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The Mediating Role of Social Media in the Relationship between Perceived Leadership Support and Employee Engagement in Banking

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Abstract:

Purpose: *The present study endeavors to concentrate on the role of perceived leadership support in fostering employee engagement. Specifically, the study considers the social media contribution in this relationship. The mediating role of social media and the links between perceived leadership support and employee engagement are also discussed.*
Design/methodology/approach: *The investigation begins with a review of literature in the context of organizations. The data are based on a cross-sectional structured questionnaire for a cohort of 167 respondents form the Polish and Sri Lankan banking sector and was used to verify the research hypotheses. The responses were examined using mediation analysis with bootstrapping.*
Findings: *Results from the study indicate that social media partially mediates the relationship between perceived leadership support and employee engagement. The study demonstrates the growing need for better use of social media in developing a positive perception of leadership support to build employee engagement.*
Implications: *Implications of these findings for organizations are discussed. The study contributes to the understanding and value of how leadership perception affects organizational outcomes.*
Originality/value: *This study provides insight into the role of social media in facilitating leadership support to enhance employee engagement.*

Keywords: *Leadership, social media, employee engagement, social networks.*

JEL classification: *M54, M14, M21.*

Paper Type: *Research study.*

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1. Introduction

A persistent challenge for current organization, especially in the banking sector, is to engage employees at the workplace. Employee engagement is a critical condition that contributes to the effective performance and desirable organizational outcomes (Al Mehrzi and Singh, 2016). Furthermore, employee engagement leads to superior work capability and drives excellent business results (Mariappanadar, 2018). Bailey *et al.* (2015) explains, herein, that employee engagement can be defined using three different approaches, as multidimensional psychological state, as a composite attitudinal and behavioral construct and as employee relations practice. In light of various research perspectives, this study will focus on employee engagement as an individual's perceived state of satisfaction and involvement in his or her work. More specifically, this approach will highlight employee psychological state founded on work-related experience (Schaufeli, 2013), which in turn leads to improved performance and profitability (Nazir and Islam, 2017). Employee engagement is an enabler of organizational productivity (Sungu *et al.*, 2019). Hence, it is regarded as an essential component of effective organizations (Anitha, 2014). Thus, it is crucial for managers to support the development of employee engagement in the workplace. Numerous studies have analyzed employee engagement and its outcomes.

However, research on employee enjoyment in the banking sector are limited (Cooke *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, the interplay between employee engagement and perceived leadership support focuses on narrow problems, such as a generational aspect of workforce (Kolodinsky *et al.*, 2017), employee creativity (Chang *et al.*, 2014), or in the context of organizational change (Ford *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, according to available research, the perspective of employee engagement in relation to perceived leadership support has not been examined. Hence, to address this gap, the purpose of this study is to extend the investigation of the relationship between perceived leadership support and employee engagement. Under examination herein, is whether perceived leadership support (PLS) impacts positively on employee engagement This research suggests that certain perceived leader behavior leads to increased engagement. Positive outlook states arising from perceived leadership support can influence long-lasting employee-engagement. Hence, this study assumes, that perceived leadership support drives employee engagement.

Furthermore, this study investigates how internet technologies affect this relationship. These innovative tools redefine existing work relationships. Social media promotes openness, knowledge sharing and a sense of community among employees in the workplace (Ahmed *et al.*, 2019). This study assumes that social media facilitates the development of employee engagement on the basis of perceived leadership support. With this purpose, this article is organized as follows: the first section provides a theoretical framework on the basis of a literature review. Subsequently, the hypothesis development and a conceptual model is presented. Next, the measures and methods used are depicted. Then, the results are discussed. This paper concludes with contributions for theory and practice.

2. Theoretical Development

2.1 Perceived Leadership Support

The issue of leadership is an important component of current organizational science. Leadership is considered a key factor that contributes to influencing employees in organizations. There are numerous research perspectives highlighting different aspects of this topic (Vincent-Höper and Stein, 2019). However, in this study the leadership is specified as a complex and dynamic relationship involving a leader's interactions with subordinates (Meschitti, 2019). This approach which focuses on the connections occurring in an organizational context. This comprehensive approach refers to transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1995). This theory is one of the main concepts of leadership in current organizational studies (Harbi *et al.,* 2019). Transformational leadership is characterized by employee internalization of organizational goals through motivation and leadership support (Koh *et al.,* 2019). Leaders encourage subordinates and enhance their engagement (Amor *et al.,* 2020). This perspective focuses on the relationship aspect and not on contextual settings, hence, it emphasizes the importance of social interactions in the workplace.

