Using an Enterprise Social Network to build faculty engagement in Higher Education: An Experiment at Jammu, India

Ankur Gupta[1], Ankita Nanda[2], Sahil Sawhney[3]
[1,2,3] Model Institute of Engineering and Technology, Jammu, J&K
[1]ankurgupta@mietjammu.in,[2]ankita.mba@mietjammu.in,[3]sahil@mietjammu.in

Abstract— **Indian Higher Education is rapidly transforming with a national mission to improve quality and attain enhanced outcomes. Faculty is the bedrock of all institutional transformation initiatives. Faculty development has thus received significant attention from policy makers with several national initiatives in the offing. However, faculty support, engagement and true empowerment has not received the desired attention in a large majority of the institutions in the Indian Higher Education space. Apart from institutional commitment to building faculty engagement, an entire supporting ecosystem is required to create a culture of sustained performance leading to measurable outcomes. During the Covid-19 pandemic, online platforms for facilitating employee engagement gained traction across several industry verticals, a trend which has continued in the post-pandemic world. We present a case study on implementing an Enterprise Social Network (ESN) at an educational institution in India for building faculty engagement. Initial results establish the effectiveness of Enterprise Social Networks for facilitating information flow, communication, sharing success stories and recognition, besides effectively chronicling events, activities, and achievements. We recommend adoption of such platforms, subject to some caveats.**

Keywords— **Faculty Engagement; Higher Education; Social Networks.**

JEET Category— **Research**

I. INTRODUCTION

Employee engagement is critical as organizations seek to survive, remain relevant and attain the desired growth objectives in a dynamic business environment, accentuated by new challenges in the post-pandemic world. The pandemic has had a deep psychological impact on individuals forcing them to reevaluate their priorities in life and an attitude shift towards work and careers. This has resulted in the "Great Resignations" (Serenko, 2023) a moniker for the mass exodus of employees from organizations globally on extremely short notice, their propensity for a work-from-home role or even gravitating towards the gig economy over a regular 9 to 5 job, besides prioritizing their personal lives over their professional growth. Concepts of employee loyalty and long-term careers

are being severely challenged. "Employee Engagement" models therefore need to be revisited and evaluated in this changed context and operating environment and new models need to be devised which place the employees firmly at the center of the process. This is especially significant for higher education as a sector, which is contending with lower student enrolments, disruption through online and hybrid learning and where faculty engagement has not been a focus area traditionally.

Employee engagement initiatives in an organization can boost productivity and profitability, improve staff satisfaction, staff retention, and reduce absenteeism (Osborne and Hammoud, 2017). According to the *State of the Global Workplace* report 2022, Gallup concludes that only "21% of employees are engaged at work globally", which is alarming. In the South Asian Countries including India the employee engagement percentage is 27 percent and the daily stress level among the employees is 35%.

Employee engagement has also begun to receive attention in academia. The high rates of turnover and early retirement among the teachers are an area of concern in the educational institutions globally including India (Gupta et.al, 2011; Kraft, Marinell, & Yee, 2016). The concept of faculty engagement in educational institutes was proposed by Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura (2005) who have identified four potential areas of engagement: "educating students; preserving and advancing a specific domain of knowledge; serving the needs of the institution; and responding to the needs of the broader society" (p. 62). This implies that the role of a faculty is no longer limited to mere teaching, but she is expected to contribute to teaching, research and service. Educational institutions are facing concerns as top institutions continue to scale up and the sector just does not have enough quality teachers to go around. In this context, faculty retention and high levels of engagement reflecting alignment with institutional core values and objectives is central to creating a culture of high-performance. The scenario is exacerbated in a country like India, where quality concerns for the broader ecosystem exist leaving the faculty members largely disengaged and unable to contribute effectively. Traditionally, the culture in the Indian Higher Education sector has been authoritarian with a top-down orientation. However, faculty members increasingly seek greater freedom and flexibility, institutional support, work-life balance, purposeful work, and a voice within the

institution. Indian institutions urgently need to adopt modern HR practices and design transformational and enabling strategies which empower the faculty members to deliver their best and help them attain their professional and personal objectives while feeling valued.

