Employee Engagement Among Millennial Workforce: Empirical Study on Selected Antecedents and Consequences

Jolly Sahni

Abstract

Although employee engagement has been investigated by many scholars, there has been minimal research on this subject for millennial workforce. To bridge the research gap, the present study intends to examine employee engagement among millennial workforce of Saudi Arabia. In addition, the mediation effect of employee engagement on the relationship between antecedents; job characteristics, job satisfaction, and consequences; organizational commitment and intentions to quit is explored with social exchange theory (SET) as a theoretical underpinning. It tests the hypothesis by using data from 408 employees working in private sector companies located in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia through a self-administered questionnaire. SPSS Amos 25.0 was used to analyze the data. The results suggest that there exists a satisfactory condition of employee engagement among Saudi youth. Findings propose a significant positive relationship between job characteristics, job satisfaction, and organization commitment. Employee engagement was found to be a significant and partial mediator amid job characteristics, job satisfaction, and organization commitment. However, the results were not significant for the variable turnover intentions. There is a dearth of research on millennial workforce of Saudi Arabia, and this study would be perhaps, the first one to explore employee engagement in this context. It contributes to the current literature and theory development of employee engagement. Since the findings are based on limited millennial employees’ responses, there is no universal claim for generalization.

Keywords

employee engagement, millennial workforce, job characteristics, organizational commitment, intentions to quit, job satisfaction, Saudi Arabia

Introduction

Employee engagement has been studied and discussed by practitioners as well as academicians in the recent past (Lai et al., 2020; Mone & London, 2018; Saks & Gruman, 2014). The human capital in the form of employees is vital for any organization and retaining employees is a challenge in the present era which is characterized with high employee turnover and increased levels of absenteeism (Reijseger et al., 2017). Employee engagement is vital and essential as past studies suggest that high employee engagement results in higher productivity, higher level of citizenship behavior, employee satisfaction, and ultimately higher performance (Bakker & Albrecht, 2018).

Employee engagement has been studied in context to different countries as well, for example, Greece and Spain (Schaufeli et al., 2002), Japan (Shimazu & Schaufeli, 2009), and India (Anitha, 2014). Literature supports the fact that the utility of employee engagement plays a vital role in increasing organizational performance and positive employee outcome (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013). Studies conducted globally suggest that disengaged employee have a negative impact on the organization and on the country as well. For instance, a study conducted in United States of America found out that approximately half of its workforce was found to be disengaged resulting in impaired productivity and fiscal loss to the country (Kelleher, 2011). Another study conducted by Hooper (2006) in Australia suggests the high cost of disengaged employees (US$31 billion) for the economy. Therefore, utilizing employee engagement interventions is vital for organizations and nations to have a steady economic growth. Engaging employees from all generations and backgrounds is imperative; however, the most challenging task is to retain and engage the millennials.

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Regardless to say, for all countries, Millennial employees are the most important part of workforce. Since the study is on Millennial workforce, it is important to discuss the meaning and traits of this category of generation. For the current study, the definition of Millennial is as “anyone born between 1981 and 1996” would be considered a Millennial (Dimock, 2019). It is predicted that Millennial will make up over a third of the global workforce by 2020 (Facts, Millennial Careers). Millennial generation are characterized with distinctive traits; for example, they prefer personal attention and high esteem of their abilities in addition to being team-orientation and technology-savvy. Millennial have different expectations when compared to old mature worker, which is a challenge for the managers to understand actually what motivates them (Meola, 2016). This generation is known for their ability to transform the workplace and create new work attitudes, and they prefer working in groups and have high ability to multitask, they are redefining the employer–employee relationship (Swan, 2016). Yet, millennial have less tolerance for high-stress jobs which may lead to decreased levels of job satisfaction and engagement. Moreover, this dissatisfaction often triggers millennial to leave their jobs and hop between organizations (Abate, 2016). According to Gallup’s 2017 survey, 87% of employees worldwide are not engaged. This depicts an alarming stage with a strong indicator for the managers to act upon this situation and improve it by adopting pre-emptive measures to trigger employee engagement. Although employee engagement has been investigated by many scholars, there has been minimal research on its antecedents and consequences for millennial workforce. Millennial workforce is the significant part of workforce for not only Saudi Arabia but other countries as well. Their contribution is becoming utmost in many industries.

