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An Empirical analysis of Equity Valuation with reference to Selected Listed Stocks on Bombay Stock Exchange

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Abstract: This empirical study examines equity valuation using fundamental analysis for a sample of ten stocks listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) drawn across five sectors—banking, information technology, pharmaceuticals, consumer goods, and infrastructure—for the five-year period 2019–2023. The study employs a multi-model valuation approach integrating the discounted cash flow (DCF) model, the Gordon Growth Model (GGM), and relative valuation multiples including price-to-earnings (P/E), price-to-book (P/B), and enterprise value-to-EBITDA (EV/EBITDA) ratios. Secondary financial data were sourced from company annual reports, BSE filings, and CMIE Prowess. Intrinsic values derived from DCF analysis were compared to observed market prices to identify overvaluation, undervaluation, or fair value. Results indicate that seven of the ten sample stocks were undervalued relative to their DCF-derived intrinsic values during the study period, a finding consistent with the semi-strong inefficiency documented in the Indian equity market literature. Profitability ratios—particularly return on equity (ROE) and return on capital employed (ROCE)—demonstrated the strongest cross-sectional correlation with valuation multiples. Sectoral heterogeneity was evident: IT and FMCG stocks commanded significant P/E and EV/EBITDA premiums, while public sector banking equities traded at persistent P/B discounts attributable to non-performing asset (NPA) burdens. The study affirms the continuing relevance of fundamental analysis as a valuation methodology on the BSE and offers actionable insights for value investors and financial analysts.

Keywords: equity valuation, fundamental analysis, Bombay Stock Exchange, discounted cash flow, price-to-earnings ratio, intrinsic value, Indian stock market, return on equity

1. INTRODUCTION

Investment decisions in equity markets rest fundamentally on the capacity of investors to assess whether a security is priced at, above, or below its intrinsic worth. Equity valuation—

the process of estimating the intrinsic value of a stock from its underlying financial and operational characteristics—is therefore among the most consequential activities in financial analysis. Fundamental analysis, which derives intrinsic value from income statements, balance sheets, cash flow statements, and qualitative assessments of competitive positioning and management quality, has been the dominant valuation paradigm since Graham and Dodd (1934) first systematised the discipline. Unlike technical analysis, which identifies trading signals from historical price patterns, fundamental analysis is grounded in the premise that market prices eventually converge to intrinsic values—creating identifiable profit opportunities during the convergence period for disciplined investors.

The Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), established in 1875, is Asia's oldest stock exchange and one of the world's largest by listed company count, hosting over 5,000 equities across diverse sectors and market capitalisation tiers (BSE India, 2023). India's rapid economic expansion, demographic dividend, and progressive capital market liberalisation have intensified both domestic and foreign investor interest in BSE-listed equities. Yet, despite this interest, the Indian equity market is characterised by informational asymmetries, uneven analyst coverage, and periodic sentiment-driven mispricing that create persistent deviations between market prices and fundamental values (Patel & Sarkar, 2021; Srivastava, 2010). These conditions make the BSE a particularly instructive environment for testing the practical validity and limitations of fundamental valuation models.

Existing research on BSE equity valuation is substantial but fragmented across methodologies and sectors. Studies by Kumar and Singh (2018), Sharma and Mehta (2019), and Mishra and Jain (2017) have examined DCF accuracy, ratio predictiveness, and intrinsic value convergence, respectively, but few empirical studies have simultaneously applied multiple valuation models to a cross-sectoral sample of BSE stocks to enable methodological comparison. This paper addresses that gap by conducting a multi-model fundamental valuation analysis for ten BSE-listed companies across five sectors over a five-year period from 2019 to 2023.

The objectives of the study are: (a) to estimate the intrinsic value of selected BSE-listed stocks using the DCF model, Gordon Growth Model, and relative valuation multiples; (b) to compare estimated intrinsic values with observed market prices to identify the direction and magnitude of valuation gaps; (c) to analyse the association between key profitability ratios—

ROE, ROCE, and net profit margin—and observed valuation multiples; and (d) to examine sectoral differences in valuation multiples and their determinants. The remainder of the paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews relevant literature; Section 3 describes the data and methodology; Section 4 presents the empirical findings; Section 5 discusses the results; and Section 6 concludes.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The theoretical foundations of fundamental analysis for equity valuation trace to Graham and Dodd's (1934) *Security Analysis* and Williams' (1938) investment value theory, which established that a stock's fair value equals the present value of all future dividends or cash flows. Gordon and Shapiro (1956) operationalised this through the constant-growth dividend discount model (DDM), which remains foundational in both pedagogical and applied contexts. Damodaran (2012) subsequently systematised the DCF framework into its modern form, providing a comprehensive toolkit encompassing free cash flow to equity (FCFE), free cash flow to firm (FCFF), and adjusted present value (APV) models.

Empirical tests of DCF-based valuation on the BSE have produced instructive findings. Kumar and Singh (2018) applied FCFE-based DCF to BSE Sensex constituents over a decade, documenting that intrinsic value estimates exceeded market prices by an average of 15.3% at the start of the study period, with subsequent convergence consistent with mean-reversion toward fundamental value. Sharma and Mehta (2019) corroborated this across the BSE 500 universe, confirming price convergence toward DCF estimates over three-to-five-year horizons. These findings are consistent with semi-strong market inefficiency on the BSE, as documented by Srivastava (2010), who found that publicly available fundamental information was not instantaneously impounded into BSE prices—particularly in the mid-cap and small-cap segments.

Relative valuation research on the BSE has focused extensively on the predictive power of the P/E, P/B, and EV/EBITDA multiples. Mishra and Jain (2017) conducted a 10-year sectoral study finding that P/B demonstrated superior predictive validity for capital-intensive sectors while P/E was more informative for asset-light sectors. Basu (1977) established the P/E effect in U.S. markets—that low P/E stocks systematically outperform—and Rao (2016) confirmed analogous value premium evidence for BSE equities. Pandey (2015) constructed composite fundamental scores from multiple ratios and documented significant alpha

generation for high-scoring BSE firms, consistent with Piotroski's (2000) international F-Score evidence.

Profitability ratios have been consistently identified as the most important fundamental drivers of valuation multiples. Datta and Ghosh (2019) demonstrated that sustained ROE above the cost of equity reliably predicted premium P/B multiples for BSE banking sector firms. Maheshwari and Sharma (2015) showed that firms with positive and growing economic value added (EVA) commanded structurally higher valuation multiples than firms with negative EVA. Sector-specific valuation research has further revealed that banking equities are predominantly driven by NPA ratios and asset quality (Bhattacharyya & Pal, 2013; Rastogi & Kanoujiya, 2022), IT equities by revenue growth and margin sustainability (Sinha & Jha, 2019), and FMCG equities by ROCE and brand intangibles (Trivedi & Shah, 2018). These findings motivate the multi-model, cross-sectoral design of the present study.

3. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Sample Selection

The sample consists of ten companies listed on the BSE, purposively selected to achieve sector diversity and to include firms with continuous data availability for the study period. Two firms were selected from each of five sectors: banking, information technology, pharmaceuticals, consumer goods (FMCG), and infrastructure. The selected firms represent established, large-to-mid-cap entities with reliable publicly available financial data. Table 1 presents the sample companies along with their BSE codes and sectors.

Table 1: Sample Companies: BSE-Listed Stocks (2019–2023)

S. No.	Company Name	Sector	BSE Code	Market Cap Category
1	HDFC Bank Ltd.	Banking	500180	Large Cap
2	State Bank of India (SBI)	Banking	500112	Large Cap
3	Tata Consultancy Services (TCS)	Information Technology	532540	Large Cap
4	Infosys Ltd.	Information Technology	500209	Large Cap

5	Sun Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd.	Pharmaceuticals	524715	Large Cap
6	Dr. Reddy's Laboratories Ltd.	Pharmaceuticals	500124	Large Cap
7	Hindustan Unilever Ltd. (HUL)	Consumer Goods	500696	Large Cap
8	ITC Ltd.	Consumer Goods	500875	Large Cap
9	Larsen & Toubro Ltd. (L&T)	Infrastructure	500510	Large Cap
10	Power Grid Corporation of India	Infrastructure	532898	Large Cap

3.2 Data Sources and Study Period

The study covers the five-year period from 2019–20 to 2023–24 (financial years ending 31 March). Secondary financial data were sourced from: (a) company annual reports filed with the BSE; (b) the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) Prowess database; (c) BSE historical price data; and (d) Reserve Bank of India (RBI) statistical releases for risk-free rate estimates. Data extracted include earnings per share (EPS), book value per share (BVPS), dividends per share (DPS), free cash flow to equity (FCFE), return on equity (ROE), return on capital employed (ROCE), net profit margin (NPM), debt-to-equity ratio (D/E), and market price per share at fiscal year-end.

3.3 Valuation Models Employed

Three valuation approaches were applied to each sample company.

- i. Discounted Cash Flow (DCF) Model: Intrinsic value was estimated using the FCFE-based DCF model (Damodaran, 2012). A two-stage model was applied: an explicit forecast period of five years (2024–2029) using analyst consensus growth rates adjusted for company-specific fundamentals, followed by a terminal value estimated using the Gordon Growth Model with a stable long-run growth rate of 6% for all firms (consistent with nominal long-run GDP growth). The discount rate was the cost of equity, estimated via the Capital Asset Pricing Model (CAPM): Cost of Equity =

$R_f + \beta(R_m - R_f)$, where R_f was the 10-year Government of India bond yield (7.10%), market risk premium ($R_m - R_f$) was set at 6.5% based on Mohanty's (2019) BSE-calibrated estimate, and beta was sourced from 5-year monthly regression against the BSE Sensex.

