

MAPPING THE LITERATURE AND FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA OF EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT: A BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS OF THE PAST 20 YEARS

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Structured Abstract

Purpose: The aim of this study is to highlight the intricacies involved in the conceptualization and theorization of Employee Engagement in the past twenty years. By analyzing the antecedents and, this study aims to identify the gaps in the present literature so that future research directions can be deliberated. **Design/methodology/approach:** This research applies a bibliometric analysis approach in order to synthesize upcoming themes in the area of employee engagement. **Findings:** Employee Engagement as a concept has been widely conceptualized and mainly differentiated into two dimensions – psychological or attitudinal and behavioural. Less research has taken place on the behavioural front of the topic wherein the extra-role performance by engaged employees' discretionary behaviour should be studied. Also, factors like the nature of work and leadership, and emotional intelligence need attention. **Limitations:** The present study has only undertaken articles and has not focused on book chapters, conference proceedings and focused on English language research papers. Also, the study excluded research studies where engagement was examined as a moderator or mediator as the emphasis was on understanding the antecedents of engagement. **Implications:** Since engagement levels have dropped in the past decade, it becomes imperative for practitioners to overhaul its understanding and make every employee's experience a unique one by engaging them.

Keywords: Antecedents, Bibliometric Analysis, Employee Engagement

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of HRD advocates that people's intelligence, fulfilling work energy, positive attitude, reliability, commitment, ability to learn, aptitude, imagination, creativity, and motivation to share information and knowledge, make a difference that leads to innovation and process capital which have become very important to the development processes (Nafuko et al., 2010). Employee Engagement is becoming a popular term among human resource management and development consultants, internal communications practitioners, and business conference presenters, but questions persist regarding whether engagement is just a passing fad (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Employee Engagement has been positioned as a dominant source of competitive advantage by many organizations (Kular et al., 2008). However, there continues to be ambiguity and a lack of consensus regarding the uniqueness of employee engagement among scholars and practitioners (Bakker et al., 2011). Research has also indicated that an extensive breadth of the theoretical framework has supported the concept of employee engagement, however, there is a lack of a distinctive outline to practice it.

The majority of research within the engagement field has focused on engagement as a psychological state and has not analyzed issues or areas of interest to practitioners (Bailey et al., 2017). A great volume of research has indicated that quality empirical research is missing and whatever has been written till date is either not complete or under-theorized. A lot of claims have been made about employee engagement enhancing an organization's performance and shareholder returns. However, the area of concern lies that it is on the decline world-over. In the United States, this problem has been referred to as an "engagement gap" that is costing US businesses billions of dollars a year in lost productivity (Bates, 2004). Gallup Report (2013) exhibits that employee engagement is responsible for 9 performance outcomes, which are customer ratings (10%), profitability (22%), productivity (21%), turnover (65%), safety incidents (48%), shrinkage (28%), absenteeism (37%), patient safety incidents (41%), and quality (41%), the percentages reflecting the median differences between top- and bottom-quartile units.

When it comes to the conceptualization of employee engagement, it has been researched that it is not only work engagement, that has been studied by scholars, but one of the most common types of engagement identified is engagement with the organization as a whole. Since this overall engagement overlaps with other constructs like commitment and satisfaction, most of the researchers have limited their focus to the more distinctive concept of work engagement (Peccei, 2013). To add on, many consulting organizations have materialized their peculiar strategy to achieve employee engagement, resulting in an augmentation of definitions and scales. Except for Gallup's Q¹² employee engagement scale, none of the measures of the construct has been subjected to systematic scrutiny and testing (Wefald and Downey 2009). Rather than measuring engagement itself, these constructs endeavour to define it in terms of its correlates, antecedents or consequences. Saks and Gruman 2014 suggest that future research should emphasize developing a new measure based on the age-old Kahn's (1990) conceptualization and theory of engagement, exploring further psychometric exploration and the three-dimensional model of engagement.

