



Online Employees Communication Behaviours During Crisis in Jordanian Public Hospitals: The Value of Internal Communication Practices

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Abstract: The present study examined symmetrical communication (SC) and transparent communication (TC) by studying crisis employee-organization relationships (EOR) and their causes and effects. The study utilised relationship management theory (RMT) to evaluate crisis-related online employee communication. It examined RMT antecedents and consequences, including EOR, SC and TC. The study conducted an online survey through a questionnaire collecting data from 392 full-time employees at three public hospitals in Jordan. It tested the hypotheses using PLS-SEM. It supported the link between TC and online ECB. The results did not support the hypothesis that SC directly affected online employee communication. The relationships between SC, TC and EOR were also supported. SC, TC, and online employees' communication behaviour (ECB) were fully mediated by the role of the employee-organization relationships. This study could contribute new knowledge to the literature on internal communication, EORs, and ECB in online settings. Hence, the study examined the theoretical framework of RMT in the context of the healthcare sector and its practical effects on online employee communication during a crisis.

1. Introduction

Online ECB has become a significant public relations and organisational communication research area. In the digital environment era, it becomes crucial to understand the significant function of corporate communication in managing strategic internal communication, including internal communication on social media, which directly and indirectly affects the organisation's outcomes (Alsharairi et al., 2022). Empirical research examined megaphoning behaviours. However, the various issues remained unexplored based on the available evidence. The online ECB during the crisis remained an issue of debate, with varying viewpoints that were insufficient, incompatible, and unresolved (Wang, 2020). A research

gap was evident in the need to empirically examine the theoretical constructs linked with factors that impact an employee's propensity to engage in megaphoning behaviour amidst an organisational crisis (Perdana et al., 2021). Therefore, scholars in this discipline gave severe attention to investigating the importance of online ECB and antecedents that influenced its direction, and it was crucial to reconsider the potential implications for the dynamics between employees and their respective organisations.

Men (2014) claimed that social media made inter-organizational communication on work, profession, and organisation more accessible for employees. ECB in offline environments was linked to numerous



organisational functions in academic literature. Research showed that ECB seemed strongly correlated with organisational reputation (Kim and Rhee, 2011), corporate product and service marketing (Dreher, 2014), employer branding (Mangold and Miles, 2007), social selling (Warren, 2016), and organisational resilience. Despite the growing emphasis on ECB, their antecedents, and their influence on ECB, but it was little studied in online sittings, particularly from employees' perspective. However, scholars in corporate communication studies, particularly in behavioural management, seemed to agree that organisational relationships strongly influenced employee communication behaviour in times of crisis. Thus, these circumstances could increase or decrease observable communication behaviours and practices.

According to Kim (2018), researchers in the field of public relations identified several factors that could influence the ECB, both directly and indirectly, especially in the context of a crisis. Several variables contribute to the dynamics within an organisation, including internal factors such as SC (Alyaqoub et al., 2023; Men, 2014; Lee and Li, 2020). Studies investigated the link between SC and ECB. They argued that a symmetrical system was one effective communication strategy for managing employee relationships and communication behaviours (Kang and Sung, 2017; Grunig et al., 2002; Shen and Kim, 2012). In the same way, Men and Stacks (2014) argued that SC was a driver of internal communication efficiency in fostering positive employee behavioural outcomes. Employee voice research supported this approach, demonstrating that an organisational context significantly impacts employee "voice" behaviours. An open communication approach and management that seemed to care about employees made them more likely to speak up and share information about the organisation (Thelen and Formanchuk, 2022).

Regrettably, there was a dearth of literature that examined whether empirical research had explored the potential of internal SC to yield favourable outcomes, such as the cultivation of appropriate ECB in an online crisis setting (Lee and Kim, 2021; Lee, 2020; Men and Bowen, 2017; Wang, 2020). According to Lee and Li (2020), unfavourable internal SC may ultimately lead to negative employee relationships and ECB towards an organisation. The existing literature lacks an understanding examination of the significance of SC within organisations, particularly concerning its impact on an organisation's ability to effectively address challenges and its influence on an online ECB during the healthcare sector crises (Alyaqoub and Alsharairi, 2020).

Hence, the present study examined how internal SC and TC practices affected online ECB in the Jordanian public healthcare sector during the crisis.

