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THE MEDIATING POWER OF INNOVATION AND EMOTIONAL AGILITY ON EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT IN INDIA'S MSMEs

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Abstract

In the milieu of Indian "Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises" (MSME), this study travels around the complex relationships among "Employee Engagement" (EE), "Innovative Work Behavior" (IWB), "Emotional Intelligence" (EI), and "Perceived Organizational Support" (POS). The research has pinpointed a group of 300 workers from different MSMEs. It has been proven that employee engagement is at its highest when the organizational culture is creative. This research stresses the significance of emotional intelligence as an intermediary that promotes positive well-being effects more prominently among employees. Thus, these findings show that having a good attitude among the employees is the key to the success of Indian MSMEs. A cheerful workforce skilled in engagement, emotional intelligence, and innovation may be achieved by offering employees a fair and supportive environment that acknowledges their efforts. The inadequate training programs will eventually lead to the decline of the organization's performance and competitiveness. The outcomes of the study will help MSME key persons make the right decisions to position their enterprises for development and survival in the highly competitive business environment.

Keywords: Innovative Work Behavior, Employee Engagement, Emotional Intelligence, MSME, Organizational Support

1. Introduction

As per the Economic Survey of 2022, the Indian economy heavily relies on “Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises” (MSME), the main key which create jobs and significantly add to the economy. Understanding the significance of this sector, the government has started to take action to demonstrate its backing. They have devised various revival strategies, especially concerning environmental, social, and economic issues (Jain et al., 2023). Besides, MSMEs have problems, such as limited resources, unpredictable business environments, and intense rivalry from multinational corporations. These issues are the key to keeping the level of staff engagement high and constantly fostering innovation to guarantee an organization's growth to guarantee an organization's growth.

1.1 Problem Statement:

MSMEs in India usually require aid with problems like the lack of funds, a high rate of employee turnover, and obsolete technology infrastructure. These obstacles can prevent a business from creating an organizational culture that favours employee engagement and innovation. To stay competitive and respond to market changes, employees must be involved in all company operations and inspired by management to show creativity and innovation. Nevertheless, attaining this goal is difficult because of these companies' limitations.

As per Saks (2006), employee engagement is a mental state defined by energy, commitment, and absorption in the workplace. Studies have proved that employee engagement improves an organization's performance, for example, by increasing productivity, innovation, and profitability (Ahmad et al., 2015). An organization's culture, characterized by appreciation and support for individuals, has been recognized as a crucial element in fostering employee engagement (Eisenberger et al., 2002).

Existing literature has proved an association between “Employee Engagement” (EE) and “Perceived Organizational Support” (POS). Nevertheless, further study is required to walk around the rationale of “Emotional Intelligence” (EI) alongwith “Innovative Work Behavior” (IWB) as mediators in the liaison, which is especially relevant to Indian MSMEs. The study mainly deals with the more prominent companies in Western management. Hence, the understanding of the similar dynamics of the small-scale and the resource-constrained markets of the Indian MSMEs is not there. This research seeks to address the current need for more understanding by surveying the brunt of IWB and EI on customers' opinions.

2. Theoretical Backdrop

2.1 “Social Exchange Theory” (SET): The theory suggests that societal behaviour comes from the transactional processes and simultaneously reduces the negative and positive outcomes. When people realize that their organization identifies their hard work, they are more likely to return it by showing more dedication and participation (Blau, 1964). Moreover, this interdependent connection highlights the need for a supportive organisational environment to foster energy efficiency.

2.2 “Self-Determination Theory” (SDT): According to SDT human beings have three inherent cognitive needs: relatedness, competence, and autonomy. These requirements will likely increase internal motivation and engagement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Meeting the psychological needs of employees can be achieved by establishing a work environment that fosters feelings of autonomy, competence, and connection among employees. Consequently, this boosts the level of involvement of these employees.

2.3 Theories of Emotional Intelligence: The theories of EI highlight that the critical competencies for good interpersonal functioning and work performance are seeing, utilising, comprehending, and managing emotions. EI can positively affect stress management, cultivating social connections, and making superior decisions. These benefits can significantly influence individuals' EE and their capacity for innovative behaviours in the workplace (Goleman (1995); Mayer and Salovey (1990)).

2.4 Innovative Work Behaviour (IWB) Frameworks: Common IWB theories, such as those proposed by Janssen (2000), emphasise three critical stages of innovation: idea generation, promotion, and concept implementation. An organisational culture characterised by psychological safety creates an environment that encourages employees to engage in innovative behaviours. This study aspires to determine whether the combination of POS and EI intervenes the association between IWB and EE.