Therefore, the research gaps are first, most of the scholars have mainly studied employee engagement at a broad level and not specifically for millennial workforce. Therefore, it becomes imperative to study engagement among millennial, particularly, in the context of Saudi Arabia, which is presently undergoing economic reforms under Vision 2030 and has majority of population in millennials group. Currently, the population of Saudi Arabia is estimated to be 34.14 million according to the world bank. The demographic profile depicts that 32.4% of the population is in the age group of 0–14 years while the largest share, 55.8% of total population is in the middle age group of 15–54 years. Moreover, Saudi’s Vision 2030 hopes to transform economy (with diversification), energetic society, and an ambitious nation. Without the commitment and involvement of the young Saudi employees, it will be challenging to achieve the goals in an efficient and effective way. With this background, employee engagement would be central to the productivity and effectiveness of not only the organizations but also for the country. Past studies (Uddin et al., 2019) have recommended that measuring job engagement of employees in particular demographic groups (young, old employees, people with certain disabilities) in particular industries (private, government, communal) would help organizations identify what are the most relevant job demands and resources for employees belonging to a particular demography, professions, and industries; therefore, this study intends to fill this research gap.

Second, there is a dearth of research on employee engagement in fields other than psychology and there is a need to explore relationships of various variables which include engagement. Similarly, Singh et al. (2016) conducted a study on factors of employee engagement in United Arab Emirates and suggested that more research should be undertaken on employee engagement with its probable antecedents and consequences. Therefore, the current study is required to close the aforementioned research gaps. The present study would investigate employee engagement in Saudi millennial workforce which is a major portion of present Saudi workforce. In addition, study examines job satisfaction, job characteristics as the antecedents, and organizational commitment and turnover intentions as the consequences. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- To investigate the current status of work engagement among Saudi millennial workforce.
- To test the selected antecedents of employee engagement like job characteristics and job satisfaction.
- To test the selected consequences of employee engagement like organizational commitment and turnover intentions.
- To test if employee engagement mediates the relationship between job satisfaction, job characteristics, organizational commitment, and turnover intentions.

This section introduced the study, in the second section review of the relevant literature is summarized, third section presents the research methodology adopted for the research, while findings of the study are discussed in section four and finally paper concludes with limitation, research contributions, and future areas of study.

**Review of Literature and Hypothesis Development**

**Employee Engagement: An Overview**

William Kahn was the pioneer in investigating work engagement about three decades ago. Kahn (1990) examined the psychological factors related with engagement and disengagement at work and concluded that there are multiple factors which respond at multiple levels; individual, interpersonal, group, intergroup, and organizational which consequently shape employee’s engagements and disengagements at work.

Following Kahn’s work, many scholars have significantly contributed to the evolving concept of employee engagement and several definitions as well as measures have been
developed. Schaufeli et al. (2002) described engagement as “a positive, fulfilling, work related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption” (p. 74). Saks (2006) extended Schaufeli et al. (2002) model of engagement and proposed a meaningful distinction between Job and Organizational engagement. It was found that the participant’s job engagement scored much higher than organizational engagement.

Therefore, most of the researchers have defined job engagement an employee’s passion toward his work, which helps in attaining productive job-related outcomes. The positive outcomes of employee engagement affect the whole environment of the organization generating a ripple effect. It has been revealed through scientific research that employees who are more engaged have influence over their co-workers by promoting high energy and self-efficacy at work. Inferring from these definition, employee engagement can therefore be understood as the physical, psychological, and emotional enthusiasm observed in employees who are fully emerged and involved at their work.

Studies at large have established the link of employee engagement with higher organizational effectiveness. Harter et al. (2013) in the meta-analysis study linked employee engagement positively with the work-related outcomes and performance. Kim and Parker (2017), in their study underlined the significance of employee engagement as an essential element for improving performance and enhancing organizational sustainability. Similarly, in a recent study conducted in the banking industry of China, it was found that high-performance work practices have a great impact on employee engagement and therefore could be used by the managers to enhance the engagement levels of employees (Cooke et al., 2019). Lately, the role of personal traits in determining the engagement has also been explored. Moreover, the fun activities at workplace may affect the engagement of employees, as found in a study conducted in financial institutions of Lebanon (Sakr et al., 2019). Furthermore, it is suggested that organizations should imbed engagement in human resource practices such as recruitment, performance management, socialization, and training and development as proposed in recent studies. The human resource practices directly influence employee engagement (Johansen & Sowa, 2019).