Additionally, employee communication behaviour was affected by an organisation's TC. Effective internal communication helps employees cope and reduce uncertainty during crises (Li et al., 2021). It emphasised that providing employees with sufficient and reliable information was essential to understand and effectively address negative situations within the organisation, such as the unforeseen changes created by a crisis. According to Kim and Rhee (2011), unforeseen circumstances demonstrated the significance of effective TC in fostering favourable attitudes. Consequently, these attitudes resulted in positive ECB. Kim (2018) posited that employees could comprehend the incident's circumstances, underlying reasons, and the subsequent measures to foster positive communication behaviour.

According to Men (2014), TC aimed to foster productive relationships between organisations and their internal stakeholders. The boundaries separating organisations from their internal public have become increasingly fragile because of the process of globalisation. Social media has facilitated the adoption of efficient internal TC within contemporary organisations (Men, 2012), thereby providing a rationale for implementing a TC strategy. However, an organisation would involve employees in open TC in decision-making about the type and quantity of necessary information and assessing the organisation's ability to meet their needs, especially during a crisis.

Theoretically, the existing body of literature predominantly focused on examining the influence of the relationship approach on ECB in offline contexts. However, a dearth of research examined the relationships between the relationship approach and ECB in online environments (Lee, 2020). There was a divergence of opinion among scholars regarding assessing communication behaviours. One perspective suggested that aggregating the perceptions of all stakeholders could be a practical approach (Fombrun et al., 2000). Conversely, another perspective concluded that investigating communication behaviours from employees' perspectives could yield better outcomes of organizational effectiveness (Frandsen and Johansen, 2016; Men and Yue, 2019).

Accordingly, public relations researchers highlighted the quality of EOR and its importance (Alyaqoub et al., 2019), enhancing employees' trust, satisfaction, and commitment by maintaining a favourable relationship would help create positive ECB, reflected in being online

ambassadors for their organisations in a crisis (Lee, 2019). The absence of a good EOR during a crisis like Covid-19 was an issue because employees could seem sensitive to how information was received from an organisation, impacting their perceptions (Wang, 2020). This sensitivity might directly or indirectly influence a healthcare employee's communication behaviour.

Although EORs had implications with the ECB, however, were not empirically and theoretically tested in the context of a crisis and online environments (Kang and Sung, 2017). This is because of the less understanding of communication behaviours in digital settings (Aldoori and Sha, 2007; Kim and Grunig, 2011). In addition, recent explanatory theories could not guide organisational management in communicating strategically with employees or explain relational approaches and contextual organisational factors with communication behaviours whenever a crisis occurs (Men and Jiang, 2016). Such an explanation would enable organisations to evaluate their strategies to decrease negative information-making decisions using feedback from the internal public. Therefore, the current study seeks to fill this gap by examining the relationships between SC, and TC with online ECB and the role of EOR in explaining the relationships amongst these constructs during crisis.

2. Methodology

2.1 Samplings and Participants

An online quantitative questionnaire survey was conducted to evaluate the hypotheses provided. The sample for this study comprised full-time employees from three public hospitals. Specifically, the focus was on nurses working in various departments (Sekaran and Bougie, 2016). In order to obtain the sample of Jordanian nurses, a stratified random sampling technique was applied. This method was chosen based on the most recent census data from the Jordanian Ministry of Health, which included information on marital status, age, high educational qualification, years of experience, and nursing specialties.

The final sample consisted of 392 participants. Although the margin was slight, more male nurses responded than their female counterparts; females were 189 (48.2) while 203 (51.8) for males. Regarding marital status, the study also shows that the majority are married, 254 (64.8%), while 131 (33.4%) were single, and 7 (1.8%) were divorced. Regarding their highest educational qualification, most respondents (268 or 68.4%) had Bachelor's degrees. While 69 (17.6%) possessed a diploma and 39 (9.9%) and 16 (4.1%) acquired master's and PhD, respectively. For the