The extant literature suggests that perceived leadership support builds upon transformational leadership theory based on perceived leadership support is a crucial element that shapes relationships in organizations. The concept of leadership support is linked to employee perception in the workplace (Mwesigwa *et al.,* 2020). It assumes that employee attitudes can be enhanced by the supportive behaviors of a leader. Indeed, according to this concept, the demeanor of a leader can shape/form an employee's disposition. Furthermore, empirical research has confirmed that leadership support contributes to employee well-being (Marescaux *et al.,* 2019).

Additionally, it has been claimed that perceived leadership support influences overall outcome (Khattak *et al.,* 2020). Moreover, perceived leadership support impacts turnover intentions (Arici, 2018), motivation to stay longer (Chen and Wu, 2020) and fosters a positive perception of the organizational climate (Jha and Singh, 2019). All in all, perceived leadership support strengthens a positive outlook in the workplace.

Transformational leadership theory highlights the importance of the exchange process between a leader and a subordinate (Popli & Rizvi, 2015).. It elucidates the reciprocal nature of interaction applied in the employee-leader dyadic relationships. Due to the mutual interdependence occurring between employees and leaders, the perceived leadership support leads to increased work effort and enhanced employee engagement.

2.2 Social Media

Social networks are a key organizational asset. They shape knowledge exchange and enable collaboration (Brown *et al.,* 2013). Furthermore, social networks can amplify employee's collective efforts and, as a result, lead to improved group performance.

The role of social networks is especially important in dynamic settings (Cross and Parker, 2004). Social networks provide an opportunity for employees to be recognized for their needed expertise. Cross and Parker (2004) identified two factors pertaining the individual usefulness to contribute to work-related challenges: first, employee expertise and knowledge, second, his/her timely accessibility. Hence, those who are perceived as both knowledgeable and available are sought out in dynamic project settings. Social networking promotes these valuable contributors.

The current ubiquity of social media can enhance social networks in the workplace. Its growing omnipresence not only in a social context (2.95 billion people were using social media worldwide (Clement, 2020), but also in the workplace (Tijunaitis *et al.*, 2019), which impact social relationships. Social media in organizations can advance social networks and thus facilitate knowledge transfer and collaboration (Neeley and Leonardi, 2018). Social media boost the collective processes and bind employees together in community-like contexts. Consequently, it increases recognition of their needed expertise and approachability. Therefore, social media foster relationships in the workplace and as a result, it boosts collaboration.

3. Hypotheses Development

3.1 Leadership and Engagement

Work engagement can be defined as a personal manifestation expressed by certain behaviors guiding individual attitudes towards work role performance. It refers to personal involvement in work activities, revealed by individual presence and active participation at work (Kahn, 1990). Furthermore, Kahn (1990) describes engagement as a self-expression and employment in a work task in which a person expresses his or her own “preferred-self” (Kahn, 1990). It is often characterized by positive orientation toward work-related tasks, marked by involvement, dedication, and vigor (Schaufeli *et al.*, 2002). In other words, work engagement indicates how willing employees are to concentrate their 'hands, head, and heart' on professional assignments (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995). This is expressed through emotional, rational, cognitive, and physical investment in the work performed (Kolodinsky *et al.*, 2017). This also pertains to the way employees perceive their work (Joo *et al.*, 2016).

Moreover, employee engagement is a combination of attitude and behavior (Iddagoda and Opatha, 2020). It has been claimed that it is rather a permanent state (Amor *et al.*, 2020). The conceptualization of engagement concerns, on the one hand, the investment in fulfilling a professional role as well as the perseverance and intensity with which employees commit themselves to their duties (Vila-Vázquez *et al.*, 2020). In an organizational context, work engagement is related to employee motivation (Demerouti *et al.*, 2010), and employee performance (Kim *et al.*, 2013). Further, Opatha and Opatha (2020) mention that poor management is a major reason for low productivity. It is acknowledged that work engagement is an essential success factor for organizations in the current economy (Joo *et al.*, 2016).

Research shows that one of the most important factors that influence employee engagement is the behavior and support of the leader (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2018). Transformational leadership is based on the interaction between leader and employee through reference to values relevant to both parties (Wang *et al.*, 2011). A supporting leader plays an essential role in the organization because it enables employees to make greater physical and cognitive efforts to achieve the leader's vision (Caza *et al.*, 2015). The leader support can be demonstrated by expressing concern for subordinates, providing personalized support as a mentor, as well as considering the needs of employees (Amor *et al.*, 2020). Leadership supporting behaviors influence an employee's attitude. Employees who perceive their immediate supervisors as supporting them and their work gain a sense of security (Barling *et al.*, 2002). Emotional security, on the other hand, leads to strengthening the personal qualities of the employee such as self-confidence and openness. With the support of a leader and a safe climate in the organization, the working atmosphere encourages creativity (Zaitouni and Ouakouak, 2018) and innovation (Vincent-Höper and Stein, 2019). Employees who feel valued, have their motivational needs fulfilled, receive support and encouragement from their leader, feel individualized consideration and get involved in the work (Ghadi *et al.*, 2013).