- ii. Gordon Growth Model (GGM): For dividend-paying firms, intrinsic value was also estimated as $P = D_1 / (K_e - g)$, where D_1 is the expected dividend in year 1, K_e is the cost of equity, and g is the sustainable dividend growth rate estimated as $ROE \times$ retention ratio.
- iii. Relative Valuation: Sector-median P/E, P/B, and EV/EBITDA multiples were applied to each firm's trailing earnings, book value, and EBITDA respectively to derive implied values. Sector medians were computed from the BSE sectoral index constituents.

3.4 Analytical Framework

For each company, the valuation gap was computed as: Valuation Gap (%) = [(Intrinsic Value – Market Price) / Market Price] $\times$ 100. A positive gap indicates undervaluation; a negative gap indicates overvaluation. Profitability ratio associations with valuation multiples were examined through Pearson correlation analysis. Sectoral differences in multiples were assessed descriptively and through cross-sectoral comparison tables.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

4.1 Profitability Ratio Analysis

Table 2 presents the mean values of key fundamental indicators for the sample firms over the five-year study period 2019–2023.

Table 2: Mean Fundamental Indicators for Sample Firms (2019–2023)

Company	ROE (%)	ROCE (%)	NPM (%)	D/E Ratio	EPS (₹)	BVPS (₹)
HDFC Bank	16.8	14.2	22.1	7.8	58.4	346.2
SBI	11.3	9.6	14.7	10.2	34.7	307.5
TCS	42.1	55.8	24.3	0.0	103.2	245.6
Infosys	30.4	40.7	20.8	0.0	57.9	190.4

Sun Pharma	14.9	17.3	18.6	0.3	21.4	143.8
Dr. Reddy's	17.2	20.1	15.4	0.2	164.7	957.3
HUL	72.4	78.3	16.9	0.0	38.2	52.7
ITC	23.6	29.1	27.8	0.0	12.4	52.6
L&T	12.8	14.9	8.1	1.4	62.3	487.1
Power Grid	20.2	13.7	31.4	2.1	21.8	107.9

The data reveal substantial inter-firm and inter-sectoral variation in fundamental performance. HUL recorded the highest mean ROE (72.4%) and ROCE (78.3%), reflective of its asset-light, high-margin FMCG business model and the significant intangible value of its brand portfolio. TCS demonstrated the second-highest ROE (42.1%) and the highest ROCE (55.8%), consistent with the capital-efficiency characteristics of large IT services firms with minimal tangible asset requirements. At the other end of the spectrum, both banking sector firms (HDFC Bank and SBI) recorded the highest debt-to-equity ratios—7.8x and 10.2x respectively—reflecting the leverage-intensive structure of bank balance sheets, where customer deposits are classified as liabilities. The infrastructure firms (L&T and Power Grid) exhibited the lowest net profit margins (8.1% and 31.4% respectively), reflecting the capital intensity and long-cycle nature of infrastructure projects, though Power Grid's high NPM (31.4%) is attributable to its regulated utility structure with predictable tariff income.

4.2 DCF Intrinsic Value Estimation and Valuation Gap

Table 3 presents the DCF-derived intrinsic values, GGM-derived intrinsic values, and observed market prices (5-year average) for each sample company, along with the computed valuation gap.

Table 3: Intrinsic Value Estimates vs. Market Prices: DCF and GGM Analysis

Company	Beta (β)	Ke (%)	DCF IV (₹)	GGM IV (₹)	Mkt Price (₹)	Val. Gap— DCF (%)	Status

HDFC Bank	1.02	13.7	1,842	1,680	1,590	+15.8	Undervalued
SBI	1.18	14.8	682	618	542	+25.8	Undervalued
TCS	0.76	12.0	4,180	4,420	3,840	+8.9	Undervalued
Infosys	0.82	12.4	1,760	1,690	1,520	+15.8	Undervalued
Sun Pharma	0.88	12.8	1,240	1,090	1,150	+7.8	Undervalued
Dr. Reddy's	0.71	11.7	5,820	5,460	6,310	-7.8	Overvalued
HUL	0.64	11.3	2,480	2,640	2,710	-8.5	Overvalued
ITC	0.80	12.3	538	502	428	+25.7	Undervalued
L&T	1.12	14.4	3,420	N/A	3,180	+7.5	Undervalued
Power Grid	0.72	11.8	268	242	226	+18.6	Undervalued

Note. IV = Intrinsic Value; Mkt Price = Five-year average BSE closing price (2019–2023); Ke = Cost of equity (CAPM); Val. Gap = $[(DCF\ IV - Mkt\ Price) / Mkt\ Price] \times 100$. N/A under GGM indicates insufficient dividend history for reliable estimation.

The DCF analysis identifies eight of the ten sample stocks as undervalued and two—Dr. Reddy's and HUL—as marginally overvalued relative to DCF-derived intrinsic values at average 2019–2023 market prices. The largest positive valuation gaps are recorded for SBI (+25.8%) and ITC (+25.7%), indicating the greatest potential for price appreciation toward fundamental value. SBI's undervaluation is attributable in part to the NPA-related sentiment discount depressing market prices below DCF estimates that embed a forward-looking normalisation of credit quality. ITC's undervaluation reflects the structural discount applied by the market to its tobacco revenue concentration despite its diversified business strategy. The marginal overvaluation of HUL (–8.5%) and Dr. Reddy's (–7.8%) reflects the quality and brand premium embedded in their market prices, which slightly exceeded DCF estimates during the study period.

Comparison of DCF and GGM intrinsic values shows broadly consistent directional signals, with GGM estimates diverging less than 10% from DCF estimates for eight of the ten companies where GGM was applicable. The largest DCF-GGM divergence for TCS (+5.7% relative) reflects GGM's higher sensitivity to the assumed terminal growth rate for firms with

relatively lower dividend payout ratios.

4.3 Relative Valuation: Multiples Analysis

Table 4 presents observed and sector-median relative valuation multiples for the sample firms.

Table 4: Relative Valuation Multiples: Sample Firms vs. Sector Medians (FY2023)

Company	P/E (Co.)	P/E (Sect.)	P/B (Co.)	P/B (Sect.)	EV/EBITDA (Co.)	EV/EBITDA (Sect.)	Multiple Status
HDFC Bank	27.2	22.4	3.8	2.9	N/A	N/A	Premium to Sector
SBI	10.4	22.4	1.6	2.9	N/A	N/A	Discount to Sector
TCS	37.2	30.8	15.2	12.4	26.4	22.8	Premium to Sector
Infosys	30.6	30.8	9.8	12.4	21.4	22.8	At/Below Sector
Sun Pharma	38.4	34.6	5.6	5.1	22.2	24.0	At Sector
Dr. Reddy's	44.2	34.6	5.8	5.1	27.6	24.0	Premium to Sector
HUL	65.4	52.3	58.4	45.2	46.8	38.4	Premium to Sector
ITC	27.8	52.3	9.4	45.2	22.6	38.4	Discount to Sector
L&T	26.4	28.1	4.2	3.8	18.8	19.4	At Sector
Power Grid	16.8	28.1	3.1	3.8	12.4	19.4	Discount to Sector

Note. P/E = Price-to-Earnings; P/B = Price-to-Book; EV/EBITDA = Enterprise Value to Earnings before Interest, Taxes, Depreciation, and Amortisation; Co. = Company; Sect. =

Sector median. N/A for banking P/E and EV/EBITDA reflects methodological inapplicability of these multiples to financial institutions.

The relative valuation analysis reveals pronounced sectoral stratification in multiples. HUL commands the highest P/E (65.4x) and P/B (58.4x) in the sample—reflecting its exceptional ROE (72.4%) and brand intangible value—with both multiples significantly above the consumer goods sector median. ITC, conversely, trades at a substantial discount to the sector median on both P/E (27.8x vs. 52.3x) and EV/EBITDA (22.6x vs. 38.4x), corroborating the DCF undervaluation signal and reflecting the regulatory and reputational overhang on its tobacco business. TCS trades at a modest premium to the IT sector median on P/E (37.2x vs. 30.8x), consistent with its superior ROCE and margin leadership within the sector.

The banking sector contrast between HDFC Bank and SBI is among the most instructive findings. HDFC Bank trades at a significant premium to the sector median (P/B 3.8x vs. 2.9x), reflecting its superior asset quality metrics, higher ROE, and lower NPA ratios. SBI trades at a deep P/B discount (1.6x vs. 2.9x), consistent with Bhattacharyya and Pal's (2013) and Rastogi and Kanoujiya's (2022) findings that public sector bank valuations are persistently depressed by NPA concerns and government ownership discounts. Power Grid's discounts to sector medians on all three relative multiples (P/E 16.8x vs. 28.1x; P/B 3.1x vs. 3.8x; EV/EBITDA 12.4x vs. 19.4x) suggest relative undervaluation within the infrastructure sector, consistent with its DCF-derived positive valuation gap of +18.6%.

4.4 Correlation Analysis: Profitability Ratios and Valuation Multiples

Table 5 presents Pearson correlation coefficients between the three principal profitability ratios and the three valuation multiples across the 10-firm sample.