respondents' age, those between the age of 30-38 participated highest, 186 (47.4%), compared to those who ranged between 21-29, 39-47, 48-56, and those above 56 years, with the latter having the least representation 16 (4.1%). Further, regarding the respondents' experience in the nursing profession, from the table, 41 (10.5 %) had less than 3 years in the profession. However, the highest 212, representing 54.1% of the participants, had worked for 4-8 years, and those working for 9-13 years, representing 115 (29.3%) and more than 13 years of experience in the healthcare industry, were 24 (6.1%). Looking at the nursing specialties of the respondents, most of the respondents were in Emergency departments 193 (49.2%) followed by Intensive care units (ICUs) 145 (37%), and clinics 23 (5.9 %) followed by operation rooms 21 (5.4 %), and Medical/surgical ward 10 (2.6%), and students 17 (10.8%). In terms of type of occupation, it was indicated that 250 respondents had registered nurses, representing 63.8%. Furthermore, nursing assistants were 102 (26%). The nurse-midwives with the lowest occupation rate dominated with 40 (10.2%). Some of these respondents have experienced different crises when discharging their duties. Out of the total sample size, all 392 participants (100%) reported that they encountered such a crisis.

2.2 Measurements of Variables

The items utilised in the present study were derived from prior studies. A 5-point Likert scale assessed participants' responses for all items, ranging from 1-5 (strongly disagree-strongly agree). All measurement items were placed within the contextual framework of "During the COVID-19 pandemic."

Symmetrical communication (SC): The present study utilised a measurement scale developed by Dozier et al. (1995) and subsequently adapted by Steyn et al. (2011), consisting of ten items. These measures were implemented as they were designed to assess SC from the viewpoint of employees. Cronbach's alpha coefficient confirmed the internal consistency, which yielded a value of .86. and .81, respectively.

Transparent Communication (TC): The measurement of TC consisted of an 18-item scale ($\alpha = .97$), which was adapted from the study of Men and Stacks (2014). The COVID-19 pandemic necessitated the implementation of three distinct forms of communication practices. The statistical significance of the 18 items was observed across three dimensions: participative ($\alpha = .92$), substantial information ($\alpha = .88$), and accountability ($\alpha = .88$).

Employee-organization relationship (EOR): The current research operationalised the concept of the EOR as a

second-order construct. In a crisis, employees' perceived EOR was assessed using an 18-item scale ($\alpha = .946$) derived from a study by Hon and Grunig (1999). The indicators consisted of four dimensions: trust, control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction. Trust was measured using six items, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .814$. Control mutuality was assessed using four items, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .866$. Commitment was measured using five items, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .824$. Lastly, satisfaction was assessed using four items, with a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = .869$. As a result, the measures were predominantly obtained from various sources and evaluated for satisfactory reliability by utilising Cronbach's alpha.

Online ECB. The scale comprised ten items derived from the study conducted by Kim and Rhee (2011), which have gained significant recognition and utilisation in prior scholarly studies (Lee and Kim, 2020; Lee, 2020; Wang, 2020). A set of 10 items was employed, derived from previous research conducted by Kim and Rhee (2011). The assessment of the items' reliability yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.93. The items above were subsequently classified into two dimensions: positive megaphoning, which comprised 5 items with a coefficient of 0.88, and negative megaphoning, which comprised 5 items with a coefficient of 0.78.

2.3 Data Analysis Process

This study employed PLS-SEM and SPSS methods to analyze descriptive and inferential data. To achieve study objectives, the current study followed the recommendation suggested by Hair et al. (2017) by assessing the measurement model including (item reliability, discriminant validity, convergent validity, composite reliability, and internal consistency). Additionally, the present study examined the structural model for hypothesis testing results.

3. Findings

3.1 Testing Measurement and Structural Model

Table 1 summarises descriptive statistics and variable correlations. CFA analysis showed that the measurement model fit well. This study also analysed construct correlation coefficients. With a correlation of 0.072 to 762, the Latent variable showed that the independent variables were not correlated with other variables. The factor loading values were statistically significant and above the 0.5 criterion ($p < .001$). Composite reliabilities (CR) were calculated for all variables to assess internal consistency. As seen in Table 2, all CR values surpassed

0.6. The study calculated average variance extracted (AVE) values above 0.5. AVE square root values exceeded construct correlations (Bentler, 1990). Therefore, the current study showed a fit measurement model. Thus, the study proceeded to conduct testing on the structural model.

