

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT AND AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT AMONG SAUDI EMPLOYEES: THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL TRUST

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Abstract. Despite the acknowledged importance of perceived organizational support (POS), organizational trust (OT), and affective commitment (AC) for favorable organizational outcomes, relatively little is known about the processes that underlie these various associations, especially in Islamic, Arabian Middle Eastern contexts. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the relationships between POS and AC, and testing the mediating effect of OT in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). This study conducted a survey of 347 Saudi employees from a wide range of organizations, occupations, and industries and performed a hierarchical regression analysis. The results provided evidence of the validity of the three relevant constructs (POS, OT, AC) and the generalizability these constructs have outside of North American samples. It also indicated that POS is a significant predictor of OT, and both POS and OT were significant determinants of AC. The study also revealed that OT partially mediates the relationship between POS and AC. The findings contribute to a better understanding of the POS-OT-AC link in the Islamic Arabian context of the KSA. This study is among the first to test the mediating effect of OT on the POS-AC relationship, aiding the understanding of the indirect relationship between POS and AC.

Keywords: perceived organizational support, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, organizational trust, affective commitment, Arab, Islam, social exchange theory.

JEL Classification: D23, J81, L32.

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1. Introduction

In today's rapidly changing environment, it is important to have an edge over competitors. Having excellent HR practices (e.g., policies, programs, and activities) is a significant ingredient for success because this enables organizations to be competitive through people. People are a crucial success factor and the most valuable assets an organization possesses (Shen et al., 2020; Hanaysha & Majid, 2018) because they have the potential to learn, grow, and contribute. Employees' contributions to the creation of firms' competitive edge are undisputable. These contributions include knowledge sharing, innovative ideas for new products and services, creative solutions to current and future problems, and exceptional customer service (Rodriguez & Orellana, 2020). Therefore, the retention of skilled, valuable, and committed employees is extremely important to employers because they perceive employees as a sustainable source of competitive advantage (Khandekar & Shar-

ma, 2005). Employees require support and encouragement from organizations to achieve the best outcome. Organizational support and organizational trust are among those aspects that offer the highest level of return from employees, especially in terms of their commitment to organizations (Mercurio, 2015). There are numerous definitions of organizational commitment in literature. However, Meyer and Allen's (1991) three-component framework describes a more systematic approach to organizational commitment that is valid across multiple contexts and accurately describes the phenomenon of commitment (Mercurio, 2015). According to Meyer and Allen (1991), organizational commitment is a multi-dimensional construct that entails three distinct components based on two types of social exchange relationships: economic and affective (Liu & Wang, 2013). First, there is continuance commitment, which is based on the recognition that there are costs associated with leaving the organization. Second, there is

normative commitment, which reflects a sense of obligation to remain in the organization. Third, affective commitment refers to an employee's emotional attachment to the organization (Meyer et al., 2002). The current study focuses on affective commitment – rather than on all three forms of commitment – because this component has been perceived as and argued to be a key aspect of the organizational commitment construct (Mercurio, 2015). Furthermore, affective commitment has been demonstrated to be more strongly and more consistently associated with organizational-relevant and employee-relevant outcomes (Meyer et al., 2002; Solinger et al., 2008). Additionally, it is considered a critical motivational force binding individuals to effective courses of action that sustain the organization and its goals (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001; Solinger et al., 2008). In this study, affective organizational commitment (AC) is hypothesized to be an outcome of perceived organizational support (POS) and organizational trust (OT). Employees' POS and trust help boost their obligations toward the organization in order to reciprocate favorably (Jiang et al., 2015; Gigliotti et al., 2019).

Despite the acknowledged importance of POS, OT, and AC to outcomes that are favorable to both employees and organizations, relatively little is known about the processes that underlie these various associations, especially in the non-Western Arabian context. The aim of this exploratory study is to deepen the understanding of the relationships between POS and AC and to test the mediating effect of OT in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) context. More specifically, it aims to explore how affective organizational commitment, which refers to "emotional attachment to, identification with, and involvement in the organization" (Meyer & Allen, 1991, p. 67), develops in response to perceptions of organizational support via the building of organizational trust. Research studies conducted in the KSA discussing POS, OT, and AC have been scarce. This study was conducted to bridge such a gap. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this is the first study that investigates these relationships in the KSA context. Furthermore, the majority of studies on POS, OT, and AC were conducted in Western countries and based on Western samples. To assess the generalizability of these findings, a methodical investigation of the relationships among these constructs in different settings is necessary. Sociocultural and institutional factors in various countries may significantly affect the strength and direction of these relationships (Farh et al., 2007; Francesco & Chen, 2004). Given its unique socio-cultural fabric, the KSA provides an ideal context for conducting this research.

