3.447
SL → AC → VB	0.343	0.051	0.000	6.747
SL → KSB → VB	0.111	0.033	0.001	3.342

Note: $p < 0.05$ is required for hypothesis support.

Discussion

The model presented in this research aims to integrate several organisational dimensions—namely leadership style, commitment, and cultural practices—to strengthen overall performance, a theme widely examined in prior work [33]. This investigation centers on how these components—Servant Leadership (SL), Affective Commitment (AC), Knowledge Sharing Behavior (KSB), and Voice Behavior (VB)—interact with one another.

The study primarily examined the linkage between SL and VB, while also drawing attention to the role of AC and KSB as mediators in this association.

Hypothesis 1 predicted a positive and significant relationship between SL and VB. The results supported this claim, revealing that SL promotes VB, aligning with earlier findings [8]. This indicates that banks adopting SL through leadership development or training may strengthen VB among staff members.

Hypothesis 2 assumed that SL would also reinforce AC. The findings confirmed this, showing a meaningful and positive effect, in line with previous scholarship [34]. Banking institutions integrating SL can therefore expect a workforce with stronger commitment, as AC is more likely to flourish under servant-oriented leaders.

Under Hypothesis 3, the study inspected the link between AC and VB. Consistent with prior research [35], AC proved to have a positive and significant effect on employees' willingness to speak up. Workers with elevated commitment levels tend to express concerns or ideas more openly.

Hypothesis 4 then explored whether AC mediates the SL–VB link. The results showed partial mediation, suggesting that incorporating SL can boost VB partly by strengthening employees' emotional attachment to their roles and organisation.

Hypothesis 5 addressed the connection between SL and KSB. The study found a positive and significant relationship, echoing previous observations [34]. Because SL encourages supportive and cooperative climates, it becomes a strong enabler of knowledge exchange. This underscores the need for banks to adopt SL if they aim to build a robust KSB.

Hypothesis 6 extended the analysis by linking KSB to VB. A positive and significant association was found, consistent with earlier results [23]. Encouraging staff to share knowledge appears vital for raising levels of VB in the banking industry.

Hypothesis 7 concentrated on whether KSB mediates the SL–VB association. Partial mediation was confirmed, meaning that servant leaders can enhance VB by stimulating knowledge-sharing habits among employees.

Finally, Hypothesis 8 tested the relationship between AC and KSB. A positive and significant connection was established, mirroring earlier literature [34], showing that committed employees are more eager to share knowledge.

Building on this, Hypothesis 9 proposed an interconnected system where both AC and KSB jointly mediate the SL–VB pathway. The evidence confirmed partial mediation, implying that SL helps build AC and KSB, both of which contribute to the formation of VB across the workforce.

Managerial Implications of the Study

This research offers practical insights for leaders in India's banking sector. It suggests fostering workplace conditions that strengthen service-oriented mindsets among employees. The study demonstrated that SL encourages VB, both directly and indirectly via AC and KSB. Prior research [36] also indicates that SL enhances organisationally beneficial behaviours.

Thus, leadership teams—especially at the top and middle levels—should be encouraged to adopt SL principles. Training initiatives and professional development programs could be used to embed service-focused behaviour within leadership practices. Additionally, banks should cultivate a service-based culture where respect and consideration are valued. Rewarding employees who demonstrate care, courtesy, and support for coworkers may aid this transition.

The role of AC as a mediator stresses the need for managers to create conditions that reinforce employee commitment. Providing meaningful work experiences and organisational support could increase commitment levels, which in turn raises VB.

The study also revealed the importance of KSB in building VB. Managers should therefore create environments characterised by openness, trust, and strong interpersonal connections. A shift away from hierarchical or authority-heavy practices toward more people-centric approaches may help develop consistent KSB, ultimately leading to higher VB.

Overall, organisations should prioritise servant-oriented leadership, foster employee commitment, and promote consistent knowledge sharing. These efforts collectively strengthen employee voice behaviour in the Indian banking industry.

Conclusion

This research investigated a conceptual model examining the impact and mechanisms of Servant Leadership (SL) on Voice Behavior (VB) within the Indian banking context. The findings revealed that SL enhances Affective Commitment (AC) and promotes Knowledge Sharing Behavior (KSB), which together contribute to fostering VB. The study offers actionable insights for banking management, suggesting that VB among employees can be strengthened by implementing strategies that cultivate SL, AC, and KSB within organisations in India.

While this study advances understanding of SL, AC, KSB, and VB, several limitations were identified that can guide future research. First, the sample was exclusively composed of banking professionals, representing the service sector in India. Consequently, the findings may be sector-specific, and future studies could broaden the scope to include industries such as manufacturing, automotive, or technology. Second, the data were collected only from the southern region of India, limiting the geographic generalizability of the results. Future research could incorporate samples from other regions across India. Third, this study focused primarily on individual-level relationships between SL and VB through AC and KSB, without considering team- or organisational-level dynamics. Subsequent research may examine these relationships at the collective level to obtain a more holistic understanding. Finally, the study explored the drivers of VB and factors that encourage employees to express their opinions, but it did not assess the quality or effectiveness of the expressed voice. Future research could investigate this aspect to provide a more nuanced understanding of VB.

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