The statistical approach in this study used a two-step structural equation model (Byrne, 2013). The structural model was evaluated utilising latent variables after CFA analysis. This study used Cronbach's Alpha to assess assessment items' internal consistency reliability for comparison with prior studies. This study used Cronbach's Alpha to assess assessment items' internal consistency reliability for comparison with prior studies. In this study, the mediation test was conducted using the bootstrap approach, employing 5,000 samples to obtain a 95% bias-corrected confidence interval (Preacher and Hayes, 2008).

3.2 Hypotheses Testing

3.2.1 Direct Relationship

The current study employed a two-stage approach. Before analysing the mediating effect, a bootstrapping procedure was implemented with a resampling size of 5000. It was performed to gain the t-value, which was used to evaluate the significance of direct relationships. The results suggest that two exogenous variables display a positive coefficient concerning the endogenous variable, while the remaining variable shows a negative coefficient. The researchers present the results comprehensively as follows:

Hypothesis-1 posits that there was no relationship between SC and the online ECB demonstrated by public hospitals in Jordan. Examining the algorithm and bootstrapping PLS-SEM indicated a statistically insignificant negative correlation between SC and online ECBs ($\beta = -0.119$, $t\text{-value} = 1.751$, $p\text{-value} = 0.081$). Consequently, it rejected Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis-2 posits a positive correlation between TC and the online ECB of public hospitals in Jordan. The present study established a positive correlation between TC and online ECBs within public hospitals in Jordan. Nevertheless, the study supported a noteworthy and favourable association between TC and online ECB ($\beta = 0.262$, $t\text{-value} = 5.676$, $p\text{-value} = 0.000$). Therefore, the evidence is supported.

Hypothesis-3 proposed a positive correlation between EORs and online ECBs in public hospitals in Jordan. It confirmed the statistical evidence for this relationship by a beta coefficient of 0.364, a t-value of 4.67, and a p-value of 0.000. As a result, hypothesis-3 was supported.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations among the Variables

Constructs	P.T.C	S.T.C	A.T.C	CM.EOR	T.EOR	C.EOR	S.EOR	SC	OECB
P.T.C	1								
S.T.C	.369**	1							
A.T.C	.352**	.442**	1						
CM.EOR	0.072	.150**	.205**	1					
T.EOR	.291**	.351**	.363**	.704**	1				
C.EOR	.327**	.335**	.283**	.499**	.711**	1			
S.EOR	.257**	.300**	.270**	.520**	.651**	.762**	1		
SC	.254**	.214**	.237**	.573**	.636**	.593**	.578**	1	
OECB	.259**	.259**	.385**	.346**	.445**	.314**	.383**	.265**	1

Hypothesis-4 demonstrated a statistically significant and positive correlation between SC and EORs in public hospitals located in Jordan ($\beta = 0.502$, t -value = 14.064, p -value = 0.000). Therefore, hypothesis- 4 was found to be supported.

Hypothesis-5 posited a positive correlation between TC and the EOR within public hospitals in Jordan. The study results also indicated a positive correlation between TC and the EOR in public hospitals in Jordan ($\beta = 0.124$, t -value = 3.952, p -value = 0.000). As a result, it could be concluded that hypothesis-5 was supported.

Hypothesis-6 posited a positive correlation between EORs and online ECB within public hospitals in Jordan. It supported the relationships by a beta coefficient of 0.364, a t -value of 4.67, and a p -value of 0.000. Therefore, hypothesis-6 was confirmed.

3.2.2 Testing the Mediating Effect of EOR

As previously mentioned, in the context of mediation analysis, the present study employed the bootstrapping approach (Hair et al., 2017; Hayes, 2009; Preacher & Hayes, 2008) to examine the mediation effect. The subsequent sub-section presents a discussion of the outcomes of the mediation.

SC and Online ECB: EOR as Mediator

The results of the bootstrapping analysis indicated that the effect ($\beta = 0.183$) was statistically significant, with a t -value of 4.446. According to Preacher and Hayes (2008), the results demonstrated an indirect effect with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from 0.099 to 0.253. The absence of zero within this interval suggested

the presence of mediation. The findings indicated that effective and efficient EOR significantly enhanced the extension of SC to online ECB ($\beta = 0.183$, t -value = 4.446, p -value = 0.000). Therefore, the evidence provided supported Hypothesis 7.