Broadly examining, engagement has been conceptualized in two different dimensions within the academic framework – as a psychological state or attitude, propagated by Schaufeli, Bakker and colleagues (2002, 2006) and as a behaviour, best endorsed by the work done by Kahn (1990, 1992). The in-depth analysis of the attitudinal approach draws attention towards the differentiable comparison between work engagement as a remarkably stable phenomenon and engagement as a fleeting wavering entity, constantly changing on a weekly or daily basis. (Purcell, 2014) has suggested building on the key advantage of the focus on employees' beliefs, values, behaviours, and experiences at work in order to move forward in the concept of employee engagement.

Newman et al. 2011 found Employee Engagement to be entangled in the jangle fallacy, which is a common concern related to construct validation. They inferred that engagement is not much different from overall job-related attitudes, defined previously as the "A-Factor" (Harrison et al., 2006). Although an array of similar constructs exists in the literature – work engagement, job engagement, organizational engagement, and intellectual/social engagement, employee

engagement uniquely stands as a separate theoretical construct. A distinguishment describing the precise measurement terms, their focus, and the nuances that impact conceptualization has been given by Nimon et al. 2016. Also, a major distinction has been observed in employee engagement in relation to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and job involvement (Nimon et al. 2016).

As per previous literature, Engagement is a multi-faceted construct and shows varieties in the form of state, trait or behaviour. Also, it has been conceptualized in two prominent ways – psychological state or attitude-based and behavioural side of engagement, affected by different factors. This understanding has led to an argument amongst researchers about the name of the construct – whether it should be called employee engagement or job engagement or work engagement (Rich et al. 2010).

Although a lot of research has been conducted to understand the antecedents and consequences of employee engagement as well as in theorizing or conceptualizing it, few have done a summary of these and out of which very less work on conceptual synthesis was found. Another significant gap in the literature was the dearth of studying trait, state and behavioural engagement. Therefore, this study attempts to highlight not only the predictors and outcomes of engagement but also present comprehensive coverage by understanding the dynamics of their relationships.

The following questions are answered through this systematic literature review:

1. What are the publication trends in the domain of employee engagement in view of the top journals, authors, organizations, and countries in the past 20 years?
2. What factors affect the concept of employee engagement and what theoretical background supports them?
3. What gaps still exist in the literature of employee engagement and what future directions can be applied to the field?

These research questions are answered through the analysis of bibliometrics. Bibliometric analysis is a helpful tool for deciphering and mapping the cumulative scientific knowledge and evolutionary nuances of well-established fields by making sense of large volumes of unstructured data in rigorous ways (Donthu et.al., 2021). It not only facilitates in identifying conceptual gaps in literature but also provides new avenues for investigation. The significant challenge imposed in this methodology is to rely on a limited set of data and techniques, which allows a gradual study of the topic. The edge that bibliometric analysis has over meta-analysis is that in meta-analysis the heterogeneity and limited studies on a domain can adversely affect the validity of results. The systematic literature review serves to locate published as well as unpublished research to delimit the effect of biases and systematically examine the methods used in this research.

The research findings of this inquest would add value to the existing literature and assist professionals in enhancing their understanding of the factors that lead to higher employee engagement. It will also provide academicians with future research perspectives that have the

potential to affect employee engagement. The following sections describe the research methodology and results of bibliometric analysis.

2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of mapping the literature is to identify the right research questions for the fraternity at large. Academicians as well as practitioners should be able to find relevant gaps through this review that can bring to light the hurdles to understanding employee engagement. It has been important for the scholarly and practitioner communities to develop processes and methodologies for bringing research evidence together systematically and applying it in practice (Tranfield and Denyer, 2003). Due to the vast and varied literature available on employee engagement, there exists a pressing need to systematically map its theorization, conceptualization, and process further avenues for its development. A systematic approach to review fosters a structured method of identifying appropriate keywords, synthesizing literature, and analyzing relevant data. It calls for covering numerous journals relevant to the discipline as well as cross-discipline coverage to amalgamate one area. For this study, we used Scopus and the Web of Science database. Scopus is the largest single abstract and indexing database ever built (Burnham, 2006). It is a popular and comprehensive database offering substantial and reliable publications for the academic community (Solvoll et al. 2015); Caviggioli and Ughetto 2019). Both Scopus and Web of Science are considered to be more reliable for a bibliometric study as they are oriented towards individual researchers and documents on a specific research topic. The study was carried out in December 2022. A three-stage process was followed comprising of scanning, curating and analysis (Khanra et al. 2020; Bhatt et al. 2020).