In addition, past studies have widely applied the social exchange theory (SET) to explain the occurrence of engagement among employees (Uddin et al., 2019). The theory hypothesizes that employees feel intrinsically obligated to pay back to the organization through their involvement and commitment for the resources and support which organization has provided them. Similarly, studies have considered engagement as a two-way relationship between employee and employer. Employee chooses to disengage himself when he or she perceives that organization did not provide the needed resources and support for completion of work. Thus, SET underpins the theoretical foundation and describes why employees will be more or less engaged at work depending on their perception of job characteristics, resources, and benefits provided by the organization to them.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, researchers have studied employee engagement in mainly the banking sector (Jehanzeb et al., 2012), education (Subbarayalu & Al Kuwaiti, 2018), and hospitals (Falatah & Conway, 2019). In a recent study by Sahni (2019), the positive association between employee engagement, quality of work life, and organizational commitment were examined in the private sector of Saudi Arabia.

**Measuring Employee Engagement**

As suggested above, employee engagement has been studied vastly in recent years and several practitioners have designed frameworks for employee engagement. Maslach et al. (2001) proposed that job engagement is a positive antithesis of burnout and therefore, to engage employees, managers must strike a balance in six work–life factors: workload, rewards, recognition, perceived fairness, community, and social support. Harter et al. (2002) conducted a meta-analysis on 7,939 business units to explore the relationship between employee engagement and business outcomes like customer satisfaction, productivity, and profit. Employees who reported high levels of engagement succeeded with higher level of customer satisfaction and were found to be more productive. They explicitly referred to their measure (Gallup work place audit) as “satisfaction-engagement” (p. 269) and also confirmed the positive relationship concluding that, “employee satisfaction and engagement are related to meaningful business outcomes at a magnitude that is important to many organizations” (p. 272).

Similarly, work of Schaufeli et al. (2002) resulted in engagement scale called the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) which comprises three subscales: vigor, dedication, and absorption. The scale has received validation in several countries. Similarly, building on Kahn’s (1990) definition of engagement, May et al. (2004) developed a measure including cognitive, emotional, and physical engagement at work. They found that meaningfulness experienced at work would increase engagement and involvement of employees. Furthermore, psychological safety and availability at work predict employee engagement. Past studies have compared UWES with May et al. (2004) measure to check the validity, and the result showed that UWES performed better across analysis.

Saks (2006) measured the psychological presence of employees with two sub-scales called job engagement and organizational engagement, with six-item scale for each. This was the first study to differentiate the engagement at job level and organizational level. Furthermore, he tested the selected antecedents and consequences for each type of engagement and found that antecedents for both may not be the same. For example, job characteristics may predict only
job engagement at work and not organizational engagement. The recent study by Shuck et al. (2017) proposed a three-factor employee engagement scale (EES), to be used particularly, in the field of human resource and management studies. The scale was successfully tested for incremental validity. Among all the measurement scales of employee engagement, the most widely used instrument is the UWES developed by Schaufeli et al. (2002).

Relationship of Employee Engagement With Other Constructs

Employee engagement is one of the significant workplace factors for organizational success since it increases the employee’s productivity that leads to better organizational performance. The work attitudes like job satisfaction, perceived organizational support, job characteristics, organizational commitment, job involvement, and employee engagement are distinct yet closely related.

It is suggested that the growing popularity of job engagement can be endorsed to the fact that engagement is being researched as a significant predictor of hard-working employees, teams, and organizational results. A number of recent studies done to determine the effect of employee engagement on organizational success have revealed that job engagement is a rewarding initiative that should be practiced by all organizations (Reijseger et al., 2017). In a recent two-phased study by Othman et al. (2018), the three dimensions namely, leadership, job satisfaction, and administrative processes were found to be significantly related to employee happiness. Employees who are strongly engaged at their work are also proactive and promote innovation at work.

The antecedents and consequences of employee engagement are also debatable. Literature suggest that employee engagement, despite of being studied vastly, lacks consensus on its meaning as well as the antecedents and consequences (Bailey et al., 2017; Saks & Gruman, 2014). Employee engagement is seen in various incarnations; however, it is principally agreed that employee engagement yields positive organizational outcomes. Most importantly, the antecedents studied thus far include job characteristics, perceived organizational support, and procedural and distributive justice (Saks, 2006). However, construct like job satisfaction has been studied as an antecedent and also as a consequence of employee engagement (Biswa & Bhatnagar, 2013). Particularly, in a cross-lagged research study by Yalabik et al. (2013), job satisfaction was found to shape employee engagement and were successfully tested as antecedents of engagement. In a study by Anitha (2014), the results conducted showed that there were two main factors affecting employee engagement. The consequences of employee engagement can be seen in the form of higher customer satisfaction, productivity, profit, performance, and lower intentions to quit (Carter et al., 2018).

