

Antecedents and Outcomes of Employee Engagement in Small to Medium Businesses from Romania

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Abstract. *The purpose of this research paper is to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement within SMEs in Romania. The paper illustrates the importance of addressing how organizational culture, leadership and the complexity of dealing with the new information and communication technologies (NICT) influence employee engagement, and how these factors can benefit, ultimately, the organizational image, through word of mouth (WOM). To do so, we used the ISA Engagement scale measuring intellectual, social and affective engagement. For the aims of this explorative study, a quantitative method was used, and the data was collected through an online questionnaire, from a sample of 130 employees working in SMEs, in Romania. The conceptual framework included factors, which were proved to have affected satisfaction and work engagement such as (1) relationship with the leader, (2) organizational shared values, (3) dealing with information and communication technologies (ICT). Then, considering that employees can play an important role in building an organizational reputation, we analyzed the relationship between employee engagement and word-of-mouth (WOM).*

Keywords: *employee engagement; leadership; organizational values; WOM.*

Introduction

Embracing current employee demands becomes even more challenging considering the context of digitalization, accelerating rate of change and the expectations regarding leadership and management in general. According to the Romanian Human Capital Trends (Deloitte, 2017), organizations are now increasing their attention to the engagement strategies and to the “experience and sense of fulfillment that work itself and the work environment bring to the employee” (p.9), admitting, however, that the readiness level for these efforts is still low compared to the rest of Europe.

Even though most businesses in Romania (around 90%) consist of small to medium businesses (SMEs), they are contributing to 60% of the GDP, compared to over 70% in other European states. SMEs are essential for the economic progress of the country, providing jobs and, in general, employment and growth opportunities for people (in 2015, 91 million people from the EU-28 were employed in SMEs). At the UE level, SMEs ensure two-thirds of the jobs from the private sector (Eurostat, 2018), although there are many challenges within this sector, most of them being related to financing, limited resources and dealing with digitalization (Soare et al., 2018).

Successful organizations are now focusing on building a continuous learning environment that ensures the capacity of adapting to dynamic shifts and circumstances, complemented by employee engagement strategies and benefits that allow employees to have an integrated experience of the organization. However, most studies on employee engagement have been focusing on its relationship to the outcomes and, in general, the benefits it provides at the organizational level in the context of western economies, whereas it is also important to investigate the concept and its relationships to different variables within developing countries.

Along with the dynamics of the information and communication technologies and their use within organizations, employees also need to adapt to digital technologies that have the potential to facilitate their work. The adoption of new technologies implies changes in generating value for businesses, but also uncertainty for employees who fear the challenges of new skills acquirement (Bughin et al., 2018). Moreover, as the current state of change is the most common certainty affecting organizations globally, leadership plays an even more important role in driving direction and proving agility (Aon, 2018). Continuous learning is crucial and some organizations are committed to creating this sort of environment for their employees, by offering training and support in new skills development (Deloitte, 2017), but additional involvement is required in order to keep employees satisfied and willing to act as reputational agents.

After analyzing existent scholarly literature, Omar (2016) signaled the need for more empirical research in the study of employee engagement. In order to develop a better understanding of the factors affecting employee engagement and its effects, this research investigates the context of SMEs in Romania and the importance of leadership, shared values and technological skills approach in relationship with different forms of engagement (affective, intellectual and social) and the potential of generating positive word-of-mouth based on this sort of organizational involvement.

Literature review

Nowadays, the concept of *employee engagement* has gained a lot of importance considering the continuous developments in technology and the exceeding needs of individuals in relation to their jobs. A large specter of positive organizational outcomes has been linked to employee engagement, as many scholars approached this subject. Today, the main challenge for employers is to keep employees motivated and involved in their work. While organizations investing in employee engagement strategies harness favorable outcomes, gaining competitive advantages on the market, the lack of employee engagement can lead to potential financial losses (Omar, 2016). In this sense, it is important to define employee engagement and understand its characteristics, but also what constitutes disengagement. During the past years, various authors have proposed models for organizations interested in implementing employee engagement strategies.