Scanning: The first and foremost step in systematic literature review is to determine the relevant keywords that can help in including significant studies related to the concept. An initial search on Google Scholar helped in understanding the synonyms and common words related to the topic of research. A pilot search on Scholar gave an idea of the research similar to Employee Engagement. Using the proximity principle, we grouped the keywords into the following:

Group A: "Employee Engagement" OR "Work Engagement" OR "Job Engagement" AND
Group B: "Antecedents" OR "Factors" OR "Causes" OR "Explor*"

Various combinations of the above-mentioned keywords were searched using Boolean operators. Keywords of both groups were individually looked for in the title, abstract, and articles for inclusion of appropriate studies.

Curating: Articles were restricted to management, business and social science domains. The inclusion criteria were: 1) All articles with the keyword 'Employee Engagement' or 'Work Engagement' or 'Job Engagement' or even 'Engagement'; 2) peer-reviewed studies; and 3) English language papers. All the articles were initially screened for titles, abstracts, and keywords. There was one exclusion criterion: the articles that portrayed engagement as a mediator or moderator or an antecedent for other variables were not included in this study. Any kind of disparateness between the two reviewers was deliberated and agreement was achieved

in all samples/ specimens.

The database search on Web of Science and Scopus produced 504 results out of which duplicates were deleted and conditional formatting done, leaving 491 papers at hand. These papers were subjected to initial screening of titles, abstracts, and keywords leaving a total of 264 papers for final analysis. Fig. 1 represents the entire data retrieval process.

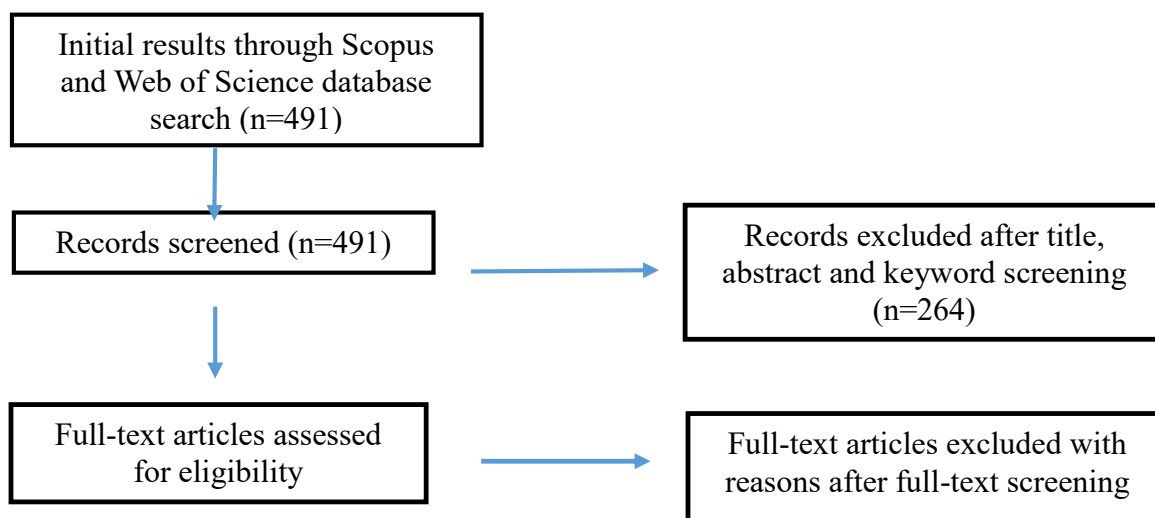


Fig 1: Flow of Data Filtration

Analysing: To achieve the objective of mapping the literature on Employee Engagement, a two-tier analysis involving bibliometric and research synthesis was executed. A bibliometric analysis is a statistical assessment of reported scientific research in the form of articles, books or book chapters and an effective measure regarding their publication status in the scientific fraternity (Iftikhar et al., 2019). The use of bibliometric study can bring a new perspective to the field of Employee Engagement and the factors affecting it as it is a statistical technique on objective data like authorship, publications and citations. This research endeavours to create a database of various conceptualizations of the topic and its extensive theorization. Both conceptual and empirical papers were shortlisted for a holistic examination of the domain.