Employees are more engaged in the workplace if they feel informed and believe their opinions are heard. The increased use of digital platforms and social media has drastically changed the way organizations handle communication. Organizations are increasingly using corporate communication platforms to communicate new programs or policies to their employees. A study by Luqman et.al (2021) advocates that social media platforms at the workplace have both social and work applications.

There is almost no study which has focused on faculty engagement or on building faculty engagement through the use of Enterprise Social Networks in India. The present study, therefore, investigates the correlation between the use of an Enterprise Social Network and faculty engagement levels at a higher education institution in Jammu, J&K, India. Faculty engagement levels at other higher education institutions which did not employ the social media platform were also recorded and compared. The Gallup poll was employed to determine faculty engagement levels at both types of institutions. Factors which contribute to the effective use of social media platforms for faculty engagement are also articulated.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the literature review and development of hypotheses. Section 3 presents the research methods, data collection and survey instruments used in the study. Section 4 presents the results of the quantitative analysis while section 5 discusses the results and the implications. Finally, section 6 concludes the study and identifies some areas for future work.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Faculty engagement is the predominant factor behind the success of educational institutions. Deutschlander, D. (2019) in his study has highlighted engagement with the faculty and staff as one of the most important factors that ensures institutional success. The faculty if engaged well can be an asset to the institution and disengagement may result in absenteeism, early retirement and ultimately quitting the profession (Artates, 2023).In a study by Fernandez (2020) faculty engagement was found to have a significant relationship with teaching effectiveness. Another study by Kovaleski and Arghode (2020) revealed that there are three themes; institutional engagement, perceived necessary engagement and relational collegial engagement perceived by the faculty around engagement. A recent study by Gonzalez et.al (2021) indicated that greater involvement of the faculty members in the decision making has a positive impact on the student satisfaction as well as the academic results. Thus, its importance has been endorsed through various studies in literature.

Various studies have identified distinct factors influencing faculty engagement like administration and management, workplace and resources, compensation and benefits, interpersonal relationship, and achievement and recognition (Tumbali et.al, 2021); cognitive engagement, commitment, catalyst, and comfort (Ameen & Babu, 2018). Shirina et.al (2022) in their study have identified six factors affecting faculty engagement in higher education namely: job satisfaction, leadership, work-life balance, career development, work environment and job characteristics. Further, the study also advocates that age, years of experience, the marital status of the employee and position/designation in the organizational hierarchy also affects the engagement levels. From existing studies, it is clear that faculty engagement is critical for students as well as institutional success. However, actionable strategies to build or improve faculty engagement levels are very few in literature. This clearly indicates that a lot more work is needed to help devise actionable strategies which are proven to work in diverse higher education settings, especially in developing countries where a vast majority of institutions operate in resource constrained environments.

A Social Media in the Workplace

Social media networks have gained popularity throughout the world and are increasingly used by various companies and institutions. Some of the commonly used social media platforms used in professional settings are: Slack, Empuls, Amber and Facebook Workplace. The usage of social media in professional settings has picked up especially after the Covid-19 pandemic (Oksa et al., 2021). Social media has great potential to help engage the employees at the workplace (Parry & Solidoro, 2013). The findings of the study have further suggested that the engagement of the employees through the use of social media would not be successful unless and until open communication and participation is adopted in the culture and by the leadership team. The Forbes Report (2018) advocates that many organizations of today are not directly using LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram and Pinterest to engage their employees and are instead adding their features to enhance the organization's internal communication and platform. One such leading platform is Workplace by Facebook which provides a dedicated space where the employees can connect, communicate and collaborate on work related initiatives. Although there are other products like Slack, Yammer and G-suite existing in the market, the Facebook Workplace is comparatively easier to use as everyone is already familiar with the interface of Facebook. A study by Nayak et.al (2020) indicates that recognition over social media platforms to the individual and the team members is a great source for building employee engagement. By using the social media platforms the organizations can create a culture of positivity, togetherness and an appreciative workplace (Janssens and Zanoni,2014). Studies like (Adzovie et.al, 2017, Lee and Lee, 2020) have also studied the influence of social media usage at the workplace on productivity and employee performance and concluded that it is largely effective.