TC and online ECB: EOR as a Mediator

Similarly, the findings indicated that the bootstrapping analysis yielded a statistically significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.045$) with a t -value of 2.934. Preacher and Hayes's (2008) results were indirectly effective, with a 95% bootstrap confidence interval ranging from 0.020 to 0.078. The absence of zero within this interval suggested the presence of mediation. Consistent with expectations, the findings indicated a positive and significant relationship between TC and online ECB. The effectiveness of the EOR was fully mediated in this relationship. Furthermore, the statistical analysis confirmed the significance of this relationship, as evidenced by the beta coefficient of 0.045 (t -value = 2.934, p -value = 0.003). As a result, Hypothesis 7 received empirical support.

4. Discussion of the Research Findings

4.1 Discussion Direct Hypotheses

This study posited direct hypotheses to examine the relationship between three variables: EOR, SC, and TC, on online ECB. In all of the hypotheses, a correlation existed between the constructs, with varying degrees of strength ranging from high to slight. The subsequent sub-sections provide a comprehensive analysis and elaboration of the results.

Table 2. Reliability and Validity of the Constructs of Latent Constructs

First Order Construct	Second Order Construct	Scale Type	Items	Loadings	AVE	CR	α
SC		Reflective	SC3	0.749	0.593	0.910	0.887
			SC4	0.705			
			SC5	0.752			
			SC6	0.762			
			SC7	0.837			
			SC8	0.848			
			SC9	0.726			
	TC	Reflective					
		Participative	P.TC2	0.796	0.624	0.869	0.801
			P.TC3	0.792			
			P.TC4	0.812			
			P.TC6	0.758			
		Accountable	A.TC2	0.775	0.687	0.897	0.847
			A.TC3	0.830			
			A.TC4	0.865			
			A.TC5	0.841			
		Substantial	S.TC2	0.841	0.633	0.912	0.883
			S.TC3	0.830			
			S.TC4	0.815			
			S.TC5	0.771			
			S.TC6	0.719			
			S.TC7	0.791			
	EORs	Reflective					
		Satisfaction	S_EOR15	0.802	0.643	0.878	0.814
			S_EOR16	0.712			
			S_EOR17	0.869			
			S_EOR18	0.823			
		Trust	T_EOR10	0.846	0.665	0.908	0.874
			T_EOR5	0.779			
			T_EOR7	0.831			
			T_EOR8	0.861			
			T_EOR9	0.756			
		Control mutuality	CM_EOR1	0.908	0.769	0.909	0.850
			CM_EOR2	0.891			
			CM_EOR3	0.831			
		Commitment	C_EOR11	0.848	0.720	0.911	0.870
			C_EOR12	0.856			
			C_EOR13	0.856			
			C_EOR14	0.834			

	Online ECBs	Reflective					
		Positive megaphoning	PECB2	0.785	0.680	0.895	0.842
			PECB3	0.828			
			PECB4	0.871			
			PECB5	0.812			
		Negative megaphoning	NECB1	0.758	0.593	0.853	0.771
			NECB2	0.820			
			NECB4	0.753			
			NECB5	0.746			

Note: CR, composite reliabilities; AVE, average variance extracted. * p <0.001

Table 3. Discriminant Validity (Fornell-Larcker)

	ATC	CEOR	CMEOR	NECB	PECB	PTC	SC	SEOR	STC	TEOR
ATC	0.829									
CEOR	0.284	0.848								
CMEOR	0.241	0.504	0.877							
NECB	0.410	0.320	0.399	0.770						
PECB	0.284	0.265	0.284	0.695	0.825					
PTC	0.397	0.340	0.132	0.325	0.214	0.790				
SC	0.269	0.657	0.602	0.325	0.221	0.320	0.770			
SEOR	0.272	0.761	0.507	0.371	0.334	0.280	0.638	0.802		
STC	0.477	0.351	0.209	0.302	0.207	0.446	0.273	0.313	0.796	
TEOR	0.369	0.720	0.709	0.471	0.360	0.329	0.679	0.650	0.385	0.816

Relationship Between SC with Online ECB

H1 suggested a link between internal SC and online ECB. Contrary to expectations, SC did not directly or statistically affect ECB. In the current study, SC has not affected ECB. This was due to EOR mediating a solid role. Thus, the first hypothesis was rejected. Results could be interpreted differently. A two-way symmetrical public relations model improved internal SC (Kim and Rhee, 2011; Men and Bowen, 2017). A communication practice prioritising employee interests and needs emphasised transparency, collaborative decision-making, reliance, and reliability (Grunig, 1992). Kang and Sung (2017), Kim (2018), and Kim and Rhee (2011) found that SC improved ECB. Lee (2020) found that preserving communication balance encouraged employees to seek and express positive ECB during crises. Contrary, these findings contradicted studies that indicated no direct link between SC and ECB (Huang, 2004; Lee et al., 2021; Men, 2014; Perdana, 2021).