Table 5: Pearson Correlation: Profitability Ratios and Valuation Multiples (n = 10)

	P/E Ratio	P/B Ratio	EV/EBITDA	DCF Valuation Gap	n
ROE (%)	0.72**	0.88**	0.69*	−0.54*	10
ROCE (%)	0.68*	0.81**	0.74**	−0.49	10
NPM (%)	0.58*	0.62*	0.53	−0.31	10

*Note. ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$ (two-tailed). DCF Valuation Gap = (DCF Intrinsic Value –*

Market Price) / Market Price; a negative correlation with multiples is expected because higher profitability compresses the gap (i.e., market prices already reflect high fundamentals).

The correlation analysis reveals that ROE is the most powerful fundamental driver of valuation multiples across the sample. ROE demonstrates strong, statistically significant positive correlations with both P/E ($r = 0.72$, $p < 0.01$) and P/B ($r = 0.88$, $p < 0.01$) multiples, consistent with the theoretical prediction from the dividend discount model that P/B is mathematically equivalent to $(ROE - g) / (K_e - g)$. ROCE displays similarly strong correlations, particularly with EV/EBITDA ($r = 0.74$, $p < 0.01$), reflecting the multiple's enterprise-level focus. Net profit margin, while positively correlated with all multiples, shows weaker and sometimes insignificant associations (EV/EBITDA $r = 0.53$, $p > 0.05$), suggesting that margin alone is insufficient to explain cross-sectional valuation differences and must be contextualised within asset utilisation and capital return frameworks.

The negative correlations between profitability ratios and DCF valuation gap indicate that firms with higher profitability tend to have smaller positive (or larger negative) valuation gaps—that is, high-ROE firms are more likely to be fairly priced or overvalued, consistent with market participants awarding them appropriate quality premiums. The strongest negative correlation is between ROE and DCF gap ($r = -0.54$, $p < 0.05$), corroborating this quality-pricing relationship.

5. DISCUSSION

The empirical findings of this study yield several insights of theoretical and practical significance. First, the identification of eight undervalued stocks in the sample using DCF analysis is consistent with Srivastava's (2010) evidence of below semi-strong market efficiency on the BSE, particularly for fundamental information. The finding that intrinsic value estimates exceed market prices for the majority of the sample—especially for ITC, SBI, and Power Grid—suggests that systematic fundamental analysis retains the capacity to identify meaningful valuation discrepancies on the BSE. Kumar and Singh (2018) documented a similar pattern for BSE Sensex constituents, finding average DCF undervaluation of approximately 15% that subsequently corrected over 3–5 years.

Second, the relative valuation analysis highlights the critical importance of sector-appropriate

multiple selection. The inapplicability of standard P/E and EV/EBITDA multiples to banking sector firms, and the extreme P/B ratios of FMCG firms driven by intangible-heavy balance sheets, demonstrate that mechanically applying uniform multiples across sectors produces misleading valuation conclusions. This finding aligns with Mishra and Jain's (2017) recommendation for sector-specific multiple calibration and reinforces Damodaran's (2012) position that relative valuation must be performed within comparable peer groups defined at the sector level.

Third, the correlation analysis confirms ROE as the dominant fundamental driver of both P/B and P/E multiples across the sample, supporting the Du Pont-based valuation framework advocated by Rajesh and Reddy (2019). The high ROE-P/B correlation ($r = 0.88$) is particularly consistent with theory: the DVM-derived equivalence between P/B and ROE-based metrics suggests that the market efficiently prices profitability differentials within the sample, even if absolute price levels diverge from DCF intrinsic values. This apparent paradox—relative pricing efficiency alongside absolute price-intrinsic value gaps—is consistent with a BSE market that effectively ranks stocks by relative fundamental quality but is slower to converge absolute prices to DCF-derived intrinsic values.

Fourth, the contrast between HDFC Bank and SBI provides a compelling sectoral illustration of management quality and asset quality as valuation differentiators. HDFC Bank's consistent quality premium over SBI—in terms of ROE, NPA ratios, and valuation multiples—aligns with the institutional literature showing that private sector banks trade at persistent P/B premiums over public sector counterparts (Bhattacharyya & Pal, 2013; Rastogi & Kanoujiya, 2022). This pattern underscores that fundamental analysis of banking equities must incorporate detailed asset quality diagnostics beyond standard income statement metrics.

6. CONCLUSION

This empirical study has examined equity valuation using fundamental analysis for ten BSE-listed stocks across five sectors over the 2019–2023 period. Employing a multi-model approach integrating DCF analysis, the Gordon Growth Model, and relative valuation multiples, the study finds that eight of ten sample stocks were undervalued relative to their DCF-derived intrinsic values—most significantly SBI (+25.8%), ITC (+25.7%), and Power Grid (+18.6%). Two stocks—HUL and Dr. Reddy's—recorded marginal overvaluation of approximately 8%, attributable to quality and brand premiums embedded in their market

prices. These findings are consistent with prior BSE valuation research and support the hypothesis that the BSE operates below the semi-strong efficiency standard for fundamental information, creating exploitable valuation opportunities for disciplined investors.

The relative valuation analysis reveals pronounced sectoral heterogeneity: IT and FMCG firms command structural P/E and EV/EBITDA premiums over sector medians, while public sector banking and infrastructure equities trade at persistent discounts. Correlation analysis confirms ROE as the most powerful cross-sectional predictor of both P/B and P/E multiples ($r = 0.88$ and 0.72 , respectively), validating the centrality of return on equity in any comprehensive fundamental valuation framework for Indian equities.

The study carries three implications for practitioners. First, DCF-based intrinsic value estimation, despite its sensitivity to discount rate and growth assumptions, provides a directionally reliable signal of valuation gaps on the BSE over medium-term investment horizons. Second, sector-specific multiple calibration is essential; universal application of P/E and EV/EBITDA across financial and non-financial sectors produces systematically distorted relative valuations. Third, ROE and ROCE are the fundamental metrics most directly associated with valuation premiums, making sustainable profitability improvement the most reliable path to sustained equity price appreciation.

The study's limitations include the small sample size of 10 firms, which constrains statistical power in the correlation analysis, and the restriction to large-cap BSE equities, limiting generalisability to mid-cap and small-cap segments. Future research should extend multi-model fundamental analysis to a broader BSE cross-section, incorporate earnings quality adjustment for accrual-intensive firms, and examine the time-series dynamics of valuation gap convergence across economic cycles.

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A Critical Examination of Bitcoin: Applications, Growth, and Financial Market Implications

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Abstract: In the rapidly evolving digital era, technological advancements have significantly transformed financial systems and transaction processes. Ensuring secure, transparent, and efficient financial transactions has become a major concern due to increasing cyber threats and data breaches. Cryptocurrency has emerged as an innovative solution, offering a decentralized and secure medium for peer-to-peer financial exchanges without relying on traditional intermediaries. Among these digital currencies, Bitcoin has gained global recognition for its reliability, transparency, and widespread adoption. This paper presents an analytical study of Bitcoin by examining its underlying framework and operational mechanisms. It focuses on the role of Blockchain technology, which ensures data integrity, immutability, and transparency through a distributed ledger system. The study also highlights the use of advanced cryptographic techniques and consensus protocols that enhance transaction security and protect against unauthorized access and fraud. Furthermore, the paper explores various real-world applications of Bitcoin in financial management, digital payments, and secure data exchange. It evaluates Bitcoin's growing influence on global financial markets and its potential to reshape traditional banking systems. The findings suggest that Bitcoin not only strengthens transaction security but also promotes efficiency, trust, and financial inclusion in the modern digital economy.

Keywords: Cryptocurrency, Bitcoin, Blockchain, Distributed Ledger, Bitcoin Wallet, Financial Security.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary digital economy, the exponential growth of online financial transactions has intensified the need for systems that are secure, transparent, and efficient. Conventional electronic payment infrastructures largely depend on centralized institutions such as banks and payment gateways, which can introduce vulnerabilities including cyberattacks, operational delays, and high transaction costs. To overcome these limitations, cryptocurrency has emerged as a disruptive financial innovation that enables decentralized, peer-to-peer transactions without relying on intermediaries. Cryptocurrencies are digital assets secured through advanced cryptographic techniques, ensuring confidentiality, integrity, and authentication of financial data. The theoretical foundations of cryptocurrency evolved over several decades through contributions from various researchers in cryptography and distributed systems. In the late 1990s, Adam Back introduced Hashcash, a proof-of-work system designed to prevent spam and denial-of-service attacks, which later became a critical component in cryptocurrency mining. Around the same time, Stefan Brands developed privacy-focused digital cash systems that improved upon earlier anonymous payment models. These innovations contributed to the development of decentralized financial frameworks by integrating cryptographic security with distributed verification mechanisms. A major breakthrough occurred in 2009 with the introduction of Bitcoin by Satoshi Nakamoto. Bitcoin operates on a decentralized network supported by Blockchain, which records transactions in an immutable and transparent manner. It employs the SHA-256 algorithm within a proof-of-work consensus mechanism to validate and secure transactions across the network. This architecture eliminates the need for central authority while ensuring trust among participants. Following Bitcoin's success, the cryptocurrency ecosystem has rapidly expanded with the development of alternative digital currencies and blockchain platforms. For instance, Ethereum introduced smart contract functionality, enabling programmable financial applications and decentralized finance (DeFi). Other cryptocurrencies such as Cardano and Polkadot have focused on scalability, interoperability, and energy-efficient consensus mechanisms like proof-of-stake. These advancements have broadened the application of cryptocurrencies beyond simple financial transactions to areas such as supply chain management, digital identity verification, and decentralized governance. Furthermore, the growing adoption of cryptocurrencies has encouraged governments and regulatory bodies to explore frameworks that balance innovation with financial stability and consumer protection. Despite its transformative potential, the cryptocurrency domain faces challenges such as

regulatory uncertainty, market volatility, and concerns related to security breaches and illicit activities.



