

Employee Engagement Determinants: Pre and Post COVID-19 era in an Emerging Economy's Public Media Industry

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Abstract

The contemporary organisation witnessed a sharp drift from the known normal to a new normal due to the novel Coronavirus pandemic. Most organisations insist that staff members work from home, except those on essential duties. Employee engagement has been instrumental in ensuring the sustainability of the workplace during that period. This research compares some employee engagement determinants pre- and post-COVID-19 among entrepreneurs in the media sector. Employees' proactiveness and innovativeness ascertained entrepreneurs. A pooled cross-sectional analysis was conducted. The findings expressed a variation between employees' priorities in the two periods, with compensation at the apex.

Keywords: artificial intelligence, COVID-19 pandemic, digitalisation, employee engagement, emerging economy, entrepreneur

INTRODUCTION

Change is not new in management, but the abrupt entrance of the COVID-19 pandemic caused the world to rethink how businesses and institutions should operate. Before the pandemic, employee engagement was gaining popularity with many organisations, with academic and research institutes reporting a direct relationship between engagement and enhanced organisational performance. Thus, instituting an engaged workforce became a top priority for various organisations (Alfes et al., 2010), to the extent that it has been reasoned that 'engaged' employees are the mainstay of a good working environment with diligent, principled and accountable employees (Cleland et al., 2008). Scholarly reports suggested that one of the techniques for achieving improved organisational performance is to form a probable scheme toward a more engaged workforce (Clapon, 2014).

Drivers of employee engagement are those elements that influence and motivate employees, drive people's actions, and transform them into productivity, profitability, organisational loyalty, and performance (Clapon, 2014). O'Carroll (2015) argued that from the literature, engagement drivers are non-exhaustive; rather, some drivers appear commonly in most research. Some of these drivers are grouped under the following: leadership, communications, compensation, recognition, training, learning and development, career development, perceived supervisor's support, perceived organisational support, job crafting, work environment, and feedback. These drivers tend to motivate employees towards vigour, dedication, and absorption in an organisation (Egwuonwu, 2015; O'Carroll, 2015).

Nigerians are purportedly ardent consumers of news and other social media reports. A study carried out in 2014 on Contemporary Media Use in Nigeria in a face-to-face interview with 4,000 adults living in Nigeria aged 15 years and above revealed that about two-thirds of respondents claimed to have access to news at least once a day (66.6%). The assertion is said to be prevalent among men (72.8%) and those living in urban areas (72.4%). Audio electronic media is asserted to be the predominant news platform in Nigeria, with 77.4% of the respondents across various demographic categories sourcing for news from several audio

media outfits at least weekly, and the internet ranked fourth with 28.2% of the participants opting for news from the radio stations. The study further documented that most households sourced information from electronic mass media. About 83.4% had functional audio electronics, and 74.6% depended on visual electronic sets. Nevertheless, about 83.7% of urban dwellers were more likely to use visual media.

Reports have associated Nigeria's media and Show Businesses with one of the fastest-growing entertainment, creative, and cultural industries worldwide. It is documented in a report from The International Trade Administration's official website that revenue from the entertainment industry rose from \$732 million in 2018 to \$806 million in 2020 and was estimated to hit about \$900 million in 2023; an estimated revenue of about \$10.8 billion in 2023 was expected from the Media Industry according to an IMF report. Part of this anticipation will come from Africa's pay television subscribers, which is estimated to increase by 21.2% in 2025.

The above submission underscores the essence of revamping the public media's operations toward a better outcome (Hartley et al., 2013), meeting citizens' expectations, and steering society to improve quality of life (Kearney et al., 2008). The COVID-19 era has redefined how most businesses function, especially audio and visual broadcasting. Conventional media outfits like the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria (FRCN) were established to be an unbiased, reliable, trustworthy, inventive, and digitalised medium at the vanguard of Nigeria's national development, harmony, and advancement. From observations, the public media industry is gradually losing its patronage to social media and individual bloggers. Before the lockdown in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nigeria's TV market and radio were experiencing an advancement in local content production. Thus, recruiting and retaining engaged employees with expertise in developing programmes is necessary to keep pace or face the danger of extinction. This research seeks to examine whether any changes exist in determinants of workers' engagement post-COVID-19 period.