2.5 Recent Studies

2.5.1 EE and PO: Ahmed et al. (2021) highlighted that those employees with better organizational support are more engaged, as shown by their higher level of vigour, devotion, and absorption. Imran and Aldaas (2020) have also proved that POS is the main factor of EE in different organizations, including MSME.

2.5.2 POS, IWB, and EE: According to the works of Turki et al. (2023) and Jin and McDonald (2017), EE and POS make use of the (IWB) as a mediator. The research has proved that those organizations offering psychologically safe workplaces tend to have employees who are more likely to take risks and try out new ideas and other innovative behaviors. Institutionalizing those regulations increases workers' engagement since they feel appreciated and recognized.

2.5.3 POS, EI, and EE: On the other hand, the most current researches have also given validity to the impact of EI as a mediator between EE and POS. For instance, Gong (2020) and Alotaibi (2020) indicated that people with POS have the relevant wealth of complex skills and support to enable them to handle their emotions accurately. This highly developed EI prepares people to accept all the challenges they can face at work, interact well with others, and be more dedicated to their work roles. George et al. (2022) additionally showed those outcomes are related to the

fact that higher EI is the reason for higher EE, which in turn produces overall workplace satisfaction.

2.5.4 Cultural Context: According to Shukla(2015), in the Indian context, POS includes two critical factors, i.e., organizational trust and commitment, which are crucial for maintaining engagement. Chattopadhyay (2007) commented that emotional wellness and relationships with others are the most essential values in the Indian culture, and hence, EI is the key mediator. The present research goes beyond these cultural features to comprehensively analyze how POS, IWB, and EI interact to influence EE in Indian MSMEs.

2.5.5 IWB: In accordance with Alshaabani et al. (2021), personnel in organisations that foster a compassionate atmosphere are more leaning to connect in pioneering attitudes. The outcomes of the study support the idea that EI plays a crucial role in converting POS into IWB, hence improving EE.

3. Methodology of Research

3.1 Sample and Method: This study utilised convenience sampling to gather data from 300 employees in various MSMEs in India. The data was gathered from January to December 2022 using a self-administered questionnaire through online platforms and direct interaction. The data quality was ensured by checking the responses, and only the completed questionnaires were considered for the final analysis.

3.2 Sample Characteristics:

Age: The sample comprised 80 workers aged between 20 and 60, with a mean age of 35.

Gender: The gender ratio was almost the same between boys and girls, 52% and 48%, respectively.

Job Roles: The participants were from various job sources, such as technical staff (40%), administrative staff (30%), and managerial posts (30%). This type of diversity of job roles gives a full view of the organizational dynamics at different levels within MSMEs.

Experience: The employees' job experience was from 1 to 25 years old, and the average was ten years. Such a diversity of experience makes it possible to generalise findings through all stages of career development.

3.3 Measures

- An 8-item scale assessed employees' insight of their business' recognition of their performance for their well-being (Designed by Eisenberger et al., 2002).
- The study utilized the IWB scale, developed initially by Janssen in 2000. This scale comprised of 10 items and was employed to measure employee engagement in various aspects of idea generation, promotion, and execution.

- EI is assessed using the 15-item “Wong and Law Emotional Intelligence Scale” (WLEIS), which measures “empathy, motivation, self-regulation, self-awareness, and social skills”.
- The 9-item UWES evaluated the enthusiasm, dedication, and engagement levels of EE. All scales employed a range from "strongly disagree to strongly agree".

3.4 Data study: This research employed “SmartPLS 4”, a strategem based on (PLS-SEM). The researchers were performing experiments to assess the suggested connections.

4. Findings

4.1 Measurement Framework: The reliability of the measurement framework were found to be satisfactory, since Cronbach's α surpassed the acceptable threshold of 0.

4.2 Structural Framework: The outcomes of the framework established all the hypothesized connections (Figure 1). The association between the IWB and EI is statistically key ($\beta = 0.086$). In contrast, the relationship of IWB is even more significant ($\beta = 0.368$). Overall, the POS is a significant factor in EE ($\beta = 0.757$). In addition, the POS has a positive relationship with IWB ($\beta = 0.774$) and EI ($\beta = 0.712$).