In the following sections, the concepts of POS, OT, and AC are discussed in light of the extant organizational and management literature. In particular, the causal relationship between POS, OT, and AC is investigated and the hypotheses of this study are then proposed. Then, the methodology is explained in detail and the empirical results are presented. Finally, the theoretical and practical implications of this study are discussed.

2. Literature review and development of hypotheses

2.1. Affective commitment

The literature on organizational commitment has established that affective commitment is rooted in social exchange theory (SET; Blau, 1964), which explains the interdependence between employees and their organization. Affective commitment captures an employee's emotional identification with, engagement with, and attachment to his or her organization (Meyer et al., 2002). Moreover, it describes the extent to which an individual wants to maintain their relationship with an organization, often due to the emotional rewards gained from that relationship (Lövsblad et al., 2012; Iqbal et al., 2021). Affective commitment develops as the outcome of values shared with the organization. It also develops through personal involvement, which refers to belief in the importance and significance of an individual's activity (Meyer & Herscovitch, 2001). Therefore, affectively committed employees typically identify with the organizational goals, feel that they fit into the organization, enjoy membership in the organization, are more enthusiastic, and contribute more clearly to organizational goals (Wu & Liu, 2014). In such cases, employees with strong affective commitment desire to maintain their emotional relationship with the organization, and this commitment is independent of any moral, economic, or duty-related reasons that could oblige them to stay with the organization (Agostini et al., 2019). Previous studies have indicated that, in comparison to continuous and normative commitments, affective commitment has a particular explanatory power with regard to individual and organizational variables (Meyer et al., 2002; Riketta, 2002) and is consistently found to be the most accurate predictor of positive organizational behavior (Lavelle et al., 2007). A wide range of antecedents of affective commitment has been identified in research findings, and these include POS, OT, and work experiences (Mercurio, 2015; Wong & Wong, 2017). Affective commitment has also been found to be associated with in-role job performance and extra-role behavior (Mercurio, 2015; Meyer & Allen, 1991), turnover intention (Mercurio, 2015; Vandenberghe & Bentein, 2009), absenteeism, and stress (Mercurio, 2015).

2.2. Perceived organizational support

The general perception and beliefs developed by employees that their organization values their contributions and cares about their wellbeing are reflected in the concept of POS (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Perceived organizational support is the central construct of organizational support theory (OST), which draws on SET and the norm of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960) to explain employee-organization relationships and emphasizes the importance of employees supporting the organization and vice versa (Baran et al.,

2012; Fu & Lihua, 2012). Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) proposed that employees develop POS through assessing the favorable and unfavorable aspects of their working conditions, organizational rewards, procedural justice, and support received from supervisors. Thus, POS strongly depends on employees' assessment of their organization's intent behind favorable or unfavorable treatment (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Based on SET and the norm of reciprocity, employees who gain organizational support are expected to compensate their organization with a high level of performance (Ding et al., 2020). Eva et al. (2020) argued that elevated levels of POS produce feelings of obligation on the part of employees towards the organization. These feelings, in turn, lead employees to reciprocate with improved attitudes and behaviors such as hard work, dedication, and a high level of commitment to achieving the organization's goals and integrating organizational membership into their social identity (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Similarly, Fulei et al. (2014) reported that when employees perceive the organization's concern and support, they exert more effort and perform better than employees who do not perceive that support.

Baran et al. (2012) argued that the recent popularity of the POS construct in organizational research is due to many factors, including its relationships with organizationally relevant outcomes such as citizenship behavior and turnover; its relevance across occupational contexts; its high reliability of measurement using Eisenberger et al.'s (1986) Survey of Perceived Organizational Support; and its strong grounding in OST, which has focused scholarly advancement. In their meta-analysis of 73 studies, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) identified the antecedents and consequences of POS. Among the antecedents are fairness, perceived supervisory support, organizational rewards, and favorable job conditions. In the same vein, POS enhances affective commitment, improves job satisfaction, creates positive moods, elevates performance levels, positively influences organizational citizenship behavior (OCB; Chiang & Hsieh, 2012), and contributes to the reduction of withdrawal behavior. A more recent meta-analysis by Kurtessis et al. (2017) confirmed the findings articulated by Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) and demonstrated that the antecedents of POS include the supportive aspects of leadership, fairness, HR practices, and working conditions. Furthermore, they found that through the social exchange process, POS was shown to positively predict affective and normative commitment, employee identification with the organization, felt obligation, and the outcome variables of OCB-Individual, OCB-Organization, and job performance. Moreover, their findings revealed that high-POS employees also expressed more trust in the organization, believing that they could take risks on the organization's behalf without fear of being exploited (Rousseau et al., 1998).

