

The Impact of CSR on Employees' Engagement. A Study on SMEs in Egypt

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Abstract

Purpose: - With the rapid rise in the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), this article examines the impact of CSR practices on employees' engagement in Egypt.

Design/methodology/approach: -A quantitative study was conducted by distributing an online questionnaire on 226 employees working in the SMEs from five Egyptian cities in Egypt. The questionnaire was developed based on previously validated scales.

Findings: - The findings showed that there is a significant influence of CSR practices towards the society on the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of employees' engagement. Furthermore, it showed that CSR practices towards employees only influenced the emotional dimension of employees' engagement. Surprisingly, the results showed that all form of CSR practices towards customers don't have an impact on employees' engagement.

Research limitations/implications: - The article only examined the impact of CSR on employee' engagement in Egypt. Further research can investigate the role of CSR on other concepts such as loyalty and commitment.

Practical implications: - This article provides important insights to the Egyptian SMEs regarding the importance of CSR practices in enhancing employees' engagement, where it shows the critical value of these practices to the SMEs' success.

Originality/value: - This study contributes theoretically by focusing on the impact of CSR practices on employees 'engagement in the context of SMEs. Prior research has mainly focused on the impact of CSR on consumer attitudes and behaviors.

Keywords: CSR, Employees' engagement, Egypt, SMEs, Developing countries.

Category: Applied paper

1. Introduction

With the extensive challenges that small and medium enterprises (SMEs) are facing in today's business environment that is characterized by high levels of uncertainty and competition, it is very critical for these organizations to look for new ways to enhance the quality and efficiency of their workforce (Ajayi et al., 2017). One of the concepts that has recently attracted the attention of both academics and practitioners is the concept of 'employee engagement' (Glavas, 2016; Saks, 2019). This concept is used to describe employees who are emotionally, cognitively and behaviorally engaged within the work setting (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). This is in contrast with the concept of passive employees who are not engaged in their work or with their colleagues.

Both academics and practitioners have been widely interested in understanding the antecedents of employees' engagement. This is due the advantages that companies can benefit from when engaging their employees. For instance, employees' engagement has been associated with high levels of job satisfaction, organization commitment, less turnover rates and better organizational citizenship behavior (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). It has been reported that companies that have engaged employees often enjoy high levels of individual morale and organizational performance (Bailey et al., 2017). Because of these benefits, much of the scholarly work in the field of organizational studies has been eager to understand the drivers of employees' engagement. For example, the literature has highlighted the role of organizational practices in enhancing employees' engagement, these practices include job design, quality of leadership, organizational interventions and team factors (Bailey et al., 2017). Also, other practices such as effective reward systems, job enrichment and employment security were found to be important in improving the levels of employees' engagement (Barik & Kochar, 2017).

Despite the efforts that has been done by researchers in studying the facilitators of employee's engagement, the literature still shows some shortcomings regarding the impact of some organizational practices on this important construct. For instance, the impact of corporate social responsibility practices (CSR) on employees' engagement needs more exploration (Nazir & Islam, 2020). The concept of CSR has been rising to describe organizational responsibilities towards their stakeholders including employees, customers, government and the society (Afsar et al., 2018). It is built on the notion that companies are not only established to make profits, but to contribute to the overall well-being of the society and environment (Chaudhary, 2020).

The purpose of this article is to examine the impact of CSR activities that are practiced by SMEs on employees' engagement. The article focuses on CSR practices towards customers, employees and the society. This is considered important for several reasons. Firstly, much of the scholarly work that has been done in the area of CSR has been mainly focusing on the effect of CSR practices on customer behavior (Ashraf et al., 2017), where the extant literature shows that the customers' perception of CSR activities is often associated with high levels of loyalty, purchase intention as well as favorable corporate reputation (Bianchi et al., 2019). However, little work has been done to examine how CSR activities affect employees' behavior and attitudes (Chaudhary, 2020). Thus, our study fills an important research gap, where it examines the impact of CSR activities on employees' engagement in the context of SMEs. Another important contribution of our research study is that it examines CSR activities that are performed by SMEs in a developing country which is Egypt. This is considered a relatively novel research area, where much of the existing literature has been focusing on CSR activities and employees' engagement in developed counties (Baraibar-Diez & Odriozola, 2019). Thus, examining CSR activities from the employees' perspective is very important, where our article provides insights on how to enhance the various dimensions of

engagement, which in turn will have a positive impact on the performance and profitability of these SMEs.

