

**LINKING HR PRACTICES AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE IN THE
PRINT MEDIA INDUSTRY: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF EMPLOYEE
ENGAGEMENT**

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Abstract

The print media industry in India is navigating profound structural disruption precipitated by digital convergence, declining print circulation, fragmented advertising revenues, and escalating talent attrition. Against this backdrop, strategic human resource management (HRM) has emerged as a pivotal determinant of organizational survival and competitive performance. This study investigates the influence of four HR practice dimensions—Employee Training and Upskilling, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, and Work-Life Balance Practices—on Organizational Performance, with Employee Engagement serving as the mediating variable. Grounded in Social Exchange Theory and the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, the study adopts a quantitative cross-sectional design. Primary data were collected from 165 print media professionals employed across editorial, advertising, production, circulation, and digital departments in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics v26, employing Pearson bivariate correlation, multiple regression, and Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step regression-based mediation procedure. The empirical results demonstrate that all four HR practice dimensions exert significant and positive effects on Employee Engagement. Among the predictors, Organizational Culture ($\beta = 0.281$) and Employee Training and Upskilling ($\beta = 0.271$) are the most influential, followed by Leadership Support ($\beta = 0.228$) and Work-Life Balance Practices ($\beta = 0.217$). Employee Engagement, in turn, strongly and significantly predicts Organizational Performance ($\beta = 0.614$, $R^2 = 0.377$). Mediation analysis reveals partial mediation: the direct effect of HR practices on Organizational Performance diminishes from $\beta = 0.512$ to $\beta = 0.295$ when Employee Engagement is introduced as a mediator, yet remains statistically significant, confirming that Employee Engagement is a critical yet non-exclusive pathway through which HR investments translate into performance outcomes. The study makes an original contribution to the strategic HRM literature by providing the first sector-specific empirical evidence from the Chennai print media industry and offers actionable guidance for HR practitioners committed to sustaining performance through engagement-centred people management systems.

Keywords: Employee Training and Upskilling; Leadership Support; Organizational Culture; Work-Life Balance Practices; Employee Engagement; Organizational Performance; Print Media Industry

1. Introduction

The global print media industry is undergoing one of the most severe structural transformations in its history. The rapid proliferation of digital news platforms, social media aggregators, and online content ecosystems has fundamentally altered audience consumption patterns, eroded print advertising revenues, and accelerated the migration of readers away from traditional newspaper and magazine formats (Küng, 2017). In India, this structural pressure has been compounded by rising newsprint costs, intensifying digital competition from regional and national online portals, and a persistent challenge in attracting and retaining talented professionals who perceive print media as a declining career destination. Chennai, as a hub of Tamil-language and English-language print journalism, encapsulates these challenges acutely: the city's legacy media organizations face the dual imperative of maintaining journalistic quality and operational efficiency while simultaneously adapting to a rapidly evolving technological and competitive landscape.

In response to these pressures, strategic human resource management (HRM) has emerged not merely as an administrative concern but as a critical driver of organizational resilience and sustained performance. The shift from transactional to transformational HR functions reflects a broader recognition that organizational performance in knowledge-intensive, creative industries is fundamentally contingent on the capabilities, motivation, and commitment of human capital (Sparrow & Cooper, 2014). Print media organizations rely on the intellectual creativity, editorial judgment, and relationship management competencies of their employees far more than they rely on physical or financial capital; accordingly, the quality of HR practices directly determines whether organizations can generate the sustained output quality and operational agility required for competitive survival.

Employee Engagement has been theorized and empirically established as the pivotal psychological mechanism linking HR investments to organizational performance. Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) define engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind characterized by vigour—the willingness to invest effort and persist through difficulties; dedication—a strong sense of significance, enthusiasm, and pride in one's work; and absorption—the state of being fully concentrated and engrossed in work activities. Engaged employees exercise greater discretionary effort, exhibit stronger organizational citizenship behaviour, demonstrate superior job performance, and are significantly less likely to voluntarily leave their organizations (Harter et al., 2002; Saks, 2006). In the print media context, where content quality and audience trust are existentially consequential, the difference between an engaged and a disengaged journalist, designer, or sales professional is directly manifested in the quality of organizational output.

Despite the conceptual and practical importance of the HR–engagement–performance nexus, systematic empirical evidence connecting specific HR practices to engagement and onward to organizational performance remains conspicuously absent within the print media sector. The preponderance of HRM research has been conducted in manufacturing, banking, information technology, and healthcare sectors, creating a significant knowledge gap regarding how HRM systems operate in creative, knowledge-intensive media organizations (Boxall & Macky, 2014; Jeffrey et al., 2021). This study addresses that lacuna by examining four theoretically grounded HR practice dimensions: Employee Training and Upskilling, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, and Work-Life Balance Practices. The study is situated in Chennai, with a sample of 165 print media professionals, and employs rigorous SPSS-based analytical techniques including Pearson correlation, multiple regression, and Baron and Kenny's mediation procedure.