After analyzing the retrieved data for bibliometric purposes, this study also synthesized relevant and influential studies to deduce/ extrapolate productive sapience from the analysis. Till date, very less bibliometric research has been done on Engagement using Scopus and Web of Science both. Four such research papers were found by the authors, out of which one covered hospitality and tourism industry, one focused on effect of engagement on organizational performance and other two were basic bibliometric studies. Observing the paradoxical nature of the literature related to engagement, this study hopes to be useful in the context of practitioners and researchers.

3. BIBLIOMETRIC ANALYSIS - RESULTS

Numerous software packages are available for Bibliometric Analysis like BibExcel, Gephi, Biblioshiny, CiteSpace, Bibliometrix package for R and VosViewer. This study used VosViewer version 1.6.18.0 developed by Nees Jan Van Eck and Ludo Waltman for statistical analysis. This tool is used for creating maps based on network data and for visualizing and exploring these maps. It can be used to construct networks of scientific publications, scientific journals, researchers, research organizations, countries, keywords or terms. Items in these networks can be connected by co-authorship, co-occurrence, citation, bibliometric coupling, or co-citation links. A database file from any of the sources like Web of Science, Scopus, Dimensions, Lens and PubMed files and reference manager files i.e. RIS, EndNote, and RefWork Files are provided as input to VosViewer. Alternatively, it can also download data through an API (i.e., Crossref API, OpenAlex API, Europe PMC API etc. The vital information utilized for the analysis included author, title, journal, publication year, keyword, affiliation and reference which were downloaded from Scopus and Web of Science.

3.1 Chronological Publication Trend: The year-wise evolution of articles from the chosen time period 2002-2022 is shown in Fig 2. The last two decades have seen a substantial growth of 45% in the number of articles published in the area of Employee Engagement. There was a void in the research till 2006 and a gradual acceleration is seen after 2007. The highest annual increase has been seen in the year 2019 which is 11% and it is only in 2022 that the growth is at the maximum negative of 17%. This could have occurred due to the impact of Covid-19 on various organizational factors. Overall, the graph has an escalating trend until 2020, as the interest in the research area is seen to be growing. 95% of the research was executed in the last ten years i.e. 245 papers out of 258 in both the databases were published in the last decade. The invigorating augmentation in the field can be contributed to the distress and ambiguity associated with the concept of Engagement.