Our article mainly focuses on employees' engagement in SMEs in Egypt. This is considered important as the Egyptian government has been focusing on developing that sector as a main driver of the Egyptian economy. Limited research has been conducted in the area of CSR activities in developing countries, where the vast majority of research has been mainly concerned with investigating employees' engagement in developed countries (Baraibar-Diez & Odriozola, 2019). To summarize, the purpose of the research study in this article is to examine the impact of employees' perception of CSR activities in SMEs on their emotional, cognitive and behavioral engagement. It further examines the role of strategic implementation of CSR activities within these organizations in moderating these relationships.

This paper is organized as follows: firstly, an introduction that demonstrates the research purpose has been introduced. After that, a literature review that discusses the concepts of CSR and employees' engagement are presented together with the proposed conceptual model and hypotheses. Then the methodology that were used to collect and analyze data is further explained. Following this, the data analysis and key findings are presented and discussed. Finally, the implications, research limitations and directions for future studies are introduced.

2. Literature review and conceptual model development

2.1 The concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR)

The concept of CSR was introduced in the fifties of the last century when organizations had to face the growing public criticism for their unethical and irresponsible business practices (Newell & Frynas, 2007). These organizations have faced societal pressure regarding the negative effects they have caused to the environment and society (Porter & Kramer, 2006). So, with these pressures, companies have been forced to become more accountable towards their employees, customers, suppliers, environment and the society at whole (Albdour & Altarawneh, 2012).

The stakeholder perspective of social responsibility is one of the most broadly used theoretical frameworks that explains the concept of CSR (Park & Ghauri, 2015). Stakeholders are defined as those groups or people who are affected or affected by the performance of organizations (Freeman, 2015). The concept of CSR is important for organizational performance. This can be explained by the assumption that when organizations care about the well-being of stakeholders, employees have higher expectations regarding the work environment (Glavas & Kelly, 2014). On the other hand, Turker (2009) indicated that workers are less likely to respect their companies when they violate laws and regulations or get involved in public frauds or unethical behaviors towards its stakeholders.

Turker (2009) argued that the concept of social responsibility involves the discretionary, legal, economic, and ethical expectations that the community has in a certain organization. Organizations initiate and implement various CSR plans to reach the expectations of these societies and to enhance their corporate identities (Kim et al., 2010). In line with this view, Valentine et al. (2015) noted that many organizations have incorporated CSR activities and initiatives in their business plan for the purpose of inspiring positive change in their societies and improving their public image. In the context of organizational studies that examined the impact of CSR practices on employees' behaviors and attitudes, Klimkiewicz & Oltra (2017) indicated that employees generally react favorably towards the CSR initiatives of their organizations, especially when they feel that these practices involve social or environmental aspects. To conclude, CSR contributes

towards organization's profitability besides enhancing its public image (Deng et al., 2013). CSR can involve responsible practices towards employees, customers, and society.

2.2 CSR practices in developing countries.

With the rise of CSR in the organizational studies literature, practitioners still find some challenges when putting these theories into practice in developing countries (Zhu & Zhang, 2015). For instance, Visser (2007) mentioned that CSR in developing countries is characterized by less formalization and institutionalization if compared with CSR practices in the western world, where there are inadequate benchmarks to measure the impact of the CSR practices and initiatives. This view is further supported by the study of Muthri & Gilbert (2011) which recommended the developing of an "Africanized" CSR approach as a benchmark for CSR activities in African countries. CSR in developing countries mostly focus on philanthropic activities and supporting charity, where these activities involve various CSR practices to support health programs, education and societal welfare (Visser, 2014).

