Exploring the linkages among transparent communication, relational satisfaction and trust, and information sharing on social media in problematic situations

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Abstract

Grounded in the framework of the relationship management theory, this study examined the effects of employees' perceived transparent communication on their relational trust and satisfaction with their organization and how the relational perceptions influenced their information sharing on social media in problematic situations. This study conducted a national survey of 449 employees working for large organizations in the United States. It found that employees' transparent communication with their organization positively influenced their relational satisfaction and trust. Employees who trusted their organization were more likely to share positive information about organizational problems on social media. The theoretical and practical implications of this study are discussed.

Keywords

Organization-employee relationships; Relational satisfaction; Relational trust; Social media; Social networks; Information sharing on social media; Transparent communication.

1. Introduction

The relationships between organizations and publics have drawn attention from public relations scholars since 1984 (**Kent**; **Taylor**, 2002). Organization-public relationships (OPRs) are defined as

"the degree that the organization and its publics trust one another, agree on one has rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit oneself to one another" (**Huang**, 1998, p. 12).

Given that the subject of this study is employees working in large organizations who are considered a critical strategic constituency in public relations (**Jo**; **Shim**, 2005), the current study focuses on organization-employee relationships (OERs) and explores their antecedent (i.e., transparent communication) and outcome (i.e., information sharing on social media).

Public relations researchers have identified a couple of predictors and outcomes of OERs (e.g., **Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011; **Men**; **Stacks**, 2014), which include transparent communication. Transparent communication is conceptualized as

> "an organization's communication to make available all legally releasable information to employees —whether positive or negative in nature— in a manner that is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal" (**Men**, 2012, p. 65).

The current study focuses on transparent communication and their strategic roles in facilitating OERs. However, very few scholars have explored the impact of OERs on employees' communication behaviors on social media. This paper fills this research gap by developing a framework of OERs that links their antecedent (transparent communication) to their outcome (information sharing on social media).

Employees' communication behaviors are perceived to be neutral by external publics, compared with tailored public relations messages (**Center** *et al.*, 2003). Employees who regularly communicate with external publics can adopt the role of public relations professionals (**Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011). However, the communication behaviors of employees have not been extensively studied in the field of public relations (**Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011). Although public relations scholars have examined various communication behaviors (e.g., **Grunig**; **Hunt**, 1984; **Kim**; **Grunig**, 2011; **Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011), few of them seemed to focus on communication behaviors on social media, especially information sharing on social media. Given the fact that more and more employees have adopted social media to share information in problematic situations, it would be valuable to examine the factors that may influence their information sharing on social media.

> ' The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of employees' perceived transparent communication on their relational trust and satisfaction with their organization '

The purpose of this study is to examine the effects of employees' perceived transparent communication on their relational trust and satisfaction with their organization and how the relational perceptions influence their information sharing on social media in problematic situations. Grounded in the theoretical framework of the relationship management theory, the current study conducts a national survey of employees working in large organizations in the U.S. This study advances the literature on public relations and social media. It empirically examines the motivations of employees' information sharing on social media and tests the value of internal public relations. Moreover, this study offers practical suggestions for organizations to effectively use public relations strategies to maintain quality relationships with employees and improve their information behaviors on social media.

2. Literature review

2.1. Theory of relationship management

The theory of relationship management has been one of the most frequently applied theories in the field of public relations. It posits that effective OPR management in light of common goals and interests facilitates

> "mutual understanding and benefit for interacting organizations and publics" (**Ledingham**, 2003, p. 190).

Ledingham (2003) indicated that OPRs that change over time are dynamic. These relationships are influenced by

> "relational history, the nature of the transaction, the frequency of exchange, and reciprocity" (**Ledingham**, 2003, p. 195).

The theory of relationship management has a couple of advantages and implications for public relations scholarship. Proposed as a general theory for public relations (**Ledingham**, 2003), this theory can identify the components of OPRs and explain how a symmetrical relationship is established (**Ledingham**, 2003). It can be applied throughout the processes of public relations (**Ledingham**, 2003).

2.2. Organization-employee relationships (OERs)

Organization-public relationships (OPRs) are defined as

> "the patterns of interaction, transaction, exchange, and linkage between an organization and its publics" (**Broom**; **Casey**; **Ritchey**, 2000, p. 18).

Heath (2013) critically discussed the conceptualization of OPRs and argued for

> "their complexity, multidimensionality, and the multiple layers of meaning that drive them and result from them" (p. 428).