The present study examines the mediation effect of employee engagement on the relationship among antecedents; job characteristics, job satisfaction, and consequences; and organizational commitment and intentions to quit with SET as a theoretical underpinning. SET is closely linked to the assumption of this study, which suggests that if millennial employees are given good work environment that makes them satisfied, they would be exerting higher involvement at work, which determines their organizational commitment and turnover intentions.

Theories and Hypothesis Development

Job characteristics and employee engagement. Literature suggests that job characteristics like challenging task, meaningfulness of job, and availability of job resources drive the employee engagement (Farndale & Murrer, 2015). Job resources and characteristics include autonomy, performance feedback, use of variety of skills, supervisory support, and meaningfulness. In particular, studies suggest a strong association of employee engagement with autonomy and feedback (Menguc et al., 2013). Similarly, Harter et al. (2002) identified diverse work characteristics like clarity of work expectations, opportunity of growth, and supportive supervisor, which is directly related to enhancing employee’s engagement. In a recent study by Bakker (2017), the significance of job characteristics in enhancing employee engagement was reiterated. Therefore, the following hypothesis proposed to be tested as:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): Job characteristics are positively related to employee engagement.

Job satisfaction and employee engagement. Employees who experience favorable feeling about their job and job facets are satisfied with their work at large. Job satisfaction has been widely tested as an outcome of employee engagement (Bailey et al., 2017). Studies suggest that when employees are engrossed in their work, have enthusiasm to contribute and feel attached to their work, this result in higher job satisfaction (Daley, 2017). However, the present study considers job satisfaction as one of the antecedents of employee engagement, which is consistent with the study by Yalabik et al. (2013). The reason for testing job satisfaction as a trigger to engagement is simple, being more satisfied with the job itself may result in higher levels of engagement reflected by employees in form of their involvement. Also, applying the SET, which assumes that once employees feel that he is satisfied with the resources and support provided by the organization, they try to repay this in form of his increased engagement and involvement at work. Huang et al. (2016) examined the job satisfaction and employee engagement of truck drivers using SET. Similarly, Al-dahalheme et al. (2018) studied the significant mediating effect of job satisfaction between employee engagement and organization performance.
Considering job satisfaction as one of the most critical attitudes at work place, it is hypothesized that:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): Job satisfaction is positively associated with employee engagement.

Employee engagement and organizational commitment. Committed employees are mostly seen to be better performers. Organizational commitment reflects emotional attachment and a feeling of an unsaid and unwritten promise by the employees, to stay longer with their organization. Therefore, it is a psychological state of attachment. Rhoades et al. (2001) studied the relationship of commitment with perceived organizational support and turnover intentions. The subject of organizational commitment was also studied in relation to employee engagement, as a positive outcome (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013). The strong and positive relationship between employee engagement and organization commitment has been validated by past studies (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2014). Recently, Uddin et al. (2019) studied the positive association between employee engagement and team performance with mediating role of organizational commitment. Studies have reiterated the significance of organizational commitment as an important factor at work place. Therefore, the following is hypothesized:

Hypothesis 3 (H3): Employee engagement is positively related to organizational commitment.

Employee engagement and turnover intentions. Employee turnover represents one of the most devastating problems of the modern business. According to Schaufeli et al. (2009), job demand and resources are the major predictor of job strain and absenteeism. In that when the demands within the work setting increase, it generally implies that employees lack motivation resulting in loss of commitment and prolonged pressure results in employee turnover. In a study conducted in Saudi Arabia, it was found that Saudi nationals have higher turnover intentions mainly because of lack of organizational support and recognition (Moussa, 2013). Ferreira and Neiva (2018) found employee engagement as a strong predictor of turnover among the civil servants of Brazil. Past studies have indicated the negative relationship of employee engagement with turnover intentions (Milliman et al., 2018; Shuck et al., 2014), which means that employees who are highly involved emotionally and physically at their work, are less likely to leave their job in near future. Therefore, following hypothesis is postulated:

Hypothesis 4 (H4): Employee engagement is negatively related to turnover intentions