In recent years, global interest in cryptocurrency has surged, driven by increasing institutional adoption, regulatory developments, and technological innovation. Financial institutions, fintech companies, and governments are actively exploring blockchain-based solutions, including central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), to modernize payment systems. Additionally, the integration of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things (IoT) with blockchain is creating new opportunities for secure, automated, and data-driven financial ecosystems. Overall, cryptocurrency represents a paradigm shift in the financial sector by decentralizing control, enhancing security, and promoting financial inclusion. Its continuous evolution, supported by advancements in cryptography and distributed systems, indicates a strong potential to redefine the future of global finance and digital transactions.

2. CRYPTOCURRENCY

Cryptocurrency is a form of digital asset designed to function as a medium of exchange through secure, decentralized networks. Unlike traditional currencies issued by central authorities, cryptocurrencies operate on distributed systems that rely on advanced cryptographic techniques to ensure the authenticity, integrity, and security of transactions. The core technology behind most cryptocurrencies is Blockchain, which maintains a transparent and immutable record of all transactions across a network of nodes. This decentralized structure eliminates the need for intermediaries such as banks, thereby reducing transaction costs and enhancing financial accessibility. A cryptocurrency network functions

through a sequence of well-defined processes. Initially, a transaction request is generated by a user and broadcast across the peer-to-peer network. This request is then verified by network participants, often referred to as miners or validators, depending on the consensus mechanism employed. In systems like Bitcoin, validation is achieved through a proof-of-work mechanism, where computational power is used to solve complex cryptographic puzzles. Once verified, transactions are grouped into blocks, which are then added to the blockchain in a chronological and irreversible manner. This ensures transparency and prevents issues such as double-spending, where the same digital asset could otherwise be used multiple times.

Mining plays a crucial role in maintaining the network by validating transactions and securing the blockchain. However, modern cryptocurrencies are increasingly adopting energy-efficient alternatives such as proof-of-stake, which reduces computational requirements while maintaining security. Each participant in the network maintains a copy of the ledger, ensuring that transaction histories are consistently updated and verified across all nodes. Cryptocurrencies possess distinct characteristics, including the absence of physical form, independence from central authority, and reliance on mathematical algorithms for issuance and validation. Ownership is determined through digital wallets secured by private keys, and any transfer of ownership must be validated by the network consensus. In cases where conflicting transactions occur, the network resolves them through consensus rules, ensuring that only one valid transaction is recorded.

Since the introduction of Bitcoin in 2009, the cryptocurrency ecosystem has evolved significantly. Ethereum introduced smart contracts, enabling automated and programmable transactions. Ripple focuses on fast cross-border payments using a consensus-based system, while Litecoin offers faster transaction processing through an alternative hashing algorithm. More recent innovations include decentralized finance (DeFi), non-fungible tokens (NFTs), and central bank digital currencies (CBDCs), which are expanding the scope of blockchain applications. Overall, cryptocurrency represents a transformative shift in digital finance by combining cryptographic security, decentralization, and transparency. Its continuous development is reshaping global financial systems, promoting financial inclusion, and enabling innovative applications across various industries. However, the widespread adoption of cryptocurrency also necessitates addressing challenges related to regulatory compliance, scalability, and environmental sustainability. The volatility of digital assets continues to pose risks for investors and limits their acceptance as stable mediums of exchange. Ongoing

research in areas such as energy-efficient consensus mechanisms, layer-two scaling solutions, and enhanced security protocols is helping to mitigate these concerns.

Major Cryptocurrencies with Key Features and Technological Attributes

Cryptocurrency	Launch Year	Approx. Market Status*	Network Type	Common Name/Token	Consensus Mechanism & Technology
Bitcoin	2009	Market leader (largest capitalization)	Decentralized Peer-to-Peer	BTC	Proof-of-Work (SHA-256), Blockchain
Ethereum	2015	Second-largest ecosystem	Decentralized Smart Contract Network	ETH	Proof-of-Stake, Smart Contracts, Blockchain
Ripple	2012	High institutional adoption	Semi-centralized Network	XRP	Consensus Ledger Protocol (RPCA)
Litecoin	2011	Established altcoin	Peer-to-Peer Network	LTC	Proof-of-Work (Scrypt), Faster block generation
Bitcoin Cash	2017	Medium market presence	Decentralized Network	BCH	Proof-of-Work, Larger Block Size
Cardano	2017	Growing ecosystem	Decentralized Blockchain	ADA	Proof-of-Stake (Ouroboros), Research-driven
Polkadot	2020	Interoperability-focused	Multi-chain Network	DOT	Nominated Proof-of-Stake (NPoS)
Solana	2020	High-performance network	Decentralized Blockchain	SOL	Proof-of-History + Proof-of-Stake

2.1 Bitcoin

Bitcoin is a decentralized digital currency introduced in 2009, designed to function as an electronic cash system without the involvement of central authorities such as banks or governments. It operates on a peer-to-peer network, allowing users to transfer value directly while maintaining transparency and security. Unlike traditional currencies, Bitcoin is not issued or regulated by any central institution, making it resistant to centralized control and manipulation. The fundamental technology supporting Bitcoin is Blockchain, which records all transactions in a secure, chronological, and immutable manner. This distributed ledger is maintained by a network of nodes, where each participant holds a copy of the entire transaction history. Such a structure ensures that any attempt to alter past records is practically impossible, thereby enhancing trust among users. One of the major challenges in digital currency systems is the problem of double spending, where a single digital token could be used more than once. Bitcoin effectively addresses this issue through its consensus mechanism known as proof-of-work. In this process, network participants (miners) validate transactions by solving complex mathematical problems, ensuring that each transaction is verified before being added to the blockchain. Bitcoin transactions are secured using cryptographic algorithms, particularly SHA-256, which ensures data integrity and prevents unauthorized modifications. Additionally, users interact with the system through digital wallets that store cryptographic keys required to send and receive funds securely.

In recent years, Bitcoin has gained global recognition not only as a digital payment system but also as a store of value, often referred to as “digital gold.” Its growing adoption, institutional interest, and integration with financial systems highlight its significant role in shaping the future of decentralized finance and digital economies.

2.2 Bitcoin Wallet

A Bitcoin wallet is a specialized software application designed to store, manage, and facilitate transactions of digital assets securely. Rather than storing physical currency, the wallet maintains cryptographic keys—private keys for authorization and public keys for receiving funds. The public key is transformed into a wallet address, which is shared with others for receiving Bitcoin. Modern wallet systems operate by interacting with the Blockchain network to retrieve transaction data and broadcast new transactions. Based on their functionality and architecture, Bitcoin wallets are broadly categorized into three types:

full-service wallets, signing-only wallets, and distributed wallets.

Full-service wallets integrate all essential operations, including key generation, transaction creation, signing, and broadcasting. These wallets are user-friendly but may be more vulnerable to cyber threats if private keys are stored on internet-connected devices. To enhance security, signing-only wallets isolate private keys in offline or hardware environments, ensuring that transaction authorization occurs in a protected setting. These wallets are often combined with networked wallets that handle blockchain communication. Distributed wallets further improve security and scalability by using hierarchical deterministic (HD) structures, where a single master key can generate multiple child keys. This approach reduces key reuse and enhances privacy. Additionally, modern wallets incorporate features such as multi-signature authentication, biometric security, and hardware integration to protect against unauthorized access. Overall, Bitcoin wallets play a critical role in enabling secure, efficient, and user-controlled digital transactions.

2.3 Blockchain

Blockchain is a decentralized data structure that records transactions in a series of interconnected blocks secured through cryptographic techniques. Each block contains a set of validated transactions, a timestamp, and a unique cryptographic hash of the previous block, forming a continuous and tamper-resistant chain. This design ensures that once data is recorded, it cannot be altered without affecting all subsequent blocks, thereby maintaining data integrity. Blockchain operates on a peer-to-peer network where participants, known as nodes or validators, collectively verify and maintain the ledger. When a new transaction is initiated, it is broadcast across the network and validated using consensus mechanisms such as proof-of-work or proof-of-stake. After validation, the transaction is grouped with others into a block and appended to the existing chain.

An important structural component of blockchain is the Merkle tree, which organizes transaction data efficiently by hashing pairs of transactions into a single root hash. This structure enables quick verification of large datasets while maintaining security. The linking of blocks through cryptographic hashes ensures resistance to tampering and unauthorized modifications. In recent developments, blockchain technology has expanded beyond cryptocurrencies to support applications such as decentralized finance (DeFi), supply chain management, digital identity systems, and smart contracts. Its decentralized and transparent

nature makes it a foundational technology for building secure and trustless digital ecosystems.

3. APPLICATIONS OF CRYPTOCURRENCY

Cryptocurrency represents a secure and tamper-resistant form of digital asset, where transactions are permanently recorded using Blockchain. The decentralized architecture ensures that once data is recorded, it cannot be modified, thereby enhancing transparency and trust. Unlike traditional financial systems, cryptocurrencies enable direct peer-to-peer transactions without the need for centralized intermediaries, reducing operational costs and improving efficiency. The integration of cryptographic algorithms further strengthens security, making these systems resilient against fraud and cyberattacks.