The concept of employee engagement

To begin with, the concept of *employee engagement* leads, in most cases, to William A. Kahn's works, being one of the most complex and comprehensive perspectives from literature. His work, "*Psychological conditions of personal engagement and disengagement at work*" (1990) has been an important pillar in the field for almost 30 years. Primarily, he put forth the concept of "personal engagement", followed by employee engagement. He proposed that it serves as an expression of the self that makes employees feel connected with the organization on a physical, cognitive or emotional level when they perform their assigned roles within the organization (Kahn, 1990). Kahn's perspective is especially important as he suggests that appropriate conditions can influence individuals' desire to act as the best versions of themselves. He defined personal engagement as the process of "harnessing of organizational members' selves to their work roles; in engagement people withdraw and defend themselves physically, cognitively, or emotionally during role performances" (Kahn, 1990, p.694), whereas disengagement refers to the opposite state of mind, when the individuals withdraw or defend themselves. Low employee engagement levels can be determined by job design, ineffective communication, management approach and recognition forms (Pillay & Singh, 2018).

As Soane et al. (2012) explain, it is important to signal the difference between engagement as a state and engagement as a set of behaviors. Whereas the state of engagement can lead to certain behaviors, this study will also follow this conceptual logic, taking into account the possibility of influencing the employee to become

engaged (and having an *engaged state*). As such, building on Kahn's theory, Soane et al. (2012) developed a model using the ISA (Intellectual, Social, Affective Engagement Scale), addressing the three dimensions that Kahn was initially referring to. According to Rich, Lepine and Crawford (2010), who adopted the same conceptualization of engagement as the "investment of an individual's complete self into a role" (p. 617), found that practices dedicated to enhancing employee engagement could be more relevant for job performance development compared to job involvement, satisfaction and intrinsic motivation. For the employees involved, there are ways of engaging in work (Schaufeli et al., 2002) such as the *vigor* component, stimulating and energetic component and in which they really want to devote their time and effort; the second, the *dedication* component, as an important and significant aim, and the last, the *absorption* component, as something exciting and in which they are fully connected.

Employee engagement is a motivational process, which guarantees the future of the employee through real investment of the employee's energies, which impacts the performance of an employee's role (Dhir & Shukla, 2018, p.972). Earlier studies described this process, identifying that employee engagement refers to the state of attachment to the organization and the level of involvement in the job roles, working towards organizational progress and performance (Pillay & Singh, 2018) and even offering more than was originally discussed via the contractual agreement, *the extra mile* (Markos & Sridevi, 2010).

Therefore, although there are some similar points, engaged employees are different from satisfied or committed employees. Engaged employees are involved multi-dimensionally in their job roles, engaging on various levels both with their assigned tasks and their approach to the given position, as well as with the organization and the working environment.

Leadership and engagement

Employee engagement sums up the ideal qualities for both an employee and an employer to maximize work efficiency in the organization and to build reputation among employees and other stakeholders (Kaliannan & Adjovu, 2015). This means communication and involvement is necessary from both sides as Robinson asserted, management should have a two-way relationship to stimulate the employee to stimulate work performance (Robinson et al., 2007). The employee must be motivated and competitive, wanting to excel in work, but management should offer support, ensuring the necessary resources. Leadership is linked to work engagement, transparent communication having an important role in this sense (Vogelgesang, Leroy, & Avolio, 2013). For this reason, transparent communication should be prioritized in the employee – management relationship. According to Xu and Thomas (2011), leaders who are supportive of employees, encouraging them to develop, can also favor engagement.

Furthermore, Brunetto et al. (2013) also found that the relationship between the supervisor and the employee is important as it can influence engagement through teamwork, proving once again that relationships at work are valuable for these purposes. In small to medium organizations, leaders play an important role especially as far as communication is involved, but also including motivation, support, and instilling the desire to work (Chaiprasit & Dantidhirakul, 2011). In this sense, their behaviors and relationships with employees affect the latter's happiness becoming an important resource in driving productivity and gaining competitiveness in the long term.