Perceived leadership support is based on mutual relations and commitments between the leader and employees. Social interactions are at the cornerstone of relational processes, which are the basis of effective leadership (Kim *et al.*, 2020). Leader supporting behaviors can be oriented in two dimensions, towards task or towards relations (Amabile *et al.*, 2004). Task support consists in providing the necessary resources for their execution, while relationship support focuses primarily on the leader's concern for the social and emotional needs of employees. A relationship-oriented leaders support, encourage and demonstrate genuine interest, have more impact on employee engagement than goal-oriented leadership (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2018). In this study, leader support is considered as a set of activities and behaviors of a leader that influence the attitude, mind, and emotions of an employee. Accordingly, this study focuses on relationship-oriented leadership support (Blau 1964, Amor *et al.*, 2020). This mutual relationship between leader and employee is about reciprocity. Furthermore, mutual relations guide the behavior of participants in the exchange process. This relationship creates obligations such as psychological relevance, safety, or availability (Zhu *et al.*, 2009). In other words, leader support strengthens positive behavior and results in a higher level of employee engagement. Based on this reasoning, it can be hypothesized:

H1: Perceived leadership support is positively correlated with employee engagement.

3.2 Leadership and Social Media

In recent years, the ubiquity of social media in the workplace has affected organizational processes. Social media are used as a workplace tool (Cao *et al.*, 2016) and is an effective means of internal communication (Moqbel *et al.*, 2020). Carr and

Hayes (2015) define social media as: "Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audiences who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others" (Carr and Hayes, 2015: 50). This approach emphasizes the social media's purpose in enabling connectivity within organizations. Additionally, it highlights the value created by digital collaborative experiences based on interactions. The management's view on social media offers additional elaboration pertaining its role in facilitating social interaction (Kim and Scott 2018). Hence, its role in interaction is critical. Therefore, research requires focus on how social media influences social collaboration in organizations.

Currently organizations apply both internal solutions Enterprise Social Media (ESM) (such as Intranets and Slacks), as well as external social media (for instance Facebook and LinkedIn). ESM allows employees not only to receive, send and disseminate messages but also create communicational channels and share information within teams in organizations (Leonardi *et al.*, 2013). Whereas ESM are limited to the given organizations (Moqbel *et al.*, 2020), communication on external digital platforms enabling employees to instant message or generate content not only related to the work-task but also for personal use (Holland *et al.*, 2016).

The extant research pertaining the role of social media in the workplace indicates its important contribution to work performance (Lee and Lee, 2020). By enabling instant, effective communication and immediate feedback it helps to improve work performance (Lee and Lee, 2020). Expertise exchange and employee consultation in social media boosts work productivity (Wushe and Shenje, 2019) Furthermore, numerous studies suggest the essential role of social media in empowering workplace collaboration (Bizzi, 2018). Additionally, social media facilitates employee relationships and supports rapport building in organizations (Yu *et al.*, 2018). Likewise, social media promotes knowledge sharing (Schiavo *et al.*, 2019) and helps employees to gain access to information resources (van Zoonen *et al.*, 2017). Also, it assists in the decision-making process (Tiago and Veríssimo, 2014) by offering instant feedback, support and/or advice (Liu *et al.*, 2015).

Moreover, social media helps one to overcome difficulties such as time differences and geographical dispersion and thus, it can link employees in global, virtual teams. Social media use creates networks and improves connectivity, which in turn help to instantly disseminate information (Korzyński, 2013). The development of social media can promote effective communication, team cohesion and successful collaboration (Ewing *et al.*, 2019).

However, social media can also cause employees to spend less time on work-tasks and become more distracted (Rosen and Samuel, 2015), less engaged in work activities (Archer-Brown *et al.*, 2018) and time waste (Leftheriotis and Giannakos, 2014). Furthermore, the omnipresence of social media can lead to information overload and

increased stress (Bucher *et al.*, 2013) due to intrusions into one's social life and blurred work-life boundaries (Thomson and Emmens, 2018).

The way social media is used in organizations depends on the leader. Supportive leadership implies emotional support and concern for employee needs (Shin *et al.*, 2016). Leader support can be expressed by direct interactions and through social media. Empirical research indicates the importance of social media in providing precise and immediate feedback (Koo *et al.*, 2011). Hence, leadership requires quick feedback and guidance adjusted to an individual's needs and situational context can boost employee efforts and result in improved performance (Lee and Lee, 2020). Employees who feel supported by their leader are more confident, achieve better results and are more engaged (Ewing *et al.*, 2019).