Huang (1997) identified the indicators of OPRs including *satisfaction* and *trust*.

- Relational satisfaction: Satisfaction is defined as
> "the extent to which each party feels favorably toward the other because positive expectations about the relationship are reinforced" (**Hon**; **Grunig**, 1999, p. 3).

In a satisfactory relationship, the allocation of rewards is relatively fair (**Stafford**; **Canary**, 1991). In quality OPRs, an organization and its publics are satisfied with each other and have positive expectations about their relationships.

- Relational trust: Trust has been frequently studied in the fields of marketing, management, and public relations. Trust is defined as

> "a willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence" (**Moorman**; **Deshpandé**; **Zaltman**, 1993, p. 82).

The attributes of trust include dependability, competence, and integrity (**Barney**; **Hansen**, 1994; **Carnevale**, 1995; **Daley**; **Vasu**, 1995; **Whitener** *et al.*, 1998). Relationship marketing scholars argue that trust exists when one party is confident about the reliability and integrity of the other party (**Morgan**; **Hunt**, 1994). According to the theories of economics and strategic management, the trust of publics (e.g., consumers, employees, governments, and media) enables an organization to survive (**Verčič**; **Grunig**, 1995). Trust among employees can also lead to their organizational learning (**Kim**; **Park**, 2019). In the field of public relations, trust is considered the willingness and confidence of organizations and its publics involved in relationships to be open to one another (**Hon**; **Grunig**, 1999).

OPRs have been an important paradigm in the field of public relations over the past decade. In the first half of the last decade (2009-2013), public relations scholars mainly focused on the scale application of OPRs. Researchers adopted and applied the scales developed by **Hon**

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and **Grunig** (1999), **Huang** (2001), and **Ledingham** and **Bruning** (1998) and explored the antecedents and outcomes of OPRs. In the second half of the decade (2014-2018), scholars mainly applied OPRs in various contexts, such as emerging media (e.g., **Saxton**; **Waters**, 2014) and public engagement (e.g., **Men**; **Tsai**, 2014). In particular, social media provide a vehicle for organizations to build relationships with their publics. Therefore, many scholars used the content analysis method to examine how organizations strategically used social media to develop relationships with the publics.

Drawn from the literature on OPRs, this study focuses on its special form, OERs. OERs are defined as

> "the degree to which an organization and its employees trust one another, agree on who has the rightful power to influence, experience satisfaction with each other, and commit themselves to the other" (**Men**; **Sung**, 2019, p. 7).

OERs are considered an important outcome of internal public relations (**Men**, 2012). Employees are the organization's stakeholders with the closest connection to the organization (**Men**, 2011). The productivity, success, and performance of an organization are influenced by its employees' attitudes, behaviors, and performance (**Men**, 2012). Favorable OERs lead to positive performance, goal attainment, and reputation protection of the organization (**Men**, 2012). On the contrary, bad OERs may damage organizational reputation and cause negative performance.

2.3. Transparent communication

Transparent communication is considered a process that leads to trust and credibility (**Men**, 2012). Transparency has received attention from scholars in such fields as management, economics, journalism, and public relations (e.g., **Allen**, 2008; **Berggren**; **Bernshteyn**, 2007; **Drew**; **Nyerges**, 2004; **Men**; **Stacks**, 2014; **Men**; **Tsai**, 2014; **Monfort**; **Villagra**, 2016; **Rawlins**, 2008; 2009). Organizational transparency is identified as a reputation

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trait and a communication process (**Rawlins**, 2008; 2009). Information transparency is considered an organization's efforts to make its decisions and behaviors ascertainable and understandable for its stakeholders (**Gower**, 2006). But more transparent information can result in less understanding, which may, therefore, result in less trust in the organization (**Strathern**, 2000). If an organization makes too much negative information available to its employees, those employees may have increased negative attitudes toward their organization and not trust the organization, which may lead to poor job performance.

Transparency is characterized by three aspects:

- substantial information,
- participation, and
- accountability

which support communication efforts (**Balkin**, 1999; **Rawlins**, 2009).

First, substantial information requires organizations to

> "make available publicly all legally releasable information —whether positive or negative— in nature in a manner which is accurate, timely, balanced, and unequivocal" (**Heise**, 1985, p. 209).

Second, the participation aspect is reflected by public engagement in identifying the needed information (**Men**, 2012). Organizations should listen to the publics' voices before deciding what information they need and how well their information need is satisfied (**Rawlins**, 2009).

