Public Relations: Investigating the Impact of Internal Public's Engagement on Megaphoning and Scouting Behaviors

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Abstract

While previous studies in the literature have concentrated chiefly on investigating employee engagement and communication behavior in relation to other organizational variables, very little research has examined the association between the two constructs. Therefore, the present study aimed to address this deficiency in the literature of public relations by examining the effect of engagement on employee communication behavior. Specifically, forms of engagement, including alignment, affectiveness and action-orientation (Shrotryia and Dhanda, 2020) were posited as antecedents to Kim and Rhee's (2011) two dimensions of employee communication behavior, namely megaphoning and scouting. Using non-probability snowball sampling, a total of three hundred and seventy eight employees who currently work for Moroccan private organizations participated in the study by filling out a 20-item questionnaire. By deploying Pearson-product moment correlation and linear regression, all three dimensions of engagement were found to be significantly associated with employees' megaphoning and scouting behaviors. The study highlights the critical role of enhancing cognitive, affective and behavioral engagement of employees in influencing external communicative behaviors. Important implications of the findings are discussed. In addition, the study's limitations and recommendations for future research are addressed.

Keywords*: Employee engagement, megaphoning, scouting, Moroccan private organizations, public relations*

1. Introduction

Scholarly and practical attention has been devoted to the crucial role of employee engagement and communication behavior in improving organizational effectiveness. While the extant public relations literature demonstrates that the concept of employee engagement is in a state of disarray, it can generally be defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption" (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 27). Shrotryia and Dhanda (2020) introduced the construct of alignment engagement as a critical dimension of employee engagement. It describes an employee's recognition of the congruence of his or her role with the wider organizational orientations. An engaged employee is aligned with the organization's vision and mission, embraces organizational values, comprehends larger work goals, and is aware of what is expected of him or her. In addition, an aligned employee considers his or her work to be meaningful, feels empowered, and takes responsibility. Previous research has shown that advanced levels of employee engagement fosters organizational productivity and profitability (Kataria et al., 2013; Bhuvanaiah & Raya, 2014; Shuck & Wollard, 2010), task performance (Shantz et al., 2013; Park et al., 2020), customer satisfaction (Zameer et al., 2018), and employee retention (Balakrishnan et al., 2013; Alias et al., 2011), indicating the highly strategic importance of employee engagement.

Within the same vein, the affectiveness dimension of engagement represents an employee's favorable affectivity towards his or her job and organization. Precisely, it captures an employee's

emotional experience, which is characterized by sentiments of pride, dedication, belonging, and optimism. Positive affectivity motivates employees to invest their hearts and souls into their jobs. In this sense, an engaged employee appreciates coming to work and gains self-improvement. Finally, the behavioral manifestation of employee engagement is captured by the component of action-orientation. It displays an employee's willingness to take action to enhance organizational effectiveness. These employees demonstrate traits of productivity and adds value for his or her respective organization. Besides, Employee proactivity, discretionary efforts, involvement, and overall contribution are all included when measuring action-orientation.

Therefore, Shrotryia and Dhanda's (2020) dimensions are an amalgam of employee engagement components advanced by the most highly influential theories in the literature. For instance, the alignment dimension is grounded upon Kahn's (1990, 1992) cognitive dimension which reflects the attention, vigilance and mindfulness displayed by engaged employees. The roots of alignment dimension can also be found in Macey et al.'s (2009) view of engaged employees as individuals who demonstrate qualities of persistence and adaptability.