1.1 Problem Statement

Print media organizations in India face a constellation of HR challenges that collectively undermine organizational effectiveness and competitive performance. High voluntary attrition among editorial and digital professionals, chronically inadequate investment in continuous training and skills development, authoritarian or unsupportive leadership styles inherited from legacy hierarchical organizational structures, and organizational cultures that have been slow to evolve in response to digital demands—these are not isolated problems but systemic HR failures that directly erode both employee engagement and organizational performance (Jeffrey et al., 2021; Küng, 2017). The widespread adoption of cost-reduction strategies—including editorial downsizing, bureau closures, and the outsourcing of production functions—has further destabilized organizational cultures and eroded the psychological safety that employees require for sustained engagement. Yet despite the urgency of these challenges, there exists no systematic empirical evidence, specific to the Indian print media context, identifying which HR practices most effectively cultivate employee engagement and how that engagement translates into measurable organizational performance improvements. This study is designed precisely to fill that empirical and theoretical void.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Theoretical Foundation

This study is anchored in two complementary theoretical frameworks that together provide a comprehensive explanation of the HR–engagement–performance linkage. Social Exchange Theory (Blau, 1964) proposes that social behaviour is fundamentally governed by a process of exchange in which individuals reciprocate perceived benefits with corresponding obligations. When organizations invest in their employees through training, supportive leadership, positive cultural environments, and work-life balance initiatives, employees perceive these investments as signals of organizational care and support. In accordance with the norm of reciprocity, employees respond to these perceived investments with heightened commitment, discretionary effort, and engagement (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). This reciprocal dynamic forms the theoretical foundation for the proposed positive effects of HR practices on Employee Engagement.

Complementing Social Exchange Theory, the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) provides a process-oriented framework for understanding how organizational resources influence employee engagement. The JD-R Model posits that employee wellbeing and motivation are determined by the balance between job demands—the physical, psychological, and organizational costs associated with work—and job resources—the physical, psychological, social, and organizational aspects of the job that facilitate the achievement of work goals, reduce job demands, and stimulate personal growth and development. HR practices function as organizational resources that buffer the motivational depletion effects of job demands, thereby sustaining employee engagement. In the print media context, where deadline pressure, editorial complexity, and technological disruption constitute significant and persistent job demands, HR resources such as training, leadership support, and flexibility acquire heightened importance as engagement-sustaining buffers.

2.2 Employee Training and Upskilling and Employee Engagement

Employee training and development is among the most extensively studied HR practices in the engagement literature. Elnaga and Imran (2013) conducted a systematic review demonstrating that structured employee training programmes significantly enhance job performance, intrinsic motivation, and organizational commitment by equipping employees with the competencies necessary to perform their roles effectively and confidently. Noe et al. (2017)

further established that training signals organizational investment in the employee's professional future, generating a sense of valued membership and psychological safety that is foundational to sustained engagement. Dysvik and Kuvaas (2008) empirically confirmed that perceived training adequacy positively predicts work engagement among knowledge workers, a finding with immediate relevance to journalists and editorial professionals navigating rapid technological change.

In the print media context, the training and upskilling imperative has been dramatically intensified by the demands of digital convergence. Traditional competencies in print journalism-sub-editing, layout design, photographic darkroom techniques, offset printing management-must now coexist with and increasingly yield to competencies in digital content management, search engine optimization, social media strategy, audience analytics, video journalism, and interactive storytelling (Jeffrey et al., 2021). Print media professionals who receive systematic training in these evolving competencies experience a sense of growing capability and organizational relevance that directly sustains engagement. Conversely, those who perceive their organizations as failing to invest in their upskilling experience a growing sense of obsolescence and disengagement that accelerates attrition. The relationship between training adequacy and engagement is therefore not merely one of skill acquisition but of organizational signalling about employee value and future relevance.

H1: Employee Training and Upskilling positively and significantly influences Employee Engagement.