Positive organizational culture and employee engagement

Even if companies gain competitiveness when employees work effectively, this result is due to workplace happiness that is not so closely linked to money but to the atmosphere of the place that stimulates people's creativity and freedom of ideas, so they feel at ease to create and to bring benefits to companies (Chaiprasit & Santidhirakul, 2011, p.198). In order to help maximize employee engagement, there are different methods, incentive schemes or program proposals such as The Millar Method, Job Demands-Resources Model (JD-R), Hierarchy of engagement; virtual employee engagement platform (VEEP) and the list continues. For instance, the JD-R model proposes that engagement in work takes place through a motivational pathway and how workplace resources to channel energy into responsibilities, effort and optimization of employee engagement (Tuckey, Bakker, & Dollard, 2012 p.16).

For instance, the ideal organization builds an environment where cohesion between employees is encouraged and bright, quiet and clean workplace exists. Guy Millar, founder of the Millar Method involved in staff engagement for the workforce of 25,000 employees, supports interconnectedness and accountability for both the employer and the employee, suggesting that these reciprocal elements are key in the relationship (2012). Also, there is a connection between employees' good understanding and efficient teamwork. Feeling comfortable at work and not being afraid to express conflicting opinions is important. Organization's shared value, consisting of collective behaviors shared and accepted by organization members, should be mediated by leaders or supervisors who "play key roles as *integrators*, connecting organization strategy to employees' functional values that derive from societal, cultural, and religious experiences" (Paarlberg & Perry, 2007, p.396).

Positive organizational culture is important as it can influence both jobs (as the emotional and cognitive focus on job-related involvement) and organizational engagement (as the general involvement in the relationship with the organization), even though this can be a challenge considering various dynamics and changes affecting employees (Parent & Lovelace, 2018, p.210). Continuing the line of emotional state in relationship with the job, happiness at work refers to positive feelings toward the organization and to behaviors like productiveness and achieving targeted goals (Maenapothi, 2007).

New information and communication technologies and employee engagement

Besides the evolution of the concept of employee engagement and the factors affecting it, we must also take into account that the technology has favored in one way or another employee engagement's optimization. From phones to email to platforms dedicated to connecting employees and facilitating information and knowledge exchanges, this would not have been possible without digital development. For instance, virtual employee engagement platforms (VEEP) are designed to assist organizations' virtual touchpoints which are created to offer structural support for employees to exchange and integrate resources and to facilitate employee virtual interactions for companies and employees and between employees (Kim and Gatling, 2018, p. 243). Today, there are many platforms used by organizations: Basecamp, Monday.com, Forecast, Wrike, Meister Task, Podio and so on. Digital platforms allow a quick exchange of information between employees, access to useful materials over time, and monitoring of projects. However, studies have also shown that information and communication technologies (ICT) can also lead to negative psychophysical effects usually referred to as technostress (Fuglseth & Sørrebø, 2014).

Nowadays, employees need to adapt to current ICTs in order to efficiently leverage working tasks. But this adaptation process can be challenging for some, studies focusing on the technostress creators, which include techno-overload, techno-invasion, techno-complexity, techno-insecurity and techno-uncertainty (Tarafdar et al., 2007; Fuglseth & Sørrebø, 2014; Chandra, Srivastava, & Shirish, 2015). New information and communication technologies are increasingly becoming complex and, in small-to-medium businesses, employees are constantly facing different situations in which they need to adapt fast and acquire new skills for succeeding in resolving their tasks. In this sense, it is important to address technostress creators such as techno-complexity described as "situations where the complexity associated with ICTs makes users feel inadequate as far as their skills are concerned and forces them to spend time and effort in learning and understanding various aspects of ICTs" (Tarafdar et al., 2007, p.310). This type of stressor could influence the state of the employee, its relationship with the organization and the way it is perceived in providing the resources and environment where the individual can develop.