Supportive and constructive leadership support evokes positive emotions and employee engagement (Kolodynski *et al.*, 2017). Empirical research implies that leadership engagement in social media-based relationships in a virtual work environment is linked to trust in leaders (Norman *et al.*, 2019). A leader inspired motivation increases the positive influence of social media on the functioning of a company (Barry and Gironda, 2018). Social media can amplify leader endorsement and as a result increase perceived leadership support. Therefore, this leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: Perceived leadership support is positively assisted with the application of social media.

3.3 The Mediating Role of Social Media

Empirical research in the field of organizational studies demonstrate that social media may boost internal communication (Lee and Lee, 2020). However, several studies on social media have also indicated that non-work social media use during the working day decreases productivity (Andreassen *et al.*, 2014). Furthermore, non-work social media use often leads to decreased work engagement (Syrek *et al.*, 2018). It has been confirmed that social media can enhance engagement. For instance, in a qualitative study, Parry and Solidoro (2013) have examined the role of social media in employee engagement. They established that social media use can promote work engagement if it is linked to leadership. In turn, research carried out by Oksa *et al.* (2020) confirmed that social media communication helps to strengthen employee engagement based on social support and identification within organizations. In an empirical study by Sievert and Scholz (2017) concurred that social media can foster employee engagement.

Increased engagement is achieved through intensified communication in social media, which enables the support of employees and the strengthening of social group ties within an organization (Lu and Hampton, 2017). Indeed, Buehler *et al.* (2019) examined various communication strategies through social media to build mutual support and positive exchanges at work. In the light of the reported findings, social

media enable the establishment of communication within an organization, which can lead to mutual support and an increase in positive reinforcement. Social media is a useful tool that can provide quick feedback, encouragement, immediate gratification, motivation, and recognition of those within organizations (Lee and Lee, 2020). As a result, this may increase employee engagement.

According to the results of the Parry and Solidoro study (2013) leadership is a crucial contribution to developing employee engagement through social media. The role of a leader in building positive relationships with employees is important and can contribute to achieving positive work engagement (Storm *et al.*, 2014).

Erçetin and Bisaso (2016) suggested that social media is a robust tool allowing leaders to navigate the interaction between leaders and followers. Furthermore, it is now agreed that social media influences the perception of leaders (Erçetin and Bisaso, 2016). The perception of a leader is context-dependent, and social media through its ubiquity and timelessness and immediate communication significantly increases the reach of the leader's impact on employees in organizations. By producing a communicative proximity, social media are a valuable instrument for building relationships between leader and employee (Delavari and Badizadeh, 2018).

Social media is an auxiliary means of communication, allowing a leader to communicate directly with his subordinates and, as a result, give more opportunities to shape a positive relationship in the workplace. Thus, social media as a bridging and bonding instrument that may support a formation of positive perception of leadership support.

For social media to promote positive perceptions of a leader, adequate measures are necessary. The mere presence and use of social media do not guarantee a positive impact on the formation of relationships in the workplace. Moreover, empirical research indicates that social media used at work can reduce employee engagement (Li *et al.*, 2013).

Therefore, based on the promotion of communication, information flow, transparency of decisions and cooperation, it is possible to develop positive relations within organizations. Through the suitable use of social media and an emphasis on visibility, awareness, and responsibility in the interaction between employees and the leader, a thread of understanding is formed as a basis for strengthening employee involvement (Ericson and Kellong, 2000). Therefore, with proper communication through social media, the perception of leadership support can have a positive impact on employee engagement. Trust in the social media may serve as a mediating variable between perceived leadership support and employee engagement.

H3: Social media mediates the relationship between perceived leadership support and employee engagement.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Banking Context

The banking sector is subject to tighter regulation, which prevents it from competing with actions threatening the stability of the funds entrusted to it (Bielas, 2013). The implementation of solutions based on new technologies is one of the ways to build competitiveness. The transition to digital banking, in particular mobile and online banking, has been noted in banking services (Meola, 2019). The use of modern solutions leads to the redesign of workplaces. An employee of the banking sector is required to be intuitive, creative, interpretative and possess problem-solving skills, which only people can handle best (Volini *et al.*, 2019). Thanks to bank employees, there is an opportunity to increase the value of customer relations (Bielas, 2013).