A study by Kumar and Pooja (2019) indicates that social media is being increasingly used in higher education institutes in India for brand promotion & admission process, on campus student engagement, placement and career development, alumni networks and professional development. However, no

use cases for promoting faculty engagement have been reported.

It can be seen that studies examining the relationship between Enterprise Social Networks and faculty engagement in higher education are lacking both globally and in the Indian Context. The present study tries to fill this gap by investigating whether Enterprise Social Networks and a well-thought platform usage strategy influences the faculty engagement.

Based on the above review of literature the below hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There is no difference in the engagement level of faculty members in higher education institutions with and without the use of Enterprise Social Networks.

H2: The use of Enterprise Social Networks significantly improves faculty engagement levels at an institution.

III. METHODS

A. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to investigate faculty engagement levels in different settings - one with an Enterprise Social Network with a well-defined platform-usage strategy, another with a deployment of an Enterprise Social Network with no articulated strategy and finally, an environment with no Enterprise Social Network deployed.

B. Research Design

The study used a combination of quantitative and qualitative surveys undertaken to determine the level of engagement among faculty members across multiple higher education institutions. The study was undertaken across five higher education institutions in Jammu city. The primary questions addressed by the study are:

1. What is the impact of social media platforms in helping build faculty engagement in institutes of higher education?
2. What are the social media platform usage strategies which can be employed to enhance faculty engagement?

C. Data Collection

In this study, 300 faculty members from five different higher technical education institutes in Jammu were approached to fill up an online questionnaire as part of a descriptive research project.Out of the five institutes chosen for the study, three were using the Enterprise Social Network and two were not using. The faculty members were teaching undergraduate and postgraduate courses in engineering and management with a mix of Assistant Professors, Associate Professors and Professors. The survey contained questions related to the demographic details of the respondents and their engagement. To get responses from possible users, we employed a simple random sampling technique along with convenience sampling. The study was carried out over a period of 10 months from November 2022 to August 2023. Out of the total number of participants, only 230 responses were considered valid as they were completely in full. Thus, the survey had a 76.6% response rate.Further, the real time data was also collected from the two institutes where there was actual implementation of the Facebook Workplace.

D. Survey Instrument

The study uses the Gallup Survey which is a validated instrument for measuring employee engagement levels (Harter. et.al, 2009), comprising 12 questions, and finding wide adoption across diverse industry verticals.

E. Data Analysis

A series of steps were carried out to analyze the data. First of all, the grand mean for the faculty members of the various institutes using Enterprise Social Networks and not using the internal social media network were calculated and presented in Table I. The t-test was chosen for its suitability in comparing engagement levels between institutions using and not using Enterprise Social Networks. Its parametric assumption, applicability to small sample sizes, and ease of interpretation enhance the study's robustness. This choice ensures a rigorous assessment of potential differences in engagement, contributing to the study's validity and reliability.

Subsequently, the t-test was applied to see if there exists a difference in the engagement levels in the institution using and not using Enterprise Social Networks. Further, t-test was again applied to check if there was significant difference in the means of the institutions using an Enterprise Social network, one with a well thought out strategy in place and another in which there is just mere deployment of the platform but no strategy. SPSS 29 was used to carry out the analysis.

IV. RESULTS

A. Adoption Rate

Figure 1 below illustrates the rate of adoption of the social media platform (Facebook Workplace) within the institutions. In July 2022, the organization initiated its implementation, and within the first two months, approximately 74% of the faculty members successfully adopted the platform and created their profiles. The remaining members joined and adopted the platform in the subsequent two months. However, 5% of the senior-most faculty members faced initial challenges and did not participate. Nonetheless, once the platform usage gained traction all members were successfully onboarded with any formal training.
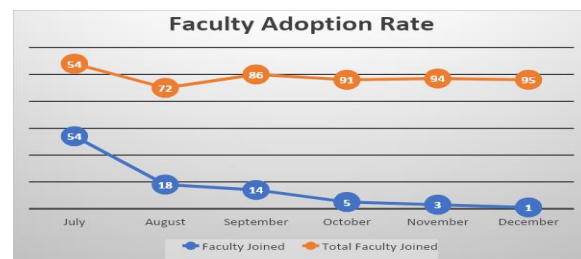