This paper focuses on CSR activities in Egypt. Many Egyptian companies across various business sectors have put some efforts into CSR practices either voluntarily or because the growth in the societal pressure to invest in these activities. For instance, the Egyptian stock exchange collaborated with both the Egyptian institute of directors and standard and poor's foundation to establish the S&P/EGX ESG index (Ali, 2014). This measure aims at raising the profile of Egyptian companies that engage in environmental, social and corporate governance responsibility when compared to their market peers (The Egyptian Exchange, 2021).

On the other side, many Egyptian corporations still perceive CSR as a charity more than as a social responsibility. This is in line with the view of Carroll & Shabana (2010) which indicated that CSR was still "the continuing philanthropic era, in which there was a focus on charitable donations by businesses". For instance, Orange, the telecommunications company focusses on education, environment, and community-related projects (Egyptian Corporate Social Responsibility, 2018). The main challenges that face Egyptian companies when they practice CSR is the lack of adequate expertise to implement, and follow up these programs, the high cost of its implementation with the lack of suitable financial resources to cover these programs (Refaat, 2014). Another important challenge is the lack of awareness of the concept of CSR among Egyptian companies. For instance, the Egyptian corporate social responsibility center carried out a study to assess the CSR for Egyptian companies. The findings indicated that only 33 % of the interviewed companies were able to understand what CSR is, where 39 % of the interviewed companies indicated that CSR is synonymous with charity. This can be attributed that many corporations still consider CSR to be charity rather than using a CSR stakeholder approach. Several scholars highlighted how CSR in Egypt, and in many developing countries, is often involved in philanthropic activities, which can be due to the religious and cultural factors that encourage social responsibility towards the poor (Darrag & Crowther, 2017). On the other hand, many Egyptian corporations perform CSR activities to avoid taxes, to enhance their public image and to protect themselves negative publicity (Egyptian Corporate Social Responsibility, 2018).

2.3 Employees' engagement and their perception of CSR activities

Considering the importance of human capital, many organizations have changed the way they have been using to treat their employees (Knezović et al, 2020). In today's competitive environment,

many companies are looking for engaged employees who are more productive, with less turnover rates and who cooperate positively with customers (Chalofsky, 2010).

In our paper, we examine the three dimensions of employee engagement, namely: cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement. Cognitive engagement refers to the degree to which workers appraise their workplace environment, along with the tasks they are involved in. In other words, cognitively engaged employees are individual who are totally concentrating on their mission and delivering their tasks as expected (Purcell, 2010). On the other hand, emotional engagement refers to a workers' positive emotional state, and affective association to the companies that they are working in (Purcell, 2010). It refers to the feelings that affect employees' attitude, whether favorable or unfavorable, towards the company and its leaders (Kular et al., 2008). Emotional engagement can result from employees' positive emotional experiences with their companies, besides their relationships with their colleagues (Luthans & Peterson, 2002). Finally, our article examines behavioral engagement, which is the main dimension of employee engagement. It includes the physical display of the cognitive, and emotional engagement combination together (Macey & Schneider, 2008), where it refers to an increased effort by employees to accomplish organizational goals (Shuck & Wollard, 2010).

The relationship between CSR activities and employees' engagement has been studied in a number of academic publications. For example, Glavas (2016) argued that CSR has a major role in enhancing employees' engagement at work. On the other hand, another study by Ferreira & de Oliveira (2014) showed that CSR practices doesn't impact the levels of employees' engagement. However, they found that workers who are exposed to internal CSR are more likely to be engaged than workers who were only exposed to external CSR practices. In our study, we argue that CSR activities can play a significant role in enhancing employees' engagement in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Egypt. This might be explained by the assumption, that initiatives might boost employees' feelings of doing jobs that are worthy and that are beneficial and meaningful to the society in general (Glavas, 2016). Also, this can be explained to the findings of Gazzola & Mella (2017) which showed that CSR activities and initiatives would enhance employees' satisfaction and emotional connection with the tasks they are performing. Our study mainly focuses on the CSR activities in three main areas which are: CSR practices towards society, CSR practices towards customers and CSR practices towards employees. From these discussions, we propose the following hypotheses:

- H1: CSR towards society significantly affects employees' cognitive engagement.
- H2: CSR towards society significantly affects employees' emotional engagement.
- H3: CSR towards society significantly affects employees' behavioral engagement.
- H4: CSR towards customers significantly affects employees' cognitive engagement.
- H5: CSR towards customers significantly affects employees' emotional engagement.
- H6: CSR towards customers significantly affects employees' behavioral engagement.
- H7: CSR towards employees significantly affects employees' cognitive engagement.
- H8: CSR towards employees significantly affects employees' emotional engagement.
- H9: CSR towards employees significantly affects employees' behavioral engagement.

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework of the current study. It shows the relationship between the three types of CSR practices and cognitive, emotional and behavioral dimensions of employees' engagement.

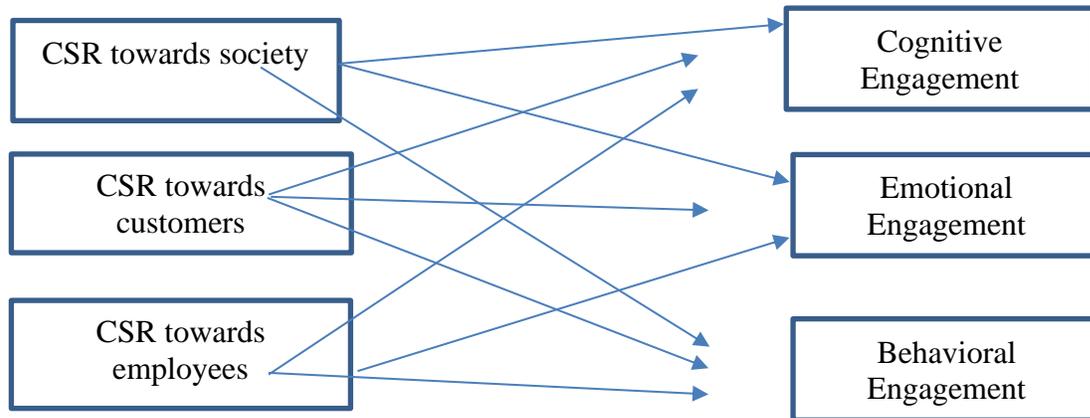


Figure 1: The proposed conceptual framework

3. Methodology

This article used a quantitative research approach for data collection and analysis. For the purpose of data collection, a questionnaire was developed based on previously validated scales in the organizational behavior literature. The researchers used four items to measure CSR practices towards society, five items to measure CSR practices towards customers and five items to capture CSR practices towards employees. The items capturing the three forms of CSR practices were adapted from Turker (2009) and Glavas & Kelley (2014). For measuring the three dimensions of employees' engagement, five items were used to capture each of the following constructs: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement and behavioral engagement. The items capturing the engagement constructs were adapted from Rich et al. (2010) and Shuck & Reio (2014). The developed questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first section contained some introductory questions that aimed at collecting data about the respondents' demographics such as income, age, gender, managerial level and years of experience in the organization. The second part consisted of the questions that captured the study constructs. This part adopted a 5-point item Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Since the target population of our survey are employees and managers who are working in the small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Egypt, the researchers distributed the questionnaires on the social networking site LinkedIn, where the researchers sent the link of the survey to managers and employees of different organizations and startups. After a period of two months, 226 complete responses were submitted. The data analysis was conducted using partial least square structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) with SmartPLS 3.0. PLS-SEM was chosen where it is powerful in analyzing small sized samples. Also, it doesn't require normal distribution and is able to analyze complex models (Hair et al., 2019).