Similarly, several studies have demonstrated the strategic importance of employee communication behavior to the prosperity of organizations. According to Kim and Rhee (2011), employees interact with external publics on virtually a daily basis; therefore, they are strategic communicators who informally act as public relations practitioners. Employee communication is especially vital since external publics perceive employees' viewpoints to be organic, impartial and more honest compared to complex public relations messages (Center & Jackson, 2003). Following the fundamental principles of situational theory (Grunig, 1977), Kim and Rhee (2011) have identified employee communication behavior as a two-dimensional concept, consisting of megaphoning and scouting behaviors. "The two concepts refer to employees' voluntary efforts to collect and circulate information related to the organization externally and internally" (p. 245). Precisely, megaphoning is associated with employees' tendency to share information about their company with people outside the organization. On the other hand, scouting refers to employees' voluntary communication efforts to find and bring relevant information to internal organizational members such as supervisors, management and colleagues (Kim & Rhee, 2011). Employees may utilize face-to-face or mediated communication channels in their interactions with external publics to obtain critical information that is likely to help improve organizational performance (Lee, 2021). Furthermore, past studies have shown that employee communication behavior is integral to the success of organizations. Madsen and Verhoeven (2019) indicate that employees can voluntarily promote, recommend and defend their employing organizations. Vibber and Kim (2021) and Lee (2017) found that employees may act as either advocates or adversaries for their companies during situations of crisis. Other studies demonstrated that positive employee communication behavior helps buttress organizational reputation (Thelen, 2020; Sonne et al., 2018).

While studies in the extant literature have focused chiefly on the examination of employee engagement and communication behaviors (megaphoning and scouting) in relation to other organizational variables, very little research has been conducted on the relationship between the two constructs. Therefore, to address this deficiency in the literature, the present study purports to examine the effect of employee engagement dimensions, namely alignment, affective and action-orientation on megaphoning and scouting communication behaviors amongst Moroccan employees. Undertaking research in this area allows to fill this knowledge gap and illustrates how these organizational variables are connected, which, in turn, assists Moroccan companies in devising strategies to enhance engagement and communication behaviors of employees. Furthermore, the study targets in particular individuals who occupy permanent or temporary positions in Moroccan private organizations. In doing so, the study aims to provide insights for

Moroccan corporate managers into the significance of enhancing the engagement of employees in the workplace as a crucial path towards fostering positive megaphoning and scouting behaviors. Hence, the study endeavors to examine the following hypotheses:

H₁ *Alignment engagement is positively associated with megaphoning behavior.*

H₂ *Alignment engagement is positively associated with scouting behavior.*

H₃ *Affective engagement is a positive predictor of megaphoning behavior.*

H₄ *Affective engagement is a positive predictor of scouting behavior.*

H₅ *Action-orientation engagement positively predicts megaphoning behavior.*

H₆ *Action-orientation engagement positively predicts scouting behavior.*

2. Methodology

2.1. Research design

A quantitative research method was used to conduct the present study. According to Creswell (2014), researchers implement a quantitative design to look at how independent and dependent variables are related. The association between workers' engagement and their megaphoning and scouting behaviors was originally investigated using Pearson product-moment correlations, and then further examined through incorporation a series of linear regression analyses. The purpose was to determine if external communicative behaviors of employees (dependent variables) could be predicted by alignment, affective and action orientation forms of engagement (independent variables). Additionally, both statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 26.

2.2. Participants

Individuals currently employed by Moroccan private (for-profit) companies in a variety of economic sectors, including retail, education, tourism, etc., constituted the focus of the present research. Three hundred and seventy-eight Moroccan workers *(n = 378)* were selected using a non-probability snowball sampling technique, and they took part in the study by answering 20 questions on a questionnaire that included demographic questions (gender, age, employment situation, and job tenure) and items using a seven-point Likert scale. One hundred eighty four male workers (*48%* of the sample) and one hundred ninety-four (*52%* of the sample) were female employees. Additionally, 68 participants (*18%*) were under the age of 20, *123* participants *(51%)* were between the ages of 20 and 29, and *117* participants (*31%*) were between the ages of 30 and 39. Furthermore, *153* participants *(35%)* worked part-time, whereas *225 (65%)* held full-time positions in their respective companies.

2.3. Variables and measures

Alignment engagement was assessed by borrowing 7 items from Shrotryia and Dhanda's (2019) employee engagement scale. A sample of items includes: "*I understand very well how my work is contributing toward achievement of organizational goals,*" "*I am aligned with the activities of the organization I work for,*" and "*My personal goals match with the vision and mission of the*

organization." All seven items were assessed along a seven-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (=1) and strongly agree (=7). Additionally, the scale was tested for internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient which was *.88*, indicating satisfactory scale reliability.