Fig. 1. Faculty adoption rate of the ESN
Source: Facebook Workplace of the Institution

B. Device Level Usage

The usage pattern at the device level during a sample month (Figure2) illustrates that a significant proportion of active users preferred utilizing the mobile application of the social networking platform, in contrast to those who were active through desktop usage. The number of users engaging with the mobile application exceeded that of desktop users by over two and a half times.
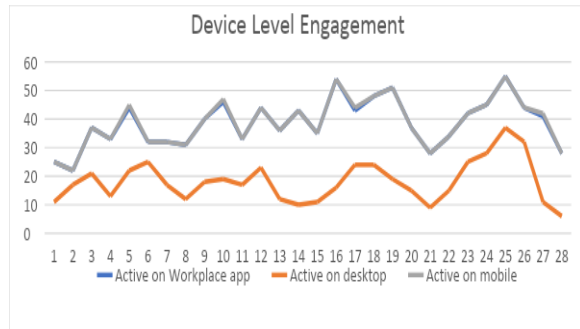
Fig. 2. User device usage for ESN
Source: Facebook Workplace of the Institution

C. User Engagement

The user engagement data extracted from the ESN shows in Figure 3 that on average, about 78% of the faculty members remained active over the past year, particularly during the college's operational periods. However, this percentage decreases to around 45-50% during holidays and vacations
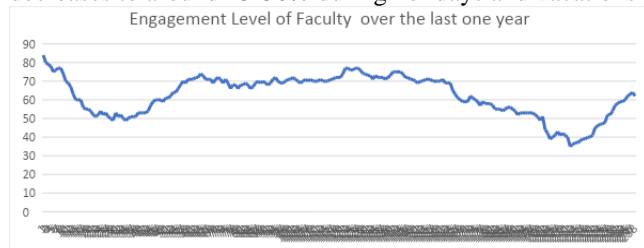

Fig. 3. ESN faculty engagement trends
Source: Facebook Workplace of the Institution

An examination of the pattern of faculty engagement on the platform reveals that 67 out of 100 faculty members achieved a minimum activity score of 1 or more (Figure 4), indicating that 67% of the workforce remained highly engaged. Among the highly engaged faculty members, 19 faculty members exhibited the highest engagement by posting 5 or more posts within the given month. Seven faculty members contributed by posting between 3 to 4 times during the month. Further, 17 faculty members participated by sharing 1 to 2 posts within the same timeframe. The remaining 24 faculty members acquired activity scores due to their consistent involvement in actions such as sharing, liking or commenting, despite not creating any original posts themselves.It's noteworthy that the remaining 33 individuals within the community had activity scores below 1 indicating little to no engagement on the platform. Thus, 43% of the faculty members were active producers of content, while a significant 57% remained consumers. 22 faculty members had recently joined the platform and may have been hesitant to post on the platform. Thus, departments and groups within the institution must encourage all faculty members to actively share on the platform and enrich the community.
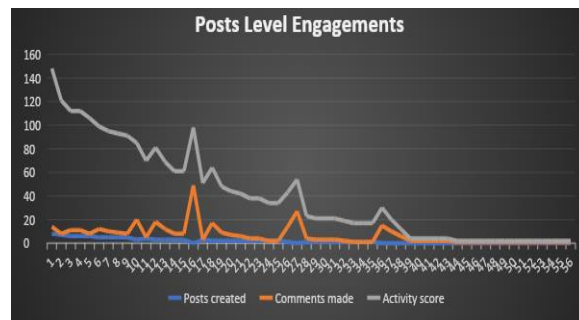

Fig. 4. ESN post level engagement indicators
Source: Facebook Workplace of the Institution

D. Content Creation

Within the sphere of various post types, those that revolve around individual accomplishments of faculty members, especially those with higher-order achievements say in awards, research publications, funding received etc. tend to attract the most attention. Also, posts that showcase institutional achievements closely follow in terms of generating interest. On the other hand posts which are of operational nature or providing basic information tend to receive the least interest and attention from the community. As a result, it becomes evident that significant value lies in spotlighting and celebrating both faculty and student achievements. To amplify institutional involvement and acknowledgment, it is crucial for the leadership team in the institution to deliberate on cultivating a culture that embraces these accomplishments and actively advocates for their recognition. It became apparent that individuals who engaged actively and attained elevated activity scores tend to be successful in creating a personal brand and improve performance perception among the peers and the leadership team.