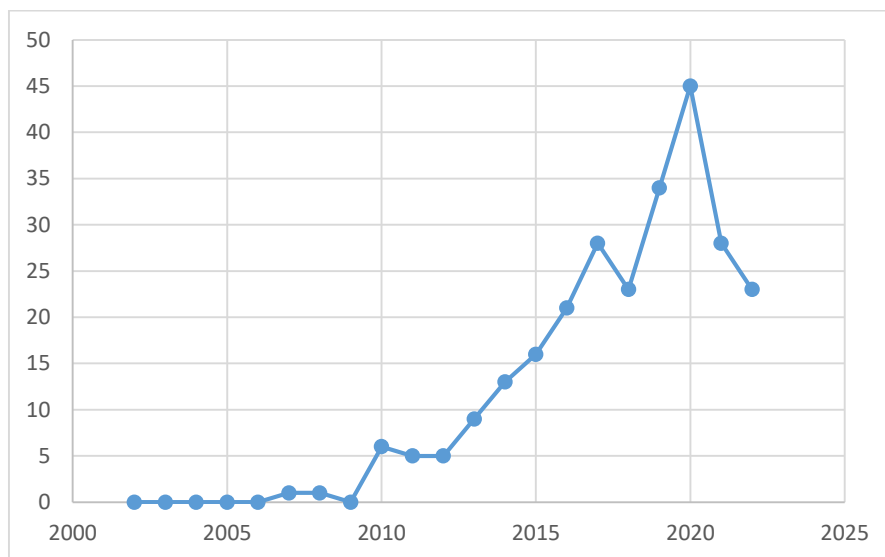


Fig 2: Chronological Publication Trend

3.2 Journal Quality Analysis: An analysis of the significant journals that have remarkably been published in the area of Employee Engagement is shown in Table 1. During the entire 20 years under study, 118 journals have published in this domain with a minimum of 1 research paper in 71 of these. A minimum of 2 publications were found in 19 of them. The highest number of articles found in a single journal was 14, published in the International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management and Personnel Review with an H index of 100 and 77 respectively, accounting for 5.15% of total papers under study. The journal with the highest H index of 208 is the Journal of Business Ethics contributing 7 articles which constitute 2.57% of the total. International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management propagates upcoming progress and discussions on hospitality and tourism businesses worldwide covering almost all areas of management including HRM. Personnel Review focuses mainly on original and contemporary issues with Human Resource Management theory, practice and policy development and covers a plethora of employee-oriented areas. The Journal of Business Ethics is known to print only original articles on versatile methodological and disciplinary viewpoints concerning ethical outgrowths. Most of these top journals belong to the category of organizational or occupational psychology, but few of them also cover areas like hospitality, tourism, career, business and ethics. This comprehensive coverage promotes the significance of Employee Engagement in different scenarios.

Table 1: List of top 10 journals published work on Employee Engagement

Sources	No of articles	H Index
International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management	14	100
Personnel Review	14	77
JOURNAL OF MANAGERIAL PSYCHOLOGY	12	86
EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF WORK AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY	8	72
Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management	8	45
JOURNAL OF OCCUPATIONAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY	8	123
Career Development International	7	67
Human Resource Development Quarterly	7	69
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS AND PSYCHOLOGY	7	83
JOURNAL OF BUSINESS ETHICS	7	208

3.3 Affiliation Statistics

Based on the authors' affiliation a table was created mapping the geographical distribution of the research done on Employee Engagement. Table 2 exhibits the geographical distribution of worldwide publications on the topic, region-wise i.e. Europe, Americas, Africa, Asia & Oceania. The region dominating this field of study is South Asia which includes developing economies like India, Malaysia & Indonesia. And very competing with it is North America with the United States touching heights on this concept.

Table 2: Region-wise Geographical distribution of organizations involved in Employee Engagement research

Geographical Distribution	No of organizations	% Contribution
Europe		
Northern Europe	29	10.66
Central Europe	20	7.35
Western Europe	12	4.41
Southern Europe	7	2.57
America		
North America	61	22.43
South America	2	0.74
Africa		
North Africa	1	0.37
West Africa	4	1.47
South Africa	9	3.31
Asia		
Eastern Asia	24	8.82
Middle East	13	4.78
South Asia	75	27.57
Oceania		
Australia & New Zealand	15	5.51
Total	272	100.00

Table 3 shows the contribution of top 7 organizations that have published articles in the field of Employee Engagement with their location in the past 20 years. The maximum number of publications have taken place in Texas A & M University in United States. Second to that is the Pondicherry University, a central university under the Ministry of Education, Govt of India. This ranking is followed by Colorado State University, State University System of Florida, and Malviya National Institute of Technology, India. The research on Employee Engagement is dominated by the United States and India collectively.