Employee engagement and word-of-mouth (WOM)

Word-of-mouth (WOM) is typically studied in the context of marketing, being usually defined "as an exchange, flow of information, communication, or conversation between two individuals" (Goyette, 2010, p.6), influencing the opinions of other individuals who might be at a certain step in acquisition journey. Although not previously explored as much, the relationship between how employees perceive the organization (its internal image) and their engagement has shown that this is an important variable to be taken into consideration (Dhir & Shukla, 2019), especially as employees have the potential to speak favorably or unfavorably about the organization, influencing the way it is perceived by other publics.

WOM includes both positive (praise) and negative valence (Goyette, 2010), and organizations should be inclined towards obtaining the former. Considering the fact that reputation implies a comparative evaluation of the organization's performance and services (Cismaru, 2015) affecting market positioning, it is important to address the involvement of employees in this process. As internal stakeholders, employees also develop evaluations and perceptions regarding the reality they are experiencing within the organization, while also being influenced by external perceptions. An organization with a good image and reputation is "indicative of stability and security to the employees" (Dhir & Shukla, 2019, p.972), potentially attracting valuable talent and resources on the long term.

Based on the literature review and previous research findings, we propose an exploratory study investigating the relationships between the variables explained above.

Hence, the research hypotheses are (Figure 1):

H1: Leadership will have a positive relationship with employee engagement dimensions.

H2: Organizational shared values will have a positive relationship with employee engagement.

H3: Techno-complexity will have a positive relationship with employee engagement dimensions.

H4: Employee engagement will have a positive relationship with word-of-mouth dimensions (word-of-mouth intensity and positive valence)

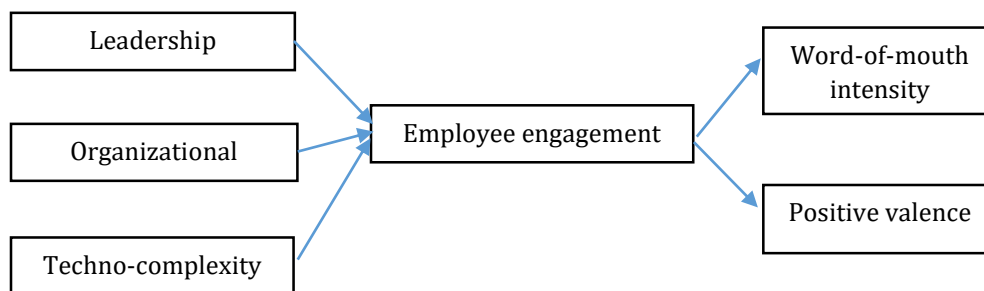


Figure 1. Hypothesis

Methodology

The main objective of the study was to investigate the antecedents and outcomes of employee engagement in the small-to-medium business context. For the purposes of this research, a quantitative method was used. The survey is useful in providing the data showing whether the relationships between variables are valid. The questionnaire was distributed online in May 2019, containing 40 items designed to investigate the relationships between the antecedents and effects of employee engagement. The participants in the study indicated the responses that best fit their level of agreement or disagreement with the statements developed for the objectives of this research. The questionnaire also included demographic variables, such as age, gender, level of studies, as well as variables measuring working experience at the current organization, working experience in general, time spent working on digital devices per day, and department.

The heterogeneous sample consisted of 130 employees working in small-to-medium organizations in Bucharest from various industries (communication and advertising, IT, banking, human resources, outsourcing and manufacturing). The final sample size was 121 after some questionnaires were eliminated, as some items were not filled. The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS statistics version 25. The sample included 65% women and 35% men. Most of the research samples are aged between 21 and 30 years, followed by 23% between 31 and 40 years, 16% between 41 and 50 years, and 11 % more than 51. Additionally, 49% have a master's degree, while 36% have a bachelor's degree (only 3% have PhD studies and 4% postgraduate studies). As far as the experience at the current job is concerned, 38% of the employees have between 1 and 3 years of experience,

while those who have been employed less than 1 year or between 4 to 6 years are the same. Most of the small-to-medium business employees spend more than 7 hours per day working on digital devices (69%).