In addition, high competitiveness in the market leads to mergers and acquisitions and organizational changes. Deloitte's research shows that 80% of 706 respondents from global banking and capital markets believe that changes in this sector require leaders who can lead a team in a complex situation (Srinivas *et al.*, 2019: 17). In addition, 75% of respondents from the Global Human Capital Trends survey emphasize that technology creates a new context for 21st century leadership (Volini *et al.*, 2019: 38). The use of modern technological solutions by a leader may also serve to support and engage employees.

4.2 Data Collection

To test the research model, a self-administered survey was conducted within the banking sector. Due to the self-reported nature of the questionnaire, the results obtained could have been jeopardized by common method bias (CMB) (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). To prevent this, it was decided to collect data from two different sources (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, participants came from Polish (Poland) and Sri Lankan (Sri Lanka) banks. Banking employees were solicited from two sources. The first respondent group (solicited in Poland) was obtained via snowball sampling (Atkinson and Flint, 2016) by asking managers, employees and people associated with the banking industry for help and by participating in the survey. Professionals received an e-mail asking them to complete or forward the questionnaire. In total, 101 questionnaires were collected from Polish banking sector employees. Paper-based questionnaires were also distributed among bank employees in Sri Lanka. Overall, 93 questionnaires were obtained from Sri Lankan employees. Incomplete and invalid responses were eliminated, resulting in a final cohort of 167 banking employees (76 collected from Sri Lankan and 91 from Polish banking sector employees).

4.3 Sample

The profile of respondents consisted of 64.07 percent females, and 35.93 percent males. Of the respondents 16.17 percent had a secondary education diploma, 4.19

percent had professional qualifications, 26.35 percent had Bachelor degrees, 50.9 percent had Master degrees, and 2.4 percent graduated from postgraduate studies. A total of 50.9 percent of respondents had more than 20 years of professional experience, whereas 13.17 percent declared 11 to 20 years, 15.57 percent 6 to10 years, and 20.36 percent between 1- and 5-years' experience. Regarding the position that the respondents held in the organization 3.59 percent were executives, 14.97 percent worked as managers, a vast majority (53.89 per cent) were specialists, 14.47 per cent held assistant positions and 13.17 per cent declared other. The characteristics of the surveyed organizations were carried out based on size categories, considering the number of employees.

4.4 Measure and Design

The variables used in this study were selected based on an analysis of the literature. The method of measurement of issues under investigation were adjusted to the hypotheses developed. Each measure used the five-point Likert scale, responses ranged from "Strongly agree – (1)" to "Strongly disagree – (5)." Details of the identification of each variable for the purposes of this research are provided below.

The independent variable (X) is *perceived leadership support.* Perceived leadership support was measured with a 10-point scale that combined the positions taken with Iddagoda (2018), Eisenberger *et al.* (1986) and Kolodinsky *et. al.* (2017). Among others, the measure uses a scale developed by Eisenberger *et al.* (1986), in which a slight modification was made by changing the original phrase 'organization' to 'leadership', as was done in the Kolodinsky *et al.* (2017) study, to ensure that the respondents' opinions were obtained regarding only their leaders and no other organization resources. These items relate to the extent to which employees perceive the way their manager or supervisor provides support, appreciates their work, contributes, and cares about their well-being.

The dependent variable (Y) is *employee engagement*. Work engagement was measured using an 8-item scale that combines the items proposed by Iddagoda *et al.* (2016), Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), Rich *et al.* (2010), and Schuck *et al.* (2017).

Due to constructional dimensions of this study (attitudes and behaviors), work engagement was measured using four elements of emotional and cognitive engagement Schuck *et al.* (2017), and two elements proposed by Rich *et al.* (2010). Two statements characterizing vigor and absorption come from the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). To emphasize that the state of an employee's engagement is individual self-expression (Kahn, 1990) and to concentrate their 'hands, head, & heart' on professional assignments (Ashforth and Humphrey, 1995), the questionnaire added phrases that more precisely define an employee's emotional state, such as 'I feel', 'I believe', 'I strive' (Iddagoda *et al.*, 2016).

The mediating variable (M) used in this study is use of *social media*. Social media use was analyzed from the user perspective. The use of social media was evaluated by employees and was measured using the eight-item scale (Landers and Callan, 2014) Work-related Social Media Questionnaire (WSMQ). WSMQ was also applied in empirical studies to measure social media use in the workplace (Cilliers *et al.*, 2017).

4.5 Statistical Analysis

Statistical analyses were performed using RStudio (R Core Team, 2018). In order to assure the exogeneity of the independent variable so the study estimator is consistent (Maydeu-Olivares, Shi, and Fairchild, 2020), the analysis of the variable social media has been conducted. A significant regression equation was found (F (4,162) = 5.36, p<.001), with R^2 0.117. The regression analysis showed that gender affects the use of social media. Other variables do not affect the use of social media. Therefore, it can be assumed that social media is indeed an exogenous variable (Table 1).