Third, a transparent organization is supposed to be accountable for its actions and decisions, be open to criticisms, and admit its problems or weaknesses (**Men**, 2012).

Drawn from previous literature, this study uses these three dimensions to measure transparent communication.

> If an organization makes too much negative information available to its employees, those employees may have increased negative attitudes toward their organization

Scholars have identified some antecedents and outcomes of transparent communication. For instance, **Men** (2012) argued that new communication technologies could facilitate the publics' expectation of organizational transparency. **Fombrun** (2007) indicated that transparency is an important communication attribute in establishing a favorable organizational reputation.

Transparent communication has been identified as a predictor of OERs. **Jahansoozi** (2006) considered organizational transparency a relational condition that leads to cooperation, accountability, and commitment. **Rawlins** (2008) surveyed employees working for a health care organization and found that organizations can gain employee trust if they encourage employee participation, make substantial information available to their employees, and deliver balanced reports. **Men** and **Stacks** (2014) documented that employees' transparent communication with their organization positively influenced their perceived relationships with the organization. If an organization makes truthful and substantial information available to its employees and encourages their feedback, employees may trust and feel satisfied with their organization, which are indicators of OERs. Thus, the following hypotheses are posed:

> H1: Transparent communication is positively associated with relational satisfaction.

> H2: Transparent communication is positively associated with relational trust.

2.4. Communication behavior

Communication behavior refers to a movement of words or symbols made by an individual in a life situation (**Carter**, 1973; **Kim**, 2006). People who communicate actively can form more organized cognitions, tend to develop attitudes about a situation, and do something about the situation more frequently (**Grunig**, 1992; **Grunig**; **Ipes**, 1983). According to **Grunig** and **Hunt** (1984), communication behaviors include two forms: information processing and information seeking.

Information processing is defined as

> "unplanned discovery of a message followed by continued processing of it" (**Clarke**; **Kline**, 1974, p. 233).

Information seeking is defined as

> "the planned scanning of the environment for messages about a specified topic" (**Grunig**, 1997, p. 9).

This study advances the literature by identifying information sharing as a new communication behavior of employees.

2.5. Information sharing on social media

Information sharing is an important feature and function of social media (**Chung**; **Han**; **Koo**, 2015; **Masip**; **Ruiz-Caballero**; **Suau**, 2019). Information sharing is a unique type of communication behavior on social media. Researchers have identified a couple of motivations of individuals' information sharing on social media, such

> Employees who perceive their relationship with the organization negatively tend to share negative information about the organization

as their information self-efficacy, expected social outcomes, enjoyment sharing, opinion leaders, and perceived strength of network ties (**Kim**; **Lee**; **Elias**, 2015; **Ma**; **Lee**; **Goh**, 2014). Publics tend to share negative information on social media when a crisis occurs (**Zhang**; **Borden**; **Kim**, 2018). Given that employees may use social media to share information regularly, it can be assumed that employees with good relationships with their organization may tend to share some positive information about an organizational problem on social media.

Research have examined the relationships between OERs and employee information behaviors. According to **Kim** and **Rhee** (2011), employees who perceive themselves as having a good relationship with their organization tend to seek, process, and share positive information about their organization when interacting with external strategic publics. In contrast, employees who perceive their relationship with the organization negatively tend to share negative information about the organization (e.g., organizational problems) with external stakeholders (**Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011). Thus, this study proposes that employees with a favorable relationship with their organization tend to share positive information related to organizational problems (e.g., poor products and/or services generated by their organization) on social media. For instance, employees may tend to share positive information (e.g., the organization's efforts to resolve this issue) with their followers on social media, if they are satisfied with, and trust, their organization. Therefore, the following hypotheses are posited:

H3: Employees' relational satisfaction is positively associated with their information sharing on social media in problematic situations.

H4: Employees' relational trust is positively associated with their information sharing on social media in problematic situations.

2.6. Moderating role of position level

According to **Men** (2012), employees with management positions in large and medium organizations perceive better transparent communication and more favorable relationships with their organizations than their counterparts. Senior employees are more likely to identify with the organization (**Abu-Nasra**, 2019) and perceive affective attachment to the organization due to their relatively established connections with the organization. Thus, even if an organization maintains worse transparent communication with its employees, those with higher position levels may still perceive good relationships with the organization. **Wang** and **Ki** (2018) examined the perceptions and behaviors of members of 18 professional associations and documented that career status moderates the effect of members' attitudes toward their association on their volunteering behavior, with junior members showing a stronger effect. However, it is still unclear whether employees' position level also moderates the effect of organizational transparent communication on their relationships with the organization. Therefore, the following research question is posited.