Dissemination of information and communication has become a critical part of human life. There is a shift from the traditional means of communication limited by the station's radio signal for broadcast known as Frequency Modulation (FM) and Amplitude Modulation AM. Then, the public media in Nigeria enjoyed a monopoly and was perceived to be central to national building and development (Inuwa, 2017).

However, with the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill in 2011, many media outlets, especially Radio Broadcasting, have sprouted up (Baños et al., 2022). Moreover, there seems to be intense competition between the public, private, and individual social media bloggers on listenership and followership post-COVID-19 era. The challenge is how to draw the line between which information is correct or not. Some content creators push news or information that may be partially true but can attract followers and traffic to their site. It has been observed that some information pushed into social media is either unconfirmed, inaccurate, or false, mostly to increase followership and audience and to make money. Someone should be held accountable to address these challenges, which is what a statutory media outfit stands for.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Ho: The determinants of employee engagement before and after the COVID-19 lockdown are similar.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Employee engagement

Employee engagement has received several definitions from inception (Rogel, 2016). Among the definitions proffered by different authors, Kahn's definition is comprehensive and precise in terms of the definition and measurement of the concept. In his study, Kahn expressed engagement as the individual's physical, cognitive, and emotional connection to their work responsibilities while executing their duties (Kahn, 2010). From the several definitions, engaged employees are pragmatic, productive, and constructive and establish appropriate abilities an employer anticipates from employees, such as participation, involvement, dedication, doggedness, enthusiasm, concentration, determination, energy, and zeal daily (Schaufeli, 2014). An engaged workforce advocates a workplace technique that precipitates relevant situations for the optimal execution of daily responsibilities and explicit commitment to the organisational goals, aspirations, and values (Macleod, 2016). Macleod (2016) asserts that engaged employees are inspired and enthused to aid the organisational accomplishment, with a heightened sense of wellness.

Workforce engagement drivers

Several studies were instituted to ascertain the determinants of improved engagement (Markos & Sridevi, 2010). However, most studies aimed to establish the drivers that would advance the employee engagement level in their study setting. From existing literature, the list of engagement drivers is numerous. The diverse nature of the most important determinants of engagement can differ based on the type, role, and culture of the organisations (O'Carroll, 2015) pointed out that the differences.

This study is a follow-up to our earlier field survey conducted before the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic. We isolated the eight most rated drivers of engagement (leadership, work environment, communications, career development, job crafting, compensation/rewards, perceived organisational support, and learning and development). Each of the eight key drivers in this study relates to Kahn's (1990) and May et al. (2004) engagement model. Kahn (1990) reveals that three psychological conditions need to be present for personal engagement to be attained. These conditions are psychological meaningfulness, psychological safety, and psychological availability.

Meaningfulness can refer to the extent to which the organisation supports its employees through leadership, communication, career development, job crafting, compensation, intrinsic reward, perceived management's appreciation and value regarding their contributions to their organisation, and learning and development meant for employees to improve their skills in job execution. Psychological safety refers to perceived organisational support, work environment, job crafting, leadership, and recognition.

Psychological availability relates to the job description, employees' willingness and readiness to carry out their responsibilities, and appropriate work-life balance. One of the aftermaths of the COVID-19 pandemic is digitalisation and flexibility.

The benefits of advanced technology in traditional mass media

Advanced technology has significantly impacted mass media operations (Ayotunde, 2012). One of the advanced technologies that has come to stay with this generation is Artificial intelligence (AI) has come to stay. It has made content creation simpler with little or no errors. These contents can reach a wider audience.

Furthermore, innovation brought by advanced technology provides processes, systems, and procedures for tracking followership, subscribers, viewers, and your audience. Some digital platforms now used by traditional mass media stations are Twitter, Facebook,

and Instagram. Time lag and out-of-coverage are no longer challenges for listeners and viewers. The beauty of these social media handles is that the media houses can receive feedback from viewers and readers.