Table 1. *Social media relationship with control variables*

Independent variable	Social media			
	B	**SE B**	**β**	**p**
gender	-0.1877	0.3750	-0.4067	0.015
academic qualification	-0.0631	0.1660	-0.0585	0.458
designation in the organization	-0.1364	0.0787	-0.1470	0.093
number of employees in your organization	0.1534	0.0870	0.1313	0.051
F	5.36***			
R^2	0.117			

Source: *Own elaboration.*

Internal consistency was evaluated for each dimension using the Cronbach α (Tang *et al.*, 2014) and categorical the McDonald omega (ω). The McDonald ω overcomes the limitation of Cronbach α, which assumes tau-equivalence and therefore may indicate insufficiencies for congeneric models (Kelley and Pornprasertmanit, 2016). Further, α and ω coefficients with 95% bias-correction based on a 10,000 bootstrap were calculated. Table 2 indicate the estimates, which at the level of *Social media* α=.867, ω=.872; *Employee engagement* α=.756, ω=.756, *Perceived leadership support* α=.946, ω=.947 were values over .70 are considered acceptable (Hair *et al.*, 2016).

Table 2. *Construct internal consistency*

Construct	Items	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	McDonald's ω
Social media	7	2.56	1.04	0.867	0.872
Employee engagement	8	3.42	0.645	0.756	0.756
Perceived leadership support	10	3.58	0.783	0.946	0.947

Source*: Own elaboration*.

For analyzing construct validity, the bivariate Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated between the three scales of the variables (Westen and Rosenthal, 2003) (Table 3). Correlation coefficients between 0.1 and 0.3 were interpreted as weak, coefficients larger than 0.3 and smaller than 0.5 as moderate and larger or equal to 0.5 were considered strong correlations (Cohen, 1988).

Table 3. *Correlation Matrix*

	N	**Mean**	**Sd**	**1**	**2**	**3**
1. Social media	167	3.42	0.645	—		
2. Employee engagement	167	2.56	1.04	0.336 ***	—	
3. Perceived leadership support	167	3.58	0.783	0.276 ***	0.304 ***	—
Note. * p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001 The Pearson product moment correlation coefficients: small (0.10–0.29), medium (0.30–0.49), and large (> 0.50)						

Source: *Own elaboration.*

Next, the procedure developed by Hayes (2013) was used to verify the simple mediation model and verify research hypotheses. This is a regression-based method. The bootstrapping method with 10,000 bootstrapping samples was used in the estimation. In line with this approach, the indirect effect of the variable mediating (M), *social media* on the relationship between the independent variable (X), *perceived leadership support* and the dependent variable (Y), *employee engagement* was analyzed.

The analysis used a more reliable bootstrapping 95% confidence interval (CI) including zero for the range between the lower level (LLCI) and upper level (ULCI) Cis, and it indicates the significance for the total, direct and indirect effects (Hayes, 2012). The analysis assumed partial mediation. When the confidence interval does not include zero and the mediation effect is significant, partial mediation occurs (Preacher and Kelley, 2011).

5. Empirical Results

To verify the H1 and H2 hypotheses, a multiple regression analysis was conducted. H1 states that there is a positive relationship between perceived leadership support and employee engagement. The result of regression analysis supports this hypothesis and indicates that perceived leadership support affects employee engagement (β = 0.304, $p < 0.001$). This may explain the 9 percent (R^2=0.092) of variances. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 4 below. This confirmation of the association between independent and deepened variables is a necessary condition to conduct further analysis (Hayes, 2018). To test H2, a relationship was proposed between perceived leadership support is positively assisted with social media application, linear regression analysis was conducted (Table 5).

Table 4. *Linear regression analysis of H1: perceived leadership support is positively related with employee engagement*

	Employee engagement				
Independent variable	B	SE B	β	T(165)	p
Perceived leadership support	0.251	0.061	0.304	4.10	<.001
F	16.8***				
R^2	0.092				

Notes: *n = 167; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; B-unstandardized beta; SE B is the standard error for the unstandardized beta; β is the standardized beta; t is the t test statistic; p is the probability value.*
Source: *Own elaboration.*

Table 5. *Linear regression analysis of H2: perceived leadership support is positively assisted with social media*

Independent variable	**Social media**				
	B	**SE B**	**β**	**T(165)**	**p**
Perceived leadership support	0.368	0.099	0.276	3.68	<.001
F	13.6***				
R^2	0.076				

