

“Enhancing and sustaining employee engagement through HRM practices: A study on Indian unicorn startups”

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ENHANCING AND SUSTAINING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH HRM PRACTICES: A STUDY ON INDIAN UNICORN STARTUPS

Abstract

This study focuses on human resource management (HRM) practices that encourage employee engagement. It aims to explore the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement and also investigates the moderating role of employee gender between both variables. The study applied a cross-sectional research design alongside correlational and regression analysis to evaluate the responses of 410 employees working in unicorn startups based in Gurgaon, New Delhi, and Mumbai through the structured survey questionnaires. Regarding the respondents' gender, the majority are male (70%), and female constitutes 30%. However, the study results demonstrated that no matter an employee's age or gender, effective HRM practices have a strong positive correlation with employee engagement ($\beta = 0.93$; $p < 0.001$). The results of the regression model show that HRM practices have explained 87% of the variance in employee engagement, which indicates that most of the employee engagement level depends on the best HRM practices of the organization. The gender differences do not significantly moderate this relationship. The F value in ANOVA analysis showed the overall significance of the model. The findings illustrated that by improving skills and promoting employee engagement, individuals experience heightened satisfaction levels and assume greater responsibility for their assigned duties.

Keywords HRM practices, employee engagement, India, unicorns, startups

JEL Classification J21, O15

INTRODUCTION

HRM practices play a pivotal role in influencing employee engagement. Employee engagement helps an organization achieve a competitive advantage with improved outcomes. In other words, HRM practices significantly correlate with higher employee engagement levels, making them crucial for sustained success. HRM practices involve policies and procedures for employment management, such as hiring, coaching, evaluating, and rewarding. Employee engagement encompasses intellectual, psychological, and behavioral aspects. Employee engagement relates to HR practices like learning, career growth opportunities, performance feedback, and rewards. Recognition and incentives also positively impact engagement. Engaged employees are more innovative and contribute to the organization's success in the long run. Employee engagement is positively correlated with HRM practices, leading to increased productivity, client retention at a greater rate, reduced turnover, and higher profitability (Harter et al., 2002). HRM practices, such as effective communication, well-planned employment strategies, and a balance between work and personal life, are closely linked

to employee engagement (Guest, 2017). Therefore, organizations must prioritize HRM practices to improve employee engagement.

Unicorn startups are privately owned enterprises worth over \$1 billion. India ranks third with 108 unicorn startups worldwide, behind the United States and China (Ravishankar, 2022). Flipkart started in 2007 and was one of India's first unicorn startups. After that, other Indian unicorns like Paytm, Ola, and Byju's also appeared. These companies changed the market dynamics and generated significant revenue, attracting international investors and venture capital firms to invest in Indian startups. Increased digital technology and smartphone usage have thrived internet companies and e-commerce platforms. However, startup development in the country is also hindered by a lack of infrastructure development, especially in rural India. Some issues still need fixing to ensure these startups keep growing. For the optimal operation of the business, it is necessary to have a solid grasp of the fundamentals of HRM.

HRM practices are crucial for maintaining the efficiency of Indian unicorn startups. Employee recruitment and retention have been a significant challenge for startups (Mukul & Saini, 2021). Employees' lack of access to perks and pay is another HRM-related concern facing Indian unicorn firms. A common reason for the high turnover rate in the startup industry is the low compensation and few perks offered to employees. There needs to be more emphasis on the salary and benefits policies for employees at unicorn startups (Sharma, 2017). There is a deficiency in the performance management systems available to Indian startups, making it difficult to promote employee enthusiasm and productivity while raising the overall performance of organizations. These issues have made many employees disinterested in working for startups in India. Several studies have examined women's engagement in Indian startups, including their motives, problems, and impact on the startup ecosystem. Startup women have fewer role models and mentors because less than 20% of startup CEOs are women. Indian women's participation in small businesses is on the rise, but the country has a long way to go before gender bias and other obstacles are eliminated.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES

HRM practices are how companies handle their employees. They help organizations meet their goals by hiring, growing, and retaining talented people. These practices are significant in making employees satisfied, engaged, and efficient (Guest, 1997). When companies use organized methods for hiring, like understanding the job well, describing it clearly, and using tests, they are more likely to hire the right people for the job (Huselid, 1995). Targeted recruitment methods like employee referrals and social media recruitment improve hiring quality and reduce employee turnover (Breugh & Starke, 2000). Training and development practices teach workers how to do their jobs and improve organizational performance. Formal training programs and coaching are more effective at energizing and inspiring employees (Wang et al., 2010). Kozlowski (1998) found that team-based training improves team performance. Employment growth is facilitated through learn-

ing and growth programs. Performance management involves goal-setting, feedback, and evaluation. It can boost job satisfaction, work engagement, and productivity (Twesme et al., 2021). Gerhart and Milkovich (1990) found that performance-based rewards like bonuses or promotions improve organizational performance. Setting expectations, giving feedback, and assessing employee performance requires effective performance management. Effective performance management practices are found to improve organizational performance (Huselid, 1995). Tzafirir (2006) found that structured interviews and regular tests also significantly influence employee job performance. Compensation and benefits practices are strongly associated with job satisfaction and employee engagement (Boselie et al., 2005). Effective employee relations practices are essential for positive employee-management relationships.

Moreover, open communication, employee participation in decision-making, and grievance-handling mechanisms are associated with

job satisfaction and work engagement (Guest, 2002). According to Huselid (1995), HR practices are essential to sustain organizational success. Recruitment, compensation, training, and development processes considerably affect job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational performance. Companies must implement HRM practices that support their strategic goals to gain a sustainable competitive advantage.

Employee engagement is of great importance in HRM. It is linked to positive results like better organizational performance, higher productivity, and improved employee wellbeing. Employee engagement refers to employees' dedication, active participation, and motivation to work. The term "workplace engagement" refers to a good mental state in which workers are enthusiastic, committed, and fully absorbed in their work (Schaufeli et al., 2006). Self-report questionnaires, such as the Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES) (Schaufeli et al., 2006), and surveys, such as the Gallup Q12 (Gallup, n.d.), are two examples of different techniques that measure workers' involvement. Employee engagement is boosted by various factors: supportive supervisors and colleagues, job-related resources like stability and chances for growth, and a positive organizational culture (Saks, 2006). Organizations with highly engaged people result in overall administrative performance, including huge profitability, customer satisfaction, and staff retention (Walumbwa et al., 2010). Conversely, employees who participate in their work are less likely to experience negative emotions, substantial degrees of contentment with their jobs, and a significant rate of fatigue and stress (Harter et al., 2002). Research shows that employee engagement is crucial for maintaining organizational success. It is linked to positive outcomes like better corporate performance, higher productivity, and improved employee wellbeing. This underscores the necessity for academics to give precedence to examining employee engagement as a principal area of attention.

HRM practices strongly influence how engaged employees are, which is really important for a company to do well. When employees are motivated, they are more engaged and are satisfied in their jobs. Harter et al. (2002) asserted that HR policies, namely communication, recognition, and growth

opportunities, were critical for employee engagement. The study proposed that businesses boost employee engagement by providing a pleasant workplace that cares about employees and helps them feel like they are contributing to something bigger than themselves. Boselie et al. (2005) observed that HRM practices like job stability, learning and development, and performance evaluation positively correlated with employee engagement. The study argued that these practices are critical for fostering a positive work environment that supports employee wellbeing and engagement.

Saks (2006) identified four HRM practices significantly associated with employee engagement: job design, performance management, training and development, and reward and recognition. The study found that job design that allows employees to use their skills and abilities, performance management that provides feedback and recognition, training and development that enhances job-related skills, and reward and recognition that reinforces positive behaviors and performance are determinants of employee engagement. Similarly, Wright and Nishii (2006) stated that HRM practices that promote high-performance work procedures, including factors like the description of job creation, employee education, and job evaluation, were positively associated with employee engagement. The study recommended that the workforce is more likely to feel connected and engaged when HRM practices are consistent with corporate goals, norms, and principles.