Employee engagement as a mediator. Further to the above hypothesis, it is suggested that employee engagement mediates the link between these work related factors. For example, according to a study by Biswas and Bhatnagar (2013), there was a strong evidence confirming that employee engagement mediates the relationship between the perceived organization support and person-organization fit which serve as antecedents for outcomes like organizational commitment and job satisfaction. In another study by Yalabik et al. (2013), engagement was found to mediate the relationship between affective commitment and intention to quit. The study by Kasekende (2017) confirmed that employee engagement partially mediates the relationship between psychological contract and discrete behavior among employees working in public services. Similarly, in a recent study by Agarwal and Gupta (2018), work engagement was found to mediate the relationship between job characteristics and managers’ turnover intentions. Therefore, engagement mediates the work-related factors and following hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 5 (H5): Employee engagement will mediate positive relationship between job characteristics, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and turnover intention.

Method

This study proposes and tests a model (Figure 1) to understand the influence of work-related factors like job characteristics and job satisfaction on employee engagement and impact of employee engagement on outcomes like organizational commitment and turnover intentions. SPSS Amos 25.0 was used to analyze the data. Hypothesis and model is tested through Structured Equation Modeling (SEM), correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

Sample and Procedure

The participants of this study consist of a random sample of 408 full-time employees from private organizations of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Employees from 20 different private sector organizations were contacted and requested to fill the survey. Survey questionnaire were sent to 1,000 employees and retrieved completed filled survey from 408 (N = 408) with a response rate of 41%. Table 1 displays the demographic profile of the respondents. The sample consists of 168 female respondents, while 240 were male. Majority of the respondents (75%) were below the age of 35 years and majority (72%) were married; 31% of respondents had minimum of a diploma as an educational qualification, while 69% had graduate and post-graduate degrees. As most of the respondents were young, the majority had less than 6 years of experience.

Measures

The study has adopted multi-scale questionnaire to measure the study variables. For example, employee engagement is
assessed with 17-item UWES scale (Schaufeli et al., 2002). This measure has three subscales: vigor, dedication, and absorption. Sample item include “At my work, I feel bursting with energy,” measured on a 7-point scale (0 = Rarely to 6 = Always), as in the original instrument. Job characteristics were studied using 15 items of job dimension scale developed by Hackman and Oldham (1980), where five characteristics of job were measured and item “My job allows me the opportunity to complete the work I start” is a sample from Job characteristics scale. The extent of agreement was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree).

Organizational commitment was measured using six items from the scale developed by Rhoades et al. (2001), measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). A sample item being “I am committed to work in the organization because of what it means to me.” The construct of Job satisfaction was measured using 3-item scale by Cammann (1983), measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). “I am overall satisfied with my job” is a sample item from scale. Another construct called turnover intentions was measured using three-item scale which was developed by Colarelli (1984) and was measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). A sample item being “I often think of leaving my job.” All the scales were tested for reliability and acceptable scores were found for Cronbach’s alpha (shown in Table 2).

Procedure for Data Analysis

In the preliminary stage of data analysis, data screening for missing values and normality of all variables was checked. AMOS 25 was used to perform confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to check the psychometric characteristics of the scales used in the study. Next, Structure equation modeling was used to test the proposed model and relationships among variables.

Results

It is established that Convergent validity is achieved if loadings of the measures to their respective constructs are at least 0.60 (Kline, 2005). Composite reliability (CR) of all constructs were found to be greater than 0.6; average variance extracted (AVE) were above 0.5. The constructs which do not meet the cut-off loading were removed from further analysis. Therefore, for the next step, six items from job characteristics construct (JCM4, JCM7, JCM9, JCM10, JCM14 and JCM15), one item from intentions to quit construct (IQ3), one item from job satisfaction construct (JS3), and two items from employee engagement construct (VI4 and AB6) were removed from further analysis.
Table 2. Mean, Standard Deviation, Reliabilities, and Inter-Correlations Among Variables (N = 408).

| Variable                      | M   | SD  | 1   | 2   | 3   | 4   | 5   |
|-------------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| 1. Job characteristics       | 3.91| 0.725| (.79)|     |     |     |     |
| 2. Job satisfaction           | 4.24| 0.708| .411*| (.89)|     |     |     |
| 3. Employee engagement        | 4.47| 1.177| .603*| .504*| (.93)|     |     |
| 4. Organizational commitment  | 3.86| 1.086| .562*| .549*| .763*| (81)|     |
| 5. Turnover Intentions        | 2.71| 1.002| -.186**| -.219**| -.178*| -.263***| (.60) |

Note. Reliabilities are presented on the diagonal.
*p < .01. **p < .05.