4. Result

4.1 Structural Model Assessment

Before testing the research hypotheses, PLS-SEM requires testing the uni-dimensionality of each of the building blocks of the model. This requires conducting the reliability and validity tests for all the study's constructs. The researchers examined the Cronbach's alpha values, composite

reliability values (CR) and outer loadings to ensure the reliability of the study’s constructs. As shown in Table 1, all study’s constructs possessed high reliability where the Cronbach’s alpha values and composite reliability values were above the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2017). Additionally, the outer loadings of the items were checked to make sure that they are above the recommended threshold of 0.7. Only two items were dropped, which is CE3 for its poor loading with a value of 0.673 and TE1 with a loading of 0.660. Table 1 shows the Cronbach’s alpha values, CR values, outer loadings and AVE values of the study’s constructs.

To check the convergent validity, the researchers checked the values of the Average variance extracted (AVE), where the results indicated that all values are above the required threshold of 0.5 (Hulland, 1999). On the other hand, to test the discriminant validity, the researchers checked the heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) as suggested by Henseler et al. (2015). The results showed that the study’ constructs possess strong discriminant validity with values less than the recommended threshold of 0.85. Figure 2 shows the HTMT values of the study’s constructs.

Table 1: Loadings, Cronbach’s alpha, CR, AVE values of the study’s constructs.

Construct	Manifest variable	Outer Loading	Cronbach’s alpha	Composite reliability CR	AVE
CSR towards Society	TS1	0.835	0.853	0.900	0.693
	TS1	0.866			
	TS3	0.859			
	TS4	0.767			
CSR towards customers	TC1	0.764	0.849	0.892	0.623
	TC2	0.772			
	TC3	0.813			
	TC4	0.808			
	TC5	0.787			
CSR towards employees	TE1	0.660	0.859	0.897	0.639
	TE2	0.738			
	TE3	0.865			
	TE4	0.860			
	TE5	0.850			
Cognitive engagement	CE1	0.768	0.848	0.892	0.625
	CE2	0.851			
	CE3	0.836			
	CE4	0.673			
	CE5	0.812			
Emotional Engagement	EE1	0.830	0.914	0.936	0.745
	EE2	0.854			
	EE3	0.898			
	EE4	0.871			
	EE5	0.860			
Behavioral Engagement	BE1	0.857	0.925	0.943	0.768
	BE2	0.893			
	BE3	0.906			
	BE4	0.845			
	BE5	0.880			