Technology has simplified how readers and viewers can access information. To avoid misinformation, privacy issues, and ethical issues raised by AI integration, users must be innovative and balance innovation and ethics.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the theories that can be used to describe the concept of engagement is motivational theory. These theories are set to determine what drives individual performance and attitude to work. Young (2017) related Herzberg's two-factor theory to engagement drivers. He ascertained a variance in how people respond to two diverse kinds of "motivation". Herzberg's motivators relate to intrinsic drivers of employee engagement, while the hygiene factors relate to extrinsic drivers of employee engagement.

We based our theory on the content theories of motivation. From this research, we classified hygiene factors as exterior drivers and motivators as interior drivers. Exterior drivers of engagement are mostly hygiene factors, physiological and safety needs, and partly social, including perceived organisational support, pay, salary, holidays, bonuses, and work environment. Interior drivers are accomplishment, career development, learning/development, and Job crafting.

A sense of belonging can be external or internal, depending on the motivating factor. It can be the euphoria of belonging to a social class or the inherent joy one has to be valued and appreciated in a group. So also, is communication. It can be passive or active.

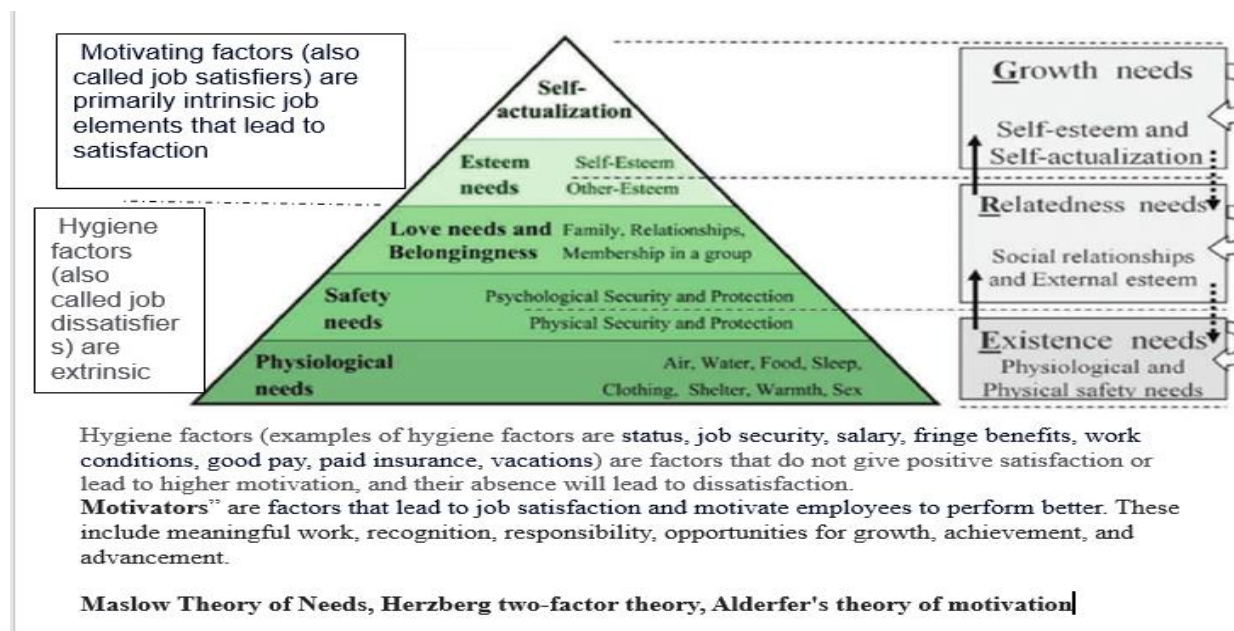


Figure 1: Contemporaneous tripartite content theory

Herzberg's accomplishment can be related to Kahn's psychological meaningfulness of work. Young (2017) referred to meaningful work as an intrinsic driver of engagement. Employee Engagement Theory, as proposed by Kahn, suggests that employees should apply their competencies, skills, abilities, and dexterities in their job role and be aware that their