RQ1: Does employees' position level moderate the relationship between transparent communication and relational satisfaction (RQ1a) and trust (RQ1b)?
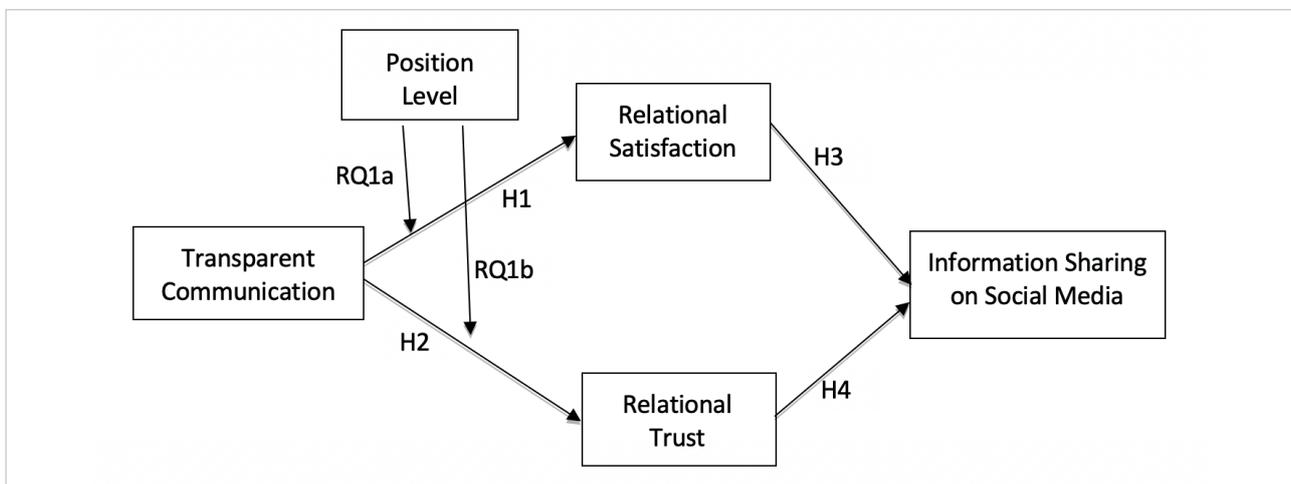

Figure 1. Proposed model

3. Method

3.1. Sample

The population of the current study is employees who have worked at large organizations in the U.S. and are social media users. An organization should have more than 250 employees in order to be qualified as a large organization (**Carim**; **Warwick**, 2013). Medium and small organizations with fewer than 250 employees were not included in the population, because these organizations have different dynamics, and public relations practices in these organizations are less prominent, compared with large organizations (**Men**, 2012).

To obtain a sample that was nationally representative of the American workforce, this researcher selected a leading data collection company in the United States, which provides sampling service for survey research and has patented national online panels (**Wang**, 2020).. This data collection method was used because it can obtain a nationally representative sample, which can increase the external validity of the proposed model (see Figure 1) and enable the findings of this study to be generalizable to any large organization in the U.S. (**Wang**, 2020). Many survey studies focusing on OERs have also used research firms to recruit employees working in various organizations (e.g., **Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011; **Men**, 2014; **Men**; **Stacks**, 2014). This research firm used stratified and quota sampling approaches to recruit participants who are or have been employees working in large organizations (with more than 250 employees) in the United States and are social media users.

Some rules are applied to determine the sample size of this study. According to **Bentler** and **Chou** (1987), in order to get trustworthy estimates, each free parameter needs a ratio of ten responses. Since this structural equation model has 14 free parameters, this study needs 140 responses. According to **Stacks** (2016), if a population is composed of more than 100,000 individuals, a random sample size of 384 is representative. Additionally, according to the most conservative estimates, a sample of 400 has a confidence interval of plus or minus 5 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level (**Babbie**, 2013). Thus, 400 is a reasonable sample size for this study.