The action-orientation dimension of engagement is assessed using a five-item scale, also devised by **S**hrotryia and Dhanda. Examples of these items are: "*I give best at everything I do at work," "Participation in organizational activities is a great use of time*," and "*I actively participate in helping my colleague deal with difficult situations at work*."). Items were coded on a seven-point Likert scale where a score of 1 indicates complete disagreement, while 7 shows complete agreement. The scale was shown to be reliable since the Cronbach's alpha coefficient was **.86.**

Affectiveness engagement scale was used to evaluate the affectivity of employees toward their work and organization. Four items (e.g. "*Working for my organization enhanced my self-esteem*," and "*I am proud of my job.*") were adopted from Shrotryia and Dhanda's engagement scale. All four items are carried out along a seven-point Likert scale, allowing respondents to express their level of agreement with each given item by selecting 1 to indicate strong disagreement and 7 to show complete agreement. Besides, the result of the reliability analysis yielded satisfactory Cronbach's alpha coefficients which was *.85*.

Six items developed by Kim and Rhee's (2011) were used to evaluate the megaphoning behavior. Examples of the adopted items include "*I write positive comments or advocating posting for my organization on the Internet*," "*I talk positively of the management and company to friends and neighbors*," and "*I try to persuade people who have negative opinions about my organization*." Items were laid out so that 1 meant "strongly disagree" whereas 7 was coded as "strongly agree." The scale's reliability was examined using Cronbach's alpha, and the value of **.84** indicated satisfactory reliability.

Seven items from Kim and Rhee's (2011) external communicative behavior inventory were used to measure scouting behavior Moroccan employees. A sample of these items include: "*I voluntarily check people's feedback on organizational events*," "*I meet people who work for similar businesses and check rumors and news about organization or business*," and "*I start conversation or give information to relevant colleagues about new trends or unusual signals related to work*" were among the options given to participants. The same seven-point Likert scale that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) was incorporated to evaluate each of the provided items. The scale's internal consistency was satisfactory, as evidenced by Cronbach's alpha value of **.87**.

3. Results and Discussion
3.1. Results

Prior to conducting the linear regression analyses, a Pearson product-moment correlation was carried out to investigate the association between employee engagement dimensions (i.e. alignment, affective, and action-orientation) and megaphoning and scouting behaviors among employees currently working for Moroccan private companies. The significance level was set at 0.05. The correlation findings are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *The correlation results of employee engagement dimensions and megaphoning and scouting behaviors*

		Alignment engagement	Affective engagement	Action-orientation engagement
Megaphoning behavior	Pearson Correlation	.615**	.489**	.561**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	378	378	378
Scouting behavior	Pearson Correlation	.699**	.563**	.618**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000
	N	378	378	378

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results have shown that alignment engagement was positively correlated with megaphoning behavior *(r = .61, p < 0.05)*. A positive correlation was also found between alignment engagement and scouting behavior *(r = .69, p < 0.05)*. In addition, a moderately positive correlation was indicated between affective engagement and megaphoning behavior (r = 48, p < 0.05). Similarly, scouting behavior was positively associated with affective engagement (r = .56, p < 0.05). Moreover, action-orientation engagement was significantly and positively related to megaphoning and scouting, *r= .56, p < 0.01* and *r= .61, p < 0.01*, respectively.

In order to further investigate these associations, a series of linear regression analyses were conducted. The purpose of these analyses was to determine whether employee engagement dimensions (defined as independent variables) could be used to predict megaphoning and scouting behaviors (defined as dependent variables). In attempt to ensure the accuracy of the analysis, the normality assumptions related to linear regression analysis, including autocorrelation and multicollinearity were checked. The results confirmed the normal distribution of data. Therefore, it was safe to proceed with carrying out regression analyses.

According to the findings of the linear regression, alignment engagement accounted for *38%* of the variation in employee megaphoning behavior, *F (1, 377) = 266.848, p < 0.05*, with an adjusted R^2 of *37*. As a result, the first hypothesis was fully supported by the finding that alignment engagement was a strong predictor of megaphoning behavior *(B =.55, p < 0.05)*. Similar results showed that alignment engagement significantly influenced scouting behavior *(B =.81, p < 0.05)*, as the former was able to predict *49%* of the variability in the latter, *F (1, 377) = 418.706, p < 0.05*, with an adjusted R^2 = *48*. The second hypothesis, which speculated that alignment engagement was strongly and positively related to scouting behavior, was therefore confirmed.