contributions add value to their workstation. For instance, an external driver of engagement includes reward (Cherry, 2019). Studies have revealed a positive correlation between intrinsic motivators and employee engagement (Egwuonwu, 2015; O'Carroll, 2015). These studies also reported that when adequately applied, intrinsic and extrinsic motivation will improve engagement levels. Rogel (2016) purported that intrinsic and extrinsic factors are key engagement components. Rogel (2016) asserted that fundamental factors known as hygiene factors, according to Herzberg, are necessary to guarantee employee satisfaction and reduced turnover. He suggested a direct relationship between motivation and enhanced performance (Rogel, 2016). Physiological factors, hygiene factors, and existence variables are easier to discover and address for better execution of tasks in the workplace. Workplace diversity entails managers understanding what drives the individuals concerning their contemporary need to achieve a motivated workforce.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a panel data research design to achieve a more comprehensive and synergetic data utilisation. Data was collected through interviews and questionnaires adapted from Gallup Q12 administered to staff members in a state and federal government station who were randomly selected. Questions were obtained from online employee engagement survey questions to identify the drivers of employee engagement. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and any variables with Cronbach alpha less than 0.700 were conducted. Primary and secondary data were deployed in 2015-2019 (Ukonu et al., 2024) for pre-COVID-19 and 2021-2022 after the COVID-19 pandemic. Ethical approval was received from the media houses under study before the beginning of the research.

RESULTS

Four hundred and forty-five (445) were recruited into the initial study, but three hundred and eighty-four (384) questionnaires were found usable. Subsequently, 6.8% were lost to follow-up and replaced with another set of employees.

Table 1: Relationship between determinants of employee engagement

INDICATION	Before the pandemic		After the pandemic	
	R	P value	R	P value
Employee Engagement	1.000		1.000	
Leadership	0.637	<0.0001	0.747	<0.0001
Communication	0.537	<0.0001	0.500	<0.0001
Compensation /Rewards	0.671	<0.0001	0.842	<0.0001
Learning and Development	0.599	<0.0001	0.622	<0.0001
Perceived Organisational Support	0.736	<0.0001	0.816	<0.0001
Career Development	0.608	<0.0001	0.644	<0.0001
Job Crafting	0.656	<0.0001	0.719	<0.0001

Work Environment	0.659	<0.0001	0.653	<0.0001
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(Source: Researcher's Field Work); R- Spearman's Correlation; **-Statistically significant

Table 1 shows a strong correlation between work engagement and determinants of employee engagement. In the study population preceding the pandemic, Perceived Organisational Support had the highest correlation ($\rho=0.736$), followed by Compensation/rewards, Work environment, job crafting, Leadership, Career Development, Learning and Development, Communication ($\rho=.671, .659, .656, .637, .608, .599, .537$) accordingly. Post covid-19 period, Compensation/Rewards had the highest correlation with employee engagement ($\rho=0.842$), followed by perceived organisational support ($\rho=0.816$), leadership ($\rho=0.747$); Job crafting ($\rho=0.653$), career development ($\rho=0.644$), learning & development ($\rho=0.622$) and communication ($\rho=0.500$). All the variables had a high statistically significant correlation ($P<0.0001$). The result obtained after the lockdown revealed a strong correlation between compensation and rewards and employee engagement.

Thematic content analysis

Thematic content analysis summarised the interview outcome conducted when sharing the questionnaire. Participants were tutored about the research title and possible determinants of employee engagement. Consenting respondents were asked what they perceived as the element that drives engagement in their corporation. Their answers are documented in Table 3. Furthermore, participants were asked to rank the identified elements in this study according to their relative importance to them. Kendall's tau-b correlation is a mean of all ranked, as seen in Table 3. The issue of leadership was of utmost importance to the respondents in terms of their level of engagement, followed by Compensation, which involves intrinsic and extrinsic compensation/rewards and perceived organisational support. Other important elements were Learning and development, work environment, job crafting, communications, and career development.