Table 3: Top 7 organizations working on Employee Engagement research

Affiliations	Location	No of Articles
Texas A & M University	Texas, United States	5
Pondicherry University	India	4
Colorado State University	Colorado, United States	3
State University System of Florida	Florida, United States	3
Malviya National Institute of Technology	Jaipur, India	3
University of Bath	UK	3
Symbiosis International University	Pune, India	3

3.4 Co-authorship Analysis: This method is a distinguished way to know and understand the most valid and demonstrable collaboration between different authors working in this area. It is a direct indication of the number of publications two authors have in common. Only two clusters came out after inputting the file in Vosviewer version 1.6.18 as shown in figure 3,

which means that not many authors have collaborated on this front. The criteria for this analysis were to include the authors with a minimum of one publication on the subject. The size of the circles represents the cooperation between the authors and the colors represent the groups or clusters. The first cluster is composed of 6 items or authors who have worked closely – Hong-Ngam J., Kingsawat K., Pasuta, K., Samorna S., Sonman K., and Thinpru S. The second cluster consists of only three authors – Auraimpai N., Ayuwat D., and Narongchai W. The analysis also indicates that very less authors have collaborated on the topic and there can be numerous associations between other authors worldwide.

Co-authorship analysis based on organization: For the co-authors who have worked together, an assessment was done of their organizations and found that there were 6 groups. Out of the total 385 organizations, the co-authorship analysis shows 6 clusters with a range of 5 to 7 items in each of them. Figure 4 demonstrates that cluster 1 consists of academic communities based in England, Europe and Canada. Cluster 2 shows collaboration between academic institutions in the United States, China and Hong Kong. Another cluster shows a partnership between universities within the United States with one in South Africa.

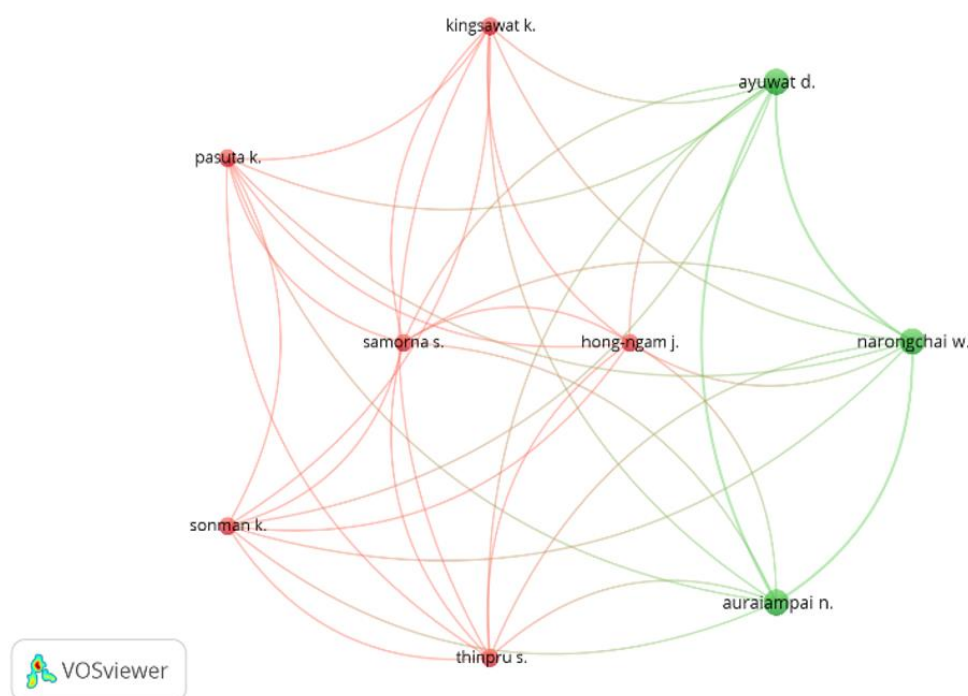


Fig 3: Co-authorship analysis

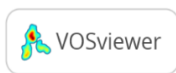


Fig 4: Co-authorship analysis organization-wise

Co-authorship analysis country-wise: The network diagram of the country-wise co-authorship depicts that 31 countries can be grouped into 8 clusters with a range of 3 to 7 items as shown in Figure 5. Cluster 1 has 7 countries, cluster 2 has 5, cluster 3 has 4, cluster 4 has 3 countries, cluster 5 has 3 countries and cluster 6 has 3 countries. Clusters number 7 and 8 have 3 countries each. In each cluster one country dominates the research articles published. For instance, in cluster 1 it is Malaysia, and in cluster 2 it is Canada. Other major clusters are dominated by China, India and United States based on the size of the nodes illustrated in the figure. It also appears that these clusters are strongly connected indicating a great number of citations amongst each other.