Notes: *n = 167; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001; B-unstandardized beta; SE B is the standard error for the unstandardized beta; β is the standardized beta; t is the t test statistic; p is the probability value.*
Source: *Own elaboration.*

These results support the H2 hypothesis ($\beta = 0.276$, $p < 0.001$) concerning the positive relationship perceived leadership support and social media. To verify hypothesis H3 a simple mediation model was estimated using 10,000-bootstrap sample (Hayes, 2012). Table 6 shows that the total effect ($\beta yx = 0.251$; LLCI= 0.130; ULCI= 0.372; $p<0.001$) was significant, and when adding the mediating variable while controlling for the independent variable (X) perceived leadership support, the total effect was reduced but still significant ($\beta yx.m = 0.062$; LLCI= 0.20; ULCI= 0.131). Further, the relatively large magnitude of the ratio of indirect to total effect of X on Y was significant ($\beta=0.247$; LLCI= 0.079; ULCI= 0.579). This confirms the hypothesized effect. This result suggests that a positive relationship between perceived leadership support and employee engagement is partially influenced by social media.

The results provide supportive evidence for H1, H2 and H3. It also confirms the mediating role of social media in the links between perceived leadership support and employee engagement.

Table 6. *Total, direct, and indirect links between perceived leadership support and employee engagement through social media*

				Bootstrap 95 % Confidence Interval (CI)	
Effect (β)	**SE**	**t**	**p**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Total effect (βyx): perceived leadership support (X) on *employee engagement* (Y)					
0.251 F_p=16.831*** R^2 = 0.092	0.061	4.102	<0.001	0.130	0.372
Direct effect: perceived leadership support (X) on *employee engagement* (Y)					
0.189	0.061	3.076	<0.001	0.067	0.310
Indirect effect (βyx.m): perceived leadership support (X) on *employee engagement* (Y) through the mediating variable social media (M)					
0.062	0.027			0.020	0.131

Notes: *lower-level confidence interval (LLCI); upper-level confidence interval (ULCI)*
Number of bootstrap samples for bias corrected bootstrap confidence intervals: 10,000
Level of confidence for all confidence intervals in output 95 %. N=167
Source: *Own elaboration.*

The results provide supportive evidence for H1, H2 and H3. It also confirms the mediating role of social media in the links between perceived leadership support and employee engagement.

6. Discussion

The present study examined the role of social media in the link between perceived leadership support and employee engagement. Although, employee engagement and leadership are currently under-researched, studies in the area focus on daily-interactions (Breevaart *et al.*, 2013) or leadership style (Besieux *et al.*, 2018). The present study extends earlier findings on the relationship between perceived leadership support and employee engagement (Kolodynski *et al.*, 2017) by providing further evidence of the association between perceived leadership support and employee engagement.

Moreover, this study explored the role of social media in strengthening the aforementioned relationship. Whereas most studies pertaining social media influence in leveraging engagement has analyzed the general strategies of social media implementation (Ewing *et al.*, 2019) or the impact of social media usage on collaboration (Naim and Lenka, 2017), this paper examines the mechanisms responsible for reinforcing a positive relationship between the perception of leadership support and the involvement of employees. Furthermore, this indicates how the use of social media supports employee engagement.

This positive link between perceived leadership support and employee engagement is likely to attribute to the mutual exchange relationship between mangers and

subordinates (Chernyak-Hai and Rabenu, 2018). According to literature, employee-leader reciprocal dyadic relationship provides a foundation for the formation of positive behavior in the workplace (Amor *et al.*, 2020). Based on mutual interactions and a positive perception of the relationship, the expected benefits are predicted and, consequently, engagement is increased (Liao *et al.*, 2013). Social media enable immediate assistance or feedback and therefore a positive perception of leadership support (Lee, & Lee, 2020). The present study demonstrates how social media is an important instrument to facilitate communication between leader and employee, as well as how social media can contribute to building engagement based on positive mutual exchange.

It is argued that social media helps to build mutual understanding (Baretto, 2019). The sense of social media augmented perceived leadership support seems to allow employees to develop positive engagement. Thus, this study provides further empirical evidence for the presumed importance of social media for perceived leadership support in enhancing employee engagement.

The empirical data in this study verify the assumption that social media are an important contributor in the positive leader-employee relationship and may have further positive consequences for organizations (such as intention to stay) (Book *et al.*, 2019). The results show the main effect of social media on the perceived leadership support and employee engagement. Supportive leadership perception not only strengthens the engagement (Kolodynski *et al.*, 2017), but also enables the effective use of social media to build positive relations within the organization. Taken together, the results highlighted that social media as an important element in the perceived leadership support and the employee engagement link.