With continuous technological advancements, cryptocurrency applications have expanded across multiple sectors:

- **Decentralized Store of Value:** Digital currencies such as Bitcoin are increasingly used as a hedge against inflation and economic instability, offering users full control over their assets through private keys.
- **Transparent Financial Systems:** Blockchain-based records promote ethical and accountable business practices by ensuring that all transactions are traceable and verifiable, thereby minimizing corruption and financial mismanagement.
- **Low-Cost and Fast Payments:** Cryptocurrencies facilitate cross-border transactions with reduced fees and near-instant settlement, making them highly efficient compared to traditional banking systems.
- **Fundraising and Investment (DeFi):** Startups and organizations utilize decentralized finance (DeFi) platforms for fundraising through token issuance, eliminating reliance on traditional venture capital models.
- **Digital Identity and Governance:** Blockchain technology is being explored for secure identity management and transparent voting systems, helping to reduce electoral fraud and enhance trust in governance.
- **Education and Global Services:** Many educational institutions and service providers now accept cryptocurrency payments, enabling seamless global transactions without currency conversion barriers.

- **Digital Content and Media:** Cryptocurrencies support fair revenue distribution in digital publishing, allowing creators to receive direct payments without intermediaries.
- **Cybersecurity and Forensics:** Advanced analytical tools, including AI-based behavioral analysis, are used to monitor suspicious activities and detect fraud in blockchain transactions, improving digital forensic capabilities.

Modern cryptocurrency platforms are largely based on open-source frameworks and operate through peer-to-peer networking models, ensuring transparency, scalability, and continuous innovation.

4. CONCLUSION

Cryptocurrency has emerged as a revolutionary financial innovation that challenges traditional centralized banking systems by enabling secure, decentralized, and peer-to-peer transactions. The use of cryptographic techniques and distributed ledger technology ensures data integrity, transparency, and resistance to unauthorized modifications. Transaction validation mechanisms, supported by network participants such as miners or validators, create secure and immutable blocks of data.

Among various digital currencies, Bitcoin remains a pioneering model due to its robust design and widespread adoption. However, the cryptocurrency ecosystem continues to evolve rapidly, with newer platforms introducing advanced features such as smart contracts, scalability solutions, and energy-efficient consensus mechanisms.

This study highlights the architecture, functioning, and diverse applications of cryptocurrency across industries. It also emphasizes the growing importance of security measures, including predictive analytics and behavioral monitoring, to detect potential threats in digital transactions. As technology advances, cryptocurrency is expected to play a significant role in shaping the future of global finance, digital governance, and secure online interactions.

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Exploring Consumer Purchasing Patterns of Automobiles segment with reference to motor cars: A cross sectional research

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to analyze consumer purchasing patterns regarding cars. A sample of 100 individuals was collected from the Ahmednagar Region. The research utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Data analysis employed one-sample t-tests and frequency analysis as statistical tools. Predominantly, individuals showed a preference for Audi, BMW, Hyundai, Mahindra and Tata. Key considerations for consumers included car price, fuel efficiency, safety features, and maintenance costs. These findings offer valuable insights for marketers in crafting effective car marketing strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

The genesis of India's auto industry traces back to 1940 when Hindustan Motors pioneered the first automobile manufacturing venture, followed closely by Premier in 1942, which began producing vehicles for G.M. Motors and Fiat Motors in 1944. The year 1945 saw the inception of Mahindra and Mahindra by two brothers, marking the assembly of Jeep utility vehicles in the country. Post-independence in 1947, both the private sector and the Indian government collaborated to establish auto component manufacturing businesses, aiming to bolster the nascent industry. Import controls on fully assembled cars were enforced in 1953 under India's import substitution programs, fostering indigenous automotive manufacturing. Today, India's auto industry stands as a formidable global player, constituting 7.1% of the nation's GDP. Fueled by a burgeoning middle class and a youthful demographic, the two-wheeler segment commands an impressive 80% market share, asserting its dominance in the Indian automotive landscape. Moreover, efforts are underway to penetrate rural markets, further augmenting industry growth. Passenger cars now claim a 14% share of the overall

market, with India emerging as a significant exporter in the international arena.

The period between April and December 2017 witnessed a remarkable 13.01% growth in the industry, culminating in the production of over 21 million vehicles. Notably, passenger cars and two-wheelers exhibited annual growth rates of 5.22% and 40.31%, respectively. Collaborative efforts between the government and industry stakeholders aim to position India as a frontrunner in the global automotive market for both two and four-wheelers by 2020. Anticipating evolving emission and safety standards, the industry is pivoting towards electric vehicles (EVs). Incentives such as green number plates, toll exemptions, and free parking for three years are being considered to promote EV adoption. With a 37.5% surge in EV sales between 2015 and 2016, efforts are underway to align with the government's vision of manufacturing six million electric and hybrid vehicles by 2030.

In pursuit of meeting burgeoning demand, automakers have made substantial investments across various industry segments. Over the years, the sector has generated approximately \$19.29 billion in revenue and has been buoyed by the government's facilitation of 100% foreign direct investment.

Forecasts predict the industry's revenue to reach \$16.5 billion by 2021, with annual revenues expected to hit \$300 billion by 2026, consequently generating 65 million additional jobs and contributing 12% to India's GDP. Rising disposable incomes are fueling consumer spending, prompting companies to adapt and cater to evolving consumer preferences. India's burgeoning economy positions it as a global economic powerhouse, attracting interest from international automakers eager to invest in its dynamic market. Financial institutions are facilitating car sales by offering attractive financing schemes, accelerating the turnover of older models for newer ones. This cycle of demand is indicative of India's vibrant automotive marketplace, poised for sustained growth and innovation in the years to come.

1. CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOR

Consumer buying behavior encapsulates the amalgamation of a consumer's attitudes, preferences, intentions, and decisions regarding their actions in the marketplace when acquiring a product or service. This field draws upon various social science disciplines such as anthropology, psychology, sociology, and economics. Identifying consumer buying behavior holds paramount importance for marketers aiming for precise market positioning. By discerning consumer needs at individual, group, and organizational levels, marketers can effectively target products and services. Hence, it's imperative to grasp the relevance of these needs to consumer buying behavior. Examining the interaction between consumers and the

marketing mix is crucial for understanding their buying behavior. This is because each individual's psychology toward products and services is influenced by factors such as culture, attitude, past experiences, and perception. Based on these factors, consumers decide whether to make a purchase and from whom to procure the preferred product or service.

Schutte and colleagues (1998) assert that beyond its utilitarian function in manufacturing, the automobile holds significant sway over lifestyle and consumption patterns, serving both basic conveyance needs and catering to a spectrum of desires, particularly evident in the informal consumption of luxury vehicles. Each individual embodies a unique amalgamation of genetics, environment, and acquired knowledge. Predicting such idiosyncratic human behavior is a formidable and intricate endeavor fraught with uncertainties, risks, and surprises. Accurate forecasts can yield substantial gains, while inaccurate ones may result in significant financial losses. Marketers, once adept at discerning and satisfying consumer needs, can justify their relevance. In line with contemporary marketing paradigms, the effective management of a company necessitates sellers to delve into the psyche of buyers, placing them at the core of professional endeavors. Thus, it is emphasized that to excel as a retailer, one must strive to unravel the mysteries within the consumer's mind, often likened to a black box.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Manish Kumar Srivastava and A.K. Tiwari (2011) conducted a study on consumer behavior concerning A3 segment vehicles, specifically focusing on Honda City and SX4 in Jaipur. The objective was to analyze consumer behavior patterns during the purchase of A3 segment cars, particularly SX4 and Honda City, and identify the key attributes considered important by customers in this segment. They employed a Simple Random Sampling method for their research. Statistical techniques such as Chi-square test and ANOVA were utilized.

Their findings revealed that among various parameters such as safety, brand name, maximum speed, and maintenance cost, customers showed a preference for Maruti SX4. However, when respondents were asked to rate both cars based on six parameters (Best Feature, Value for Money, Customer Friendly Vehicle, Best Image, Prestige, and After Sales Service), Honda City received higher ratings from the respondents.

In 2018, Dhruv Mathur, Avdesh Bhardaeaj, Aditi Pandey, Ashis Oberoi, and Divya Rani conducted a research project examining consumer purchasing patterns within the Indian automotive market. The primary aim was to gain insights into the dynamics of the automobile industry in India and to delineate prevalent consumer buying behaviors. The researchers

employed a random sampling approach to gather data, and utilized the Chi-square test as the principal statistical method for data analysis. Their findings revealed that 40.98% of the surveyed individuals did not possess a car.

Krishna (2013) characterized sensual selling as a sales approach that engages customers' senses and influences their behaviors through sensory stimulation.

In her research article on factors influencing passenger car consumer behavior and their role in ecological community policies, Cuza (2011) concluded that the automobile serves as a significant status symbol for consumers and does not solely fulfill transportation needs. It aligns with the identity of the purchaser, reflecting their persona and belonging to a specific user group associated with the product. Often, consumers must conform to the prevailing trends of the product rather than having it tailored to their individual needs. In today's context, products must also address environmental concerns, particularly reducing CO₂ emissions to meet current standards.

Apart from the logistical challenges primarily handled by civic institutions, automotive manufacturers must differentiate environmentally friendly cars through design, making them easily recognizable on the streets. Moreover, they must cultivate a new image for owners of such vehicles, distinct from the traditional car owner archetype, thereby generating consumer desire. This entails a shift from the powerful, large, and aesthetically pleasing cars to environmentally conscious alternatives that neither compromise nor appear modest to consumers.

