

## Research Article

# The impact of organizational image on enhancing performance and employee participation in universities: a structural equation modeling approach

Maryam Mehrparvar <sup>1,\*</sup>, Fatemeh Dadmand <sup>2</sup>, Zahra Moheemmi <sup>3</sup>

1. Department of Mathematical, Bozorgmehr university of Qaenat , Qaen, Iran

2. Department of Management , Payame Noor University (PNU), Tehran, Iran

3. Department of Management , Payame Noor University (PNU), Tehran, Iran

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### Abstract

Every organization has a positive or negative image, and this is also true for academic institutions. Currently, a positive organizational image is essential for the survival and strategic success of academic institutions. Specifically, research efforts are focused on the process of identification and the role that a positive organizational image plays in enhancing employee recognition and commitment to the organization they work for. The present study aimed to examine the impact of organizational image on employee engagement and performance among staff at Payame Noor University in South Khorasan Province. This research is descriptive-correlational in nature, using structural equation modeling. The data and results of this study were analyzed using AMOS software. The statistical population consisted of all employees of Payame Noor University in South Khorasan, totaling approximately 130 individuals according to the Human Resources Unit. Simple random sampling was used in this study, and based on Morgan's table, 97 individuals were selected as the sample size, with 73 questionnaires returned. Standardized questionnaires were employed for data collection, and their validity and reliability were confirmed. The data analysis results indicated that the perceived external image significantly and positively affects employee engagement and performance. Additionally, employee engagement has a direct and significant effect on overall employee performance as well as on its subscales (organizational, individual, and team performance). This research highlights the necessity of investing in the organizational image as a strategic approach to foster employee engagement, which in turn drives overall performance.

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### \* Corresponding Author:

**Maryam Mehrparvar**

Department of Mathematical, Bozorgmehr university of Qaenat , Qaen, Iran

E-Mail: [mmehrparvar@buqaen.ac.ir](mailto:mmehrparvar@buqaen.ac.ir)



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## 1. Introduction

Organizational images play a crucial role, particularly in the context of attracting new employees (Nazir, 2016, Cable et al., 2006, Tuna et al., 2015). The organizational image generally refers to the perceptions of organization members regarding how others (external components) view them and the organization (Grandy & Mavin, 2011). This image significantly impacts the success and credibility of the organization (Keller, 1993) and creates a tangible perception among all stakeholders. Every institution has either a positive or negative image. When the impact is positive, it plays a vital role in achieving a sustainable structure for the organization. Due to this characteristic, a positive image fosters trust and commitment among the members of the organization and external individuals, creating faith and dedication while shaping the sustainable existence of the organization in the minds of stakeholders, with a direct or indirect effect on organizational outputs (Kalkan et al., 2020).

Whenever individuals come into contact with an organization, they form an image of that organization, where this image is defined as the beliefs of the audience regarding the central, distinctive, and relatively stable characteristics of the organization. This is because the image of an organization sends signals to society about its employees, making the pursuit and joining of a specific organization a public and objective expression of the characteristics of job seekers (Cable et al., 2006).

This is also true for academic institutions. Currently, a positive organizational image is essential for the survival and strategic success of academic institutions (Kalkan et al., 2020). Most people tend to belong to organizations that possess socially valued characteristics. In this context, employees receive and interpret diverse messages from various external areas, which influence how outsiders may view the organization. Regardless of whether this perception is accurate, employees' personal evaluations can affect how they interact with the organization. This phenomenon is referred to as perceived external image (Herbach & Mignonas, 2004). The perceived organizational image is a structure that signifies judgment or evaluation regarding the organization's status concerning certain assessment criteria and refers to the personal beliefs of employees about how other external individuals, such as customers, competitors, and suppliers, judge the status and credibility of the organization (Carmeli, 2005).

The organizational image is crucial for many organizations that aim to be competitive and ensure their sustainability in the market in the short, medium, and long term, while increasing the demand for their products and services. The image perceived by the public and stakeholders, as well as employees, directly affects the efficient performance of organizations. In higher education institutions, the organizational image is a significant factor for attracting and retaining the best students, professors, and staff. For students, the image of an educational institution is vital for their studies, fostering student loyalty and serving as a tool for attracting other students (Brown & Mazzarol, 2009). For professors and staff, the image of an educational institution is fundamental as it creates emotional bonds, generates positive responses, and increases commitment, engagement,

and cohesion among staff (Herrbach & Mignonas, 2004; Travareso, 2005; Harrison, 1994).

Undoubtedly, today, creating an impactful image of the organization, acquiring and maintaining a positive external image, is one of the significant objectives for all organizations (Inai & Dazdari, 1392, 108)(Tuna et al., 2015). The concept of organizational image in research, education, and public relations activities is a fundamental issue. Researchers in the field of public relations believe that the image is not solely created by the organization itself, but that the communities associated with the organization are also involved in this process (Bagheri & Erfanifar, 1389, 44). Universities interact with various institutions and social classes, and to create a favorable mental image in the minds of the public, they need to make the necessary investments. Research findings regarding academic image indicate that universities must act efficiently, similar to other businesses, to maintain their current existence and thrive (Erfanifar, 1388).