6.1 Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature in several ways. First, it is one of the first to examine the role of social media in the links between perceived leadership support and employee engagement. This indicates a need to understand the influence of mediated communication in developing a positive work relationship (Andreassen *et al.*, 2014).

Furthermore, this study extends the social exchange theory by indicating that supportive leadership perception can indeed drive employee engagement. Concerning the mutual exchange relationship, this study highlights how important it is to support and communicate with employees to shape positive expectations towards organizations.

In addition, this study puts the role of social media into a broader context, showing how positive attitudes towards organizations are supported by ensuring recognition, visibility, and awareness. This addresses the need for a full understanding of the mechanism for effectively building employee engagement.

Finally, this study responds to the call for more research on the social media in organizations (Lee and Lee, 2020). This study verifies a hypothesized relationship in the banking sector in an international context.

6.2 Managerial Implications

First, this study shows that the use of social media is now an extremely important aspect of work. It is especially relevant in crisis situations, which cause a significant change in the working environment and transforms social relationships (like the COVID-19 pandemic) (Shankar, 2020). When employees work from home, social media is one of the main tools that can boost their perceived leadership support and as a result improve engagement. The results herein, suggest that leaders should focus on providing immediate feedback and recognition to raise an employees' positive involvement with other employees at work.

Since leaders are not always aware of their influence on followers, it is important to understand the mechanisms that determine employee engagement. The results of the research indicate that perceived leadership support, strengthened by social media, is a core factor that shapes engagement. This is extremely useful in situations where it is necessary to coordinate workers who are working remotely (like in a COVID-19 situation). A review of the assumptions made in this study indicates that leaders should consciously use the tools available - such as social media - and ensure that employees are supported. In this way, employees will be more engaged in their work, which will benefit the organization.

6.3 Research Limitations

Notwithstanding its contribution, this study is not without its limitations. Using the self-report survey increases the risk of common method variance (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012). In this study the perceived leadership support was examined therefore, and followers were the most reliable source of information in such studies (Kolodynski *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, respondents were ensured anonymity to reduce the risk of common method bias (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, data was used from two separate sources to prevent this occurrence (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2012).

Another limitation concerns the fact that this is cross-sectional study and further longitudinal research should be carried out (Wang *et al.*, 2013). Because this is a quantitate study, it is recommended that qualitative research be carried out in the future to supplement the research perspective (Froehlich *et al.*, 2020). In-depth qualitative analysis would allow identifying factors concerning social media that strengthen the analysis of the relationship. Finally, this study focuses on banking sector. Further research in different sectors should be conducted. One future direction of this relationship could explore the use of alternatives in the media which affect this relationship. It will also help to design precise managerial guidance regarding

facilitating employee engagement through perceived leadership support mediated by social media.

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APPENDIX:

Survey Items:

Perceived Leadership Support, Work Engagement, Social Media

Perceived Leadership Support *(1= 'strongly disagree' to 5= 'strongly agree')*

The leadership I am currently working for is a team builder.

The leadership I am currently working for gives recognition for my achievements in the organization.

The leadership I am currently working for helps me to see and feel how they are contributing to the organization's success and future.

The leadership I am currently working for shows that he/she value me as an employee.

The leadership I am currently working for helps to create confidence in a company by being an exemplar of high ethical and performance standards.
The leadership I am currently working for strives to maintain a company's reputation and demonstrate high ethical standards.
The leadership I am currently working for communicates the clear organizational vision.
The leadership I am currently working for clarifies his/her expectations on me as an employee and provides feedback on my functioning in the organization.
The leadership I am currently working for provides challenging and meaningful work with opportunities for career development.
The leadership I am currently working for sets the boundaries which cater the needs of the employees as well as the organization.
Social media *(1= 'strongly disagree' to 5= 'strongly agree')*
I have used social media to learn how to perform better at my job.
I communicate with existing customers or clients via social media.
I reach out to potential new customers and clients using social media.
I request help from people on social media when I am having trouble solving a problem at work.
I use social media to contact my coworkers when I am unable to reach them by other means.
I use my organization's official social media presence to network.
I have taken advantage of the technical features of social media (like file sharing or scheduling functions) to accomplish work tasks.
Work Engagement (*1= 'strongly disagree' to 5= 'strongly agree')*
I think the most important thing that happened to me is involvement in my work/job
I believe the major satisfaction in my life comes from my work/job.
I believe I am immersed in my work, that is I live, eat and breathe with my work/job.
At work, I feel, I am really going to "get into" this job/task.
I feel proud of the work I do.
I am proud to tell others that I work for my current organization.
I speak positively about the organization when interacting with others.
I strive towards achieving duties in the expected way by my organization, so I can give my best.