2.3 Leadership Support and Employee Engagement

The quality of supervisory and organizational leadership constitutes one of the most robust antecedents of employee engagement identified in the management literature. Eisenberger et al. (1986) established through the Perceived Organizational Support (POS) framework that employees form generalized beliefs about the extent to which organizations value their contributions and care about their wellbeing; supervisory behaviours are the primary conduit through which such perceptions are formed and sustained. When leaders demonstrate genuine interest in employee development, provide clear task direction and editorial vision, recognize and reward high-quality work, and shield employees from organizational politics and resource deprivation, they create the conditions for psychological safety and felt obligation that are foundational to engagement (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

In creative industries such as print media, leadership support performs an additional and distinctive function: it enables creative risk-taking and editorial innovation. Journalists and editors who work under leaders who protect editorial autonomy, encourage investigative ambition, and support the pursuit of complex story development invest themselves more deeply in their work than those who labour under directive, risk-averse leadership that stifles creative engagement (Rickards & Moger, 2000). Conversely, unsupportive leadership-characterized by micromanagement, lack of recognition, ambiguous direction, and indifference to professional development-has been consistently associated with disengagement and voluntary turnover, problems that are acutely manifested in Indian print media organizations undergoing resource constraints and strategic restructuring (Memon et al., 2021).

H2: Leadership Support positively and significantly influences Employee Engagement.

2.4 Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

Organizational culture, conceptualized by Schein (2010) as the pattern of shared basic assumptions, values, beliefs, and behavioural norms that define how organizational members perceive, think, and feel in relation to their work environment, is increasingly recognized as one

of the most powerful determinants of employee engagement. Denison (1990) demonstrated that cultural traits characterized by high levels of employee involvement, organizational consistency, adaptability to external environmental change, and clarity of organizational mission are positively and significantly associated with superior financial performance, productivity, and quality outcomes. Harter et al.'s (2002) landmark meta-analysis across 7,939 business units further established that cultural attributes promoting autonomy, recognition, developmental relationships, and sense of purpose are among the most potent predictors of engagement.

In the print media industry, organizational culture occupies a position of particular significance because editorial identity, journalistic ethics, and creative collaboration are cultural artefacts that fundamentally shape the employee experience. Print media organizations with strong cultures characterized by editorial integrity, shared commitment to public interest journalism, collaborative creative processes, and values-driven decision-making provide employees with a meaningful sense of purpose and professional identity that transcends instrumental work motivations and sustains deep engagement even under conditions of organizational adversity (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Conversely, organizations with fragmented, hierarchical, or commercially subordinated cultures-where editorial values are perceived as being sacrificed to revenue pressures-experience rapid erosion of the intrinsic engagement that characterizes high-performing journalism organizations.

H3: Organizational Culture positively and significantly influences Employee Engagement.

2.5 Work-Life Balance Practices and Employee Engagement

Work-life balance (WLB) practices-encompassing flexible scheduling arrangements, remote or hybrid working provisions, personal and family leave entitlements, employee assistance programmes, and organizational wellness initiatives-have been increasingly recognized as critical drivers of employee engagement, particularly in professions characterized by intense time demands and high boundary permeability between work and personal life (Haar et al., 2014). Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) established foundationally that work-family conflict arises when the time, strain, and behavioural demands of work and family roles become incompatible; such conflict depletes psychological resources essential for engagement. Cegarra-Leiva et al. (2012) and Shockley and Allen (2012) subsequently demonstrated that organizational provision of WLB practices significantly reduces work-family conflict and enhances engagement by preserving the psychological resources that employees invest in their work.

Print media professionals, and in particular those in editorial and production roles, face pronounced work-life boundary challenges. The non-standard working hours demanded by publication cycles, the intrusion of breaking news events into personal time, the psychological demands of covering distressing subject matter, and the chronic deadline pressure endemic to newsroom environments collectively create an occupational profile that is highly conducive to burnout and disengagement in the absence of organizational WLB support (Jeffrey et al., 2021). Organizations that implement formalized WLB practices-flexible arrival and departure times for non-production roles, clear policies on after-hours digital communication, structured recovery time following intensive coverage periods, and mental health support resources-signal a genuine organizational commitment to employee wellbeing. Through social exchange mechanisms (Blau, 1964), this organizational care is reciprocated with elevated engagement, commitment, and performance.

H4: Work-Life Balance Practices positively and significantly influences Employee Engagement.

2.6 Employee Engagement and Organizational Performance

The relationship between employee engagement and organizational performance is among the most extensively documented and practically consequential in the management sciences. Harter et al.'s (2002) seminal meta-analysis, encompassing 198 independent studies across 7,939 business units from 36 companies, established statistically robust positive associations between employee engagement and business-unit-level outcomes including customer satisfaction and loyalty, productivity, profitability, and reduced employee turnover and absenteeism. The study reported corrected correlations between aggregate employee engagement and business unit profitability of $r = 0.17$ and business unit productivity of $r = 0.18$ -effect sizes with substantial practical significance across large organizations.