2.3. Organizational trust

Trust as a major element of social capital has become a prerequisite for socially responsible and ethical business

undertakings. Social capital refers to features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit (Putnam, 1993, p. 35; Six et al., 2015). Putnam (1993) stated that social capital results in trust through civic networks, norms of reciprocity, and associative organizations such as guilds, clubs, neighborhood or religious associations. Accordingly, trust can be viewed as social capital that reduces transaction costs, increases natural sociability among members, and facilitates reciprocal cooperation. Trust is, therefore, the core of all successful social relationships and is essential for interpersonal relationships to develop and for organizations to operate (Oldfield & Kushniryk, 2017). As an important lubricant of the social system (Ozmen, 2018), trust has to be understood, developed, maintained, and sustained at both the interpersonal and organizational levels. This research focuses on the organizational level of trust that refers to the global evaluation of an organization's trustworthiness and competency as perceived by the organization's members (Nyhan & Marlowe, 1997). Organizations should carefully analyze what makes an organization trustworthy for its employees by investigating how employees perceive trust in their organizations (Ozmen, 2018). Organizational trust is defined as "an employee's feeling of confidence that the organization will perform actions that are beneficial, or at least not detrimental, to him or her" (Tan & Tan, 2000, p. 243). In other words, it is an employee's willingness to take a risk for an organization with the expectation that, in exchange, the organization will behave in some desired way. As Ng (2015) puts it, OT is a binding force based on positive expectations about the future conduct of an employer. Research has indicated that the recognition of employees' contributions, fairness towards employees, POS, empowerment, cultural norms, and organizational structure contribute to the development of mutual trust at the organizational level (Li et al., 2010; Tan & Tan, 2000). Prior research has shown that the elevated level of trust has many important benefits for organizations and their members. These include enhanced affective commitment; more positive attitudes (Mercurio, 2015; Wong & Wong, 2017); minimized risk and decreased operating costs (Connell et al., 2003); facilitated OCB; lower turnover intention; improved communication; employee satisfaction; and increased organizational performance (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Matzler & Renzl, 2006; Krasman, 2014, De Jong et al., 2016; Guinot & Chiva, 2019). In contrast, a climate of mistrust within an organization results in reduced employee commitment and cooperation (Simha & Stachowicz-Stanusch, 2015); low levels of employee engagement (Cambor & Alcover, 2019); employee engagement in self-protective behaviors; diminished efficiency and productivity; and increased workload and transaction costs (Mayer & Gavin, 2005; Colquitt et al., 2011).

2.4. Perceived organizational support and affective commitment

Previous studies have established that POS is an antecedent of affective organizational commitment (Rhoades et al., 2001; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Mercurio, 2015). Additionally, recent empirical evidence has confirmed the positive association between POS and AC (Chênevert et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Saks, 2006; Lee & Peccei, 2007; Wong & Wong, 2017; Siwela & Van der Bank, 2021; Ng, 2015). A significant body of research discussing the POS-AC relationship has revealed that reciprocity, social exchange, and socio-emotional needs play central roles in the explanation of this association (Lee & Peccei, 2007). The reciprocity and social exchange perspective implies that employees who believe that their organization values them and cares for their well-being are more likely to feel a sense of indebtedness toward the organization and are, therefore, more likely to reciprocate the favorable treatment with stronger affective attachment to the organization (Eisenberger et al., 2001). The socio-emotional perspective proposes that when an organization cares for an employee's self-esteem and need for approval at work (e.g., by rewarding valued efforts and supporting the employees), this creates a psychologically rewarding experience in the mind of employees. It is precisely these psychologically rewarding experiences that are at the foundation of the development of a stronger affective attachment to the organization (Lee & Peccei, 2007; Ahmed et al., 2014). This is aligned with Meyer and Allen's (1991) explanation that for employees to develop AC, they need to feel comfortable psychologically. Based on the POS-AC relationship established in current scholarship, the absence of studies that validate or negate these relationships in the KSA, and the exploratory nature of this POS-AC study in the KSA, the author hypothesizes that the relationship between POS and AC in the KSA will mirror the results found in Western studies. Thus, this study tests the generalizability of the Western results, explores their transferability to a Saudi Arabian context, and hypothesizes as follows:

H1: POS will have a significantly positive direct association with employees' affective commitment.

2.5. Perceived organizational support and organizational trust

Social exchange theory is a plausible explanatory framework for employee-organization interdependence. According to SET, if employees perceive that their organization supports them, they are more likely to believe that whatever the organization does is beneficial, or at least not detrimental to them (Tan & Tan, 2000). These perceptions of organizational support are likely to help employees feel confident that they are valued members of the organization and that their best interests are considered (Gigliotti et al., 2019). Therefore, both the beliefs and affective feelings generated by POS could result in an employee's desire to reciprocate support with high levels of emotional