3.2. Pretest

After obtaining the approval from the *Institutional Review Board* (*IRB*), a pretest was conducted with employees working in American organizations in April 2016 to ensure the validity of the measurement. According to **Trochim**, **Donnelly**, and **Arora** (2015), to replicate the study to different people, in different places, and at different times is an effective approach to strengthen external validity. The researcher recruited 206 employees working in U.S. organizations via *Amazon*'s *Mechanical Turk* (*MTurk*)[1]. Based on the feedback of some survey participants, this researcher revised a few questions to ensure clarity. For instance, the item, "The organization presents more than one side of controversial issues," was changed to "The organization presents more than one side of controversial issues (e.g., organizational crisis)." The Cronbach's alpha for each variable ranged from .83 to .90, and the factor loadings of all measurement items exceeded .70, which indicated reasonable reliability and validity. Thus, most measures of these variables were retained in this study.

3.3. Main study

After getting the *IRB*'s approval, the main study conducted a web-based national survey in September 2017. Because web-based surveys can improve the response rate, which allows more valid data analysis (**Greenlaw**; **Brown-Welty**, 2009), this researcher posted the survey questionnaire on *Qualtrics*, an online survey software site, which indicated the voluntary nature of the survey and guaranteed that employees' responses would be kept confidential (**Newman** *et al.*, 2019). It also included screening questions to ensure that each participant did work at a large organization in the U.S. with over 250 employees and was social media users. After that, the researcher sent the URL of the online survey questionnaire to the research company. The company randomly chose participants from 205,000 panelists based on the sample requirements and asked them to participate in this survey via the link. The researcher recorded the data via *Qualtrics* and stored them on a secure server. The researcher paid the sampling firm for recruiting participants, which provided monetary incentives to the participants completing this survey. A total of 449 participants were recruited and provided complete and valid responses. The incidence rate was 68%.

3.4. Measures

Transparent communication was treated as a latent variable with three indicators (substantial information, accountability, and participation), *relational satisfaction and trust* as observed variables, *information sharing* as an observed variable, and *position level* as an observed variable. A seven-point Likert scale was used to measure each variable, which ranges from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (7). The measurement items of each key variable are displayed in Table 1.

To operationalize *transparent communication*, this study measured its three dimensions: substantial information, participation, and accountability (**Rawlins**, 2008; 2009). Drawn from **Rawlins** (2009) and **Men** and **Stacks** (2014), six items were used to measure substantial information (α = .97), five items to measure participation (α = .95), and four items to measure accountability (α = .92).

To measure *relational satisfaction*, five items were adopted from **Hon** and **Grunig** (1999) and **Men** (2012). *Relational trust* was measured with five items modified from **Hon** and **Grunig** (1999) and **Men** (2012). The levels of reliability were .90 and .81 respectively.

This study focused on employees' sharing of information about organizational problems on social media, which might be influenced by their perceived relationships with their organization. Drawn from previous measurements of different types of problems (i.e., **Chen**; **Hung-Baesecke**; **Kim**, 2017; **Kim**, 2006; **Kim**; **Sung**, 2016) and common types of problems in organizations (**McNamara**, 2006), this researcher chose a specific organizational problem to investigate employees' information sharing on social media, namely, poor products and/or services generated by their organization. This problem was chosen because it is considered a universal problem encountered by most organizations (**McNamara**, 2006). The researcher asked participants whether and how they would share information about this problem on social media. To assess *information sharing on social media*, this study applied previous scales (**Chen**; **Hung-Baesecke**; **Kim**, 2017; **Kim**, 2006) to the context of social media and developed six items. The level of reliability was .97.

Adopted from **Men** (2012), position level was measured by asking the participants, "What is your level of position with, or was when you left, this organization?" The options included: "top management," "middle level management," "lower level management," and "non-management."

3.5. Statistical procedures for data analysis

This study used the expectation maximization method to address missing data. To test the proposed four hypotheses and one research question, this study conducted a correlation analysis and structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the measurement items of key constructs