4.3 Conceptual Model:

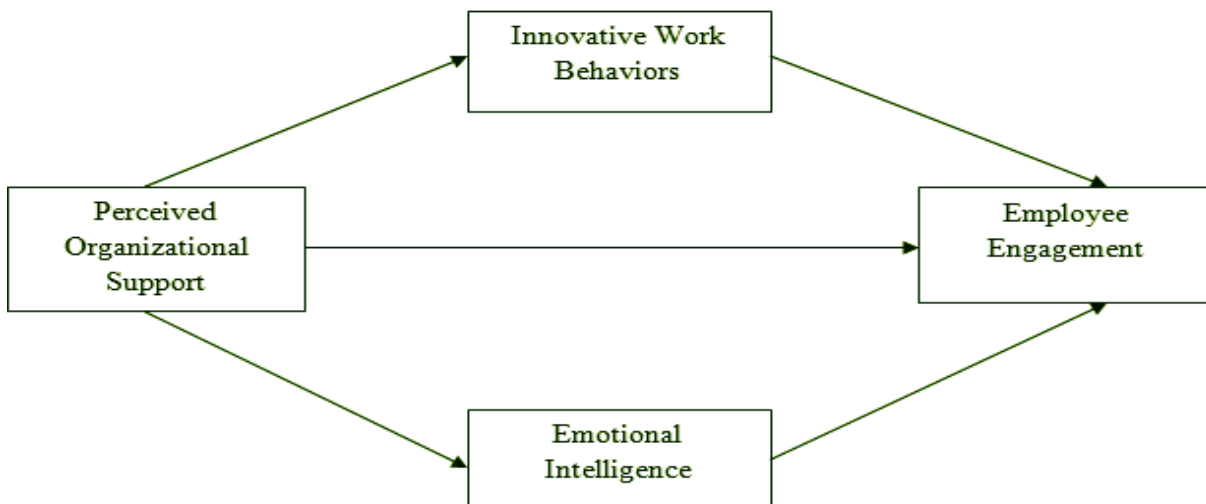


Figure 1. Conceptual Model Showing Relationships between POS, EE, IWB, and EI

Figure 1 visually represents the indirect and direct brunts of POS on EE through the mediating factors of IWB and EI. The arrows indicate the direction of influence, while the β values of the structural model results are labelled on the corresponding routes.

Chart 1 demonstrates that all the elements exhibit internal solid consistency. The measurements used in this analysis are trustworthy. All scales have “Average Variance Extracted

(AVE) values" (>0.5), showing strong convergent strength. This suggests that the items effectively measure the desired constructs.