attachment (Eisenberger et al., 2001). In other words, employees form affectionate bonds with their organizations, which can result in positive workplace attitudes and behaviors such as organizational trust (Lin, 2010). Organizational trust is reinforced by the accumulated reciprocity associated with POS. In such a case, as an organization establishes repeated patterns of support, employees are likely to develop greater feelings of trust that future organizational decisions, goals, plans, and work practices will continue to reciprocate employee support (Gigliotti et al., 2019). A number of studies have found a significantly positive relationship between POS and OT (Gigliotti et al., 2019; Alder et al., 2006; DeConinck, 2010; Biswas & Kapil, 2017; Canipe, 2006; Chen et al., 2005; Ng, 2015). For example, Biswas and Kapil (2017) found that POS was positively correlated with OT. Similarly, Wong and Wong (2017) reported a strong positive association between trust in an organization and POS. In the same vein, Ng (2015) revealed that POS had a significant positive effect on OT. Thus, investigating the relationship between POS and OT is needed to increase the understanding of this association in the KSA context. Bearing in mind the absence of studies that validate or negate these relationships in the KSA and the exploratory nature of this POS-OT study in this context, the following hypothesis has been developed:

H2: POS will have a significantly positive direct association with employees' perceptions of organizational trust.

2.6. Organizational trust and affective commitment

The most powerful driving forces behind organizational success are organizational trust and organizational commitment (Bastug et al., 2016). As argued by Tan and Lim (2009), employees' trust in the organization captures their psychological dependence on the employment relationship and their willingness to be vulnerable to the organization's actions to fulfill its obligations and to meet their expectations. Employees with a high level of OT are willing to rely on their organization regardless of the magnitude of risk involved in this dependency relationship (Colquitt et al., 2007; Mayer et al., 1995). Employees' willingness to accept this risky situation requests a high level of OT, which, in turn, represents a strong psychological attachment to an organization (Williams, 2001; Ng, 2015). In other words, OT implies that an organization reduces risk by considering employees' contributions and reciprocating with fair rewards, fulfilling the unspecified obligations in the employee-organization social exchange (Jiang et al., 2015). When employees perceive this favorable treatment, they are likely to develop the positive perception that their organizations value their contributions, thus developing and maintaining high levels of trust in the organization's fulfillment of obligations and intent to meet future expectations. This trust in future intentions will lead employees to respond by having positive attitudes and high AC (Sousa-Lima et al., 2013; Tremblay et al., 2010). This is in agreement with Ng's (2015) explanation that employ-

ees with high levels of OT are psychologically attached to an organization because they anticipate that it will treat them fairly and favorably. Prior research has consistently demonstrated that trust in the organization has repeatedly been reported as an antecedent of AC (Akkaya, 2020; Colquitt et al., 2013; Tan & Tan, 2000; Mercurio, 2015; Jiang et al., 2015; Yilmaz, 2008; Kang et al., 2021). For instance, Akkaya (2020) found that trust in an organization has a positive impact on affective organizational commitment and continuance organizational commitment. However, OT did not have an impact on normative organizational commitment. Likewise, Yilmaz (2008) observed a moderate positive and significant relationship between OT and AC. Similarly, Schoorman et al. (2007) argued that organizational trust strongly influences emotional commitment. Kang et al. (2021) revealed that organizational trust is the highest indicator of affective commitment. Based on this large body of evidence and the absence of studies that validate or negate this OT-AC relationship in the KSA context, the following hypothesis will be tested in this study:

H3: OT will have a significantly positive direct association with employees' affective commitment.

2.7. The mediating role of OT between POS and AC

As previously suggested, numerous studies have argued that POS is a significant predictor of OT (Gigliotti et al., 2019; Alder et al., 2006; DeConinck, 2010; Biswas & Kapil, 2017; Canipe, 2006; Chen et al., 2005; Ng, 2015). In addition, studies have shown that OT can positively affect and predict AC (Akkaya, 2020; Colquitt et al., 2013; Tan & Tan, 2000; Mercurio, 2015; Jiang et al., 2015; Yilmaz, 2008; Kang et al., 2021). These suggestions have been explained by SET as well. In other words, the organization's supportive actions initiate a social exchange relationship that reinforces the trustworthiness of the organization over a period of time (Gigliotti et al., 2019), which, in turn, leads to the emotional attachment of an employee to an organization (Williams, 2001; Ng, 2015). Therefore, it can be expected that when employees perceive their organization as supportive, they also perceive it as trustworthy and reciprocate with a high level of affective commitment. Hence, we hypothesize the following in the KSA context:

H4: Employees' perceptions of organizational trust will mediate the relationship between POS and employees' affective commitment.