The employees worked in departments as follows: 27% in Marketing, 16% in Administrative, 15% in Customer Service, 14% in Production, 11% in Human Resources, 9% in Accounting and Acquisitions, and 5% in IT, and 3% in other departments. In terms of general working experience, most of the participants had more than 10 years of experience (44%), while 33% had between 1-5 years of working experience and 20% had between 6 and 10 years. All respondent characteristics can be consulted in detail in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent characteristics

<i>Respondent characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Sex		
<i>Male</i>	43	35.5
<i>Female</i>	78	64.5
Age		
<20 years	0	0
21-30 years	59	48.4
31-40 years	29	23.8
41-50 years	20	16.4
51-60 years	14	11.5
Education level		
<i>Highschool</i>	4	3.3
<i>Bachelor's degree</i>	44	36.1
<i>Master's degree</i>	60	49.2
<i>PhD</i>	3	2.5
<i>Postgraduate studies</i>	5	4.1
<i>Other</i>	6	4.9
Work experience with current organization		
<1 year	21	17.4
1-3 years	46	38.0
4-6 years	21	17.4
7-10 years	14	11.6
>10 years	19	15.7
General working experience		
<1 year	2	1.6
1-5 years	41	33.6
6-10 years	25	20.5
>10 years	54	44.3
Department		
<i>Production</i>	17	14
<i>Accounting</i>	7	5.8
<i>Marketing</i>	34	28.1
<i>Human resources</i>	14	11.6
<i>Acquisitions</i>	3	2.5
<i>Customer service</i>	19	15.7
<i>Administrative</i>	20	16.5
<i>IT</i>	7	5.8

Concepts and measurement

For measuring *employee engagement*, the ISA engagement scale was used, developed by Soane et al. (2012), as it is considered a comprehensive method for measuring employee states within their working environment. Thus, the three dimensions (or “facets” as the authors call them) of employee engagement (affective,

intellectual and social) were measured, the response scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). The Cronbach alpha for the employee engagement scale was 0.891, and for each of the dimensions:

Leadership and organization’s shared values constructs were adapted from Chaiprasit and Santidhirakul’s (2011) study, who investigated the factors affecting the level of happiness at work in the context of small-to-medium businesses. Thus, the leadership scale included 9 items and the organization’s shared values included 4 items measured by using a Likert scale (from 1 “strongly disagree” to 5 “strongly agree”). The leadership variable was measured using items like “Leader takes big role in creating and developing working team”, “Leader provides shared understanding among staff”, “Leader engages in 2 way, transparent communication in the organization”, while organization shared value variable was measured through items such as “I usually get attention from co-workers” or “I believe in the organization’s values and put them in practice” or “I have a good, fun and enjoyable relationship with my colleagues”. As far as scale reliability is concerned, the Cronbach alpha coefficients for the constructs were 0.948 for leadership, respectively 0.828 for organization’s shared values.

Techno-complexity was measured using the items used in the tested model developed by Fuglseth and Sørrebø (2014) who investigated how technostress creators influence ICT use by employees. The 5 items were measured using a 5 point Likert scale, similar to the other constructs. Item examples include “I cannot find enough time to study and upgrade my ICT skills.” or “I do not know enough about ICT to handle my job satisfactorily” or “I find new recruits in this organization know more about ICT than I do”.

Word-of-mouth intensity and positive valence constructs measurement scales included 2 items, respectively 4 items based on Goyette et al.’s (2010) model for measuring the dimensions of online word-of-mouth. For WOM intensity (activity, volume and dispersion) items consisted of asking employees whether they talk about the organization with others (“I speak of this company much more frequently than about any other e-services company”, “I speak of this company to many individuals”). For positive valence (or praise) participants were asked to rate if they agree with statements like “I recommend this company to other people”, “I am proud to say to others that I am part of this organization”, “I speak favorably about this company”. Similarly, the items were measured using the same Likert scale as for the other constructs. All the items used for construct measurement are provided in Table 2, along with their reliability coefficients.