Chart 1. Construct validity and reliability

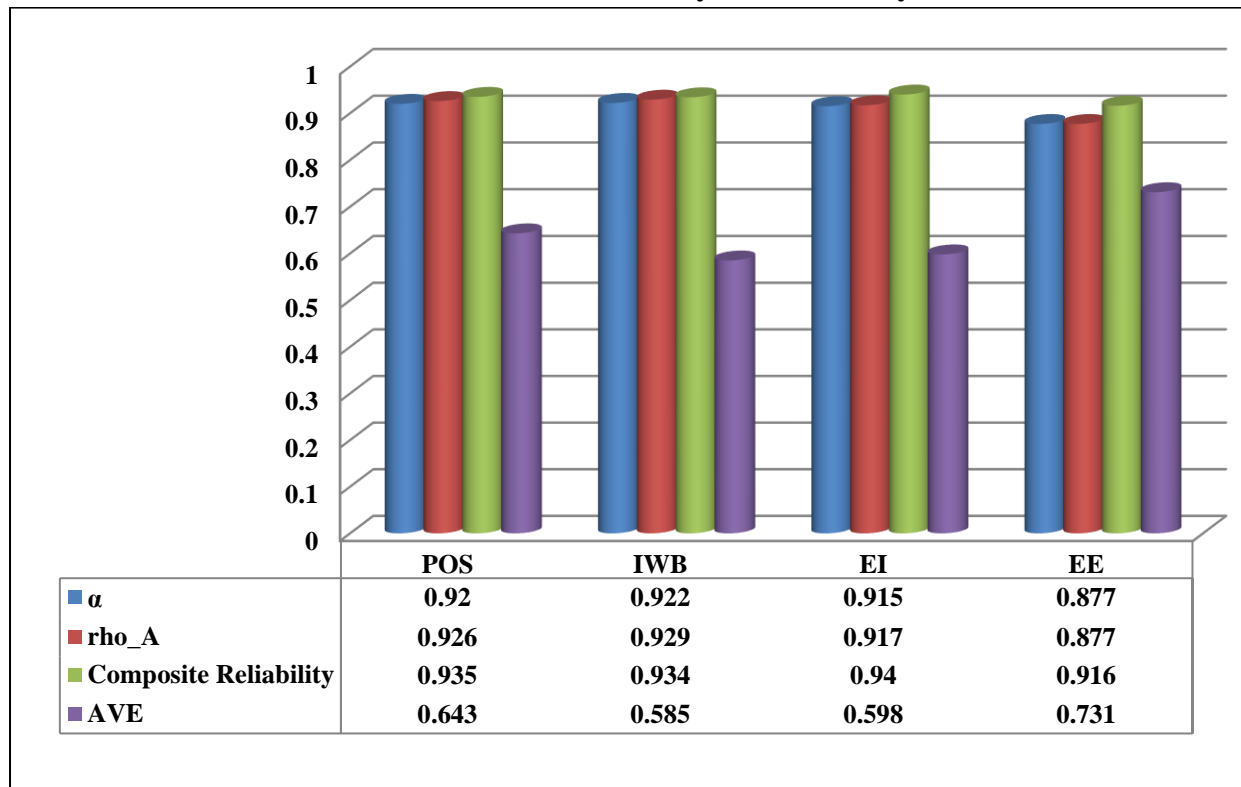


Table 1. Outer Loading

POS	OL	IWB	OL	EL	OL	EE	OL
POS1	0.816	IWB1	0.883	EI1	0.716	EEG1	0.790
POS2	0.896	IWB2	0.935	EI10	0.822	EEG2	0.822
POS3	0.880	IWB3	0.915	EI2	0.708	EEG3	0.794
POS4	0.827	IWB4	0.837	E3	0.775	EEG4	0.853
				E4	0.764	EEG5	0.849
				E5	0.701	EEG6	0.831
				E6	0.761	EEG7	0.713
				E7	0.795	EEG8	0.747

Table 1 presents the outer loadings (correlations between items and corresponding constructs) as shown below. Every outer sheath is above 0.70, means that the item is vital in measuring the construct it represents.

4.4 “Path Coefficients” (β) and “Significance Levels” (SL)

Table 2. β and SL

Relationship	“Standard Error” (SE)	(β)	p-value	t-value	Decision
POS -> EE	0.033	0.757	0.000	23.231	Supported
POS -> IWB	0.025	0.774	0.000	31.528	
POS -> EI	0.026	0.712	0.000	27.135	
EI -> EE	0.052	0.121	0.020	2.325	
IWB -> EE	0.057	0.476	0.000	8.417	
POS -> EI -> EE	0.038	0.086	0.023	2.279	
POS -> IWB -> EE	0.043	0.368	0.000	8.481	

Table 2 displays the β values, which indicate the path and magnitude of the relationships between the parameters included in the structural framework. The p-values ($p < 0.05$) suggest that these associations are statistically significant, implying their importance. This data set illustrates that POS is crucial in enhancing EE via direct and indirect channels, i.e. IWB and EI, i.e., workers who see their organization as one that promotes them will be more inclined to be engaged, innovative and emotionally intelligent. On the other hand, the EI and IWB partially intercede the results of POS on EE, consequently showing that the positive impact of POS on EE partly stems from its effect on employees' emotional intelligence and innovative work behaviour. The structural model visually displays the relationships and significance levels between the variables. Arrows represent the direction of influence, and numbers represent standardized path coefficients.

5. Discussion: The outcome of our research may represent irrefutable proof of the critical role of POS in the generation of EE, IWB and EI within Indian MSMEs. An enhanced organizational climate directly brings employee engagement to the next level and indirectly affects IWB and EI.

5.1 Cultural Analysis

5.1.1 Indian Cultural Context: This study's results are primarily essential for the Indian cultural context, where I values and rules. One effect of office behaviours on Indian culture is the importance of collectivism, family and hierarchy (Hofstede, 1980). Thus, these cultural values shape how employees expect and behave in the workplace.

Collectivism: In collectivist cultures like that of India, people generally cherish group-oriented goals more than personal ones. This cultural dimension will help boost POS because employees who feel appreciated will interact in a more dedicated and committed manner. Bonds among co-workers and mutual support are the key to creating a healthy and explorative working environment.