3. Methods

3.1. Sample

A survey questionnaire using self-reporting was developed to collect the required data for the current study. Data collection in the Middle East is often described as challenging and is characterized by several methodological limitations (Elamin & Tlaiss, 2015). This necessitated the use of a convenience sample for this study. An invitation was sent to

the HR departments of a large number of organizations across different industries in Riyadh, the capital of the KSA, and in the Eastern Province. Only seven organizations welcomed this study and granted the researcher access to their employees based on the promise of complete anonymity of all individual and institutional participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary, and all participants provided their written, informed consent to participate in the study. Both internet and paper-based surveys were utilized in this research. Four organizations opted to distribute surveys via the internet and three organizations in paper format. The surveys were returned to the researcher through a direct internet link that was provided to online participants and by self-addressed stamped envelopes for the remainder of participants. The response rate was 36.6 percent, as 1,000 surveys were distributed and 366 responses were received. However, due to the inadequacy of the answering pattern and incomplete status of some of the surveys, 342 surveys were used in this study. Among the 342 successful respondents, 69.6% were male, which was expected and is representative of the nature of the workforce in Saudi Arabia. In terms of education, more than 65% of the participants had at least a tertiary education (65.8%). More than half of the sample (54.9%) was less than 35 years old. In terms of the organizational demographics, 43.5% of the participants had been working for the same organization for more than 10 years, emphasizing the role of loyalty and commitment to one employer as an important value in the Middle East (Ali, 2010).

3.2. Procedures

The questionnaire used in this study comprised four sections. The first section solicited some individual and organizational demographic information such as gender, educational level, age, and organizational tenure. The second, third, and fourth sections asked questions relating to POS, OT, and AC. Given that Arabic is the official language of the KSA, solely administering the questionnaire in its original English version would have significantly jeopardized the response rate. To improve the response rate, a back translation was used (Brislin, 1970). The survey used five-point Likert-type scales, with responses ranging from 1 = never to 5 = always.

3.3. Measures

Affective commitment was measured using Meyer and Allen's (1997) six-item revised affective commitment scale, which measures the extent to which employees feel a sense of emotional attachment and belongingness to their organization and wish to retain membership in their organization. An example of an item is "I feel a strong sense of belonging to my organization." Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability estimate was 0.955. Eisenberger et al.'s (1997 and 1990) eight-item survey of perceived organizational support was used to measure POS. This scale measures the extent to which employees feel valued and cared for by their organizations. An example of an item is "My or-

ganization cares about my opinions.” The Cronbach’s alpha reliability estimate was 0.905. Organizational trust was measured using Robinson’s (1996) seven-item trust scale. This scale focuses on employee-perceived trust in their relationship with their employing organization. An example item is “My employer is not always honest and truthful” (reverse-scored). The Cronbach’s alpha was found to be 0.927. Tlaiss and Elamin (2015) used Robinson’s (1996) scale in the KSA, meaning that the validity and reliability of this scale for measuring OT in the context of the KSA has already been established.

3.4. Reliability and validity of the survey instrument

Cronbach’s alpha coefficients were used to test the reliability of the constructs. The alpha values indicated excellent internal consistency with Cronbach’s $\alpha > 0.90$ for the three constructs (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to determine the underlying structure between the variables in the analysis (Hair et al., 2010). Factorial validity is a form of construct validity that is established through factor analysis (Allen & Yen, 1979). An exploratory factor analysis was used because the measures used in this study are not well established in the KSA context. For instance, although Tlaiss and Elamin (2015) measured OT using Robinson’s (1996) seven-item scale, they did not conduct a factor analysis for the measure. A principal component analysis using Varimax rotation was used to check the structure of the three scales that were used to measure AC, POS, and OT. A cut-off value of 0.40 was used for the factor loadings based on Hair et al.’s (2010) recommendations for the sample size and number of items involved. A three-factor solution was extracted, which explained 70.1% of the variance (see Table 1). The pattern matrix indicated that all item loadings for each factor were above 0.598. The eigenvalue for factor one (AC) was 10.695, and this factor explained 45.9% of the variance, with six factor loadings that ranged from 0.817 to 0.892. The eigenvalue for factor two (OT) was 2.489 and explained 23.508% of the variance, with seven factor loadings that ranged from 0.598 to 0.828. The eigenvalue for factor three (POS) was 1.547, and this factor explained 22.701% of the variance, with six factor loadings that ranged from 0.619 to 0.828. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was used to measure the adequacy of the sample for the extraction of the three factors. For this study, the KMO value was found to be 0.932, which falls into the range of being superb. A value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact, meaning that a factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable factors (Kaiser, 1974). This result increases the confidence level in the appropriateness of factor analysis for this study’s data. This study also used Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity to test the multivariate normality of the set of distributions. This procedure also tests whether the correlation matrix (R-matrix) is an identity matrix. According to this test, if the R-matrix is an identity matrix, all the correlation coefficients are zero. If this is the case, it undermines the meaningfulness of factor analysis. For factor

analysis to be appropriate for the data, this test must be significant (i.e., have a significant value less than 0.05, $p < 0.05$). For this study, Bartlett’s test was highly significant (Chi-square = 6172.319, $df = 210$, $p < 0.001$). This result means that the data are approximately multivariate normal and, thus, acceptable for factor analysis. Moreover, Harman’s one-factor test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) was conducted to test the common method variance (CMV). This technique used an EFA, where all the items were loaded onto a single factor by explaining only 48.51%, which is less than the recommended threshold of 50%, meaning that common method bias was not present in this study.