Macey and Schneider (2008) found that HRM practices that enhance employee perceptions of fairness, trust, and meaningful work are strongly correlated with employee engagement. To enhance it further, the study suggested that organizations should strive to create a supportive workplace culture that prioritizes job satisfaction and helps them realize their full potential. Further, Bakker et al. (2011) also opined that HRM practices positively influence employee engagement. The study identified performance improvement programs, worker input, and performance feedback as the most significant predictors of employee engagement. These HRM practices provide employees with a sense of engagement, support, and career development. Breevaart et al. (2016) demonstrated that HRM practices that support personnel well-

being, such as a good balance between work and personal life, job security, and collective support, improve employee engagement. The study has emphasized that organizations must foster a positive work environment that promotes employee well-being and engagement. According to Wang et al. (2015), HRM practices like job security and learning opportunities significantly influence employee engagement. Past studies also discovered that HRM practices mitigated the association between stress at work and engagement, indicating that HRM practices can significantly lessen the negative impacts of stress on productivity. Thus, the literature suggests that HRM practices must support employee engagement to boost efficiency, job satisfaction, and commitment.

HRM practices play a crucial role in creating engaged workers, which is vital for organizational success. However, the impact of HRM on engagement can differ based on employees' gender. According to Hess et al. (2012), the impact of gender on work engagement is uncertain. However, female employees are more engaged when HRM practices offer work-life balance and flexibility. Godlewska-Werner et al. (2020) found that female employees have higher chances to be engaged when the HRM practices provide opportunities for job rotation alongside training and development. In contrast, male employees are more likely to be engaged with HRM practices that provide opportunities for recognition and rewards, such as performance-based pay and bonuses.

Madera and Hebl (2012) found that male job applicants were more likely to accept job offers when the recruitment process emphasized job autonomy and flexibility. However, female job candidates mostly accept job offers when the recruitment process emphasizes job security and support. Jamal and Naser (2002) identified that female workers generally feel more satisfied and committed to their work than their male counterparts with the presence of professional development and training opportunities. The impact of performance management practices on employee engagement has been found to vary based on gender. According to Bailey et al. (2017), female employees tend to be more engaged in their work than male employees in cases where performance management practices are seen as just and transparent.

Some studies have also found that gender has no moderating role in HRM practices and employee engagement. According to Salanova et al. (2005), there is an insignificant relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement between male and female workers. Mohammad et al. (2017) discovered that gender did not attenuate the linkages between HRM practices and employee engagement. They concluded that HRM practices were as significant for males as for women in increasing employee engagement.

It can be inferred from the available literature that there are both the presence and absence of gender differences in the association between HRM practices and employee engagement based on geographical location, company operations, and organizational culture. How companies recruit, train, and evaluate employee performance can affect male and female employees differently. These factors are the rationale behind considering the aspect of gender on the association between HRM practices and employee engagement. Organizations should consider the potential gender differences in the impact of HRM practices on employee engagement when designing and implementing HRM practices.

The social exchange theory, a part of social psychology, helps understand how people in relationships judge and share things like help, appreciation, and rewards. This theory explains how relationships are built and maintained by trading these resources. It is also beneficial to understand how employees and employers relate to each other. Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005) found that employees who perceive that they receive fair treatment from their employers are likely to exhibit positive behavioral factors like job satisfaction and corporate citizenship. The study identified two types of exchange relationships: transactional and relational. Transactional relationships are based on exchanging tangible resources, such as pay and benefits.

In contrast, relational relationships are based on exchanging intangible resources, such as emotional support and trust. Furthermore, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) found that when employees recognize their employers as supportive and caring, they are positively committed to corpo-

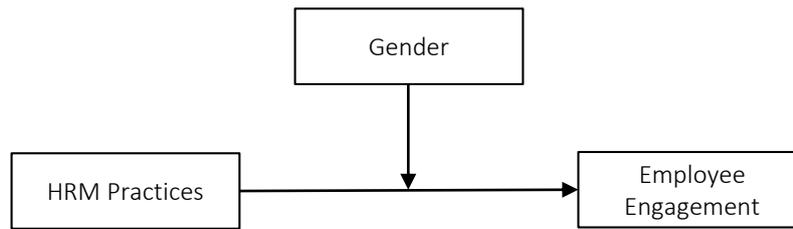


Figure 1. Research framework

rate citizenship and job contentment. Tsai and Ghoshal (1998) found that team members with strong bonds of trust and mutual respect are more willing to collaborate and exchange information. Liao et al. (2004) found that employees tend to show more creativity when they find more positives than negatives in their jobs.