Landrum et al. (1998) argue that the organizational image represents a valuable asset in today's competitive arena because if this positive mental image exists in the public's perception, it paves the way for their success. It is essential for senior managers of any organization to know how the public views their organization (Inai & Dazdari, 1392, 109). Based on this image, individuals choose a particular organization to fulfill their needs.

For every organization, the evaluation and understanding of employees regarding the organizational image in which they work, or in other words, the perceived external image, is crucial, as it influences their attitudes toward their work and, consequently, their job activities and performance (Inai & Dazdari, 1392, 109). Many employees leave their organizations to join those with a better reputation. The organizational image is shaped by the information individuals perceive from the organization (Beikzad & Rezabigi, 1393).

The organizational image is an essential feature for facilitating employee identification with the values, beliefs, and assumptions within the organization, which in turn leads to improved organizational performance. In this regard, Dutton et al. (1994) also believe that employees' behavior and performance in the workplace are directly influenced by the organizational image. The importance of the organizational image arises from its power to affect organizational performance and employee engagement levels. If employees recognize the value of the organizational image, they can convey this positive image to others, creating a positive perception in the eyes of other stakeholders. A positive perception of the organizational image strengthens members' sense of belonging to the organization, enhances employee commitment, and consequently improves employee performance (Totiyani Isfahani et al., 1396: 164). A positive perception of the organizational image increases individuals' engagement with their work. In other words, employees, due to the positive image of their organization and the positive perception of the external community, strive to consider their job as part of their identity and psychologically identify themselves with their job within the organization. Consequently, their commitment to the organization's values

and objectives, as well as their sensitivity to achieving these goals, increases, ultimately enhancing employee performance (Talaghani et al., 1391: 98 and 111). Numerous reports indicate a low level of employee engagement worldwide. According to research by Gallup, only 15% of workers globally are fully engaged in their work, while 85% are disengaged or actively separated [Gallup, 2017]. The reasons for the escalating "disengagement crisis" lie in the lack of support for employees to achieve results they find meaningful for themselves [Forbes, 2014]. The academic community has also observed the problem of low employee engagement and its negative impact on business outcomes. According to Teresa Amabile of Harvard Business School, as cited in Forbes magazine [2014], this situation leads to reduced company revenue and weakened profitability indicators. The global nature of this problem highlights the need to research the impact of employee engagement on organizations and to synthesize results to extract practical and global lessons. Based on the aforementioned discussions, it can be concluded that possessing a positive or negative image is very important for the meaningful survival and development of organizations. Therefore, organizations need to continuously assess their organizational image to maintain their meaningful existence and facilitate their advancement and development. Universities, as significant and influential organizations in society with educational, research, and social objectives, are not exempt from this requirement. However, despite the importance of organizational image, this concept has received little attention in service organizations, especially in educational and university environments (Bagheri & Erfanifar, 1389, 44). The positive

image of an organization and its impact on human resources has not been extensively researched in universities, especially the university under investigation. Given the considerable importance of this concept and its role in employee engagement and performance, this topic has not been adequately addressed, and it can be said that it has somehow been neglected. Therefore, the overarching question that this research seeks to answer is whether the perceived external image positively influences the engagement and performance of university employees. Among the institutions that are entirely dependent on their external images for advancement or even survival are universities and educational centers. It could be said that for any university or other higher education institution, image (or images) and reputation are considered the most valuable assets. Nowadays, many organizations, including universities, invest significant time, resources, and effort in creating an impactful image of themselves because whenever an organization has a positive image, its employees will also be influenced by the perceived external image. Conversely, if employees hold a negative image of the organization in their minds, their performance and behavior will be unrealistically influenced by negative perceptions and judgments. All research studies are based on a conceptual framework. Models provide a conceptual or theoretical framework and can represent a mechanism or explanatory structure for hypotheses and also serve as a method for organizing research findings and presenting them (Parhizgar & Aghajani Afrouzi, 1392). The diagram below illustrates the conceptual model employed in this research.