Table 2. Measurement scales and reliability of constructs

Variables	Items	Cronbach’s α
<i>Leadership</i> (Chaiprasit and Santidhirakul, 2011)	Leader encourages solving problems through team work. Leader provides shared understanding among staff. Leader encourages objective setting and accountability. Leader engages in 2-way, transparent communication in the organization. Leader creates motivation so that employees work efficiently. Leader promotes desire and creative mind so that employees are enthusiastic at work. Leader brings out employees’ potential so that they work efficiently. Leader is dedicated to both employees and organization. Leader encourages rewards.	.948
<i>Organization’s shared value</i> (Chaiprasit and Santidhirakul, 2011)	I believe in the organization’s values and put them in practice. I get attention from co-workers. I have a good, fun and enjoyable relationship with co-workers in every aspect.	.828

	I am able to seek advice from co-workers for any kind of problems.	
<i>Techno-complexity</i> (Fuglseth & Sørrebø, 2014)	I cannot find enough time to study and upgrade my ICT skills.	.856
	I do not know enough about ICT to handle my job satisfactorily.	
	I need a long time to understand and use new ICT solutions.	
	I find new recruits in the organization know more about ICT than I do.	
<i>WOM intensity</i> (Goyette et al., 2010)	I often find it too complex for me to understand and use new ICT solutions.	
	I speak of this company much more frequently than about any other company.	.820
<i>Positive valence WOM</i> (Goyette et al., 2010)	I speak of this company to many people.	
	I recommend this company.	.924
	I speak of this company's good sides.	
	I am proud to say to others that I am part of this company.	
	I strongly recommend people to use this company's products or services.	
<i>Engagement</i> (Soane et al., 2012)	I mostly say positive things to others about the company.	
	I have spoken favorably of this company to others.	.891
<i>Affective engagement</i>	I feel positive about my work.	.836
	I feel energetic in my work.	
	I am enthusiastic in my work.	
<i>Intellectual engagement</i>	I focus hard on my work.	.848
	I concentrate on my work.	
	I pay a lot of attention to my work.	
<i>Social engagement</i>	I share the same work values as my colleagues.	.896
	I share the same work goals as my colleagues.	
	I share the same work attitudes as my colleagues.	

Data analysis

For analyzing the collected data, IBM SPSS statistics version 25 was used. Firstly, the validity and reliability of the measurements used for the constructs were assessed via IBM SPSS statistics version 25, as seen in Table 1. All constructs have acceptable reliability coefficients, over 0.7.

Firstly, the descriptive analysis was conducted, and the results for the main research variables can be seen in Table 3. The mean scores and the standard deviation results show normally distributed values. The independent variables *leadership* and *organization's shared values* had the highest mean scores (3.74, respectively 4.13) indicating that leaders are generally perceived favorably by employees and that the relationships with co-workers are evaluated as good by most participants. *Techno-complexity's* mean score 2.16 suggests that small-to-medium employees are generally satisfied with their ability to understand and cope with new ICT solutions. After analyzing the frequency data, the item "I cannot find enough time to study and

upgrade my ICT skills." showed distinctive results as 31% of the employees were neutral regarding this statement, 34% disagreed and 34% agreed.

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation scores for constructs

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Leadership	3.74	1.07
Organization`s shared values	4.13	0.79
Techno-complexity	2.16	0.9
Employee Engagement	4.09	0.69
WOM Intensity	3.66	1.1
Positive Valence	3.93	1.08

Considering our research hypotheses, Pearson correlations were conducted to analyze the relationship between the variables proposed in the research (Table 4). The Pearson correlation coefficients can be seen in Table 4. Positive correlations were identified between *leadership* and *employee engagement* ($r=.623$ $\rho=.000$), as well as between *organization`s shared values* and *employee engagement* ($r=.720$, $\rho=.000$), thus confirming H1 and H2. The Pearson coefficient results for *techno-complexity* and *employee engagement*, however, were not statistically significant, showing that the assumption is not valid in this sense. Regarding the separate correlations with the dimensions of the employee engagement, it can be seen that the coefficient score for *social engagement* and *leadership*, respectively *organization`s shared values* are the highest, showing a stronger linear relationship between these variables compared to other dimensions of employee engagement.