The social exchange theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how organizations form and maintain social relationships. After reviewing the applicable earlier studies, the study constructed the research framework shown in Figure 1. Many research studies have shown how HRM practices affect how employees feel and how well they do at work. But when it comes to Indian unicorn companies, not much research has been done. This study helps fill the gaps by looking at how HRM practices and employee engagement are connected and explores the role of gender in this relationship in the context of unicorn startups based in India. Based on the extinct literature review, the study formulated the following hypotheses:

- H1: HRM techniques have a substantial impact on employee participation.*
- H2: Gender moderates the association between HRM practices and employee engagement.*

2. METHODOLOGY

This study combines quantitative analysis with descriptive statistics. The convenience sampling approach was used to conduct the research. According to Stratton (2021), convenience sampling is frequently used in social science when the research question is exploratory and when the investigator focuses on collecting data quickly and simply. When the research studies exper-

ience limited resources, like time, money, or personnel, convenience sampling can be helpful. As a result, the essential research data were collected through a predetermined set of questions designed to elicit predetermined answers. The study employed a mixed-methods approach to distribute questionnaires in the Indian cities of Gurgaon, New Delhi, and Mumbai, utilizing both personal references and email distribution. With the help of personal references, the study has consciously reached out to a diverse set of contacts, ensuring that different demographics and backgrounds were represented in their sample. The study also compiled a list of potential recipients' email addresses. It took steps to ensure a broad range of recipients from various sources were included in the email distribution list. The respondents were from various professions across both genders, including software developers, personnel managers, marketing and logistics professionals, and others.

The HRM practices, the independent variable, were evaluated using the nine-item scale (Conway, 2004). Employee engagement was measured by a five-point scale suggested by Byrne et al. (2016). This survey's Likert scale goes from 5 (strong agreement) to 1 (strong disagreement). A binary scale was used for assessing employee gender, which is the moderating variable. The fact that participants with the survey instrument raised no problems suggests that the questions asked are presented sufficiently precisely and that the respondents' right to privacy is being respected. In order to calculate the appropriate size of the sample, this study relied on the method developed by Cochran (1977) that took into account both a 95% assurance level and a 5% discrepancy. The size of 385 respondents has been determined to be suitable. However, there were 410 responses to the survey that were considered valid. The respondents' profile data are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents profile attributes

| Sl. No. | City | No. of Unicorn Startups Surveyed | No. of Employees Participated | Gender | |
|---------|-----------|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------|--------|
| | | | | Male | Female |
| 1 | Gurgaon | 11 | 130 | 108 | 22 |
| 2 | New Delhi | 7 | 98 | 70 | 28 |
| 3 | Mumbai | 13 | 182 | 109 | 73 |
| Total | | 31 | 410 | 287 | 123 |
| | | | | 410 | |

3. RESULTS

IBM SPSS version 25 was utilized for descriptive statistics, internal reliability, correlation, regression, and moderation analysis. These analyses were carried out to investigate how HR practices affect work engagement among employees working in unicorn startups. According to Table 1, out of the 410 people who answered the survey, 70% were male, and 30% were female. The paper used sixteen measuring items for the two aspects of HRM practices and employee engagement. A check for normality conditions was performed on the data before the analysis was done to ensure that the study produced accurate results without any misleading conclusions. Skewness and kurtosis are key factors in assessing distribution patterns. If data have z-scores for skewness and kurtosis between -2 and +2 and their p-values greater than 0.05, the data follow a normal distribution. Skewness measures

symmetry, while kurtosis gauges the peakedness or flatness of data (Tabachnick et al., 2019). The occurrence of these figures in this instance showed that the data followed a normal distribution.