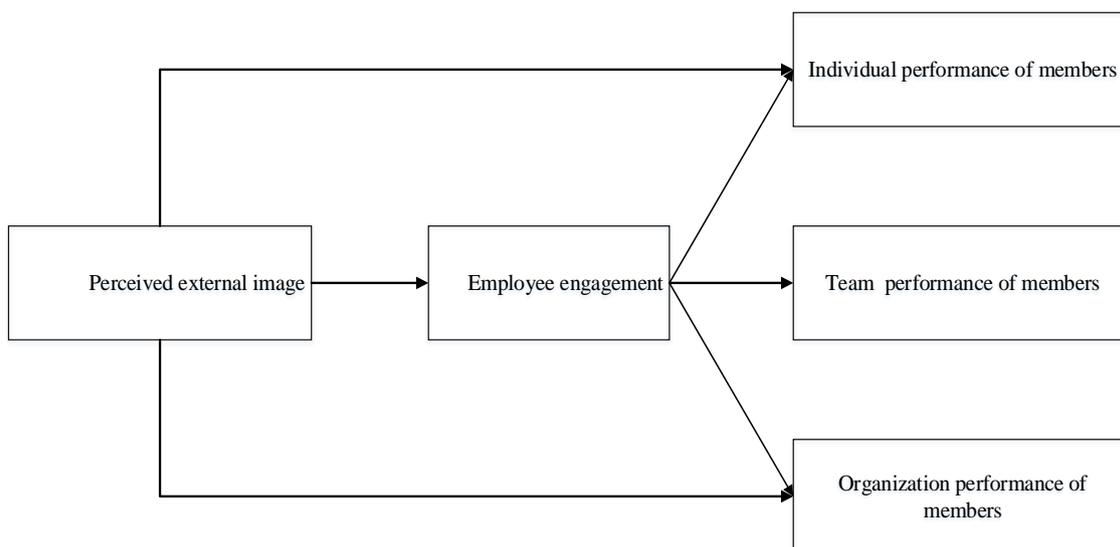


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of the Research (Zehir & Şekla, 2019)

The research model implemented regarding the impact of organizational image on the participation and performance of employees at Payame Noor University is based on a study conducted by Zair and Shukla (2019). A positive and favorable organizational image results from various factors, including appropriate human resource practices, employee satisfaction, long-term strategic moves of organizations, effective market policies, and more. A positive image gives

an organization a competitive advantage over its rivals and serves as a tool for attracting and retaining customers. However, its impact on attracting internal human resources (employees) has not been widely studied and remains insufficient (Herbich et al., 2004). The organizational image is a broader concept that includes various forms, such as perceived external image, projected image, desirable future image, corporate identity, fleeting

perception, and organizational reputation. These forms vary in perception depending on different reference frameworks. This study conceptualizes the external image as a measure of the organizational image because it reflects employees' perceptions of how others view and judge the organization. The model focuses on individuals' perceptions of the organization and their connection to employee participation and performance. A positive employee perception indicates that they identify with their organization's identity and feel aligned with the overall vision of the organization.

The necessity of the research model regarding the impact of organizational image on employee participation and performance at Payame Noor University can be articulated through several key points:

#### Understanding Organizational Image

- **Broad Conceptualization:** The organizational image encompasses various dimensions, including perceived external image and corporate identity. This comprehensive understanding is crucial, as it affects both external perceptions and internal employee engagement. A nuanced model helps clarify these relationships.
- **Competitive Advantage:** A positive organizational image not only attracts customers but also plays a critical role in attracting and retaining talent. The model underscores the importance of this dual impact, emphasizing that a favorable internal perception can enhance employee commitment and performance.

#### Addressing Gaps in Existing Research

- **Insufficient Study on Internal Impact:** While the effects of organizational image on external stakeholders are well-documented, its influence on internal human resources remains underexplored. This model aims to fill that gap by focusing on how employees perceive their organization and how this perception influences their engagement and performance.
- **Linking Perception to Performance:** By establishing a direct connection between employees' perceptions of organizational image and their participation levels, the model provides a framework for understanding how these perceptions translate into actual performance outcomes. This is essential for developing targeted strategies to enhance employee engagement.

#### Practical Implications for Management

- **Enhancing Employee Identification:** The focus on employees' perceptions allows organizations to foster a sense of identity among staff, encouraging them to align with the organization's vision. This alignment is critical for boosting morale and productivity.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Perceived external image and employee engagement

Organizational image refers to individuals' global perceptions of an organization and is defined as people's loosely held knowledge structures and beliefs about an organization. It represents the cognitive reaction and net

associations of customers, investors, employees, and applicants with the organization. Accordingly, it functions as a framework for categorizing, storing, and recalling information related to the organization (Lyons, 2017). Employees' beliefs about how others perceive their organization play an important role in how they perceive and respond to the organization. This belief about how others view their organization is called "Perceived External Prestige" (Atteya, 2021; Fuller et al., 2006; Mishra, 2006; Ciftcioglu, 1987). A positive organizational image represents a unique type of prestige, and good prestige, coupled with high employee commitment and satisfaction, leads to a reduced likelihood of employees leaving the organization (Muchlis & Rusydi, 2023, Dollard & Tuckey, 2015, Muchlis & Rusydi, 2023). Given the beneficial relationships associated with positive perceptions of organizational prestige, organizations may want to influence their prestige to achieve higher levels of employee engagement and organizational citizenship behaviors. Methods by which organizations can impact Perceived External Prestige (PEP) include increasing the organization's success in achieving its goals and enhancing its visibility (C. L. Smith & Sarason, 2012).