Saks (2006) extended this understanding by demonstrating in a structural model that employee engagement predicts not only task performance but also organizational citizenship behaviour, customer service quality, and intention to remain with the organization-outcomes of particular strategic importance in service-intensive, reputation-dependent industries such as print media. In the media context, organizational performance encompasses a distinctive range of outcomes that extend beyond conventional financial metrics: content quality and journalistic depth, reader trust and loyalty, publication timeliness and production efficiency, advertising client satisfaction, award recognition, and market share within the regional or national media landscape. All of these outcomes are directly dependent on the motivated, skilled, and committed efforts of engaged employees (Küng, 2017). An engaged editorial team produces more compelling, accurate, and impactful journalism; an engaged advertising team builds deeper client relationships; an engaged production team maintains higher quality standards under deadline pressure.

H5: Employee Engagement positively and significantly influences Organizational Performance.

2.7 The Mediating Role of Employee Engagement

A growing body of empirical research positions Employee Engagement as the crucial psychological mechanism-the motivational mediator-that translates HR practice investments into organizational performance outcomes. Alfes et al. (2013) demonstrated in a moderated mediation model across 297 employees that the effects of perceived HRM practices on task performance and discretionary behaviour are significantly mediated by employee engagement. Aryee et al. (2012) similarly established in a multilevel study that high-performance work systems influence individual- and branch-level performance through motivational states, of which engagement is a primary psychological manifestation. The causal logic of mediation operates through the following process: HR practices shape the conditions of work experience-employees who perceive adequate training, supportive leadership, positive cultural environments, and organizational care for their personal wellbeing appraise these conditions as evidence of organizational investment; this appraisal, consistent with Social Exchange Theory and the JD-R Model, generates heightened engagement; and it is through this heightened engagement that superior individual and organizational performance is produced.

H6: Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between HR practices (Employee Training and Upskilling, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, and Work-Life Balance Practices) and Organizational Performance.

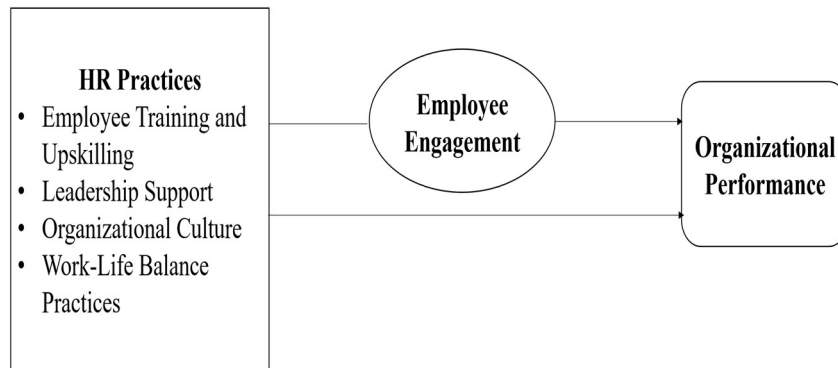


Figure 1 Research Framework

2.8 Research Gap

Notwithstanding the extensive body of knowledge on HRM, engagement, and organizational performance, three critical lacunae motivate the present study. First, the print media industry has received negligible systematic empirical attention in the strategic HRM literature relative to its economic, cultural, and democratic significance; extant sector-specific studies are largely qualitative and journalistic in nature rather than quantitatively rigorous. Second, the majority of mediation studies examining the HR–engagement–performance nexus have been conducted in manufacturing, IT, banking, or healthcare contexts, severely limiting the theoretical generalizability of findings to creative, content-intensive industries with distinctive occupational demands and cultural dynamics. Third, no prior study has simultaneously examined the specific four-dimension HR practice model-comprising Training and Upskilling, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, and Work-Life Balance-within a mediation framework in the Indian print media context, particularly within Chennai's substantial regional media ecosystem. The present study directly and comprehensively addresses all three gaps.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Sampling

This study adopts a quantitative, positivist, cross-sectional research design, which is epistemologically appropriate for the hypothesis-testing objectives of the study and practically suited to the collection of standardized data from a large, geographically concentrated professional population (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The target population comprised all full-time print media professionals employed in newspaper organizations, magazine publishing houses, and news agencies located in Chennai, Tamil Nadu. Chennai's print media ecosystem includes major Tamil-language dailies, national English-language newspapers with significant regional operations, magazine groups, and specialized trade publications, collectively employing several thousand professionals across editorial, commercial, technical, and digital functions.

A purposive convenience sampling technique was employed, consistent with established practice in organizational HRM research where probabilistic sampling methods are constrained by the unwillingness of media organizations to provide complete employee rosters and facilitate random access (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). Questionnaires were distributed through personal professional networks, organizational gatekeepers, and professional journalism associations. Of 210 questionnaires distributed, 172 were returned, of which 165 were complete and usable for analysis, yielding a usable response rate of 78.6%. This sample size comfortably exceeds the minimum threshold of five observations per predictor variable specified by Hair et al. (2019) for reliable multiple regression and mediation analysis.