It was feasible to determine the underlying dimensions using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), PCA (principal component analysis), and varimax rotation. PCA and EFA are statistical techniques used to uncover hidden patterns in data. EFA reveals how variables relate to underlying factors, and PCA helps in dimensionality reduction. Varimax rotation enhances interpretation by optimizing factor loadings' variance per variable within a factor. Combining EFA and PCA with varimax rotation capitalizes on their strengths to efficiently explore, identify, and confirm underlying patterns in data, thereby improving the analysis' quality and depth. According to Hulin et al. (2001), internal consistency scores for all of

Table 2. Mean, coefficient loadings, and internal consistency of the variables

| Constructs | Measures | Mean | Factor Loading | Cronbach's Alpha Value |
|---------------------|--|------|----------------|------------------------|
| HRM Practices | Employees are kept in the loop, and their feedback is taken into account | 3.89 | 0.77 | 0.95 |
| | The right individuals are hired, and there are opportunities for early bonding and interpersonal relationships within the organization | | 0.89 | |
| | Broad skill sets are encouraged through numerous learning programs | | 0.79 | |
| | Continuous evaluation of efficiency and improvement suggestions are provided | | 0.94 | |
| | Possibilities for advancement are abundant and depend on competence | | 0.75 | |
| | Every incentive is reasonable and proportional to effort | | 0.83 | |
| | Job stability is excellent | | 0.74 | |
| | Training can improve one's marketability and lead to a better job offer outside | | 0.84 | |
| Employee Engagement | Employment is well-defined, and they are structured to fully utilize employees' talents | 3.76 | 0.92 | 0.94 |
| | I am mentally prepared to meet the challenges of my job | | 0.80 | |
| | I am not too emotionally drained to give all to my job | | 0.72 | |
| | I am prepared, personally, to handle anything that comes my way at work | | 0.89 | |
| | I allow myself to focus on my work without any distractions | | 0.86 | |
| | I have the mental capacity to carry out the tasks associated with my job | | 0.88 | |
| Employee Engagement | My body feels prepared to start working | 3.76 | 0.86 | 0.94 |
| | I can preserve my mental energy by not stressing out about things outside of work | | 0.84 | |

the study’s metrics were well above the 0.6–0.7 threshold, which is considered acceptable. As seen in Table 2, the fact that the factor loadings were adequate and witnessed to be over the required cutoff of 0.60 demonstrates that the dependability prerequisites of the variables are acceptable overall. The Cronbach’s alpha value, an indicator of internal consistency, is greater than 0.7, which meets the reliability standards, as Nunnally (1978) stated. A Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin value of 0.77 and a sphericity result from the Bartlett test supported the statistically significant factorability requirements. HRM practices possess load coefficients ranging from 0.74 to 0.94 and an internal consistency value of 0.95, whereas employee engagement has factor loadings ranging from 0.72 to 0.89 and an alpha value of 0.94. Determining Cronbach’s alpha value for internal consistency is crucial for assessing the reliability and quality of measurement instruments, ensuring that collected data accurately reflects the underlying constructs, and drawing valid conclusions from research studies. After that, the correlation matrix was determined. This is a fundamental tool in data analysis that helps reveal underlying relationships, guide decision-making, and provide insights into potential causal relationships.

Additionally, the correlational matrix (Table 3) demonstrated a positive and statistically significant correlations between practices in HRM and

employee engagement. Table 4 summarizes the model and shows that a regression model was used. Employee engagement accounted for 87% of the variance in HRM practices, as measured by the correlation coefficient (R) of 0.93 and the square of correlation of 0.87.

Table 5 represents the results of the ANOVA analysis, indicating that HRM practices considerably impact employee engagement. The F ratio value indicates the model’s overall statistical significance, which is 2730.64 at $p < 0.001$. ANOVA analysis is conducted to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences among the means of multiple groups, which need to be compared efficiently and rigorously.