Employee engagement is defined as employees' ability to dedicate their emotional, physical, and cognitive energies to role performance, provided there is a sense of meaningfulness, availability, and security (Mohammadkazemi & Pouriz, 2024). Organizations around the world are implementing a range of employee engagement practices to boost employee morale and achieve positive organizational outcomes in the aftermath of the pandemic. Chanana (2021) highlights some of these engagement practices, including virtual team meetings, virtual training and development, online team-building activities, family engagement activities online, online communication exercises, and many other employee engagement activities (Coffie & Gyimah, 2023). Extensive research on organizational image in the private sector has provided both theoretical and empirical knowledge about its potential outcomes (e.g., Fuller et al., 2006; Lyons et al., 2007; Ping et al., 2020; Rowe et al., 2015). Some positive outcomes for an organization include increased employee engagement, retention, and strengthening of the bond between employees and the organization (or organizational identification) (Luo-Maaho, 2007). Conversely, when members of an organization hold a negative perception of the organization, a lack or failure of cognitive connection between members and their organization may be observed. This can result in those members feeling less motivated or satisfied with their work, leading to undesirable organizational outcomes.

Hypothesis 1: Perceived external image has a positive and significant impact on employee engagement.

### 2.2. Employee engagement and employee performance

Employee engagement is defined as "a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption. Unlike a momentary and specific state, engagement refers to a more persistent and pervasive affective-cognitive state that is not focused on any particular object, event, individual, or behavior" (Lee et al.,

2023, Motyka, 2018, Nazir, 2016). Employee engagement typically involves cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (M. Smith, 2017). Engaged employees are willing to invest more energy to achieve personal rewards and satisfaction. They view their work positively and see it as challenging, even if their circumstances may be stressful. Engaged employees are more productive, demonstrate better performance, and are more likely to participate in organizational citizenship behaviors (Dollard & Tuckey, 2015; Bakker, 2006; Bedarkar & Pandita, 2014), ultimately contributing to improved organizational performance as well (Nazir, 2016).

Engagement allows individuals to express their desires instantly and fully meet the needs of their role. Therefore, when employees are engaged, they remain invested in the tasks they perform (Bakker, 2006). In other words, engagement involves putting a great deal of energy into one's work, which ensures a connection between employee engagement and organizational performance management processes. When employees are physically engaged in their tasks, they are cognitively focused and warmly connected to other employees expressing similar traits (such as emotions, values, ideas, etc.). Hence, employee engagement and organizational performance management processes are a subject of interest for managers in companies worldwide, as they are considered vital to defining the scope of organizational productivity (Vujko & Vuković, 2022, Smith & Sarason, 2012).

Main Hypothesis 2: Employee engagement has a positive and significant impact on employee performance.

Hypothesis 2.1: The level of employee engagement has a positive and significant impact on their organizational performance.

Hypothesis 2.2: The level of employee engagement has a positive and significant impact on their team performance.

Hypothesis 2.3: The level of employee engagement has a positive and significant impact on their individual performance.

### *2.3. Perceived external image and employee performance*

Organizational image has been studied as an indicator of employee performance. Organizational image refers to the perceptions and impressions that employees and external stakeholders have of the organization and can have a direct impact on employee performance (Nazir, 2016). Research shows that when employees perceive the organization as having a positive and reputable image, their emotional commitment to the organization increases, which in turn enhances their motivation and performance (Mishra, 2006, Carmeli, 2005). Employee performance does not have a precise definition, as there are many aspects to performance. Some researchers define it as work outcomes or employee outputs. For example, Dessler (2016) defines employee performance as the actual outcomes of employee efforts compared to their expected performance. Performance is associated with accuracy, cost-effectiveness, completeness, and the speed at which tasks are accomplished relative to a set of standards (Coffie & Gyimah, 2023). Employees who perform well are considered valuable assets and advanced resources of the organization. Employee performance has been defined through tasks listed in their regular job

descriptions. Employees with a high level of intelligence can manage their emotions, leading to better performance. Therefore, employee performance is crucial for the success of an organization (Grac, 2019).

Organizational image motivates employees to engage more in the organization and perform their roles with greater energy and enthusiasm. As Dutton and Dukerich (1991) pointed out, when employees feel that their organization is perceived positively by others, their organizational identity is strengthened, and this positive identity leads to increased efforts and productivity (Dutton & Dukerich, 2014). Thus, our next hypotheses are as follows:

Main Hypothesis 3: Perceived external image has a positive and significant impact on employee performance.

Hypothesis 3.1: Perceived external image has a positive and significant impact on team performance.

Hypothesis 3.2: Perceived external image has a positive and significant impact on individual performance.

Hypothesis 3.3: Perceived external image has a positive and significant impact on organizational performance.

### **3. Research Method**

In this research, a field method was used for data collection. In terms of execution, this study is descriptive and correlational. The statistical population of this research consists of the employees of Payame Noor University (N=130). Based on the Morgan table and using simple random sampling, 97 samples were selected. To describe the demographic characteristics of the sample, the participants' gender and educational background were analyzed. In terms of gender distribution, 33 participants (45%) were women, and 40 participants (55%) were men, indicating a slightly higher representation of men in the sample. Regarding educational background, 61% of the women held a bachelor's degree, while 39% had a master's degree. Among the men, 70% held a bachelor's degree, and 30% had a master's degree. This shows that both male and female participants were predominantly bachelor's degree holders, with a smaller proportion holding master's degrees.