The argument arises that the two-way symmetrical approach failed to address the dynamic environment (Huang, 2001). Additionally, this finding was consistent with previous research. For instance, this finding was consistent with Men's (2014) study that SC did not directly affect employee advocacy. In addition, Perdana et al. (2021) found that SC did not affect employees'

willingness to spread negative information about their company. It could be interpreted that the COVID-19 pandemic was caused by external causes beyond the organisation's control. Leichthy and Springston (1993) suggested evaluating internal SC as a public relations model relationally. Van van Meiden (1993) argued that the two-way symmetrical paradigm provided organisational directions without reflecting reality. Therefore, the findings did not provide support for the impact of SC. Thus, employees were less likely to blame the hospital for their crisis, reducing their tendency to spread negative information about it.

Relationship Between TC with Online ECB

The results showed a substantial association between TC and online ECBs. TC helped employees understand and handle undesirable organisational events like crisis-related adjustments (Lee et al., 2021). This study suggested that providing employees with appropriate, high-quality information could help them cope and reduce uncertainty. This finding supported Lee and Kim (2020), who found that unplanned incidents showed the necessity of effective TC in a healthy workplace environment. These attitudes affected productive ECBs. This finding supported Men and Stacks' (2014) claim that TC was crucial to organisations. This phenomenon could be attributed to the finding that transparency led to

desirable employee outcomes, such as cultivating positive ECBs. According to Lee and Li (2020), implementing TC practices were identified as a potential strategy to enhance the understanding of the cognitive and behavioural drivers among healthcare professionals. These practices could influence the organisation's assessment of its employees and might also elicit employee behaviours. According to Kang and Sung (2017), their findings posited that managers who maintained a consistent and transparent approach to internal communication significantly fostered ECBs.

Relationship Between SC and EOR

The results implied that during crises, employees were more likely to experience a positive relationship with the organisation when they worked in an organisational communication environment that prioritised employee-centered and mutually beneficial activities and supported two-way communication.

Furthermore, the results indicated that implementing a SC was a highly effective strategy for effectively managing employee relationships during times of crisis in public hospitals. The degree to which leaders of public hospitals demonstrated symmetrical internal communication was positively correlated with its effectiveness. Consistent with prior empirical research (Lee, 2018; Lee, 2020; Kang and Sung, 2017; Lee and Li, 2020; Shen & Kim, 2012; Wang, 2020), the present findings confirmed the hypothesis that SC was a significant precursor to the development and sustenance of a favourable EOR.

However, this finding expanded the body of research in online crisis communication by introducing new predictors of ECBs, such as SC. This study offered direct evidence of the value of internal SC in fostering positive relationships between employees and organisations (Jo and Shim, 2005; Kim and Rhee, 2011; Men and Sung, 2019).

Theoretically, the current study supported the relationship management theory. SC, as posited in RMT, involved a communication paradigm wherein both individuals involved in a relationship engage in the reciprocal flow of information in a manner characterised by openness, equality, and transparency. The concept above had the potential to significantly influence the link between organisations and employees, particularly in the context of a crisis inside public hospitals in Jordan.

Relationship Between TC and EOR

This result could be construed as effective TC within an organisation's workforce being crucial for establishing

or re-establishing trust. The current study suggested that employees with TC regarding their hospitals were more likely to be motivated to maintain trusting relationships with their hospitals. Specifically, transparency was a relational condition promoting accountability, cooperation, collaboration, and commitment between the employees, creating a high quality of EORs.

The findings were consistent with prior research on the correlation between TC and EOR. Men and Stacks (2014) and Rawlins (2008) exemplified this result. Again, Rawlins (2008) discovered that employee trust could be established by promoting employee participation, providing comprehensive information to employees, and presenting balanced reports.