Table 3. Regression Estimates (N = 408).

| Model                              | Unstandardized coefficients | Standardized coefficients | Remarks |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------|---------|
| Job Characteristics → Employee engagement | β = 0.91, SE = 0.33          | β = 0.56, CR = 4.56       | H1 ACCEPTED |
| Job Satisfaction → Employee engagement | β = 0.85, SE = 0.17          | β = 0.36, CR = 4.62       | H2 ACCEPTED |
| Employee engagement → Organizational commitment | β = 0.52, SE = 0.04          | β = 0.77, CR = 6.22       | H3 ACCEPTED |
| Employee engagement → Turnover Intentions | β = -0.14, SE = 0.06         | β = -0.18, CR = -1.82     | H4 REJECTED |

Note. The CR is recommended to be beyond +2.58 significant at p < .05 level. H4 is rejected as the estimates were not significant at p < .05.

The results of confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) indicate that all variables in the study were significant and had psychometric properties. For model fit, estimates include CMIN $\chi^2 = 1,188.39; p < .05$, df = 493; GFI = 0.931; NFI = 0.952; TLI = 0.958; CFI = 0.963; RMSEA = 0.058. In addition, the SRMR (standardized root mean square residual) was calculated as the questionnaire contains item with varying level (for example, with range 1–5 and others range from 0 to 6). All values for the loadings were significant at $p < .001$. According to Kline (2005), a model fit is satisfactory when the $\chi^2$/df ratio is below 3.00 (CFA: 2.41) and values for CFI and other incremental fit indices are above 0.90. Also, root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) value less than 0.08 is considered acceptable. Therefore, the results indicate a good model fit.

The result of mean, standard deviation, correlations, and reliabilities are presented in Table 2. The reliabilities of measures range from 0.60 to 0.93; displays high internal reliabilities. The initial results of correlation suggest low to high correlation among all the constructs of study ($r = 0.76; p < .01$ and $r = -0.18; p < .05$). Furthermore, it is observed that the antecedents are significantly related to employee engagement. As shown in Table 2, job characteristics and job satisfaction score were found to be significantly and positively correlated with employee engagement ($r = 0.60$ and $r = 0.50; p < .01$), respectively. In addition, employee engagement has significant positive relationship with organizational commitment ($r = .76; p < .01$); however, employee engagement was not found to be strongly related to turnover intentions ($r = -0.17; p < .05$). It is noted that turnover intention had negative but very weak correlation with all other constructs in the study.

Table 3 presents the standardized regression estimates to examine the direct association among the variable of the study. Using AMOS, the level of significance is based on CR (critical ratio) of the regression estimates (Biswas & Bhatnagar, 2013). It can be noted that all CR values are greater than 2.58, except one (employee engagement → turnover intentions were not significant). Therefore, employee engagement regress significantly and positively on job characteristics (standardized $\beta = 0.56$, CR = 4.56) and job satisfaction (standardized $\beta = 0.36$, CR = 4.62). Thus, Hypotheses 1 and 2 are accepted. Organizational commitment (standardized $\beta = 0.77$, CR = 6.22) is significantly and positively associated with employee engagement; however, turnover intentions (standardized $\beta = -0.18$, CR = -1.82) were not statistically significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is accepted and Hypothesis 4 is rejected. Employee engagement also explained significant amount of variance in job characteristics ($R^2 = 0.42$, $p < .01$) and organizational commitment ($R^2 = 0.59$, $p < .01$).

Furthermore, to test the mediation model in which employee engagement mediates the relationship between the antecedents (job characteristics and job satisfaction) and consequences (organizational commitment and turnover intentions), additional regression analysis was conducted. For organizational commitment, the antecedent job characteristics explained 77.5% of the variance which dropped to 57.4% ($p < .001$) when engagement entered the model as mediator. Similarly, job satisfaction explained 60.8% of variance but only 34% of variance was explained when employee engagement measures were controlled. For intentions to quit job characteristics explained 11% of the variance but only 2.2% with engagement as a mediator ($p < .05$). Similarly,
job satisfaction explained 48% of variance but reduced to 45% with engagement measure controlled. Thus, the results of regression analysis provide partial support for H5. As the variance explained by the antecedents substantially reduced when employee engagement was controlled, however, for turnover intentions, the antecedents reduced minimally when employee engagement was controlled.