However, the responses varied after the pandemic. Regarding employee engagement, rewards and compensation were of the utmost importance to the participants.

Table 2: Summary of interview questions (Thematic Content Analysis)

Interview Question/Theme	Response (THEMES) Pre Covid-19 era	Outcome (Drivers)	Effect
<p>What are the perceived drivers of employee engagement in your organisation?</p> <p>Theme: Drivers of employee engagement</p>	<p>Career progression/ development, job crafting, leadership, staff welfare, organisational support, Health and safety, job satisfaction, provision of working materials, improved/conducive work environment, learning and development, fairness, Job autonomy, organisational image, feeling valued and involved, regular feedback and communications, compensation/recognition, Management support, staff welfare, learning and development, organisational support, autonomy for job crafting, Work-life-balance and work itself, Job satisfaction, Feeling valued and involved, Equal opportunity, organisational image, Work environment, Flexible work conditions, feedback</p>	<p>Job satisfaction, behaviour, Job involvement, Organisational citizenship behaviour, Commitment, motivation, and maximum contribution. (These are elements of employee engagement).</p> <p>The content is very important in the media industry and requires more attention for maximum employee input/output</p>	<p>Very strong in achieving Improved performance, increased productivity and competitive advantage, drive to ensure organisational sustenance.</p> <p>These drivers can help to improve employees' levels of engagement.</p>
Interview Question/Theme	Response (THEMES) Post Covid-19 era	Outcome (Drivers)	Effect
<p>What do you think are the drivers of employee engagement in your organisation?</p> <p>Theme: Drivers of employee engagement</p>	<p>Pay and bonuses, Staff Welfare, Health and Safety, Management support, Communications and feedback, Higher emoluments, Work-life balance, Improved work environment, Flexible work conditions, Remote working, feeling valued</p>	<p>More desire to work enhanced Job, Commitment, Job satisfaction, Job involvement and maximum contribution.</p>	<p>Very strong in achieving Improved performance, increased productivity and competitive advantage, drive to ensure organisational sustenance.</p>

Table 3: Relative Ranking of the key drivers of Employee Engagement in the study population

	Pre COVID-19 era (2015-2019)			Post COVID-19 era (2021-2022)		
Drivers of EE	(Tb)	Sig.	Rank	(Tb)	Sig.	Rank
Leadership	0.850	<0.0001***	1	0.844	0.001***	5
Compensation/Rewards	0.833	<0.0001***	2	0.971	0.0001***	1
Perceived Organisational Support	0.831	<0.0001***	3	0.845	0.0001***	4
Work environment	0.793	0.003***	4	0.798	0.002***	6
Job crafting	0.791	0.003***	5	0.870	0.004***	3
Communications	0.784	0.001***	6	0.687	0.009***	8
Career development	0.751	0.006**	7	0.889	0.0001***	2
Learning and Development	0.744	0.004***	8	0.774	0.007***	7

Tb- Kendall's tau-b; Sig.- Value significant at P<0.01

Discussion

The research compared the drivers of employee engagement before and after the lockdown and the possible effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on employee engagement in public media stations. The findings showed that leadership ranked highest as a driving force of enhanced engagement in the media industry under study before the pandemic, and rewards/compensation ranked the highest for most respondents. The reason was associated with the high inflation rate, fuel subsidy removal, and naira devaluation.

Conclusion

There is a surge in the prices of things. Inflation will always have a direct effect on purchasing power. Workers and their unions keep advocating for a pay raise to meet the prevalent market situation and basic needs. The need for a hybrid organisation cannot be overstated. Job crafting should be encouraged, and employees should be able to work from home. The use of technology proffers some solutions. Workplace flexibility is a path to follow. Employees need regular training and seminars to upskill their competencies to meet up with the 21st-century workplace. This study recommends sending employees to a related organisation to be exposed to exchange programmes in another organisation for effective job crafting. Digital transformation is recommended, and every staff member should be trained in green business, corporate entrepreneurship, emotional intelligence, and artificial intelligence.

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Conflicts of interest

There was no conflict of interest from the authors. There was no external funding.

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