Therefore, when an organisation provides accurate and significant information to its employees and fosters an environment that welcomes their input, employees would likely develop trust and satisfaction towards their organisation. These factors served as critical indicators of a positive EOR.

The present research contended that an organisation's endeavour to engage in TC conveys a message to its employees that the hospital is candid, truthful, and forthright. Furthermore, it suggested that the hospital should acknowledge and consider the concerns and feedback of its employees during a crisis. Similarly, with the assumption of comprehending the objectives and intentions of the crisis, employees would exhibit more excellent receptiveness towards the problem. Empirical research demonstrated that promoting TC was beneficial for cultivating positive EORs (Men and Stacks, 2014; Men, 2014; Wang, 2020).

Relationship Between EOR with Online ECB

As expected EOR was found strongly linked to online ECB. A good EOR encourages employees to share positive information about their hospitals on social media. A healthy EOR could help employees use social media. ECB increased during a crisis. Therefore, understanding the relational approach was vital. In the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, positive EOR promoted positive information sharing and reduced their tendency to share negative communications with external parties (Perdana et al., 2021).

Prior studies linked EOR and employee communication behaviors (Kang and Sung, 2017; Kim and Rhee, 2011; Men, 2014; Walden and Kingsley Westerman, 2018). Thus, employees who showed satisfaction, trust, and mutual control were more likely to communicate positively about their organisations.

The literature showed that EOR strengthens ECB (Kang and Sung, 2017; Kim and Rhee, 2011; Men, 2014; Walden et al., 2018). Hon and Grunig (1999) argued that EOR can benefit organisation socially and emotionally by encouraging positive employee attitudes and actions. Research (Kim and Rhee, 2011; Walden et al., 2018) suggested a positive EOR boost in ECBs.

4.2 Discussion Indirect of Hypotheses

The present study proposed two indirect hypotheses for examination, which would be concisely demonstrated. Two hypotheses suggested the EOR role as a mediating variable.

The Relationship Between SC and ECB: EOR as a Mediator

The present study posited that EORs mediated the relationship between SC and online ECB. Specifically, it proposed that positive EOR would facilitate effective communication behaviors during a crisis. According to Kim and Rhee (2011), the demonstration of SC practices relied on the essential role played by EOR as a mediator in unforeseen circumstances such as crises.

The finding of the present study corroborated prior research conducted by Kang and Sung (2017), Kim and Rhee (2011), Lee (2018), Lee and Kim (2020), and Wang (2020), which posited that internal SC was effective and could reduce ambiguity and uncertainty by closing the communication gap between employees and management. This, in turn, could lead to a noteworthy enhancement in employee satisfaction and trust. Furthermore, such communication could be a competitive advantage when employees disseminate positive messages about the organisation or defend it against online criticism during a crisis.

The finding held significant importance as it expanded the concepts presented by Kim and Rhee (2011) regarding the correlation between all aspects of EOR and the ECB in situations of crisis. The concept of ECB pertains to the degree of concurrence between an organization and its employees regarding the legitimate authority to exert influence, express mutual contentment, demonstrate shared commitment, and repose trust in each other. The relationship between an organisation and its employees is a crucial element in the organisation's performance, as well as in the attainment of organisational goals and the establishment and preservation of its public image and reputation during times of crisis.

Theoretically, findings consistent with RMT provided a theoretical foundation for asserting that the different aspects of the ECBs (Huang, 2001; Ledingham and

Bruning, 1998), including trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality, played a significant role in explaining variables that impacted the link between SC and ECB in the digital setting of public hospitals in Jordan, particularly during unseen circumstances.

The Relationship Between TC and ECB: EOR as a Mediator

The current study proposed that EOR mediated the relationship between TC including trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality, and ECB. The EOR is also often studied as a uni-dimensional construct (Rogge et al., 2017). This argument emphasised one dimension. Trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality were interrelated and mutually beneficial, creating a holistic organisation (Rogge et al., 2017).

TC adoption improved online ECBs, according to this study. The present study used RMT to recognise the mediating role of EOR including trust, satisfaction, commitment, and control mutuality during a crisis in Jordanian public hospitals' online contexts.