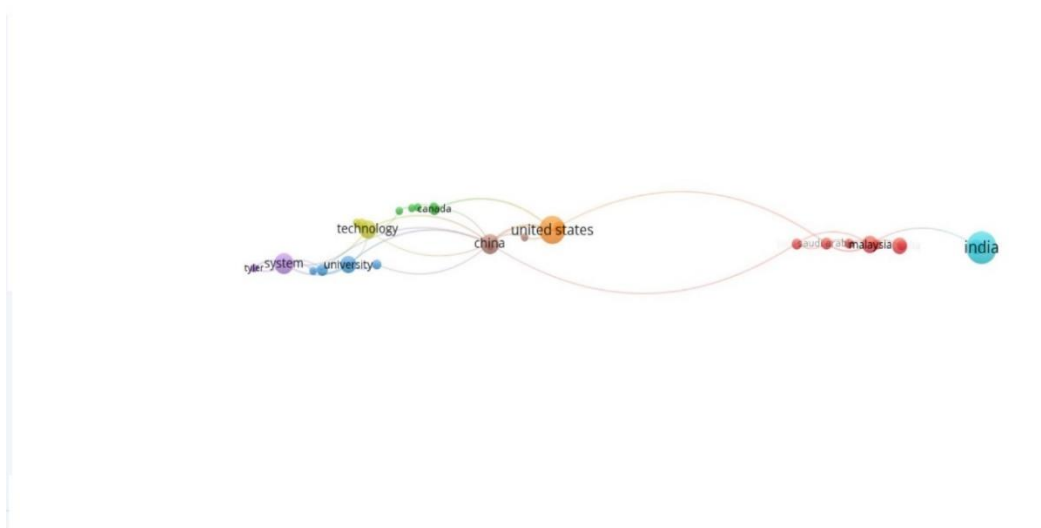


Fig 5: Co-Authorship Analysis Country-wise

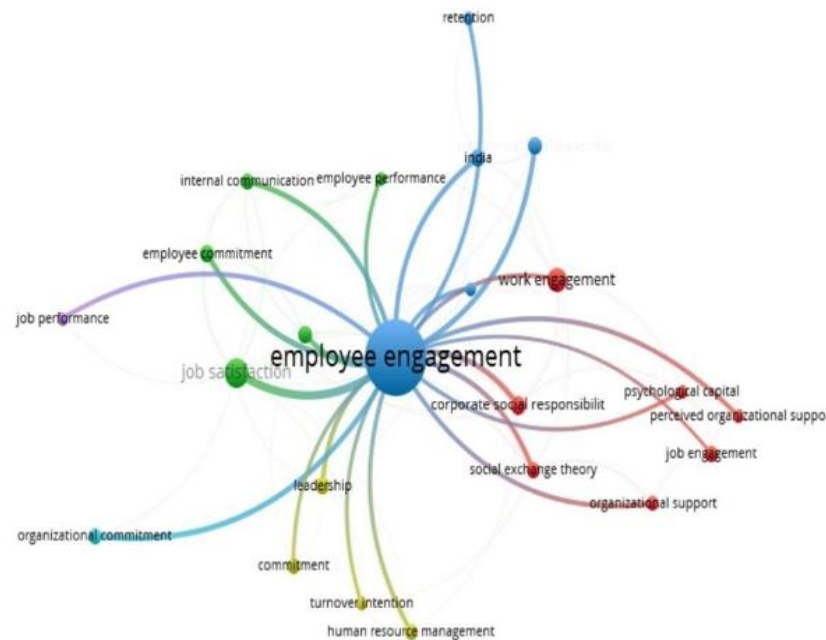


Fig 6: Co-occurrence Analysis

3.5 Co-occurrence analysis: A co-occurrence analysis was conducted on 700 indexed keywords from the shortlisted papers to comprehend the central issues revolving around employee engagement. The criterion specified was a minimum occurrence of keyword should be 5 and 25 articles got shortlisted after deleting the redundant words. Amongst all the words shown in Figure 6, employee engagement, followed by work engagement emerged as the most significant as this was the main topic we were studying. The figure also indicated that most of the extant literature of the past 20 years revolves around job satisfaction, employee commitment, employee performance, internal communication, leadership, psychological capital, perceived organizational support and social exchange theory. The lines in the figure characterize the strength and relevance of the connections between the nodes (keywords) (Donthu et al., 2020). Based on the size of the circles represented in the above figure, the next important cluster was job satisfaction which had linkages to numerous other keywords including employee commitment, employee performance, internal communication, job performance, organizational commitment, leadership and turnover intention. Few connections were found crossing the other clusters and linking with psychological empowerment, corporate social responsibility and social exchange theory. A growing interest in the area of employee engagement’s link with the above-mentioned keywords is prominent here.

4. DISCUSSION

The bibliometric analysis centred around the conceptualization and theorization of Employee Engagement directed the study towards an in-depth deliberation on a few specific areas. These include theoretical and conceptual progression and what void still exists in the extant literature. Figure 2 shows the evolution of major studies in the area of engagement beginning from year 2002 and up to 2022. It owes its augmentation to the substantial concerns raised by prominent researchers over the past two decades. After its substantiation by Kahn in 1990 and its various definitions and ideations, the year 2007 saw an exploration of engagement with respect to demographics, work-life balance and employee's intention to stay. Post 2010, research took place with regard to diverse industries' experience with employee engagement like in public sector, hospitality, service industry, and even in small and medium enterprises. It started with the behavioural dimension propagated by Kahn in 1990 to the psychological or attitudinal side of engagement by Schaufeli and Bakker, but by the year 2010 it was analyzed from the lens of job-demand resources model. By 2011, a near decade after Kahn's conceptualization, again an era of understanding the concept was initiated. The role of new effects came under study like psychological detachment, goal orientation, job performance, task and contextual performance, extra-role performance. Side by side, research continued on finding the predictors and antecedents of employee engagement. Also a new perspective related to the fluctuations in daily work engagement started emerging.