For data analysis and testing the proposed research model and hypotheses, the structural equation modeling (SEM) technique using AMOS 18 was applied. The SmartPLS 3.0 statistical software was employed to assess the validity and reliability of the constructs, and the structural equation model was used to test the hypothetical relationships. This software allows researchers to analyze complex models of relationships between observed and latent variables. AMOS, using covariance-based methods, provides the ability to estimate paths, conduct confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and examine the validity and reliability of the constructs.

1. Perceived External Image Questionnaire: This questionnaire was designed by Mill and Ashford in 1992 and consists of 8 items, designed based on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of this questionnaire was reported as 0.77 using Cronbach's alpha (Mill & Ashford, 1992). The reliability of this questionnaire was also reported as 0.70 using Cronbach's alpha.

2. Employee Engagement Questionnaire: This questionnaire was developed by Rich in 2010 and contains 18 questions designed on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of this questionnaire was reported as 0.95 using

Cronbach's alpha (Rich, 2010). The reliability of this questionnaire was also reported as 0.79 using Cronbach's alpha.

3. Performance Questionnaire: This questionnaire was designed by Griffin in 2007 and includes 27 questions, also designed based on a five-point Likert scale. The reliability of this questionnaire was reported as 0.79 for individual performance, 0.80 for team performance, and 0.79 for organizational performance using Cronbach's alpha.

**3.1. SEM analysis**

In this study, SPSS-22 and AMOS-22 software were used for data analysis in the analytical section. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) is a very general and powerful

multivariate analysis technique from the family of multivariate regression methods. More specifically, it is an extension of the general linear model that allows the researcher to simultaneously test a set of regression equations. SEM combines factor analysis, canonical correlation, and multivariate regression methods.

**3.2. Correlation matrix between variables**

Since the correlation matrix is the basis for the analysis of causal models, especially Structural Equation Modeling, before addressing the testing of the theoretical model, the correlation matrix between the research variables, along with their significance levels, is presented in Table 1:

Table 1  
 Correlation matrix between research variables along with their significance levels.

Variables		1	2	3	4	5
1. Perceived External Image	Correlation	1	0.65	0.48	0.48	0.86
	Significance	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
2. Employee Engagement	Correlation	-	1	0.47	0.49	0.67
	Significance	-	-	0.0001	0.0001	0.0001
3. Individual Performance	Correlation	-	-	1	0.38	0.64
	Significance	-	-	-	0.001	0.000
4. Team Performance	Correlation	-	-	-	1	0.49
	Significance	-	-	-	-	0.000
5. Organizational Performance	Correlation	-	-	-	-	1
	Significance	-	-	-	-	-

Based on the results of the table, variables with a correlation significance level of less than 0.05 are statistically significant. All reported relationships are positive and significant.

To test the main hypotheses of the research, the conceptual model was drawn based on theoretical foundations. Then, the proposed model was examined through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the maximum likelihood method. In Figure 2, the main conceptual model of the research is presented, and finally, after assessing the goodness-of-fit of the tested model, the results related to the evaluation of the main research hypotheses are provided.

For testing the structural model, indices proposed by Gefen and colleagues (2000) were used. These indices include the following:  $X^2/df$ , where values less than 3 are acceptable; the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) and the Incremental Fit Index (IFI), where values greater than 0.90 are considered acceptable; the Normed Fit Index (NFI), where values greater than 0.80 indicate a good model fit; and the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), where values less than 0.08 indicate a good model fit. In Table 4, the fit indices of the tested research model are reported.

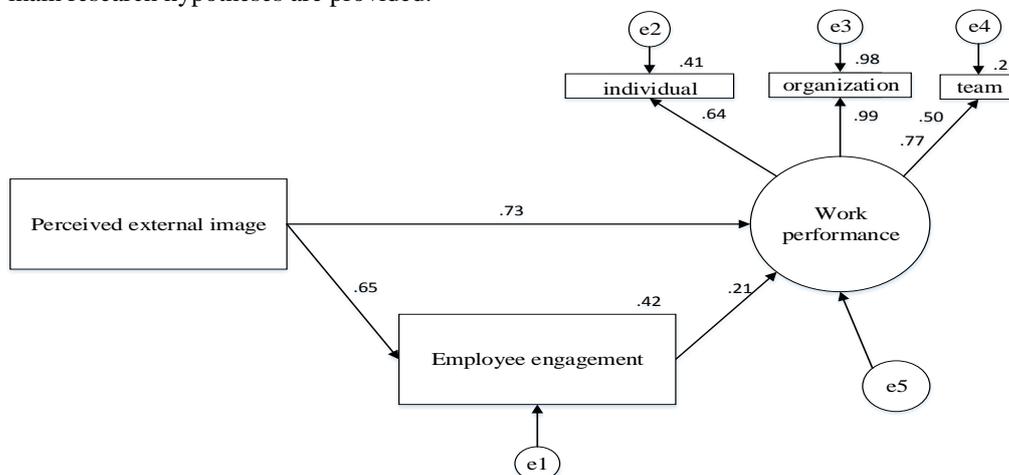


Fig. 2. The measured conceptual model of the main hypotheses with standardized path coefficients