Construct	Dimension/Item	Mean	SD
Transparent communication	**Substantial information**	4.86	1.48
	My organization provides information in a timely manner to people like me.	4.79	4.65
	My organization provides information that is relevant to people like me.	4.86	1.61
	My organization provides information that is complete.	4.69	1.62
	My organization provides information that is easy for people like me to understand.	5.05	1.55
	My organization provides accurate information to people like me.	4.89	1.56
	My organization provides reliable information to people like me.	4.90	1.56
	Participation	4.35	1.60
	My organization asks for feedback on the quality of its information from people like me.	4.43	1.76
	My organization involves people like me to help identify the needed information.	4.50	1.72
	My organization makes it easy to find the information that people like me need.	4.59	1.65
	My organization asks the opinions of people like me before making decisions.	3.98	1.86
	My organization takes time with people like me to understand who we are and what we need.	4.23	1.78
	Accountability	4.08	1.58
	My organization presents more than one side of controversial issues (e.g., organizational crisis).	4.18	1.68
	My organization is transparent with information that may be damaging to the organization.	4.00	1.78
	My organization is open to criticism by people like me.	4.09	1.79
	My organization freely admits when it has made mistakes.	4.06	1.79
Relational satisfaction	I am happy with my organization.	4.66	1.67
	I am unhappy in my interactions with my organization. (reversed)	4.47	1.78
	I enjoy dealing with my organization.	4.53	1.69
	Generally speaking, I am pleased with the relationship that my organization has developed with me.	4.58	1.69
	Both my organization and I benefit from the mutual relationship.	4.78	1.63
Relational trust	I have confidence in my organization's ability.	4.73	1.67
	My organization lacks the ability to accomplish what it plans to do. (reversed)	4.64	1.75
	Whenever my organization makes an important decision, I know it will be concerned about me.	3.93	1.68
	My organization is a reliable organization that keeps its promises.	4.38	1.69
	I believe that my organization takes my opinions into account when making decisions.	4.08	1.76
Information sharing on social media	If my friends ask me about this problem on social media, I would be willing to share my opinion.	3.53	1.82
	At times, I would share information on this problem (e.g., my organization's efforts to resolve this problem) posted by my friends or colleagues on social media.	3.35	1.82
	Sometimes I would engage in conversations about this problem by commenting and asking or answering questions on social media.	3.37	1.82
	At times, I would share information on this problem (e.g., my organization's statements about this problem) posted by my organization on social media.	3.43	1.87
	My social media would be a platform where my friends and other people can learn more about this problem.	3.31	1.85
	I sometimes would post messages on this problem (e.g., my organization's efforts to resolve this problem) on social media.	3.25	1.82

Note. SD = standard deviation

4. Results

Among the 449 respondents in the sample, there were more females (n = 310, 69%) than males (n = 139, 31%). According to **Wilcox**, **Cameron**, and **Reber** (2015), 61% of the labor force in the United States are women. Therefore, the gender distribution of the sample was similar to that of the labor force in the United States. The average and median age of the sampled employees were 52 (SD = 12.8) and 53 respectively. The average and median time that the respondents worked at the large organization were 11.5 (SD = 11.1) and 9 years respectively. The sampled employees held various positions in their organizations, including top management (n = 38, 8.5%), middle-level management (n = 82, 18.3%), lower-level management (n = 66, 14.7%), and non-management (n = 263, 58.5%). The frequency distribution of the respondents' position levels fits with the normal structure of an organization.

4.1. Correlation analysis

The correlations between substantial information, participation, accountability, relational trust, relational satisfaction, information sharing, and position level range from -.24 to .88. As shown in Table 2, all independent variables were significantly correlated with dependent variables at the significance level of .01. Thus, all variables were included in the subsequent analyses.

Table 2. Correlation matrix for measured variables

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Substantial information	----						
2. Participation	.82**	----					
3. Accountability	.72**	.88**	----				
4. Relational satisfaction	.77**	.81**	.77**	----			
5. Relational trust	.73**	.85**	.83**	.84**	----		
6. Information sharing	.21**	.33**	.41**	.35**	.39**	----	
7. Position level	-.24**	-.24**	-.23**	-.23**	-.27**	-.03	----

Note. ** Correlation is significant at $p < .01$ (2-tailed)