3.2 Measurement Instrument and Reliability

Data were collected using a structured, self-administered questionnaire comprising six content sections alongside a demographic section. Employee Training and Upskilling was measured using six items adapted from Elnaga and Imran (2013) and Noe et al. (2017), capturing perceived adequacy of training provision, relevance of skill development programmes, and organizational commitment to upskilling. Leadership Support was operationalized through six items adapted from Eisenberger et al. (1986) and Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002), measuring perceived supervisor support, management responsiveness, and developmental leadership behaviours. Organizational Culture was assessed using seven items drawn from Denison's (1990) organizational culture survey, covering involvement, consistency, adaptability, and mission clarity. Work-Life Balance Practices were measured through five items adapted from Haar et al. (2014), addressing flexibility, boundary management support, and wellbeing provisions. Employee Engagement was measured using nine items from Schaufeli and Bakker's (2004) Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES), capturing vigour, dedication, and absorption. Organizational Performance was assessed through six items adapted from Dyer and Reeves (1995), encompassing content quality, operational efficiency, market position, and stakeholder satisfaction dimensions relevant to the media sector. All items employed a five-point Likert response format (1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree).

Internal consistency reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha coefficients. Table 1 confirms that all constructs exceed the minimum threshold of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ recommended by Nunnally (1978) for research instruments, ranging from $\alpha = 0.832$ (Work-Life Balance Practices) to $\alpha = 0.904$ (Employee Engagement), indicating strong reliability. Content validity was ensured through the use of established, previously validated scales and a pilot test conducted with ten print media professionals whose responses confirmed item clarity and face validity.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of Measurement Scales

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Employee Training and Upskilling	6	0.847
Leadership Support	6	0.863
Organizational Culture	7	0.881
Work-Life Balance Practices	5	0.832
Employee Engagement	9	0.904
Organizational Performance	6	0.879

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 2 presents the demographic profile of the 165 respondents. The sample comprises a slight male majority (57.6%, $n = 95$) and a female representation of 42.4% ($n = 70$), broadly reflecting the gender composition of established Chennai print media newsrooms, which remain male-dominant in senior editorial roles while showing greater gender parity at junior and mid-tier levels. The dominant age cohort is 26–35 years (49.1%, $n = 81$), consistent with the workforce profile of regional print media organizations that recruit heavily from postgraduate journalism and communication programmes. A further 25.5% ($n = 42$) are aged 36–45, indicating a mature and experienced mid-career population. The majority hold postgraduate qualifications (63.0%, $n = 104$), reflective of the credential demands of editorial and managerial positions in established

media houses. Experience distribution reveals that 41.8% (n = 69) possess between 3 and 8 years of professional experience, with 18.8% (n = 31) holding more than twelve years of industry tenure—a cohort of significant institutional knowledge. Department-wise, editorial professionals constitute the largest group (34.5%, n = 57), followed by advertising and marketing (22.4%, n = 37), production (16.4%, n = 27), circulation and distribution (13.9%, n = 23), and digital and multimedia (12.7%, n = 21). Middle-level employees form the largest employment level category (46.7%, n = 77), followed by junior level (41.2%, n = 68) and senior level (12.1%, n = 20).

Table 2: Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 165)

Sl. No.	Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Gender	Male	95	57.6
		Female	70	42.4
2	Age Group	Below 25 years	22	13.3
		26–35 years	81	49.1
		36–45 years	42	25.5
		Above 45 years	20	12.1
3	Educational Qualification	Undergraduate	56	33.9
		Postgraduate	104	63.0
		Doctorate / Others	5	3.0
4	Work Experience	Below 3 years	28	17.0
		3–8 years	69	41.8
		9–12 years	37	22.4
		Above 12 years	31	18.8
5	Department	Editorial	57	34.5
		Advertising & Marketing	37	22.4
		Production	27	16.4
		Circulation & Distribution	23	13.9
		Digital & Multimedia	21	12.7
6	Employment Level	Junior Level	68	41.2
		Middle Level	77	46.7
		Senior Level	20	12.1

4.2 Pearson Correlation Analysis

Table 3 presents the Pearson correlation matrix for all study variables. All Pearson correlation coefficients between HR practice dimensions and Employee Engagement are positive and statistically significant at the $p < 0.01$ level. The strongest association is between Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement ($r = 0.589$), followed by Employee Training and Upskilling ($r = 0.563$), Leadership Support ($r = 0.541$), and Work-Life Balance Practices ($r =$

0.477). Employee Engagement demonstrates the strongest bivariate association with Organizational Performance ($r = 0.614, p < 0.001$) among all study variables, providing preliminary support for H5. Intercorrelations among the four HR practice dimensions range from $r = 0.318$ to $r = 0.536$, remaining well below the multicollinearity threshold of 0.80 recommended by Hair et al. (2019), confirming the conceptual distinctiveness of the constructs and their suitability for simultaneous entry into regression models.