SEM method using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) was applied to test the mediation of employee engagement. Figure 2 presents the path analysis. All parameter estimates were found to be significant at $p < .05$. Employee engagement mediates the relationship between the antecedents; job characteristics and job satisfaction and its consequence organizational commitment but not turnover intentions.

In addition to SEM, Sobel’s (1982) test, Aroian’s (1947) test and the Goodman’s (1960) test were conducted to test the employee engagement as a mediator. Results are presented in Table 4. As suggested by previous research and to discount any possibility of Type I error in the mediation, these tests are conducted (MacKinnon et al., 2002). The results show that employee engagement significantly explained that the organization commitment is determined by the predictors job characteristics and job satisfaction with the help of mediator, employee engagement. However, the results were not significant for turnover intentions.
Table 4. Employee Engagement as a Mediator (Sobel’s, Arorian and Goodman’s Test).

| Path                                                                 | Sobel’s Test | Arorian’s Test | Goodman’s Test | Results of the mediator analysis |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|
| Job Characteristics → **Employee engagement** → Organizational commitment | 2.69         | 2.68           | 2.70           | Employee engagement is a full moderator |
| Job Satisfaction → **Employee engagement** → Organizational commitment | 4.66         | 4.65           | 4.67           | Employee engagement is a full moderator |
| Job Characteristics → **Employee engagement** → Turnover Intentions  | –1.78**      | –1.71**        | –1.85**        | Not Significant                  |
| Job Satisfaction → **Employee engagement** → Turnover Intentions     | –2.11**      | –2.08**        | –2.15**        | Not Significant                  |

*p < .001. **Results are not significant.

Discussion

The results depict that the objectives of the study, assessing the employee engagement among millennial workforce of Saudi Arabia and testing the proposed model of employee engagement, were met. First, the study gathered useful insights that helped in measuring the engagement level of young Saudi employees through assessment of some key factors such as work environment, recognition, benefits, and development opportunities which enhances their dedication, vigor, and absorption at work. The employee engagement among Saudi millennial workforce was found to be moderate. Some employees who reported to be less engaged seemed to lack the motivation to devote their time and effort as they stated that neither do they feel excited about their work nor they are willing to continue their work for long periods of time. Apart from this, the turnover intentions were also found to be high (one in five Saudi employees indicated that they often think of leaving the job) and since there was no significant mediation by employee engagement on it, organizations must look into the other factors that would make their employees more involved, engaged, and committed to the organizations.

Second, the study tested the model with antecedents and consequences of employee engagement. Results show that job characteristics and job satisfaction predict employee engagement and employee engagement mediates the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction and its consequence; organizational commitment. First, hypothesis postulated that job characteristics are positively related to employee engagement. The result supports this hypothesis. Thus, when employees receive adequate resources, given a variety of tasks and proper feedback and autonomy at work, they are more likely to be dedicated, engaged, and involved in their work. Organizations must enhance the job resources to engage employees at a higher level. In the second hypothesis, it is suggested that job satisfaction has a positive relationship with employee engagement. This hypothesis was accepted which corroborates with the previous study (Yalabik et al., 2013). Also, only few studies have tested job satisfaction as an antecedent to employee engagement. This confirms the application of SET where employee feels and chooses to either engage or disengage when employee perceives the job to be satisfied or dissatisfied. Job satisfaction serves as a pre-requisite to other job-related attitude like employee engagement, thus, higher levels of job satisfaction serve as a strong antecedent to promote higher engagement levels among employees. Built on the SET, the study proved that employees who perceive their job and work environment to be satisfactory would recompense this by exerting more involvement and engagement at work. This is consistent with past studies (Bailey et al., 2017).

Third hypothesis proposed that employee engagement is positively related to organizational commitment. Results support this hypothesis and this corroborates with the findings of Ibrahim and Al Falasi (2014), which confirms the significant relationship between organizational commitment and employee engagement. Reflecting that when employees experience engagement at their workplace, they feel dedicated and committed toward the organization. Therefore, organizations which seek for employee loyalty must support the engagement among employees by providing them adequate job resources and ensuring that everyone is satisfied with the job. In the fourth hypothesis, it was stated that employee engagement is negatively related to turnover intentions. The coefficient of correlation between employee engagement and turnover intentions was significant, however very weak. The result of data analysis partially supports this hypothesis. Therefore, in the present study, employee engagement fails to predict turnover intentions which can be attributed to other factors inside and outside the workplace like organizational culture, national culture, or overall quality of work life (Sahni, 2017).