The degree of correlation between the variables presented in Table 6 was used to assess the study’s hypotheses. At a significance level of 0.001, the correlation coefficient between HRM practices and employee engagement is 1.01. To analyze the impact of gender on the association between HRM practices and worker participation, the study adopted the methodology proposed by Baron and Kenny (1986). This moderation analysis is a method used to examine how a third variable (moderator) influences the relationship between an independent variable and a dependent variable. It involves testing for an interaction effect and exploring how the relationship changes under different conditions of

Table 3. The constructs’ correlation matrix

| Construct | HRM Practices | Employee Engagement |
|---------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| HRM Practices | 1 | 0.93** |
| Employee Engagement | 0.93** | 1 |

Note: ** $p < 0.001$.

Table 4. Model summary

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | 0.93a | 0.87 | 0.87 | 0.41 |

Note: a Predictors: (Constant), HRM Practices.

Table 5. ANOVA analysis

| Model | Source of Variation | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|---------------------|----------------|-----|-------------|---------|-------|
| 1 | Regression | 469.74 | 1 | 469.74 | 2730.64 | 0.00b |
| | Residual | 70.19 | 408 | 0.17 | | |
| | Total | 539.93 | 409 | | | |

Note: b Predictors: (Constant), HRM Practices.

Table 6. Overview of hypotheses testing

| Interactions | Coefficient | t-values | Results |
|---|-------------|----------|-----------|
| HRM Practices → Employee Engagement (H1) | 1.01** | 52.25 | Supported |
| Gender×HRM → Practices → Employee Engagement (H2) | -0.07 | -1.09 | Rejected |

Note: **p < 0.001.

the moderator variable. The results found that the correlation coefficient value is not statistically significant, and no moderation effect is present. The data supported H1 and rejected H2.

4. DISCUSSION

This study found that HRM practices strongly influence the employee engagement of Indian unicorn startups, which is essential to achieving corporate goals. Effective HRM practices help startups to hire the right people who fit the company culture, vision, and values. The results demonstrated that the employees who feel their individual goals align with the company's aims are certainly more engaged and dedicated. This finding is consistent with Guest (2017). HRM practices focused on training and development yield positive outcomes for employees and organizations. By enhancing skills and employee engagement, employees become more satisfied and take increased ownership of their tasks. This could lead to heightened commitment and dedication (Wang et al., 2010). Effective HRM practices also involve consistent feedback and recognition, fostering a sense of value among employees, thereby motivating them to exert more effort. Providing equitable wages and attractive benefits through HRM practices makes employees feel valued and supported. This sense of worth and fair compensation fosters commitment and retention, as employees are more inclined to stay with a company that recognizes their contributions and provides appropriate remuneration (Huselid, 1995). HRM practices that encourage work-life balance can also reduce stress and increase employee engagement. People are more engaged and devoted when they have the flexibility to balance work and personal life (Guest, 2017). Effective HRM practices can significantly boost employee engagement in Indian startups. Startups may establish a positive work environment by applying excellent HRM practices. The observation that HRM practices are positively correlated with

employee engagement (with a coefficient value of 1.01 at $p < 0.001$) demonstrates this point emphatically. Past studies support these findings in other locations (Saks, 2006; Harter et al., 2002; Boselie et al., 2005; Breevaart et al., 2016).

HRM practices play a crucial role in fostering work engagement for employees of all genders. Employee engagement is positively linked to the implementation of HRM practices. Notably, the relationship between employee engagement and HRM practices remains consistent across genders, indicating that gender does not influence this connection (Salanova et al., 2005). This conclusion is supported by a correlation coefficient of -0.07 , which is both small in magnitude and statistically insignificant. The paper hints at how HRM practices encourage empowerment within startups, fostering a culture of openness and participation (Guest, 2002). Previous studies have also found no difference in the correlation between HRM practices and employee engagement based on gender (Salanova et al., 2005; Mohammad et al., 2017). These findings have substantial repercussions for firms and underline the necessity of implementing HRM practices that benefit all employees, irrespective of gender.

The study offers several theoretical implications that contribute to understanding the relationship between HRM practices, employee engagement, and the unique context of Indian unicorn startups. The previous literature has often explored how various HRM practices influence employee engagement rather than analyzing the effects of individual HRM practices on employee engagement (Saks, 2006; Bakker et al., 2011; Wang et al., 2015). The finding that gender does not moderate the relationship between HRM practices and employee engagement has theoretical implications for equality and diversity in the workplace. This suggests that well-designed HRM practices can be equally effective for both genders in driving engagement (Salanova et al., 2005; Mohammad et al., 2017).