Table 1. EFA for study constructs (source: Field Survey, 2021)

Item No.	Factor 1 AC	Factor 2 OT	Factor 3 POS
AC1	0.823		
AC2	0.854		
AC3	0.876		
AC4	0.892		
AC5	0.820		
AC6	0.817		
OT1		0.774	
OT2		0.758	
OT3		0.828	
OT4		0.598	
OT5		0.800	
OT6		0.760	
OT7		0.760	
POS1			0.642
POS2			0.619
POS3			0.674
POS4			0.767
POS5			0.694
POS6			0.708
POS7			0.759
POS8			0.679
Eigenvalue	10.695	2.489	1.547
% of the Variance	23.939	23.508	22.701

Note: Loadings > 0.40 shown.

4. Results

4.1. Test for determining the relationships between POS, OT, and AC

To explore the relationships between POS, OT, and AC and test the first (POS-AC) and third (OT-AC) hypotheses of the study, the author performed a hierarchical multiple regression in two steps. In Step 1, the control variables (individual and organizational demographic information such as gender, educational level, age, and organizational tenure) were entered. In Step 2, the POS and OT were entered. The results are outlined in Table 2. The hierarchical regression analysis

indicated that both POS and OT predicted AC. Perceived organizational support and OT explained an average of 36.1% of the variance in AC. Perceived organizational support and OT had a significant functional influence on AC ($\beta = 0.391$, $p < 0.001$, and $\beta = 0.258$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, when POS and OT were entered in Step 2, the result was a 0.351 change in R^2 ($F [2,335] = 93.568$, $p < 0.001$). This supported H1 and H3.

Table 2. Results of the hierarchical regression testing the relationship between perceived organizational support, organizational trust, and affective commitment: (POS-AC) and (OT-AC) (source: Field Survey, 2021)

Criterion Variable		
Predictor	AC	
	ΔR^2	β
Step 1: controls	0.021	
Gender		0.005
Education		0.043
Age		-0.102
Organizational tenure		0.159*
Step 2:	0.351***	
POS		0.391***
OT		0.258***
N	347	
Adjusted R^2	0.361***	
Equation F-value	33.055***	

Notes: β : standardized beta; AC: affective commitment; POS: perceived organizational support; OT: organizational trust; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

4.2. Test for determining the relationship between POS and OT

To explore the relationship between POS and OT (POS-OT) and test the study's second hypothesis, the author conducted a hierarchical regression analysis in two steps. In Step 1, the control variables (individual and organizational demographic information including gender, educational level, age, and organizational tenure) were entered. In Step 2, POS was entered. The results are outlined in Table 3. The hierarchical regression analysis indicated that POS successfully predicted OT, and the regression explained an average of 46.5% of the variance in OT. It also showed a significant functional influence on OT ($\beta = 0.690$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, when POS was entered in Step 2, the result was a 0.464 change in R^2 ($F [1,363] = 295.940$, $p < 0.001$). This supported H2.

4.3. Test for the mediation effect of OT between POS and AC

The mediating effect of OT on the relationship between POS and AC was tested by using Baron and Kenny's (1986) four steps for establishing mediation. The results are summarized in Table 4. The first step revealed that POS posi-

Table 3. Results of the hierarchical regression testing the relationship between perceived organizational support and organizational trust: (POS-OT) (source: Field Survey, 2021)

Predictor	Criterion Variable	
	ΔR^2	β
Step 1: controls	0.009	
Gender		0.019
Education		0.014
Age		0.019
Organizational tenure		0.026
Step 2:	0.464***	
POS		0.690***
N	347	
Adjusted R^2	0.465***	
Equation F-value	60.332***	

Notes: β : standardized beta; POS: perceived organizational support; OT: organizational trust. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

tively and significantly predicted AC ($\beta = 0.569$, $p < 0.001$). In the second step, POS and OT explained a positive and significant relationship ($\beta = 0.686$, $p < 0.001$). In the third step, OT was added to the regression model, and it was found to have a significant effect on AC ($\beta = 0.262$, $p < 0.001$), and the β coefficient of the relationship between POS and AC was significant with a considerable drop ($\beta = 0.390$, $p < 0.001$). Finally, the results of the fourth step confirmed that OT partially mediated the relationship between POS and AC. To support the mediation model, the Sobel (1982) test was conducted and was found significant at $z = 9.59$, $p < 0.001$. This supported H4.