E. Quantitative Analysis

The quantitative analysis was conducted using the Gallup Survey which consisted of 12 survey questions for which the data was collected from faculty members of institutes using the Enterprise Social Network as well as from the faculty at institutes not employing any social media platform. The mean values for the responses of faculty members from institutions using and not using the Enterprise social network have been shown in TableI.

TABLE I
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Statement	Mean (ESN)	Mean (WESN)
I am aware of what is expected of me at workI have an idea of what is expected out of me	4.05	3.16
I have the materials and equipment to do my work right .	4.14	3.16
I have the opportunity to do my best every day.	4.22	3.1
In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.	3.55	3.0
My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.	4.20	2.33
There is someone at work who encourages my development	4.44	3.5
My opinions seem to count at work.	4.31	3.3

The mission/purpose of my company makes me feel my job is important.	4.42	3.1
My associates (fellow colleagues) are committed to doing quality work.	4.40	2.03
I have a best friend at work	3.70	3.53
In the last six months, someone has talked to me about my progress.	4.05	3.03
In the last year, I had the opportunities to learn and grow.	4.24	3.9
Grand Mean	**4.14**	**3.09**

From Table I, it can be inferred that the value of mean for each statement of the Gallup survey is higher for institutions which are using an Enterprise social media network as compared to the institutions where no such network is being used.Also, value of the grand mean in Table I for faculty members of institutes   using an Enterprise social network (m=4.14) is much higher as compared to the institutions where enterprise social network is not used (m=3.06) which clearly indicates higher engagement levels among the faculty members in institutes which use an Enterprise social media network. This was further confirmed by applying the Levene's t test as shown in Table II.

TABLE II
T-TEST FOR EQUALITY OF MEANS

t-test for Equality of Means

T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
-3.048	82	.003	-.48704	.15977	-.80488	-.16920

The results in Table II above indicate significant variation in faculty engagement in organizations which are using the Enterprise social network and those which are not. The independent t-test value for faculty engagement is t= -3.048 with p=0.003. Since the p value is less than 0.05, it is confirmed that there exists a significant difference in the faculty engagement with and without the Enterprise Social Network. Furthermore, since the mean value of the faculty engagement as shown in Table 1 with workplace (m=4.14) is higher as compared to faculty engagement without workplace (m=3.09) which further proves that hypothesis H1 is rejected. Further, an in-depth analysis was undertaken for institutions which were using Enterprise social network to see the difference in engagement levels in institutes where there is a clear well-thought out platform usage strategy encompassing internal branding, consistent communication, leadership team involvement and reinforcing the right behaviors and celebrating achievement and in institutes where there is deployment of Enterprise social network but no thoughtful strategy for its effective usage. Results are tabulated in Tables III and IV.

TABLE III
T-TEST FOR COMPARING MEANS OF INSTITUTIONS USING ESNS, ONE WITH A WELL-DEFINED STRATEGY AND ANOTHER WITH NO WELL THOUGHT STRATEGY

t-test for Equality of Means

T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
-2.045	82	.002	-.48704	.16986677	-.70377	-.15830

TABLE IV
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Faculty engagement	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Without Strategy	3095	3.1611	.71917	.13130
With Strategy	5480	4.2382	.69187	.09415

The t-test in Table III indicates that the p-value=0.002 which is less than 0.05 which indicates that the difference is statistically significant. The mean value of the faculty engagement in institutions using a well-defined thoughtful strategy (m=4.2382) as calculated in Table IV is much higher than the faculty engagement in institutions where there is deployment of Enterprise social network but no well-defined strategy(m=3.16).
Thus, the hypothesis H2 is accepted.