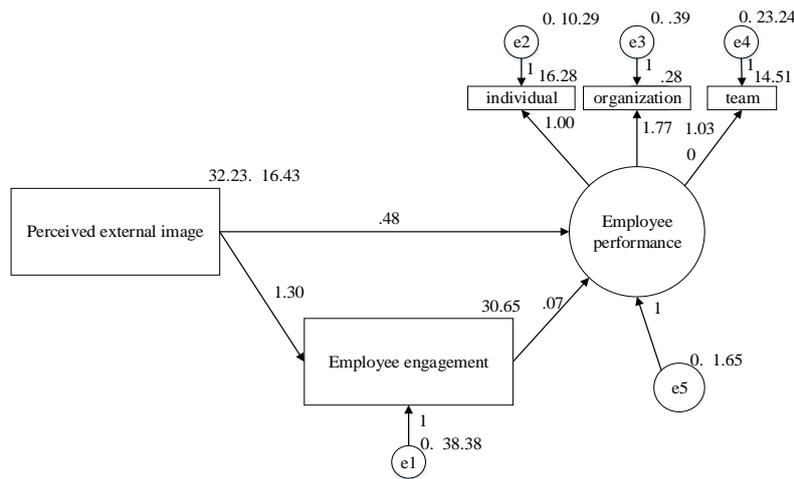


Fig. 3. The measured conceptual model of the main hypotheses with unstandardized path coefficients

Table 4  
 Fit indices of the conceptual model for the main research hypotheses

Model	X2/d.f	IFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Acceptable limit	Less than 3	More than 0/90	More than 0/90	More than 0/80	Less than 0/08
Tested model	2.03	0.98	0.98	0.96	0/079

Based on Table 4, the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio for the tested model was 2.03, which is less than the acceptable threshold of 3. The IFI, CFI, and NFI indices were 0.98, 0.98, and 0.96, respectively, all exceeding the acceptable limit. The RMSEA index for the tested model was 0.079, which is less than its acceptable limit of 0.08. These results indicate that all the indices of the developed

research model fall within the desirable range. Overall, the fit indices are within acceptable ranges. Given this information, the final research model has a good fit.

**Hypothesis 1:** Perceived external image has a positive and significant impact on employee engagement.

In Table 5, the results of structural equation modeling for this hypothesis are reported:

Table 5  
 Structural equation modeling results for the first main hypothesis

Path	Path Coefficient (Unstandardized)	Path Coefficient (Standardized)	Standard Error Of Estimate	Critical Statistic	Significant Level
EE <--- PEP	1.30	0.65	0.18	7.32	0.00
MP <--- EE	0.07	0.21	0.03	0.46	0.01
MP <--- PEP	0.48	0.73	0.09	5.66	0.00
OMP <--- PEP	0.86	0.72	0.09	9.53	0.00
TMP <--- PEP	0.38	0.27	0.18	2.09	0.04
IMP <--- PEP	0.32	0.31	0.14	2.35	0.02
OMP <--- EE	0.12	0.21	0.04	2.73	0.01
TMP <--- EE	0.21	0.31	0.09	2.36	0.02
IMP <--- EE	0.14	0.27	0.07	2.03	0.04

Based on Table 5, the perceived external image has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.65 on employee engagement, and the critical value related to the direct effect of perceived external image on employee engagement (7.23) was positive. Employee engagement has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.21 on employee performance, and the critical value related to the direct effect of employee engagement on employee performance (2.46) was positive. The perceived external image has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.73 on employee performance, and the critical value related to the direct effect of perceived

external image on employee performance (5.66) was positive. Since the observed significance level in all these relationships is less than 0.01, the research hypothesis is confirmed with 99% confidence.

To test the sub-hypotheses of the research, the conceptual model was drawn based on theoretical foundations, and then the proposed model was examined through Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) using the maximum likelihood method. In Figure 5, the sub-conceptual model of the research is presented, and finally, after assessing the