The first meta-analytic technique research took place in 2012, wherein efforts were made to assess the extent to which job burnout and employee engagement are independent and useful constructs (Cole et al., 2012). The continuance of exploring different predictors and antecedents of engagement was seen with novel relational studies of psychosocial factors, corporate social responsibility, job design, social context, personal and job resources, manager-led meetings, personality, team-member exchange, well-being, meaningfulness, absenteeism, and role-efficacy. The narrative continued with more and more research delving into the conceptualization, measurement and understanding of engagement. Research also explored the outcome of employee engagement in the form of employee performance, work culture etc. Over a period of time, as the research on engagement progressed, the nuances related to the concept also started emerging.

In the next phase of the inquisition, endeavours were made to comprehensively dig into the drivers of employee engagement, both empirically and conceptually. Gradually, a significant perspective was drawn out of the previous papers, related to the role of leadership in enhancing employee engagement. As leadership does not function in isolation, various allied variables were seen to be researched like perceived organizational support, learning climate, proactive work behaviour, employee voice, organizational citizenship behaviour, self-efficacy, job autonomy and the like. Amongst the varied styles of leadership, transformational leadership was found to have been researched the most probably due to its effective influence on each individual employee. Engagement is ought to be such a holistic factor in every type of organization, that current research states that the confusion related to its formation still exists and even after three decades, efforts are being made to understand it intellectually. This paper

tries to amalgamate all the previous notions of employee engagement, the intricacies involved in its conceptualization and to provide direction for the future scope of this subject.

Lastly, the bibliometric analysis depicts that many of the past research has focused on psychological or attitudinal aspect but less churning has been done on it's behavioural aspect, which is or relevance to the managers and practitioners. When Kahn in 1990 spoke about the three psychological conditions - meaningfulness, safety and availability, he suggested that it should be researched on the behavioural side of engagement. Hence, we strongly recommend that behavioural engagement which can be an important way to re-conceptualize engagement should be a future research agenda for the researchers.

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