Limited research studies have examined how HRM practices could affect the likelihood that workers at unicorn firms would be engaged (Mukul & Saini, 2021; Sharma, 2017; Krishnan et al., 2022). The study highlights the significant role of HRM practices in driving and sustaining employee engagement. This finding reinforces the theoretical foundation that suggests a strong alignment between effective HRM strategies and positive employee outcomes (Guest, 1997). This paper might provide a new viewpoint on the factors influencing employee engagement due to HRM policies and procedures. The study provides empirical evidence for the efficacy of HRM practices in the unique context of unicorn startups. This contributes to the ongoing dialogue about the applicability and effectiveness of HRM theories and practices in diverse organizational settings.

The paper offers several practical implications that can guide HR professionals in implementing HRM practices that enhance and sustain employee engagement within the context of Indian unicorn startups. These insights provide actionable strategies to create a motivated, committed, high-performing workforce contributing to the startup's growth and success. The findings of the

study provide helpful information for startup management to craft their HRM guidelines. They explicitly recommend that HRM practices are essential for rendering employees vibrant, committed, and passionate. Employees contribute significantly to the company's profitability and sustainability when they learn and use innovative methods, strategies, and tools. Businesses should invest in their people to boost employee dedication and loyalty. Employees with a solid connection to their employers will likely advocate for the assistance they need and put maximum effort into their work, contributing to their overall happiness and wellness. Organizations should consistently review their HRM practices to make sure they are promoting and maintaining employee engagement effectively. This involves ensuring fairness and equality in these practices. Organizations need to offer chances for employees to develop and learn. Establishing an environment of trust and respect is crucial. Moreover, organizations should actively listen to employee input and be willing to make adjustments based on their feedback. The research results can inspire administrators to implement initiatives that boost employee happiness and morale, positively impacting workplace productivity.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to understand the relationship between HR practices and employee engagement in the context of unicorn startups in India and determine if gender has a potential moderating effect on HRM practices and employee engagement. According to the findings, HRM practices significantly impact the employee engagement of unicorn firms with no moderating effect of gender. Effective HRM practices are pivotal in achieving and maintaining high engagement levels, aligning individuals with the startup's values, and enhancing commitment. The findings of the study showed a positive correlation between HRM practices and engagement, underscoring their significance. Equitable treatment, training, feedback, recognition, and work-life balance are vital in boosting engagement and fostering commitment. This relationship remains consistent across genders, underscoring inclusivity and mutual respect. This study shows the value of well-designed HRM practices in nurturing engaged workforces and promoting success, innovation, and diversity. Prioritizing employee engagement through strategic HRM approaches creates an environment where employees flourish, contributing to a harmonious workplace. The unicorn startups in India have deep insights from the study. They can implement effective HRM practices to engage their employees in various career development activities.

The study has applied convenience sampling, which has some limitations: it might not accurately represent the entire population, and therefore, findings might not generalize well to the larger group. Future research studies are recommended to implement more rigorous sampling methods. Also, it will be essential to collect data from a more significant number of participants using a bigger sample size in the future. In addition, future research has to consider the demographic features of the people who participate in the study and de-

termine the extent to which these qualities affect employees' work engagement levels due to standard HRM practices. Past research has shown differences in how HRM practices and employee engagement affect men and women. However, few other studies have shown no significant differences between males and females in employee engagement concerns. Future studies need to keep investigating this subject to have a deeper comprehension of the potential moderating effect that gender could have on this connection. This paper helps bridge an existing gap in knowledge by exploring the connection between HRM practices and employee engagement in this specific context. The study's outcomes offer valuable information to researchers and practitioners, enhancing their comprehension of the interplay between the variables.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

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Data curation: Chanchal Dey.

Formal analysis: Chanchal Dey, Sania Khan.

Funding acquisition: Sania Khan.

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