Table 4. Results of the hierarchical regression testing the mediating effect of organizational trust in the relationship between perceived organizational support and affective commitment (source: Field Survey, 2021)

Predictor	Criterion variables	
	OT	AC
	β	β
Step 1:		
POS	0.686***	0.569***
Adjusted R^2	0.469***	
Step 2:		
POS		0.390***
OT		0.262***
Adjusted R^2		0.357***
ΔR^2		0.036
F for ΔR^2 (Steps 1 and 2)		19.202***

Notes: β : standardized beta; AC: affective commitment; POS: perceived organizational support; OT: organizational trust. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

5. Discussion

This study explored the effects of POS on OT and AC, OT on AC, and the mediating effects of OT in the POS–AC relationship. With the acute shortage of research in the AME context in mind, scholars have been calling for more country-specific studies that can improve our understanding of the phenomena in different cultures (Abu Elanain, 2009; Elamin & Alomaim, 2011; Elamin & Tlaiss, 2015). Additionally, if management is to become a universal discipline, it will need theories from multiple perspectives and data from people across the globe. Simply borrowing a measure developed and validated in the West without testing measurement equivalence/invariance (ME/I) can lead to erroneous conclusions (Yeh et al., 2014). Thus, this study ensured that it tested the validity and reliability of these results in the Arab Middle Eastern (AME) context and found that these research instruments appear to be a fairly valid and reliable measure of POS, OT, and AC in the AME KSA context. The study findings suggest that the POS of Saudi employees is positively associated with their AC. This finding is aligned with previous research that found a significant relationship between POS and AC (Chênevert et al., 2015; Kim et al., 2016; Saks, 2006; Lee & Peccei, 2007; Wong & Wong, 2017; Siwela & Van der Bank, 2021; Ng, 2015). This considerable body of research supports the argument that employee perceptions of the supportiveness of the organization will influence AC. In terms of the relationship between POS and OT, the study's findings showed that employees' POS has a direct influence on OT. This result is consistent with previous research done in organizational settings examining the POS-OT relationship (Gigliotti et al., 2019; Alder et al., 2006; DeConinck, 2010; Biswas & Kapil 2017; Canipe, 2006; Chen et al., 2005; Ng, 2015). Based on SET, this stream of research concludes that employees who perceive that their organization supports them are more likely to believe that whatever the organization does is beneficial, or, at the very least, that it is not detrimental to them. The results also demonstrate that OT is a significant predictor of AC. This finding is consistent with that of previous scholars (Akkaya, 2020; Colquitt et al., 2013; Tan & Tan, 2000; Mercurio, 2015; Jiang et al., 2015; Yilmaz, 2008; Kang et al., 2021), indicating that employees with high levels of OT are psychologically attached to an organization because they anticipate future fair and favorable treatment. Therefore, employees' AC is shaped by their perception of their organization's goodwill.

Though our findings contribute to the existing literature suggesting that POS has a direct impact on employee affective organizational commitment, this effect might not be unconditional. Our results on the mediating effects of OT show that OT has a significant partial mediating effect on the relationship between POS and affective organizational commitment. Based on SET and norms of reciprocity, employees with a high level of support perceive that their organization cares about them, and they then reciprocate by increasing their trust in the organization, which can, in turn, lead to emotional attachment to the organization

(Williams, 2001; Ng, 2015). The scholarship on organizational behavior has confirmed that OT is a consequence of POS (Gigliotti et al., 2019; DeConinck, 2010; Biswas & Kapil, 2017; Canipe, 2006; Ng, 2015), and, at the same time, it is a predictor of employee AC (Akkaya, 2020; Colquitt et al., 2013; Mercurio, 2015; Jiang et al., 2015; Kang et al., 2021).

Although some of the associations were indeed similar to what has been found in Western contexts, the underlying justifications are different. These findings can be best understood in the context of the cultural and religious fabric of the KSA. Islam is not only the official religion of the KSA, but also the most prominent constituent of the cultural, social, legal, and political fabric of the country (Elamin & Tlaiss, 2015). Islamic values and teachings are based on the Holy Quran and Sunnah, which are the utterances of the Holy Prophet (pbuh) known as Hadith, his personal acts, or the sayings of others that tacitly approved by the Prophet (pbuh). Support, trust, and commitment are central Arabian cultural values that are reinforced by Islamic teachings. Consequently, because Islam is considered a way of life and a complete code of conduct, social institutions, corporations, and individuals in the KSA are expected to comply with Islamic instructions and values related to support, trust, and commitment. Supporting employees, promoting an atmosphere of trust, and increasing an employee's emotional attachment and dedication to the workplace are regarded as part of the faith and pleasing God in the Saudi context. Furthermore, Arab history and culture are based on favour reciprocity, support, responsibility, personal ties, and group loyalty in the family, extended relationship, and organizational setting. Loyalty frequently trumps society laws and restrictions in the Saudi society. The predominance of these sociocultural forms demonstrates that Saudi employees' support, confidence, and psychological attachment in Saudi organizations is strongly anchored in Saudi history and culture. This is combined with the paternalistic management style, in which the supervisor is expected to behave as a father figure to subordinates due to the strong family structure in the Saudi culture. They feel they know best for their subordinates. Saudi employees think that the paternalistic inclinations of their superiors are part of organizational support and caring, and that this is reciprocated by increased trust in and emotional attachment to organizations.