In formulating marketing strategies, effective segmentation of the market is crucial to identify early adopters. However, further research is necessary to understand consumer behavior and values that influence their purchasing decisions. Cuza's study in the Romanian consumer market aimed to gauge the level of environmental concern among consumers and its impact on their acceptance of environmentally friendly automobiles across different consumer segments. Additionally, it sought to identify emotional and symbolic factors significant to Romanian consumers regarding their cars

In Vyas's (2013) study, the focus was on investigating how different professions influence car purchasing behavior. The study aimed to discern the impact of profession on the choice of make and model of cars, as well as to analyze how the country of origin affects buying behavior across various professions. A survey questionnaire was employed to gather data from 100 respondents representing diverse professions such as academia, law, chartered accountancy firms, medical practitioners from hospitals and clinics, and the media fraternity in the regions of Jamnagar and Rajkot.

The study highlighted the dynamic nature of the Indian automobile industry, where consumers enjoy a plethora of options due to intense competition among both multinational corporations and domestic players. Consequently, the research aimed to provide insights for companies to carve out specific market niches tailored to the preferences and needs of different professional segments. This approach not only enables consumers to find precisely what they desire but also facilitates organizations in capturing a larger market share.

Given India's rich diversity, penetrating this market poses a significant challenge for every company. Understanding the intricacies of Indian consumer mentality requires thorough research, making it a pivotal factor in navigating such diverse consumer landscapes.

Sahu (2017) conducted a study aimed at examining the key factors influencing customer preferences for purchasing Maruti Suzuki cars in Bhilai-Durg, India. The research, based on primary data collected from a sample of 90 respondents through a questionnaire in the Bhilai-Durg district, revealed significant insights. The majority of respondents comprised servicemen, non-service class individuals, and students. Among the surveyed customers, 55% prioritized comfort and mileage when selecting a car. The study identified self-esteem and social status as prominent determinants of customer preferences. In light of these findings, the researcher recommended that Maruti Suzuki focus on enhancing both the external and internal aesthetics of their car models. Additionally, there is a need to address fuel consumption concerns, especially given the rising fuel prices. Offering more complimentary servicing and introducing new car models were also suggested strategies. The study concluded by emphasizing the competitive nature of the market and the necessity for a nuanced understanding of consumer behavior for effective marketing strategies and decision-making. It was suggested that by addressing the identified factors, Maruti Suzuki could potentially increase its market share, leveraging customer satisfaction with the performance and promotional efforts of its cars.

In 2017, Vandana Gupta, Dr. Asif Ali Syed, and Prof. Mukesh Chaturvedi conducted research on the purchasing behavior of customers of Hatchback cars in the Delhi/NCR region. The primary objective was to identify the key factors influencing customer purchasing behavior. The researchers employed a random sampling method for their study. Statistical techniques such as KMO & Bartlett's test, Factor analysis, Cross tabulation, and Chi-square test were utilized in the analysis. The findings revealed that friends and relatives emerged as the most significant source of information influencing customers' car purchasing decisions.

In their 2017 study, R. Anantha Laxmi and A. Antony Selva Priya investigated the factors

that influence consumers' decisions to purchase Maruti cars in the Thoothukudi district. The primary aim was to examine these influencing factors and analyze brand preference and the significance of Maruti cars to consumers. Their research utilized a convenience sampling method. Their findings revealed that consumer brand preferences were primarily influenced by two key factors: Appearance & Comfort and Cost Efficiency.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Objectives:

1. To Explore the Automobile Industry in India.
2. To Analyze Consumer Buying Behavior in hatchback cars
3. To Identify Key Factors Influencing Car Selection by Customers.

Research Design:

Descriptive research design was employed for this study. This approach was chosen as it is suitable for identifying characteristics, frequencies, trends, correlations, and categories. It facilitated the collection of large volumes of data that could be analyzed for frequencies, averages, and patterns.

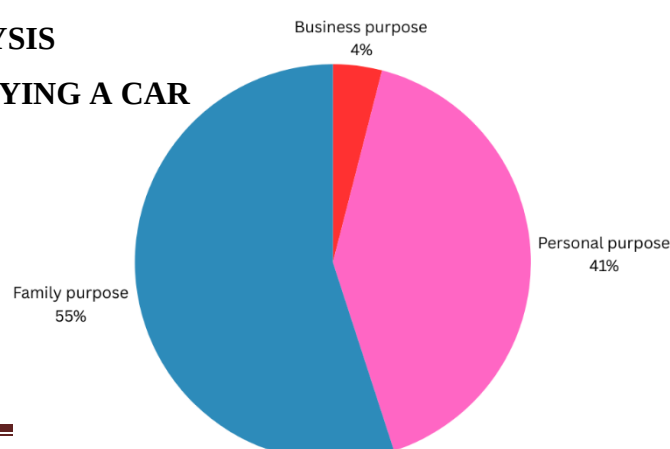
Data Collection:

Primary data, which refers to original information collected for addressing the research question, was gathered. The researcher utilized a structured questionnaire as the instrument for data collection. Closed-ended questions were employed in the questionnaire to streamline responses and ensure clarity.

Secondary data refers to information that has previously been gathered by other researchers, such as data from government censuses or past scientific studies. In this study, the population under investigation is the residents of ahmednagar Region, with a sample size of 100 individuals. The research methodology employed is non-probability convenience sampling.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

PURPOSE OF BUYING A CAR



Interpretation:

Based on the analysis of the chart provided, it is evident that the respondents have diverse motivations for purchasing a car. Among the surveyed individuals, a significant portion, comprising 55 respondents, indicated that they are acquiring a car for family use. This suggests that a primary driving factor behind car purchases among the respondents is the need for transportation within the context of familial obligations and activities.

Furthermore, the data indicates that 41 respondents are purchasing a car for personal reasons, which could encompass individual commuting needs, leisure activities, or any other personal use cases not directly tied to family requirements. In contrast, a smaller segment of the respondents, consisting of only 4 individuals, cited business purposes as their reason for buying a car. This suggests that while there is a minority interest in acquiring a vehicle for professional use, the overwhelming majority of respondents prioritize family-related needs when making car purchasing decisions.

Overall, the data underscores the importance of family considerations in the decision-making process of acquiring a car among the surveyed individuals, with family-related purposes emerging as the predominant driving force behind such purchases.

TYPE OF CAR PREFER BY RESPONDENT

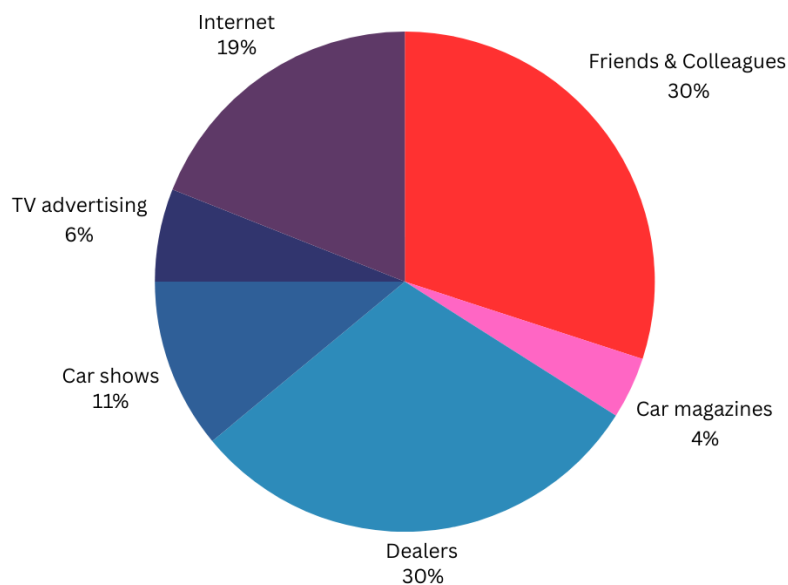
S.NO	PARTICULARS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
1	Micro-Car	12	12%
2	Super-mini/Sub-compact car	22	22%
3	Small-family car/Mid-size car	43	43%
4	Full-size car/Large car	5	5%
5	Sport-car and grand-car	14	14%
6	Off-roaders	4	4%
	Total	100	100%

Interpretation:

The chart above depicts the preferences of respondents regarding the type of car they prefer. From the analysis, it is evident that out of 100 respondents surveyed, 43 express a preference for small family cars or mid-size cars, followed by 22 respondents favoring super mini or subcompact cars. Additionally, 14 respondents indicate a preference for sport and grand cars,

while 12 respondents opt for micro cars. A smaller proportion of respondents, comprising 5 individuals, prefer full-size cars or large cars, and 4 respondents show a preference for off-road cars. Overall, the data underscores that the majority of respondents favor small family cars or mid-size cars as their preferred choice.

GATHER DATA REGARDING THE TIMING OF RESPONDENTS' CAR PURCHASES.



INTERPRETATION

The chart analysis above illustrates how respondents gather information about car brands. Among the 100 surveyed individuals, it is evident that various sources play a role in their decision-making process. Notably, 30 respondents rely on information provided by dealerships and recommendations from friends and colleagues. Additionally, 19 respondents utilize the internet as their primary source of information, while 11 respondents gather information from car shows. A smaller portion of respondents, comprising 6 individuals, rely on television advertising, and 4 respondents turn to car magazines for information.

Overall, the data indicates that the majority of respondents prefer to gather information through personal networks such as friends and colleagues, as well as through interactions with dealerships. This suggests that word-of-mouth recommendations and direct engagement with dealers play significant roles in shaping respondents' brand information gathering strategies.