Table 3: Pearson Correlation Matrix (N = 165)

Variables	Employee Training & Upskilling	Leadership Support	Organizational Culture	Work-Life Balance Practices	Employee Engagement	Organizational Performance
Employee Training & Upskilling	1					
Leadership Support	.487**	1				
Organizational Culture	.536**	.518**	1			
Work-Life Balance Practices	.318**	.391**	.412**	1		
Employee Engagement	.563**	.541**	.589**	.477**	1	
Organizational Performance	.498**	.472**	.511**	.432**	.614**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed)

4.3 Multiple Regression Analysis: HR Practices Predicting Employee Engagement (H1–H4)

To test hypotheses H1 through H4, a multiple regression analysis was conducted with Employee Training and Upskilling, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, and Work-Life Balance Practices entered simultaneously as independent variables and Employee Engagement as the dependent variable. Results are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

Table 4: Model Summary - HR Practices Predicting Employee Engagement

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error	F	Sig.
1	.712	.507	.494	.4467	41.382	.000

Predictors: (Constant), Employee Training & Upskilling, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, Work-Life Balance Practices

Table 5: Regression Coefficients - HR Practices Predicting Employee Engagement

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.612	0.284	-	2.154	.032

Employee Training & Upskilling	0.248	0.058	.271	4.276	.000
Leadership Support	0.219	0.062	.228	3.532	.001
Organizational Culture	0.287	0.063	.281	4.556	.000
Work-Life Balance Practices	0.193	0.055	.217	3.509	.001

Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement

The overall regression model is statistically significant ($F(4,160) = 41.382, p < 0.001$), and the four HR practice dimensions collectively explain 50.7% of the variance in Employee Engagement ($R^2 = 0.507, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.494$), indicating a strong and practically meaningful combined effect. Organizational Culture emerges as the strongest individual predictor ($\beta = 0.281, t = 4.556, p < 0.001$), underscoring the primacy of shared values, editorial identity, and collaborative norms in shaping the motivational climate of print media organizations. Employee Training and Upskilling follows closely ($\beta = 0.271, t = 4.276, p < 0.001$), confirming that perceived investment in continuous professional development is a powerful determinant of engagement in an industry confronting digital skills disruption. Leadership Support demonstrates a significant positive effect ($\beta = 0.228, t = 3.532, p < 0.001$), affirming that supervisory quality and management responsiveness are critical engagement enablers in hierarchically structured media organizations. Work-Life Balance Practices, while the smallest individual predictor, nonetheless exerts a statistically significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.217, t = 3.509, p < 0.001$), reflecting the engagement value employees assign to organizational care for their wellbeing under the demanding conditions of print media work. All four hypotheses H1 through H4 are therefore empirically supported.

4.4 Simple Regression: Employee Engagement Predicting Organizational Performance (H5)

Table 6: Regression Analysis - Employee Engagement Predicting Organizational Performance

Predictor	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.	R ²	Adj. R ²
(Constant)	1.243	0.317	-	3.922	.000		
Employee Engagement	0.632	0.086	.614	7.349	.000	.377	.373

Dependent Variable: Organizational Performance | $F(1,163) = 54.008, p < .001$

Employee Engagement exerts a strong and statistically significant positive effect on Organizational Performance ($\beta = 0.614, t = 7.349, p < 0.001$), explaining 37.7% of the variance in organizational performance outcomes ($R^2 = 0.377, \text{Adjusted } R^2 = 0.373$). The standardized coefficient of 0.614 represents a large effect size by conventional benchmarks (Cohen, 1988), indicating that variations in employee engagement levels account for a substantial and practically significant proportion of performance variation across the Chennai print media organizations studied. This finding provides robust empirical support for Hypothesis H5 and confirms the centrality of employee engagement as a human capital driver of organizational performance within the print media sector.

4.5 Mediation Analysis: Employee Engagement as Mediator (H6)

Baron and Kenny's (1986) four-step regression-based mediation procedure was applied to test whether Employee Engagement mediates the relationship between the composite HR practices

score and Organizational Performance. A composite HR practices score was computed by averaging the four HR practice dimension scores, consistent with the theoretical proposition that HR practices function as an integrated system rather than independent discrete interventions (Alfes et al., 2013).