Familial Ties and Respect for Authority: Indian workplaces are commonly the offshoot of typical family structures in India, which have a culture of respect for seniority and authority. POS is. Therefore, a critical component in fostering EE is when employees who believe their

ideas have been considered are more willing to work hard and be committed. Also, apart from its importance in dealing with these relationships, EI is one of the instruments which promotes better communication and good interpersonal relationships.

Interpersonal Relationships and Emotional Well-being: Emotional intelligence is highly relevant in the Indian culture, which emphasizes emotion and emotional well-being significantly. The capacity to deal well with emotions and have peaceful relationships reflects the value of empathy and social harmony as key cultural attributes. Such cultural alignment increases the capacity of EI to respond to EE and IWB challenges, as employees are better able to tackle workplace difficulties and offer creativity.

5.2 Practical Applications

The implication from the study also has widespread effects among the managers and practitioners in the Indian MSME firms. Based on building a favourable world that contains principles of respect, fairness, and acknowledgement of prized work, the organizations can now have more unique and knowledgeable work agencies.

5.2.1 Employee Support Programs: Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has introduced varied employee support frameworks, including the "Maitree" program, which comprises holistic well-being, positive community building and harmonized work-life balance. These schemes create a safe environment for employees, boosting their engagement and commitment (TCS, nd).

5.2.2 Emotional Intelligence Training: Organizations can develop EQ training programs to empower employees to enhance their EQ. These activities are helpful for teaching staff emotional self-awareness, empathy, and stress management, which help them deal successfully with workplace challenges. Likewise, Infosys has been training its leaders in EI in their management development programs, resulting in increased effectiveness of their management and additional improved relationships within the company (Infosys, n.d.).

5.2.3 Innovation Encouragement Programs: 3M's "Innovation Day" is the opportunity for employees to show their ideas and solutions to innovate operations. Such a program is designed to create and sustain a culture of innovation and psychological safety as it points towards an environment where stepping out of the comfort zone and trying new things has no negative consequences (3M, n.d.). MSMEs can use The said projects freely as recruitment campaigns for the IWB.

5.2.4 Recognition and Reward Systems: Exploring place recognition and reward programs that consider and celebrate employees' contributions as a critical role goes a long way in POS. Often, employees feel encouraged by acquiring regular feedback, awards, and public recognition, and they tend to be more involved with the job. Organizations such as HCL Technologies have set

the pace with the awards and appraisal systems to enhance the workers' morale and mainstream involvement (HCL Technologies n.d).

5.2.5 Open Communication Channels: To achieve frequent communication where people could easily participate and express their points of view, thus instigating POS and IWB. An open society, a suggestion box, and a listening policy could be employed to create a value-based work environment. Wipro's Integrity, Empowerment, and Learning values perfectly manifest open communication and joint decision-making between management and employees (Wipro, n.d.).

5.3 Limitations

- The convenience sampling method may reduce the possibility of drawing standard inferences since the sample may not encompass the diverse population of MSME employees in India.
- The reliance on self-reported responses, and therefore, the tendency of respondents to answer as they would expect, could be considered a source of bias and inaccuracy, referred to as social compliance bias, in the data.

5.4 Future Research Directions

- Build comparative studies across different cultural environments to test out the universal nature of POS to EE, IWB and EI.
- Put into longitudinal research projects to follow alterations of POS, EE, IWB, and EI as this cohort's core cadre matures to acquire causal outcomes.
- Develop and run trials of pilot programs in different MSMEs to determine the validity of the theoretical findings in real-life working circumstances. They could thus set a tremendous level of employee engagement and be an environment for innovation.

6. Conclusion

Therefore, the present study stresses the central chore of having POS in promoting EE and innovative practices within Indian MSME companies. Thus, by demonstrating the intermediary effect of intellectual tolerance and creative work habits, the results give an instruction manual for practitioners to create a collaborative work culture. Ultimately, the two models meet employees' social, psychological, and community needs, leading to an organization's effective functioning and a heightened competitive edge.

The research results are relevant not only to the Indian economy, where MSMEs are critical for employment and economic growth but also to the whole world. Through the proposed plan, MSMEs will build a solid basis and sustain a perfect working environment that would stimulate work output and creativity, thus leading to general economic growth. Moreover, the study increases the global knowledge of employee engagement in SME organizations and

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provides a culturally distinctive perspective by virtue; the findings can be insightful for upcoming research in varied types of organizations.

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