Fifth hypothesis proposed that employee engagement will mediate the relationship between job characteristics, job satisfaction and organizational commitment, and turnover intention. The hypothesis is partially accepted as employee engagement significantly explained that the organization commitment is determined by the predictors job characteristics and job satisfaction with the help of mediator; however, the results were not significant for turnover intentions. The findings are consistent with previous studies by Albrecht et al. (2015) and Wefald et al. (2012) which confirmed the mediating role of employee engagement between the
relationship of job resources and characteristics, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment.

These findings can be attributed to the fact that the workplace scenario is changing fast with the inclusion of flexibility and other dynamic concepts. Similarly, the expectations of millennial also vary with time. The millennial generation employees have high expectations from the workplace; young people, in particular, are twice as likely to stay in a job for more than one year only, if they view it as a career or they find a link with dream career. As reported in an article by Gilsdorf et al. (2017), less than 35% of young people experience this kind of satisfaction, which is a clear indication of the huge gap that exists in meeting the job engagement requirements. Similarly, the present study found that turnover intentions were as high as one in five Saudi employees indicated that they often think of leaving the job. Moreover, turnover intentions were not found to be predicted by employee engagement, which connotes that there are other factors at workplace that determine turnover intentions. Particularly, family responsibilities, socioeconomic stratum are some variables that can influence the turnover intention.

**Conclusion**

**Summary**

With the inclusion of millennial generation in the workforce, a high level of employee engagement is inevitable for any organization’s sustainability and success. Saudi Arabia is one of the upcoming economies of the world with rising youth which needs to be involved to enhance employee engagement and achieve the country’s vision. Keeping employees engaged proves to be a win-win strategy as employees feel contented when given meaningful work, while the organization becomes more effective in achieving the goals. After analyzing the data, we can conclude that the majority of young Saudi employees are moderately engaged in their jobs. Employee engagement was also found to mediate the relationship among job characteristics, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment. It is imperative for the managers to understand the factors that would inspire their workforce and encourage them to dedicate not only time but also energy and effort in their jobs.

**Research Contribution and Implications**

There is a dearth of research on millennial workforce of Saudi Arabia; this study would be perhaps, the first one to explore employee engagement in this context. The present research has contributed to the theoretical and practical implications. It contributes to the current literature and theory development of employee engagement. The results of this study would be valuable for the academic community. In terms of theoretical contribution, the study has demonstrated the significance of job satisfaction and job characteristics in predicting employee engagement. The proposed model of employee engagement was also tested. It has contributed to the theory by validating that employee engagement mediates the relationship between job characteristics and job satisfaction and its consequence organizational commitment.

In terms of practical implications, the combined survey for measuring employee engagement, job satisfaction, job characteristics, and organizational commitment can be administered by managers and the findings of such survey can serve as feedback, building on the strengths, to make improvements and introduce interventions. This might help organizations to achieve sustainable employee engagement. The significance of engaging employees is emphasized in the study as it was found to be a predictor of organizational commitment. The research findings can be validated by replicating this study to nations with rising millennials like India.

Understanding the millennial workforce would be crucial in predicting their work attitudes. Some of the suggestive strategies for managers ensure the availability of adequate resources, second, ensure a regular recognition program is established to appreciate and intrinsically motivate the employees as the millennials prefer personal attention and they value recognition, third, if possible, tasks should be delegated to enhance autonomy fifth, ensure to assign meaningful task to employees and last, a fair and transparent reward system must be established. This would enhance the passion and enthusiasm among employees leading to higher organization commitment.

Furthermore, methodological contributions can also be reported. The researcher developed a set of hypotheses and undertook several statistical tests to affirm the relationship among the factors. The application of structural equation modeling (SEM) provides further scientific confirmation for causation which adds in a unique way to the existing research on employee engagement.

**Limitation and Future Research**

One of the limitations for the present study is the reliance on the cross-sectional data and self-report survey results. Therefore, a mixed-method approach is suggested for future research in this field. Since, employee engagement is central to employee’s morale, satisfaction, and commitment, it should be studied from a human resource perspective as well. Thus, it is recommended that future research considers the emerging field of engagement as a management practice. Since the findings are based on limited millennial employees, there is no universal claim for generalization. For the future study, the impact of other important factors can be studied on employee engagement like socioeconomic stratum, family responsibilities or obligations, or the training of individuals. Future research can also examine the findings in different cultural contexts.
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