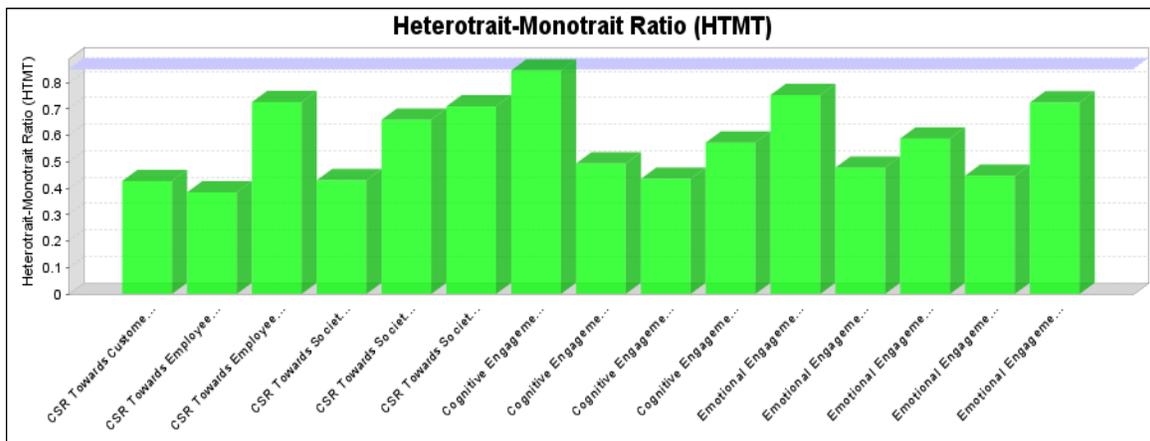


Figure 2: Heterotrait-monotrait ratio (HTMT) of the study’s constructs

4.2 Structural Model Evaluation

The bootstrapping approach with PLS-SEM was conducted to test the research hypotheses. The path coefficients (β), t-values and significance levels (P) were examined to investigate the proposed hypotheses. Table 2 shows these values with a summary of hypotheses testing. H1 was supported as CSR towards society were found to have a positive and significant influence on cognitive engagement ($\beta=0.340$, $t=4.312$, $p=0.000$). H2 was rejected as CSR towards society had insignificant influence on emotional engagement ($\beta=0.078$, $t=1.118$, $p=0.264$). H3 was supported as CSR towards society had a positive significant relationship on behavioral engagement ($\beta=0.219$, $t=2.671$, $p=0.008$) On the other hand, H4, H5 and H6 were rejected since the study found that CSR towards customers had insignificant influence on cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement with the following values respectively ($\beta=0.197$, $t=1.908$, $p=0.057$), ($\beta=0.125$, $t=1.340$, $p=0.181$), ($\beta=0.194$, $t=1.754$, $p=0.080$). Regarding H7, it was rejected, where it was found that CSR towards employees doesn’t influence cognitive engagement ($\beta=0.015$, $t=0.177$, $p=0.860$). However, the relationship between CSR towards employees and emotional engagement was confirmed as the findings showed the CSR towards employees significantly influences emotional engagement ($\beta=0.441$, $t=5.291$, $p=0.000$), thus H8 was supported. Finally, H9 was rejected since CSR towards employees didn’t have a significant impact on behavioral engagement ($\beta=0.123$, $t=1.391$, $p=0.165$). Our model showed a strong predictive power, where the R^2 of the cognitive, emotional and behavioral engagement were 0.238, 0.33 and 0.207 respectively. Figure 3 shows the structural model testing through bootstrapping approach via SmartPLS 3.0.

Table 2: Summary of Hypotheses testing

Hypo.	Hypothesized path	Path coefficients (β)	t-values	Significance levels p	Conclusion
H1	CSR society-----Cognitive Engagement	0.340	4.312	0.000	Supported
H2	CSR society-----Emotional Engagement	0.078	1.118	0.264	Rejected

H3	CSR society-----Behavioral Engagement	0.219	2.671	0.008	Supported
H4	CSR customers-----Cognitive Engagement	0.197	1.908	0.057	Rejected
H5	CSR customers-----Emotional Engagement	0.125	1.340	0.181	Rejected
H6	CSR customers-----Behavioral Engagement	0.194	1.754	0.080	Rejected
H7	CSR employees-----Cognitive Engagement	0.015	0.177	0.860	Rejected
H8	CSR employees-----Emotional Engagement	0.441	5.291	0.000	Supported
H9	CSR employees-----Behavioral Engagement	0.123	1.391	0.165	Rejected