goodness-of-fit of the tested model, the results related to the

evaluation of the research sub-hypotheses are provided

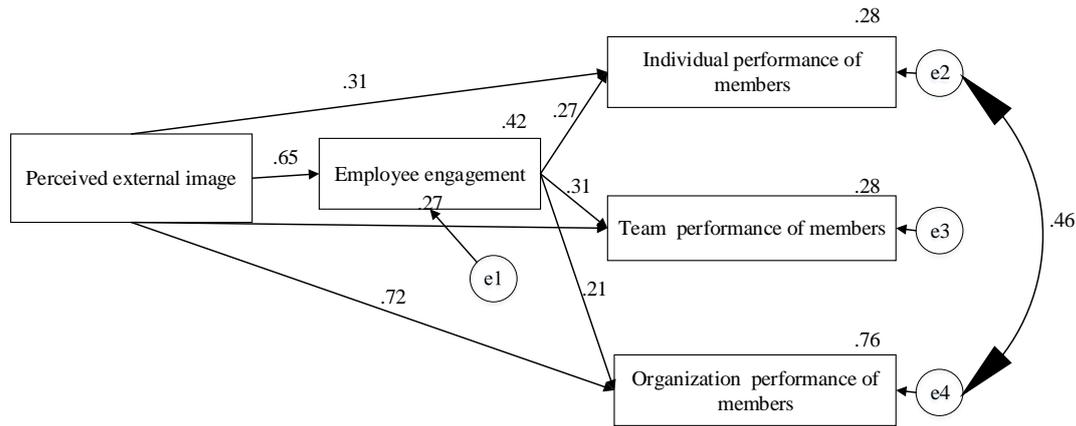


Fig. 5. The measured conceptual model of the sub-hypotheses with standardized path coefficients

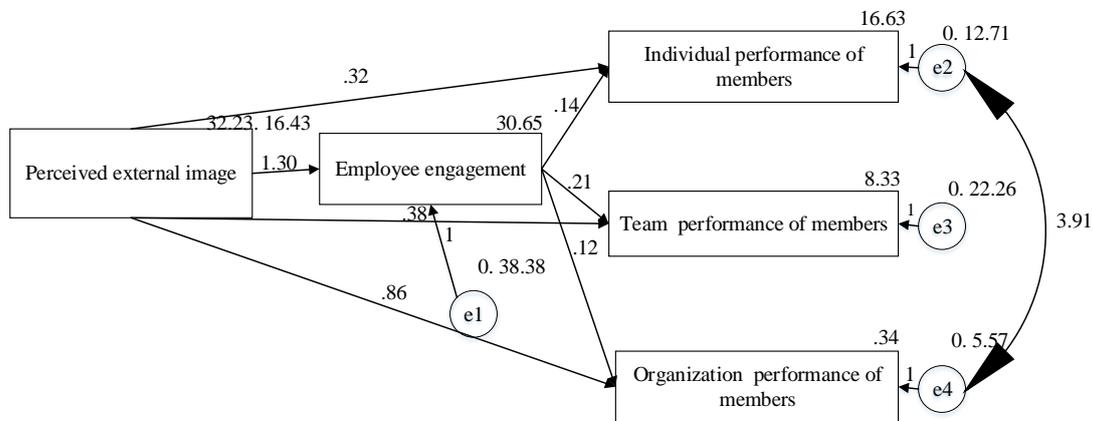


Fig. 6. The measured conceptual model of the sub-hypotheses with unstandardized path coefficients

Table 8

Fit indices of the conceptual model for the sub-hypotheses of the research

Model	X <sup>2</sup> /d.f	IFI	CFI	NFI	RMSEA
Acceptable limit	Less than 3	More than 0/90	More than 0/90	More than 0/80	Less than 0/08
Tested model	0/74	1/00	1/00	0/99	0/000

Based on Table 8, the chi-square index divided by degrees of freedom for the tested model is 0.74, which is less than the acceptable threshold of 3. The IFI, CFI, and NFI indices were 1.00, 1.00, and 0.99, respectively, which are higher than the acceptable thresholds. The RMSEA index for the tested model was 0.000, which is below the acceptable limit

of 0.08. These results indicate that all the indices of the developed research model fall within the desirable range. Overall, the goodness-of-fit indices are within acceptable ranges, and based on these findings, the final research model has a good fit. The results of structural equation modeling for this hypothesis are reported in Table 9.

Table 9

Results of structural equation modeling for the sub-hypotheses of the research

Path	Path Coefficient (Unstandardized)	Path Coefficient (Standardized)	Standard Error Of Estimate	Critical Statistic	Significant Level
OMP <--- PEP	0.86	0.72	0.09	9.53	0.00
TMP <--- PEP	0.38	0.27	0.18	2.09	0.04
IMP <--- PEP	0.32	0.31	0.14	2.35	0.02
OMP <--- EE	0.12	0.21	0.04	2.73	0.01
TMP <--- EE	0.21	0.31	0.09	2.36	0.02
IMP <--- EE	0.14	0.27	0.07	2.03	0.04

According to Table 9, the perceived external image has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.72 on the organizational performance of members, with a critical statistic related to the direct effect of the perceived external image on organizational performance being positive (9.53). The perceived external image has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.27 on the team performance of members, with a critical statistic for the direct effect of the perceived external image on team performance being positive (2.09). The perceived external image has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.31 on the individual performance of members, with a critical statistic for the direct effect of the perceived external image on individual performance being positive (2.35). The perceived external image has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.31 on the individual performance of members, with a critical statistic related to the direct effect of the perceived external image on individual performance being positive (2.35). Employee engagement has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.21 on the organizational performance of members, with a critical statistic related to the direct effect of employee engagement on organizational performance being positive (2.73). Employee engagement has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.31 on the team performance of members, with a critical statistic for the direct effect of employee engagement on team performance being positive (2.36). Employee engagement has a standardized impact coefficient of 0.27 on the individual performance of members, with a critical statistic for the direct effect of employee engagement on individual performance being positive (2.03). Since the observed significance level is less than 0.05, the research hypothesis is confirmed with 95% confidence. This means that employee engagement has a significant direct impact on individual performance.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