4.2. Structural equation modeling (SEM)

An SEM analysis was conducted to test the hypotheses and research question. According to the criteria of some indices of model fit (**Byrne**, 2001; **Kline**, 2005), the structural model indicated a reasonable fit to the data: χ^2 (3) = 88.930, $p <$ .001, χ^2 / df = 29.643, GFI = .932, NFI = .935, and CFI = .936. The results of the structural model are displayed in Figure 2. Six structural paths showed significant results at the $p < .001$ level.
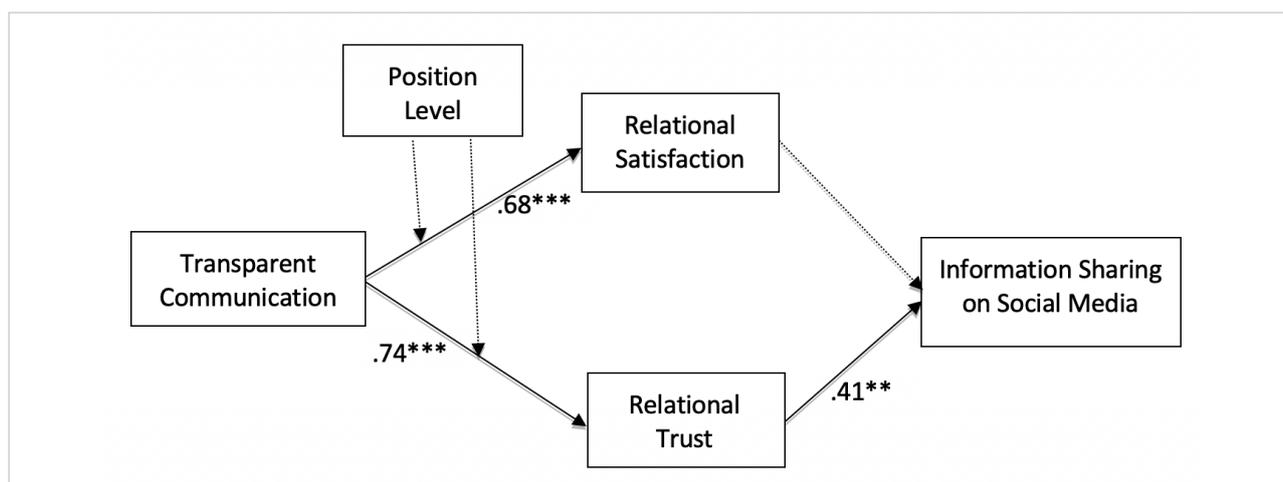

Figure 2. Results of the structural model.
Note. Coefficients indicated standardized regression weights. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$

Hypothesis 1 posited that transparent communication positively influences relational satisfaction. Transparent communication had a strongly positive impact on relational satisfaction (β = .68, S.E. = .02, $p < .001$), which supported H1. If an organization makes truthful and sufficient information available to its employees and encourages their feedback, employees are more likely to feel satisfied with their organization.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that transparent communication has a positive impact on relational trust. Results showed that transparent communication significantly positively influenced relational trust (β = .74, S.E. = .02, $p < .001$), in support of H2. Transparent communication is a predictor of relational trust. If employees perceive that their organization maintains two-way communication with them and that their opinions are valued, they tend to trust their organization.

Hypothesis 3 predicted that relational satisfaction has a positive impact on information sharing on social media in problematic situations. Results showed that relational satisfaction did not have a significant impact on information sharing on social media. Therefore, H3 was not supported.

> The results showed that position level was not a significant moderator of the relationship between transparent communication and relational satisfaction and trust

Hypothesis 4 posited that relational trust has a positive impact on information sharing on social media in problematic situations. Relational trust did indeed have a significantly positive impact on information sharing on social media in problematic situations ($\beta = .41$, S.E. = .09, $p < .05$). Thus, H4 was supported.

> " Employees who trust their organization are more likely to share information about organizational problems on social media "

The research question asked whether employees' position level moderates the relationship between transparent communication and relational satisfaction (RQ1a) and trust (RQ1b). The results showed that position level was not a significant moderator of the relationship between transparent communication and relational satisfaction and trust. Thus, employees' position level did not significantly moderate the effect of transparent communication on relational satisfaction and trust.

5. Discussion

This study examined the effects of employees' perceived transparent communication on their relational satisfaction and trust and how the relationships influenced their information sharing on social media in problematic situations. This study finds that employees' perceived transparent communication leads to their relational satisfaction and trust. Moreover, employees' relational trust positively influences employees' information sharing on social media in problematic situations.

A major finding of this study is that transparent communication have a positive impact on organization-employee relationships (OERs), which include relational satisfaction and trust. If employees perceive their communication with the organization to be transparent and two-way, they are more likely to trust and feel satisfied with their organization. This finding is consistent with previous research that documented that employees' transparent communication with their organization facilitate their perceived relationships with the organization (**Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011; **Men**; **Stacks**, 2014). If an organization makes credible and truthful information available to its employees, values their opinion, and responds to their concerns, employees tend to be satisfied with that organization and feel trusted and respected by it. Thus, in order to establish and maintain good relationships with employees, organizations should maintain transparent communication with their employees. For instance, public relations practitioners can provide transparent information to employees, encourage their feedback, respond to their concerns, and fulfil their needs.