The relevant factors affecting faculty engagement were identified from literature. Further the quantitative analysis of the responses highlighted a significant difference in the engagement levels of the faculty in two kinds of institutions- one that was having a Enterprise Social Network and others where there was no such internal communication platform. A study by Oksa et.al (2021b, 2021c) has also found that the use of social media in professional settings has a positive impact on employee engagement. We find that it is subject to some caveats. The key aspects as highlighted from the faculty interviews which contribute to the successful implementation of Facebook Workplace and some challenges are captured in Table V.

The leadership team of the institutes using the Enterprise Social Network also associated the Facebook Workplace as a platform for Internal Brand Building, amplification of the core values of the institution, recognition of the right behaviors and outcomes, strategy execution communication tool and giving a voice to the employees. Further, it was felt that the use of an ESN is useful in institutions undertaking digital transformation and trying to establish a performance culture. It may not have the same positive effects in very large mature institutions with several departments and functional units. In that case several closed subgroups will need to be created to manage the content in the ESN to facilitate engagement.

V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The relevant factors affecting faculty engagement were identified from literature. Further the quantitative analysis of the responses highlighted a significant difference in the engagement levels of the faculty in two kinds of institutions- one that was having a Enterprise Social Network and others where there was no such internal communication platform. A study by Oksa et.al (2021b, 2021c) has also found that the use of social media in professional settings has a positive impact on employee engagement. We find that it is subject to some caveats. The key aspects as highlighted from the faculty interviews which contribute to the successful implementation of Facebook Workplace and some challenges are captured in Table V.

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The present study has tried to examine the faculty engagement levels in five different institutes of higher education out of which two were not using any kind of closed social media network for internal communication and three were using the closed social media network. The study adds to existing literature as there is almost no study on faculty engagement which has been conducted to examine the role of Enterprise social networks although there are many studies which have tried to investigate the student engagement levels using common social media tools like Facebook, WhatsApp etc. The findings of this study will help the institutes of higher education to adopt strategies and practices that will enhance the faculty engagement levels to strive for individual and organizational growth and excellence.

VI. CONCLUSION

The journey of faculty engagement is dynamic and continuous, evolving over time rather than reaching a fixed destination. A crucial initial stride toward fostering effective faculty engagement involves the establishment of a robust communication channel characterized by transparency, positive reinforcement, and the empowerment of every faculty member with a voice within the system.

TABLE V
SUMMARY OF KEY LEARNINGS FROM THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ENTERPRISE SOCIAL NETWORK

What Worked	What Did Not Work
1.=Well thought out platform usage strategy	1.Mere deployment of Enterprise Social Network without a content strategy or participation of leadership tem.
2.Informal communication among colleagues	2.Posting of formal notices and Information on a public forum.
3.Leadership team's active Involvement	3.Open comments by the leadership team if perceived as negative can affect the morale of individual faculty members and create negativity.
4. Sharing of new initiatives and success stories leading to effective Internal branding	4.Posting of routine affairs
5.Celebration of individual achievements of faculty members and putting them in the spotlight.	
6.Reinforcement of right behaviors and outcomes by leadership team.	
7.Instant recognition by peer group.	
8.Data collation for the institute from the timeline feature of the ESN.	

Our research delves into the adoption of Enterprise Social Networks for faculty engagement within the context of Indian Higher Education. The findings showcase a positive faculty sentiment, underscoring the potential for heightened and effective faculty engagement through such platforms. In light of our study, we advocate for the widespread adoption of these platforms throughout the Indian Higher Education landscape. However, this recommendation comes with the caveat that the platform must be meticulously managed to ensure the celebration of the right outcomes from faculty participation. Additionally, active engagement from the leadership team is imperative, and the initiative must be championed until it becomes an integral part of the institutional culture.

The implementation of such initiatives holds the promise of fostering mutual trust, both within individual institutions and across the sector. This, in turn, equips educational institutions to navigate turbulent times, emerge stronger, and achieve positive institutional and societal outcomes. Embracing Enterprise Social Networks for faculty engagement stands not only as a recommendation but as a strategic pathway towards cultivating resilience and success in the ever-evolving landscape of higher education.

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