Key Considerations in Respondents' Car Selection Process

PRICE OF CAR

Null Hypothesis (H0): “The price of a car has no impact on my decision to purchase a car.”

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): “The price of a car does influence my decision to purchase a

car.”

Test

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2. tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference.	
					Lower	Upper
Price of Car	2.243	99	.024	.230	.02	.42

With a p-value of 0.027, which is lower than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, consumers perceive that the price of a car does indeed have an impact on their purchasing decisions.

Power

Null Hypothesis (H0): “The power of a car does not influence my decision to purchase a car.”

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): “The power of a car does affect my decision to purchase a car.”

Test

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2. tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference.	
					Lower	Upper
Power of Car	-3.127	99	.003	-.359	-.57	-.11

With a p-value of 0.002, which is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Consequently, consumers perceive that the power of a car does indeed influence their decision to purchase a car.

Safety

Null Hypothesis (H0): “The safety of a car does not influence my decision to purchase a car.”

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): “The safety of a car does affect my decision to purchase a car.”

Test

	Test Value = 5					
	t	df	Sig. (2. tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference.	
					Lower	Upper

Safety of Car	-3.012	99	.004	-.189	-.31	-.05

With a p-value of 0.003, which is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Consequently, consumers perceive that the safety of a car does indeed influence their decision to purchase a car.

Brand Popularity

Null Hypothesis (H0): “Brand popularity does not influence my decision to purchase a car.”

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): “Brand popularity does affect my decision to purchase a car.”

Test

	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference.	
					Lower	Upper
Brand Popularity	-.856	99	.394	-.110	-.14	-.36

With a p-value of 0.395, which is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, consumers perceive that the brand popularity of a car does not affect their decision to purchase a car.

Maintenance

Null Hypothesis (H0): “The maintenance of a car does not influence my decision to purchase a car.”

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): “The maintenance of a car does affect my decision to purchase a car.”

Test

	Test Value = 4					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference.	
					Lower	Upper
Maintenance	3.397	99	.001	.310	.12	.50

With a p-value of 0.001, which is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, consumers perceive that the maintenance of a car does indeed affect their decision to purchase a car.

V. Findings

- The majority of respondents fall within the age group of 16-30 years.

- Out of the respondents, 74 are male and 26 are female.
- A significant portion of the respondents hold a graduate degree.
- The majority of respondents are employed.
- The highest proportion of respondents report their marital status as single.
- Most respondents have an income under 30,000₹.
- Brands such as BMW, Audi, Tata, Mahindra, Hyundai, MG, and Kia are preferred by the majority of respondents.
- A large percentage of respondents exhibit brand loyalty.
- The primary reason for purchasing a car among respondents is for family use.
- Regarding the importance of having a car in their life, 54 respondents consider it important, 25 are neutral, and 19 find it very important.
- Information about cars is primarily collected through dealers and friends & colleagues, followed by the internet, car shows, TV advertising, and car magazines.
- The majority of respondents personally use their cars.
- 73 respondents prefer buying a new car, while 27 prefer a second-hand one.
- Small family cars or mid-size cars are the preferred choice among respondents.
- Most respondents prefer to pay for their cars through loans.
- Factors such as the price of the car, fuel consumption, power, driving comfort, safety, exterior design, and maintenance are deemed very important by the majority of respondents.
- The majority of respondents neither consider the size (capacity), advancing technology, nor the interior of the car as important or unimportant.
- After-sales services and resale value of the car are important to the majority of respondents.
- The brand popularity of the car is not considered important by the majority of respondents.

VI. Conclusion

Research indicates that the majority of consumers favor Audi, BMW, Tata, Mahindra and Hyundai brands, with a significant proportion exhibiting brand loyalty. The primary reasons cited for purchasing cars were family and personal use. Information about cars was predominantly sourced from friends and colleagues. New hatchback cars were the preferred choice among respondents. Small family cars or mid-size cars were the most favored vehicle types. Respondents commonly opted for loans as a mode of payment. Additionally, factors

such as the price of the car, fuel consumption, safety, and maintenance were deemed very important when selecting a car.

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A Comparative Study of Aggregate Production Planning With Lowest, Expected and Average Demands

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Abstract: Aggregate Planning is concerned with matching supply and demand of output over the medium time range, this paper analyze 6 month expected demand and its three possible plan of actions for aggregate planning and material planning. The term aggregate implies that the planning is done for a single overall measure of output or, at the most, a few aggregated product categories. The aim of aggregate planning is to set overall output levels in the near to medium future in the face of fluctuating or uncertain demands. Aggregate planning might seek to influence demand as well as supply. The three plans are analyzed and compared. This paper will help managers to select appropriate plan according to their cases and situations.

Keywords: [aggregate planning, lowest demand, expected demand, average demand]

1] INTRODUCTION

Aggregate planning is an essential activity in production department with the help of this advance plan for the production process can be done. The time frame may vary from 6 to 8 months. Aggregate planning helps management about material planning and resource allocation and requirements for the future. Managers try to keep the total production cost to the minimum also to fulfill client's or market's requirements in time.

The total cost considerations include regular labor costs, inventory carrying costs, overtime labor costs, sub-contracting costs, hiring and layoffs costs.

Aggregate planning has some assured and predictable pre-required inputs which include:

- Available facilities in company
- Cost of various alternatives and resources.
- Resources availability in company
- Forecasted demand for the certain future period

2] OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the basic concepts on aggregate planning.
2. To prepare production plans with average, lowest and expected demands.
3. To compare and suggest best suitable production plan.

3] RESEARCH DESIGN

S N	Parameter	Description
1	Type of Research	Analytical Research
2	Nature of Research	Quantitative
3	Survey period	November & December 2025
4	Method of data collection	Observations

4] DATA ANALYSIS & DATA INTERPRETATION

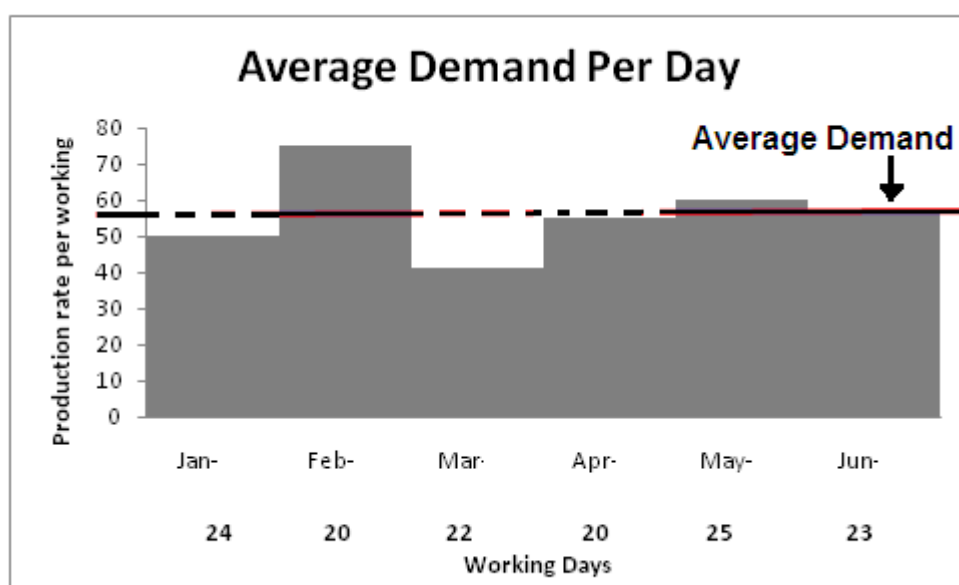
4.1 Forecast for six months

The company has forecasted demand for its product. Researchers have calculated production days and per day demand as follows.

Month	Expected Demand (Units)	Production Days	Demand Per Day (Units)
January 2026	1200	24	50
February 2026	1500	20	75
March 2026	0900	22	41
April 2026	1100	20	55
May 2026	1500	25	60
June 2026	1300	23	57
Total	7500	134	Average = 56 Units

Table 1: Forecast for six months

Graph 1 illustrates how the forecast differs from the average demand.



Graph 1: Average Demand per Day

4.2 The average requirement is calculated as:

$$\text{Average Requirement} = \frac{\text{Total Expected Demand}}{\text{Number of Production Days}}$$

$$\text{Average Requirement} = \frac{7500}{134} = 56 \text{ Units}$$

4.3 Cost information of Production:

Particulars	Details
Inventory carrying cost	₹ 10 units per month
Subcontracting cost	₹ 100 per units
Average pay rate	₹ 20 per hour = (₹ 60 per day)
Overtime pay rate	₹ 40 per hour (above 8 hours)
Labor hours to produce a unit	6 hours per unit
Cost of increasing production rate (hiring)	₹ 100 per units
Cost of decreasing production rate (layoffs)	₹ 150 per units

Table 2: Cost information of Production

4.4 Three possible plans:

Plan 1:	Maintain a constant workforce throughout the six month	Production = Average Demand
Plan 2:	Maintain a constant workforce at a level necessary for the lowest demand month (Here march) and to meet all demand above this level by subcontracting	Production = Lowest Demand
Plan 3:	To hire and lay-off workers as needed to produce the exact monthly requirements.	Production = Expected Demand

4.5 Analysis of Plan 1 (Production = Average Demand)

This is level strategy assuming 56 units to be produce per day. With constant workforce, no over time or idle time, no use of safety stock and no subcontractors. Beginning inventory is assumed to be ‘nil’ and planned ending inventory is ‘nil’.