The findings of the present study supported Kim (2018), Kang and Sung (2017), Lee and Kim (2017), Men and Stacks (2014), Men and Jiang (2016), Men (2014), Rawlins (2008), Thelen (2020), Wang (2020), and Yue et al. (2019). The current research showed that EOR mediated the relationship between TC and ECB. The study results found that employees' belief that TC crisis-related information was authentic, transparent, honest, and truthful contributed to their positive view of the hospital. Employees had to get consistent and timely crisis information from hospital management.

5. Research Contributions

5.1 Implications

Theoretical: The current analysis discovered internal SC and TC as new antecedents of EOR, advancing of RMT. This study on online ECB employs RMT framework in the context of crisis communication. The study showed that internal public relations fostered ECB. The integrated strategy might provide public relations scholars with a new direction. It may help researchers study internal communication practices and ECBs in digital settings and crisis communication. Kim and Rhee (2011) and Men and Stacks (2014) studied EOR effects on online ECB, although little is known about their effects. This study addressed the research gap by linking two antecedents, SC and TC, and the effects of ECBs during a crisis.

This study has the potential to offer a robust framework for comprehending the ECB. Even though scholars in the field of public relations explored ECB

(e.g., Grunig, 1983; Kim, 2006; Kim and Rhee, 2011), there seems to be a lack of emphasis on communication behaviours explicitly on social media. The present study formulated the concept of ECB sharing information on social media platforms. Furthermore, it employed the pre-existing measurements of communication behaviour in the context of social media.

Practical: The study will help human resource departments in hospitals to understand internal public relations practices and how SC and TC affect online ECBs during crises. The study's findings can help major healthcare sectors to improve online ECB. Public relations professionals may need to post high-quality content on company-affiliated social media like Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. In an organisational crisis, employees may use these websites to find and share information on social media. Therefore, it is essential to update regularly. PR professionals may use the hospitals social media platforms to engage employees in digital interactions to promote their content. The healthcare sector can also establish social media policies for employees and their online interactions.

6. Limitations

Despite its importance to public relations academia and practice, this study has limitations. This study uses only quantitative methods. Although the research purpose may be met, in-depth interviews have not been considered to understand the outcomes better. This study uses cross-sectional data, which could reverse model causal linkages. Further analysis has statistically eliminated reverse causation, but experimental and longitudinal studies may be needed to prove causality. Cross-sectional analysis in this study supports the integrated model of situational ECBs' causal orientations only partially.

The study focused on three public sector hospitals in a crisis. Thus, the study's findings may not apply to private healthcare institutions or emergencies. The current study only included Jordanian public hospital employees. Other economic sectors may have different findings. Public sector hospitals in different countries with different values may have different outcomes, invalidating the findings. Thus, this study's empirical conclusions may not apply to other sectors or countries. The study's findings may benefit organisations in numerous sectors and countries with similar values and cultures, particularly in Middle East, where public sector organisations in Jordan are similar.

Conclusion

The study provides useful insights into the dynamics of online employee communication during emergencies, specifically within the healthcare industry. The study has provided insight into the important function of transparent communication and its influence on employee communication behaviour, as well as highlighting the mediating effect of employee-organization connections in this particular setting.

The exclusive reliance on quantitative approaches constrains the extent of comprehension, hence suggesting the use of qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, in future research endeavours to yield a more holistic knowledge of the findings. Furthermore, the study's utilisation of cross-sectional data gives rise to inquiries regarding the causality of the found links, necessitating the execution of experimental and longitudinal research to establish more resilient causal connections. The limited scope of examining public sector hospitals in Jordan during a crisis may limit the applicability of the results to different contexts and settings. This highlights the necessity of doing similar research across diverse sectors and nations to confirm the generalizability of the findings.

Notwithstanding these constraints, the outcomes of the study are anticipated to have ramifications for organisations operating in analogous settings and cultures, namely within the Middle Eastern area. Moreover, it is essential to acknowledge the study's significant addition to the current body of research about internal communication, employee-organization interactions, and online employee communication in times of crisis. It is advisable for future research endeavours to utilise these results as a foundation, integrating a variety of approaches and broadening the scope to encompass a wider array of industries and nations.

Conflict of interest

The authors state that they do not have any known conflicting interests in the work.

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