Table 7: Mediation Analysis

Step	Path Description	B	β	t	Sig.
Step 1 (Path c)	HR Practices → Org. Performance (Total Effect)	0.487	.512	7.730	.000
Step 2 (Path a)	HR Practices → Employee Engagement	0.541	.509	7.514	.000
Step 3 (Path b)	Employee Engagement → Org. Performance (Controlled)	0.381	.369	4.187	.000
Step 4 (Path c')	HR Practices → Org. Performance (Direct Effect)	0.281	.295	3.797	.000

Steps 3 & 4 estimated simultaneously. Overall model: $R^2 = .348$, $F(2,162) = 43.219$, $p < .001$

Step 1 confirms a significant and substantial total effect of the composite HR practices score on Organizational Performance ($\beta = 0.512$, $t = 7.730$, $p < 0.001$), satisfying the first condition for mediation. Step 2 establishes that HR practices significantly predict Employee Engagement ($\beta = 0.509$, $t = 7.514$, $p < 0.001$), satisfying the antecedent condition. Step 3 demonstrates that Employee Engagement significantly predicts Organizational Performance when HR practices are simultaneously controlled ($\beta = 0.369$, $t = 4.187$, $p < 0.001$), satisfying the mediator-to-outcome condition. In Step 4, the critical test of mediation, the direct effect of HR practices on Organizational Performance decreases from $\beta = 0.512$ to $\beta = 0.295$ when Employee Engagement is introduced as a mediator, representing a reduction of 42.4% in the standardized direct effect. Crucially, the direct effect remains statistically significant ($t = 3.797$, $p < 0.001$).

This pattern—a significant but substantially reduced direct effect in the presence of the mediator—is definitively consistent with partial mediation as specified by Baron and Kenny (1986). Employee Engagement absorbs a meaningful and statistically significant portion of the HR–performance relationship, confirming its role as a critical motivational mediator. However, the persistence of a significant direct effect indicates that HR practices also influence organizational performance through additional pathways beyond the motivational engagement mechanism—such as direct capability enhancement through training, structural improvements to workflow efficiency, or reputational effects of positive organizational cultures. Hypothesis H6 is therefore partially supported, a theoretically nuanced and practically important finding.

Table 8: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statement	β	p-value	Decision
H1	Employee Training & Upskilling → Employee Engagement	.271	< .001	Supported

H2	Leadership Support → Employee Engagement	.228	< .001	Supported
H3	Organizational Culture → Employee Engagement	.281	< .001	Supported
H4	Work-Life Balance Practices → Employee Engagement	.217	< .001	Supported
H5	Employee Engagement → Organizational Performance	.614	< .001	Supported
H6	Employee Engagement mediates HR Practices → Org. Performance	Partial	-	Partially Supported

5. Discussion

The four HR practice dimensions collectively explain 50.7% of variance in Employee Engagement ($R^2 = 0.507$), validating the JD-R Model’s proposition that organizational resources buffer motivational depletion in high-demand work settings. Organizational Culture ($\beta = 0.281$) is the dominant predictor, consistent with Schein (2010) and Harter et al. (2002): in print media, shared journalistic values and editorial identity furnish intrinsic purpose that sustains engagement under commercial pressure (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). Employee Training and Upskilling ($\beta = 0.271$) carries the second-largest effect, reflecting the acute anxiety of digital obsolescence among Chennai print media professionals; organizations that invest in multimedia journalism, data analytics, and social media competencies signal commitment to employee futures, generating the vigour and dedication that define engagement (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004; Dysvik & Kuvaas, 2008). Leadership Support ($\beta = 0.228$) confirms Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) POS framework: section editors and bureau chiefs who provide directional clarity, recognition, and editorial autonomy activate social exchange obligations that manifest as sustained engagement (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Work-Life Balance Practices ($\beta = 0.217$), while the weakest predictor, exert a significant positive effect consistent with Haar et al. (2014); their comparatively lower weight reflects the primacy of journalistic vocation as an intrinsic motivator, with WLB functioning as a burnout buffer that preserves engagement sustainability over career stages rather than as an initial engagement driver (Cegarra-Leiva et al., 2012).

Employee Engagement strongly predicts Organizational Performance ($\beta = 0.614$, $R^2 = 0.377$), a large effect extending Harter et al.’s (2002) meta-analytic evidence to a sector where performance is expressed through content quality, editorial credibility, circulation efficiency, and advertiser retention. These outcomes are irreducibly contingent on the discretionary effort of engaged professionals: the engaged journalist produces more accurate and impactful reporting; the engaged advertising executive cultivates deeper client relationships; the engaged production supervisor upholds higher quality standards under deadline pressure. These micro-level behavioural expressions of engagement aggregate into the performance differentials documented in this study, confirming H5 and establishing engagement as a strategically significant human capital outcome in the Chennai print media context.