Table 4. Correlations

		Leadership	Organization's shared values	Techno-complexity	Employee Engagement	Intellectual Engagement	Social Engagement	Affective Engagement
Leadership	Pearson Correlation	-						
Organization's shared values	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.585**	-					
		.000						
Techno-complexity	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.010	-.045	-				
		.915	.621					
Employee Engagement	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.623**	.730**	-.022	-			
		.000	.000	.813				
Intellectual Engagement	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.398**	.522**	-.034	.777**	-		
		.000	.000	.711	.000			
Social Engagement	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.614**	.740**	-.018	.836**	.437**	-	
		.000	.000	.848	.000	.000		
Affective Engagement	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.494**	.515**	-.007	.867**	.637**	.530**	-
		.000	.000	.935	.000	.000	.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 5. Correlations

		Employee Engagement	Intellectual Engagement	Social Engagement	Affective Engagement	WOM intensity	Positive Valence
WOM intensity	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.464**	.290**	.397**	.441**		
		.000	.000	.000	.000		
Positive Valence	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.684**	.456**	.621**	.589**	.535**	-
		.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In the case of H4 (Table 5), where employee engagement was considered an independent variable, the assumption was confirmed, as there is a moderate relationship between employee engagement and WOM intensity ($r=.464$, $\rho=.000$) and a relatively stronger relationship with positive valence ($r=.684$, $\rho=.000$). *Social engagement* and *affective engagement* had the highest coefficient scores ($r=.612$, respectively $r=.686$), suggesting that praise can be intensified when enthusiasm and good relationships with coworkers are present in the case of employees in small-to-medium businesses.

Multiple regression analysis was applied to identify whether the independent variables *leadership* and *organization's shared values* can predict *employee engagement* (Table 6). The values of R-square were higher than 0.5 showing a moderate effect. The results illustrate the importance of these two organizational dimensions in stimulating employee engagement.

Table 6. Multiple regression

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.730a	.532	.528	.47650	.532	135.461	1	119	.000
2	.769b	.591	.584	.44748	.059	16.938	1	118	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), organizationsharedvalues

b. Predictors: (Constant), organizationsharedvalues, leadership

Discussion

Similar to other studies showing a valuable influence from management when activating employee engagement (Vogelgesang, Leroy, & Avolio, 2013; Parent & Lovelace, 2018), the results of this study also support this. The relationship with both leaders and co-workers, as well as organizational value recognition and acceptance are important when employee engagement is present. As far as techno-complexity is concerned, additional investigation is required and qualitative methodology should be applied in order to access the multiple levels of how ICTs are adopted and integrated at both the individual and organizational level. In terms of WOM (Word-of-mouth), the results indicated that employee engagement can be used as a strategic asset in determining a positive outcome when reputational aspects are concerned. From an organizational standing point, this has multiple implications; small-to-medium sized organizations are facing many challenges including employee loyalty and retention, and attracting talent can be a costly endeavor. Besides performance indicators, employee engagement indicators, especially the ones referring to social and affective aspects, seem to have become important for achieving other types of organizational goals that relate to employer branding.

Conclusions

Employee engagement as a process can be challenging for SMEs, especially when dynamic market changes occur. Both organizations and individuals are now facing various opportunities as well as barriers in addressing digitalization which is also affecting organizational culture and general ambience. ICTs are adopted for organizational progress, for both properly leveraging employees' skills, as well as information and knowledge, and this is something to be considered when engagement is evaluated. Employee energy and involvement is clearly linked with concepts that have been proven to work before, such as leadership and positive organizational values, but future research should also stress the nuances of these antecedents and how they are interlinked with employee engagement dimensions, as well as the intentions of employees to participate in socially responsible activities that could potentially add more value to their work meaning and to the working environment also.

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