The third and fourth hypotheses were put out to see if Moroccan workers' megaphoning and scouting activities could be predicted by their affective engagement. The results of the linear regression analysis showed the latter explained *24%* of the variation in megaphoning, with an adjusted R^2 of *.23* and *F (1, 377) = 137.415.443, p < 0.05*. As a result, the third study hypothesis was fully supported in that affective engagement had a substantial influence on Moroccan workers' megaphoning behavior *(B =.45, p 0.05)*. Additionally, looking at these statistics: *F (1, 377) = 203.734, p 0.05*, with an adjusted R^2 of *.31*, the same employee engagement dimension could account for *32%* of the variance in scouting activity. Therefore, it was shown that Moroccan workers' scouting behavior was positively and strongly predicted by their affective *engagement (B =.65, p < 0.05)*. Hence, the fourth hypothesis was accepted.

The final two hypotheses (H5 and H6) considered the relationship between the action-oriented engagement of Moroccan workers and their megaphoning and scouting communication practices. It was shown that the action-orientation dimension of engagement, *F (1, 377) = 201.319, p < 0.05*, with an adjusted R^2 = *.31*, explained *32%* of the variation in megaphoning behavior. This demonstrated that there was a statistically significant link between the two variables *(B=.54, p < 0.05)*. As a result, the fifth hypothesis was confirmed. Final analysis: *F (1, 377) = 270.827, p 0.05*, with an adjusted R^2 of *.38*, indicated that action-orientation engagement influenced *39%* of variability in the scouting behavior of Moroccan employees who partook in this study. Thus, it was revealed that this type of engagement significantly predicted employees' scouting behavior *(B =.76, p < 0.05)*. This result fully validates the sixth hypothesis put forward in the current study. The ramifications of the reported research findings are discussed in the next section.

3.2. Discussion

The aim of the current study was to investigate the relationship between employee engagement and external communicative behavior of Moroccan employees currently occupy full-time and part-time positions in Moroccan private enterprises across several economic sectors. In past research (e.g. Jeon & Choi, 2012; Erkmen, 2018; Min et al., 2015; Gangai & Agrawal 2015), the main emphasis considered the variables in question as antecedents or consequences of various organizational constructs, including customer satisfaction, brand image, and employee performance. However, very little research has concentrated on the effect of employee engagement - as conceptualized by Shrotryia and Dhanda (2020) – on Kim and Rhee's (2011) two forms of communication behaviors, viz. megaphoning and scouting. Moreover, to the author's best knowledge, the associations amongst these variables within the context of Morocco have not been explored. Therefore, the current research endeavored to make a contribution to the public relations literature by empirically examining the seeding role of engagement in influencing Moroccan employees' megaphoning and scouting communication behaviors.

To begin with, alignment engagement was hypothesized to have a significant effect on employee megaphoning behavior. The Pearson product-moment correlation and linear regression support this hypothesis (H_1). Consequently, it is possible to infer that Moroccan employees who perceive their goals to be in congruence with those of the organization tend to share positive information and good stories about their company while interacting with external publics such as family, friends, neighbors and acquaintances. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that alignment engagement would be a significant predictor of employee scouting behavior. The regression and correlation results confirmed this association in that alignment engagement was positively and significantly related to scouting behavior (H_2). This suggests that when employees possess sufficient grasp of their organization's goals and vision, they become aligned with the

organization's activities. This, in turn, motivates them to engage in scouting behavior by voluntarily searching for strategic information and share it with organizational members, including management and superiors. For example, as a consequence of their alignment engagement, employees may take on such voluntary behavior by meeting with people affiliated with other organizations to scout for news, rumors and information about other organizations.