The partial mediation finding (H6 partially supported) is the study’s most theoretically significant result. The 42.4% reduction in the direct HR–performance path (from $\beta = 0.512$ to $\beta = 0.295$) when Employee Engagement is introduced confirms engagement as the primary motivational channel through which HR investments generate performance gains, paralleling Alfes et al. (2013) and Aryee et al. (2012). The persistence of a significant direct effect reveals parallel non-motivational

pathways-direct capability gains from training, coordination efficiencies from supportive leadership, and talent attraction effects of strong culture-that independently improve performance. This positions Employee Engagement as the most modifiable and highest-leverage mechanism in the HR-performance system, carrying the greatest strategic value for HR intervention in organizations navigating the compounding demands of digital disruption and talent competition.

6. Conclusion, Implications and Limitations

6.1 Conclusion

This study provides the first systematic and empirically rigorous examination of the HR practices-employee engagement-organizational performance nexus within the Chennai print media industry, offering a significant contribution to the strategic HRM literature in a sector that has been persistently underrepresented in quantitative organizational research. The study demonstrates that Employee Training and Upskilling, Leadership Support, Organizational Culture, and Work-Life Balance Practices collectively exert significant positive effects on Employee Engagement, collectively explaining 50.7% of engagement variance among 165 print media professionals. Employee Engagement, in turn, exerts a strong positive effect on Organizational Performance, explaining 37.7% of its variance. Mediation analysis confirms partial mediation, establishing Employee Engagement as the primary motivational mechanism through which HR investments are converted into performance outcomes, while acknowledging the existence of additional direct performance pathways.

Theoretically, the study extends Social Exchange Theory and the JD-R Model to the underexplored domain of creative media organizations, confirming the generalizability of these foundational frameworks while identifying the distinctive contextual factors-editorial culture, journalistic professional identity, digital disruption pressures-that modulate how HR practices generate engagement in print media environments. The partial mediation finding advances the theoretical model beyond binary mediation claims, positioning Employee Engagement as a pivotal mechanism within a multi-pathway HR-performance system.

6.2 Managerial Implications

The findings carry several important and actionable implications for HR practitioners, editorial leaders, and organizational decision-makers in print media organizations. Given that Organizational Culture is the dominant predictor of Employee Engagement, organizational leaders should prioritize deliberate, sustained culture-building initiatives that articulate and reinforce the editorial values, collaborative norms, and professional identity that distinguish high-performing journalism organizations. Culture cannot be managed through policy pronouncements alone; it requires consistent behavioural modelling by senior editorial leadership, explicit integration of cultural values into recruitment, onboarding, and performance management processes, and organizational rituals that celebrate editorial achievement and journalistic integrity.

The strong effect of Employee Training and Upskilling on engagement demands that print media organizations move beyond episodic, budget-driven training provision toward institutionalized, systematic professional development programmes that equip employees for the demands of digital convergence. Investments in digital journalism skills, data visualization, multimedia content production, audience analytics platforms, and social media strategy should be treated as core operational expenditures rather than discretionary development costs. Leadership development at middle management levels-section editors, bureau heads, advertising managers-should be prioritized, as this tier constitutes the primary engagement interface for the majority of employees. Coaching competency, constructive feedback delivery, recognition practices, and transparent communication skills should form the core of such development. Finally, formalized

work-life balance provisions-flexible scheduling where editorial workflows permit, clearly defined digital communication boundaries, mental health support resources, and structured recovery protocols following intensive coverage periods-represent cost-effective investments that sustain engagement and reduce the attrition costs that disproportionately affect print media organizations competing against better-resourced digital competitors for talent.

6.3 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study is subject to several limitations that should inform the interpretation of its findings and guide future research. The cross-sectional research design precludes the establishment of definitive causal inference, as temporal precedence of HR practices to engagement to performance outcomes cannot be confirmed from simultaneous measurement. Future research should employ longitudinal panel designs that track HR practice perceptions, engagement levels, and performance outcomes across multiple time points to establish more robust causal claims. The purposive convenience sample, while adequate in size and representative in composition, may limit the geographic and organizational generalizability of findings to print media organizations beyond Chennai and to media types beyond the newspaper and magazine publishing contexts studied. Future research should extend the geographic scope to other Indian media hubs, include broadcasting and digital-native media organizations for comparative analysis, and explore whether the relative predictive weights of HR practice dimensions vary across organizational size, ownership structure, and digital transformation stage. Additionally, the exploration of further mediators-including organizational commitment, psychological capital, and knowledge-sharing behaviour-and moderators-such as job insecurity, organizational size, and union membership-would enrich the theoretical model and provide more granular guidance for print media practitioners navigating the complex human capital challenges of industry disruption.

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