Another finding is that employees who trust their organization are more likely to share information about organizational problems on social media. This result was consistent with **Kim** and **Rhee**'s (2011) finding that OERs had an impact on employee communication behaviors. If employees are confident in their organization, they may tend to actively share some positive information about an organizational issue (e.g., their organization's corrective actions) with their friends on social media. One possible reason for this is that employees who trust their organization might want to identify the issue and do something to help their organization resolve it. For example, they could use social media to share positive information about it (e.g., stakeholders' positive comments on social media) on social media to aid their organization in resolving the issue. Employees are able to serve as organizational advocates through sharing positive information about organizational issues, which is a key factor in organizational effectiveness (**Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011).

Despite the finding that employees' relational trust influences their information sharing on social media in problematic situations, relational satisfaction is not a significant predictor of information sharing, which is inconsistent with previous findings (e.g., **Kim**; **Rhee**, 2011). Employees' relational satisfaction may have little or no direct impact on their information sharing on social media in problematic situations. One possible reason is that some employees working in large organizations might use social media frequently and therefore could consume or share some information about their organization's issue on social media, regardless of the extent to which they are satisfied with their organization. These employees might use social media mainly to interact with their friends or to have fun.

This study also finds that employees' position level does not moderate the relationship between transparent communication and relational satisfaction and trust. Although employees holding management positions perceive a different level of transparent communication and relationships with their organizations compared with those without management positions (**Men**, 2012), they may perceive a similar effect of transparent communication on relational trust. Thus, a large organization should maintain transparent communication with all types of employees regardless of their position levels in order to facilitate their trust in the organization.

The findings of this study contributes to the body of knowledge on public relations and social media. The findings also advances previous literature on digital information technology by identifying the motivations of employees' social media use (i.e., relational trust). This study provides empirical evidence of the value of internal public relations in facilitating OERs. This study also documents the effects of OERs on employees' information sharing on social media in problematic situations, which expands the re-

> " Relational satisfaction is not a significant predictor of information sharing, which is inconsistent with previous findings "

lationship management theory. Furthermore, this study develops a framework of OERs that links its antecedent (transparent communication) to its outcome (information sharing on social media). It also provides insight into employee communication behavior in the context of social media.

> ' This study provides empirical evidence of the value of internal public relations in facilitating organization-employee relationships '

In terms of practical implications, large organizations should pay more attention to developing and maintaining favorable relationships with their employees in order to facilitate employees' information sharing on social media when a problem or crisis occurs. Public relations professionals can conduct employee surveys to understand employees' relationships with their organization and evaluate the effectiveness of OERs. The department of corporate communications can use a variety of communication channels such as internal publications (e.g., newsletters and magazines), organizational websites, organizational social media (e.g., *Facebook* and *Twitter*), emails, and employee meetings to disclose organizational information to employees. Furthermore, organizations can establish social media guidelines to manage employees' information sharing behaviors. In addition, organizational management could incorporate internal public relations into the overall public relations plan of the large organization and assign more resources to this area.

5.1. Limitations

First, this study used cross-sectional analysis, which could hardly test causal relationships. Thus, the findings of this study should be interpreted with caution. Second, this study only measured employees' perceived, rather than actual, transparent communication and relationships with their organization. The self-report measures can be affected by a social desirability response bias (**Williams**; **Pitre**; **Zainuba**, 2002).

5.2. Future research

Future researchers can use some qualitative research methods (e.g., interview, focus group, and participant observation) to understand the proposed model in greater detail and depth. They can also conduct experimental studies to test the causal relationships among transparent communication, organization-employee relationships (OERs), information sharing on social media, and position level. Future scholars can also use different samples to test the proposed model (e.g., employees working in medium or small organizations and those working in large organizations in other countries) in order to cross-validate the findings of this study.

6. Note

1. *MTurk* is one of the largest crowdsourcing marketplaces in the world, and it provides a platform for individuals or businesses to use human intelligence to work on various tasks (*Amazon Mechanical Turk*, 2016).
https://www.mturk.com

MTurk subjects can be more representative of the American population than convenience samples (**Berinsky**; **Huber**; **Lenz**, 2012; **Buhmester**; **Kwang**; **Gosling**, 2011; **Men**; **Tsai**, 2014).

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