Within the same frame, hypotheses 3 and 4 proposed that affective engagement could positively predicts Moroccan employees' megaphoning and scouting behaviors. The correlation and regression results lent full support to both hypotheses. This indicates that high levels of emotional engagement are associated with the way employees speak about the organization in their communication with others, whereas employees who are less emotionally engaged may be more negative or neutral in their external interactions. In addition, the results of the present study confirmed the fifth and sixth hypotheses which speculated that action-orientation engagement was positively lined to megaphoning and scouting behaviors. Therefore, megaphoning behavior can have a significant impact on the reputation of the organization and how it is perceived by outsiders. That is, positive word-of-mouth from employees can potentially help attract new customers, clients, and even new employees.

Additionally, the findings of the present study are consistent with recent studies in the literature. For instance, Shen and Jiang (2019) indicated that high levels of employee engagement help foster favorable employee communication behavior. In addition, Kang and Sung (2017) demonstrated a strong relationship between engagement and communication behavior with external publics. Nevertheless, the authors reported that this association was mediated by employee-organization relationships. Hence, the indicated impact of employee engagement on megaphoning and scouting behaviors entails that cognitively, emotionally and behaviorally engaged employees have a sense of purpose and meaning in their work. Such employees strive to make a meaningful contribution to the organization's overall effectiveness as a consequence of their engagement. Seeking out and sharing strategic information is one way for those individuals to manifest their favorable engagement. Employees, therefore, feel comfortable forwarding information that can help the organization to succeed. In this sense, employees may be incentivized to make advocating posts for their organization on the Internet (megaphoning), as well as attempt to build and nurture favorable relationships with strategic publics both inside and outside the organization.

The results of the present study carry important ramifications for corporate managers of Private (for-profit) companies in Morocco. In particular, it is of paramount important not to overlook the boundary spanning role of employees in bringing together companies and their external publics. According to Kim and Rhee (2011), a great deal of customers' viewpoints and feelings about a certain organization is largely derived from messages they obtain from employees. In fact, employees are to be considered strategically vital mediators between the organization and its external publics (Bourrouk & Bousfiha, 2022), since external publics are likely judge and evaluate an organization on the basis of what they hear from its employees (Helm, 2011). Furthermore, by encouraging employees to engage in scouting behavior, Moroccan private organizations can leverage their efforts to spot and acquire crucial information from external sources. This does not imply, however, that businesses should ignore other public relations strategies, such as environmental scanning (Dozier, 1986), and depend entirely on employee-collected data. Instead of replacing formal and systematic environmental scanning that occurs at the department and function levels, businesses should see employees' scouting initiatives as a

supplement to the existing techniques (Kim and Rhee, 2011). Since each employee has specific expertise and experience, they are able to gather distinctive and pertinent information, eventually leading to a diverse range of strategic information for the company. Therefore, it is necessary for managers to make employee engagement top priority in order to fully benefit from the advantages of excellent employees' external communicative behaviors.

4. Conclusion

While the extant public relations literature indicates that the concepts of engagement and employee communication behavior have generated increased scholarly interest, the interplay between these variables has received very little attention. Therefore, this empirical research endeavored to make a meaningful contribution to the literature by examining the effect of employee engagement on megaphoning and scouting behaviors amongst employees working for Moroccan private organizations operating in various economic sectors. These results highlight the vital role that engaged employees play in establishing and nurturing a positive organizational reputation and relationship with external publics. Moreover, the study offers important implications for corporate managers to enhance employee engagement, encourage scouting behavior, and leverage employee knowledge and experience to acquire strategic information from external sources. By prioritizing employee engagement, organizations can benefit from positive word-of-mouth and build stronger relationships with their stakeholders, ultimately leading to long-term success.

Important limitations of this study and directions for future research should be highlighted. The present research focused mainly on the context of private companies in Morocco. Future research is recommended to examine the association between engagement and employee communication behavior in other cultural as well as temporal settings. In addition, this research adopted a quantitative approach. Future studies can therefore undertake qualitative interviews to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Lastly, non-probability snowball sampling was deployed in this study, which may circumscribe the generalizability of the findings. Hence, it is integral for future researchers to use a probability sampling methods to improve the degree to which results can be generalized an entire population.

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