To conclude, this study provides empirical support for the relationship between POS, OT, and AC in the KSA. Moreover, our results show that OT plays an intervening role between POS and AC. These results have significant managerial and theoretical implications, which are discussed in the following section.

6. Conclusions and implications

Although substantial research has been conducted on AC, POS, and OT in Western countries, there is a paucity of research in the AME context, with the KSA being no exception. Theoretically, this study has contributed to the exist-

ing literature on POS, OT, and AC in several ways. First, this research provides evidence as to the validity of the three relevant constructs (POS, OT, AC), and the generalizability these constructs have outside of North American samples, as this research was conducted on a Saudi sample. Second, the relationship between POS, OT, and AC has received relatively little attention in non-Western contexts, especially in the AME context. This study contributed to the extant literature by showing that an employee's perception of organizational support and OT shapes their AC in the KSA. This research shows the importance of considering employees' perceptions of organizational support, trust, and nurturing when examining employees' emotional attachment. Moreover, this study increases our understanding of the relationship between POS and OT by empirically demonstrating how the creation of a supportive organizational environment would contribute to building and maintaining employees' organizational trust in the Saudi AME context. Third, the relationship between POS and AC has received relatively little attention in non-Western contexts. This study found that one of the critical intervening factors in this relationship is organizational trust. The perception of a highly supportive organizational atmosphere is likely to result in the perception of an organization as trustworthy, which then increases AC.

It is also necessary to explore the practical managerial implications of these results for managers, as well as how these new insights might lead to increased organizational effectiveness. First, managers in Saudi organizations must be aware that employee views of the organization's supportiveness influence employees' perceived organizational trust and affective commitment, and they must adapt their decisions and actions accordingly. Second, in order to increase employees' AC, organizations should increase their investments in organizational support and organizational trust. Simply put, POS and OT are types of social exchange, and both increase the likelihood that employees will become emotionally attached to the organization. The empirical evidence has explicitly shown the strength and nature of the effects of POS and OT on AC to the organization, which leads the author to recommend that both types of social exchange should occur within organizations to promote the emotional attachment of employees to their organizations. Therefore, in order to enhance AC, organizations need to look for ways to increase the employees' sense of POS and OT. To enhance the level of AC among employees, organizations can implement various HRM practices related to POS, including career development programs, fair reward systems, and promotion and formative performance management. With the implementation of such recognition and growth practices, Saudi organizations can demonstrate that they value the contributions of employees and care for their well-being. In a similar vein, organizational trust can be promoted by enacting justice, support, honesty, transparency, consistency, and proper communication. Third, the findings of this study have unambiguously demonstrated that support, trust, and affective commitment are profoundly ingrained

in Saudi Arabia's societal fabric. In view of the Saudi sociocultural setup, local HR departments in Saudi organizations are encouraged to seek a better understanding of employees' perception of organizational support. This can be employed as a catalyst to boost organizational trust and, consequently, affective commitment. As a result, human resource departments are invited and strongly encouraged to leverage on employee-management communication training. For instance, managers could be trained to show concern for their employees' personal problems and families, given the collective, family-oriented nature of Saudi society, which in turn can instill a sense of trust, perception of organizational support, loyalty and emotional attachment to an organization.

7. Limitations and future research

Although the findings of this study offer important insights into the relationship between POS and AC as well as into the mediating effect of OT, there are some limitations that can guide future empirical work. First, since the study was based on specific geographical areas (Riyadh and Eastern Province), the findings of the present study cannot be generalized. In order to generalize, the study would need to include data randomly sampled and drawn from the entire population of employees in the KSA. Second, the sample was obtained using convenience sampling, a method that can result in selection bias. The author tried to alleviate this problem by controlling for the effects of demographic and organizational variables. Third, this research included only POS, OT, and AC constructs. Future researchers should examine the other dimensions of support, trust, and commitment, such as, for example, perceived supervisor support, trust in supervisors, and other dimensions of commitment (continuous and normative). This would contribute to a better understanding of these constructs in non-Western contexts. Fourth, the study relied on data collected at a set point in time (i.e., cross-sectional data), which does not allow researchers to determine causality among variables. Therefore, a longitudinal analysis is needed in future research. Fifth, this study only used a self-report approach to data collection, which may easily cause common method variance and, therefore, influence the accuracy of the results (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Although Harman's single-factor test showed that common method variance was not problematic in this study, in future research, the collection of data should be managed by using multiple approaches to minimize the possibility of common method variance.

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