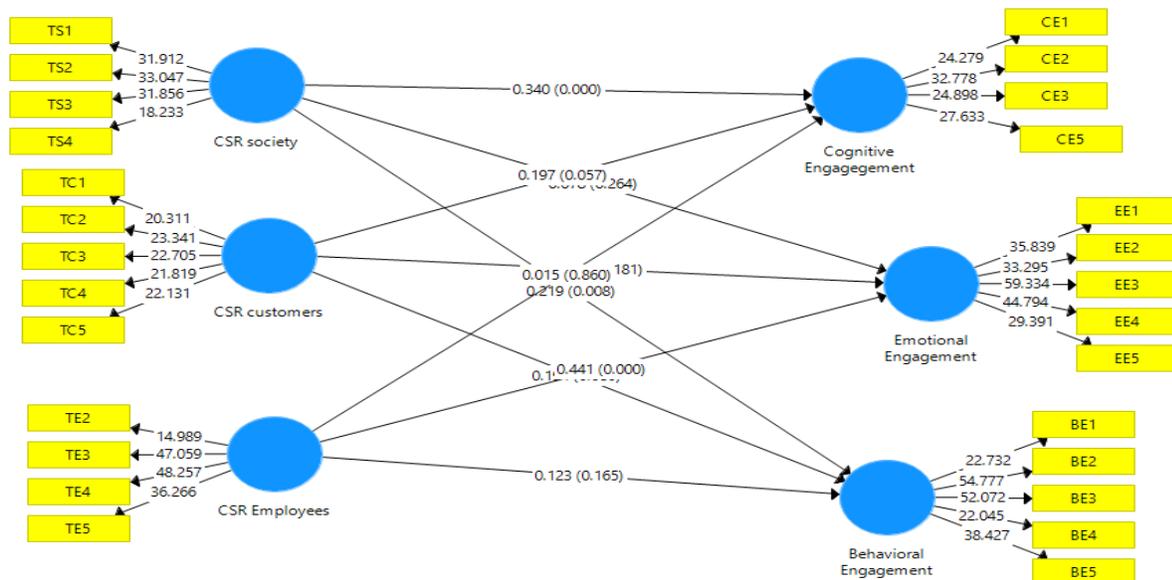


Figure 3: Structural model evaluation with SmartPLS 3.0

5. Discussion and Implications

Given the importance of the concept of CSR in today’s business world, this article examined the role of three forms of CSR practices on employees’ engagement. Surprisingly, the findings showed that only three hypotheses were supported. Firstly, our study underscored the importance of CSR activities towards the society in enhancing cognitive and behavioral engagement. Thus, SMEs should make sure to make sure to include CSR practices towards the society into their CSR strategies in order to enhance the productivity and engagement of their employees. These findings might be attributed to the religious nature of the Egyptian society, where employees expect their companies to engage in philanthropic activities, orphan days, supporting charities and fundraising events. Hence, this finding is important as it provides guidelines for SMEs, where they should focus in CSR activities that contribute to the overall well-being of their societies. Another

important finding of the study is that CSR towards employees is critical for enhancing emotional engagement of the employees. Accordingly, the SMEs should include CSR practices towards employees if they want to enhance the productivity of their employees. This might include fair paying, safe workplace, diversity, flexible working hours as well as social support systems. On the other hand, our article didn't find any support for the importance of CSR activities towards customers in enhancing employees' engagement. This might be attributed to the lack of understanding of employees about the CSR activities towards customers as well as other stakeholders. A recommendation is to enhance employees' awareness with the stakeholder approach of social responsibility, where managers and employees of the SMEs should understand the importance of the engagement of their firms in CSR activities.

6. Conclusion, limitations and directions of further research

This article responds to several calls from previous studies such as Campbell (2006) and Glavas (2016), to address the relationship between CSR activities, and organizational performance particularly employees' engagement in the emerging economies. Specifically, this study examines the influence of both corporate social responsibilities in three different directions as simultaneous antecedents to employees' engagement. To Sum up the contributions of this research, it is one of the few studies, to empirically examine this relationship in the Egyptian environment. It analyzes the perception of employees' who are working in private, and public or different types of the SMEs. As a conclusion, it is highly advised that Egyptian organizations improve their employees' feelings about the meaningfulness of their jobs towards their communities and tries to make the participation in CSR initiatives a priority. Management could develop, and organize a work-life balance strategy where employees are encouraged to attend, also participate in social charity besides awareness activities along with their families. This would also enhance workers' emotional engagement even more.

Despite the contributions that our article provides, it is limited by the nature of the samples as well as its size. Future studies can examine the impact of CSR activities in other countries and in various organizational sizes, rather than SMEs. Also, further studies can examine the moderating effect of relevant demographic variables in enhancing employee' engagement such as the age, gender and work experience. Finally, further research can examine other CSR activities that be relevant to developing and developed counties such as CSR activities towards the environment.

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