This research conducted on the impact of organizational image on employee participation and performance at Payame Noor University. To test the research hypothesis, the structural equation modeling (SEM) method was used. In explaining the results of the research, it can be said that employees with a high perceived external image in an organization with a favorable reputation feel the need for achievement in their career path (Kang et al., 2011). This sense of need is a strong motivator for employees to engage with colleagues, emphasizing their strengths to advance organizational goals (Jahangiri, 2017). Employees feel satisfied working in an organization with a strong external image in the community and prefer to contribute to such an organization by improving participation and cooperation in achieving organizational goals. From the perspective of employee engagement and the importance of this issue, spending money and time to strengthen the perceived external image (especially among employees) is not a cost but a long-term, profitable investment, which should include attention to employee engagement. The potential of the perceived external image for increasing employee collaboration should not be overlooked, and maximum use of it should be made (Hosseini et al., 2008). Failure to

properly leverage the potential in the perceived external image as a tool to increase employee collaboration will result in the waste of this valuable organizational asset. The perceived external image in an organization not only raises employees' individual expectations from the organization (in terms of employee benefits) (Arman & Nikkhab Kiaramesh, 2017), but also creates an ethical environment and strengthens the sense of belonging between individuals and the organization. This enhances employees' participation and increases their physical and psychological retention.

The research results also showed that employee engagement has a significant direct impact on employee performance overall and on its subscales (organizational, individual, and team performance of members). The goal of all companies is to achieve high levels of performance, and organizations can improve their performance by paying more attention to engagement and responding to the needs of society in a timely manner (Asadi, 2016). The logic behind the engagement strategy is that an organization cannot compete or succeed in today's rapidly advancing technological society without engagement. For this reason, many organizations seek to align internal activities and foster mutual collaboration to achieve superior performance beyond individual contributions. When engagement is implemented in an organization, all employees feel respected, valued, effective, and see themselves as part of the organization's destiny, leading to organizational commitment. Therefore, involving employees in organizational decision-making and implementing their opinions in practice increases their sense of responsibility and commitment toward the decisions made. Managers should engage employees in advancing organizational tasks based on their competence and efficiency and show respect for their opinions regarding organizational matters, thus increasing employees' performance in the organization. In fact, it can be said that employee engagement in the mission and vision of an organization remains a central issue in designing any managerial strategy. Employees who see the organization as their supporter form an emotional connection with it, which affects their motivation to engage (Rahimi Yeknami, 2018). Organizations can foster a high level of responsibility and engagement among employees. A higher level of perceived engagement is expected to lead to positive attitudinal and behavioral outcomes that benefit the organization in a positive way from the employees' side. Employees will improve their performance based on organizational goals and through increased activity. Therefore, the organization aims to develop a committed workforce that achieves higher performance levels through employee engagement.

The research results also indicated that the perceived external image has a significant direct impact on employee performance overall and on its subscales (organizational, individual, and team performance of members). To explain the findings, the perceived external image can be understood as the result of stakeholders' perceptions based on direct and indirect experiences and information stemming from the organization's previous activities. The relationship between the perceived external image and performance is reciprocal.

If employees understand the value of a perceived external image, they can convey this positive perception to others, creating a favorable impression among other stakeholders. The perceived external image of an organization is the result of the interaction between the organization's actions and the reactions of the external world. A positive perception of the organization's external image strengthens employees' sense of belonging to the organization, thereby increasing their commitment and resulting in improved employee performance. The perceived external image is one of the rare factors that encompass the entire organization and offers long-term benefits, such as improved organizational performance. Managers can foster employee commitment, enthusiasm, and performance by enhancing employees' positive perceptions of the external image (Totiyan Esfahani et al., 2017). When employees believe that external individuals view their organization positively, they are more likely to engage in desirable behaviors such as internal cooperation and good citizenship behavior (Dutton et al., 1994). Individuals' perceived external image reflects their attitude toward the organization and signifies deep job values embedded in their thoughts, which manifest in their performance (Jahangiri, 2017).

To enhance employee engagement and performance, managers can implement the following strategies:

### **Foster a Strong Organizational Culture**

- **Live the Mission and Values:** Managers should embody the organization's mission, values, and vision in their daily actions. This alignment helps employees understand their role in achieving organizational goals, fostering a sense of belonging and inspiration.
- **Encourage Open Communication:** Establish a two-way communication system that allows employees to share feedback and ideas comfortably. This openness builds trust and encourages a collaborative environment.

### **Enhance Recognition and Feedback**

- **Implement Recognition Programs:** Create systems for recognizing both individual and team achievements. This can include peer recognition platforms, shout-outs in meetings, or personalized thank-you notes.
- **Provide Constructive Feedback:** Conduct regular performance reviews that focus on growth and development rather than just past performance. This approach encourages continuous improvement and engagement.

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