Month	Production at 56 units/day (Units)	Demand Forecast (Units)	Shortage Recovery	Ending Inventory
January 2026	1344	1200		144
February 2026	1120	1500		-236 (shortage)
March 2026	1232	0900	236	96
April 2026	1120	1100		116

May 2026	1400	1500		16
June 2026	1288	1300		04
	7504	7500		376

Table 3: Operating Plan 1.

- There will be shortage of 236 units in February 2026. This shortage is planned to recover in first week of March 2026.
- The workforce required to produce 56 units/day = $(6 * 56) / 8 = 42$ workers.

Based on this calculation, cost plan 1 is calculated.

Plan 1 for Total Costs:

Costs	Calculations
Inventory Carrying	₹ 3,760
Regular time labor	₹ 9,00,480
Other	₹ 0
Total Costs	₹ 9,04,240

Table 4: Total Costs Plan 1.

4.6 Analysis of Plan 2 (Production = Lowest Demand)

- Lowest demand in March is to produce 41 units per day. Total 31 workers are needed. All other demand is met by subcontracting.
- In house production = 41 units/day * 134 production days = 5494 units.
- Subcontracting units = 7500 - 5494 = 2006 units.

Using this data, total costs of plan 2 are calculated.

Costs	Calculations
Subcontracting	₹ 20,060
Regular time labor	₹ 6,64,640
Other	₹ 0
Total Costs	₹ 6,84,700

Table 5: Total Costs Plan 2.

4.7 Analysis of Plan 3 (Production = Expected Demand)

Formula: **Production cost = (Demand * 6 hrs/unit * ₹ 20 per hour)**

Month	Expected Demand	Prod Days	Daily Prod rate	Production cost	Extra (hiring cost)	Extra (layoff cost)	Total Cost
January 2026	1200	24	50	₹ 144000			₹ 144000
February	1500	20	75	₹ 180000	50000		₹ 230000

2026					(₹100*25 *20)		
March 2026	0900	22	41	₹ 108240		112200 (₹150*34 *22)	₹ 220440
April 2026	1100	20	55	₹ 132000	28000 (₹100*14 *20)		₹ 160000
May 2026	1500	25	60	₹ 180000	12500 (₹100*5* 25)		₹ 192500
June 2026	1300	23	57	₹ 157320		10350 (₹150*3* 23)	₹ 167670
	7500	Grand Total Cost					₹ 11,14,610

Table 6: Total Costs Plan 3.

5] COMPARISON OF THREE PLANS

The three plans have been compared in following table.

Costs	Plan 1	Plan 2	Plan 3
	Production = Average Demand	Production = Lowest Demand	Production = Expected Demand
Inventory Carrying	₹ 3,760	-	-
Regular Labor	₹ 9,00,480	₹ 6,64,640	₹ 9,01,560
Overtime Labor	-	-	-
Hiring	-	-	₹ 90,500
Layoffs	-	-	₹ 1,22,550
Subcontracting	-	₹ 20,060	-
Total Costs	₹ 09,04,240	₹ 06,84,700	₹ 11,14,610

Table 7: Comparison of three plans

6] CONCLUSION

Researchers found that there is huge difference between the total costs for each action plans.

The production as per average demand will increase inventory carrying costs. This plan also leads to shortage or excess inventory and thus can affect client's requirements.

Production as per expected demand will fulfill client's requirements but the hiring and layoff costs are more.

In this case researchers found that production as per lowest demand is more economic and cost saving as compared to other two plans.

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Knowledge, Attitude and Practices of Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016 among Health-Care Executives: A Single Center, Pilot Study Experience

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Abstract: Introduction: Biomedical waste poses physical, chemical, radiological, and microbiological risks to the public and health-care executives (HCEs) for current and future generations. Aim: The aim of this single center, pilot study was to gauge the depth of understanding amongst health care executives on biomedical waste management (BMWM). Materials and Methods: A predesigned questionnaire on knowledge, attitude, and practices on BMWM Rules, 2016 was distributed to all participants. Results: Only 68% of the participants knew that the most important step in waste management is waste segregation. Eighty-two percent of the HCEs working in this setup knew of the different color-coded bins used for segregation. However, awareness was lacking with respect to health hazards associated with improperly segregated and disposed off biomedical waste as only 49% answered the questions on the hazards of waste correctly. Laboratory waste handling was found to be the least understood area of the newer guidelines.

Conclusions: Training aspects of health-care waste management should be strengthened so that the current, existing, and future regulations are practiced diligently and uniformly. Periodic evaluation and assessment should become routine to enforce adherence to waste management

Keywords: Biomedical waste management, Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, health-care executives, India, Pilot study, Single center

Introduction

Biomedical waste is any waste, which is generated during the diagnosis treatment, or immunization of human beings or animals or in research activities pertaining thereto or in the production or testing of biologicals or in health camps: categories in Schedule I appended to Bio-medical Waste Management (BMWM) Rules, 2016.¹ Improper management of medical waste has posed a grave threat not only to human health and safety but also to the environment for the current and future generations.²

Hospital waste is 85% noninfectious and only 15% infectious. However, poor segregation can cause the mixing of noninfectious with infectious waste and increase the total hazardous waste volume. In 2015, the Central Pollution Control Board, India, has estimated that 169,913 health-care facilities (HCFs) of India have generated approximately 495.30 tons/day biomedical waste, which roughly translates into 0.5–2 kg/bed/day.³ Previous methods of waste management such as the landfill and incineration are now ineffective in tackling this huge volume. Sometimes, incineration and landfill themselves pose a threat to the environment and population. This forced developers and regulators to change their focus from incineration and landfill to segregation, recycling, and waste minimization.⁴

The first regulation for efficient management of biomedical waste in India came in 1998.⁵ However, medical sciences transform faster than the methods of waste management methods. The most comprehensive and effective guidelines of waste management were introduced by the Government of India as BMW Rules and Guidelines. These guidelines included a severe penalty as a deterrent to defaulters. Waste management guidelines now follow the cradle-to-grave approach and include all steps of waste generation, collection, storage, transportation, treatment, and ultimate destination (incineration, recycle).⁶

The International Clinical Epidemiology Network performed a nationwide survey in 25 districts across twenty states. Improper pretreatment of BMW at source and improper terminal disposal and lack of proper dedicated infrastructure were observed as the major challenges. Just teaching about the rules without assessing the depth of understanding has led to a lot of mishaps related to biomedical waste. This study was done to test the KAP of BMW among health-care executives (HCEs) in a primary care setup.

The objectives of this study were as follows:

- a) To understand the Knowledge, Attitude and Practices towards Bio-Medical Waste Management rules, 2016 among health-care executives (HCEs) in a primary care setup, and
- b) To analyse the Knowledge, Attitude and Practice scores (before training and after training) regarding BMW among health-care executives (HCEs) in a primary care setup who underwent the training.

Materials and Methods

This study was undertaken in a primary-set up hospital in Pune from November-2025 to January-2026. The hospital has an established system of the mandatory teaching program of BMW Management for new HCEs, be it a doctor or housekeeping staff at the time of

induction and once every year thereafter. The training program was conducted for 2 hr. for each session. It included lectures, open discussions, and demonstrations on all aspects of BMW.

An in-house survey pertaining to health-care waste (BMW and SW) was planned to assess the existing knowledge and practices of the HCEs taking part in these training sessions. A self-designed pretested questionnaire as in all other studies done in this contemporary time, was used. We critically felt that a universal tool should be developed for assessment to establish uniformity. Participation in the survey was purely voluntary and anonymous. Questions were close ended (multiple-choice based) and based on the KAP of BMW. To ensure the understandability of the questionnaire, a trial test comprising of five participants from each study population group was done before the actual study. The language of the questionnaire was adjusted for clear-cut understanding, following discussion with the trial groups.

Analysis of the responses was done under groups as follows: (1) knowledge and attitude (12 questions) and (2) practice (8 questions). Groups under which knowledge and attitude were analyzed were (a) Legal aspect and administration, (b) SW disposal, (c) color coding of disposal bins, (d) methods of sterilization and disinfection, and (e) health hazards, prevention, and management.

In the present study, we undertook analysis of a subset of population who subgroup of participants who responded before undergoing the training in biomedical waste management and after the biomedical waste management training.

The hypotheses of this analysis were as follows:

1. Null Hypothesis (H_0) There is no significant difference in the knowledge, attitude, and practices of Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016 among health-care executives at the selected center.
2. Alternative Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant difference in the knowledge, attitude, and practices of Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016 among health-care executives at the selected center.
3. Null Hypothesis (H_0) Health-care executives have a negative attitude toward the need for Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016, but face challenges in compliance due to institutional or logistical barriers.
4. Alternative Hypothesis (H_2): Health-care executives have a positive attitude toward the need for Bio-medical Waste Management Rules, 2016, but face challenges in compliance due to institutional or logistical barriers.

These results were analyzed by the Bland Altman Analysis. We conducted all analyses using SPSS and considered the results of statistical tests significant at 5%.

Results

We distributed the study questionnaire to a total of 170 executives during the study period. As participation was voluntary, many choose not to take part, and only 120 responded with the completely filled-up study questionnaires. At the end of each session, the checked responses were recirculated and discussed among the participants to increase comprehension. Out of the 120 participants, 67% (n = 80) were doctors of different specialties, 19% (n = 23) were nurses, 6% (n = 7) were laboratory technicians, and the rest 8% (n = 10) were housekeeping staff [Figure 1].

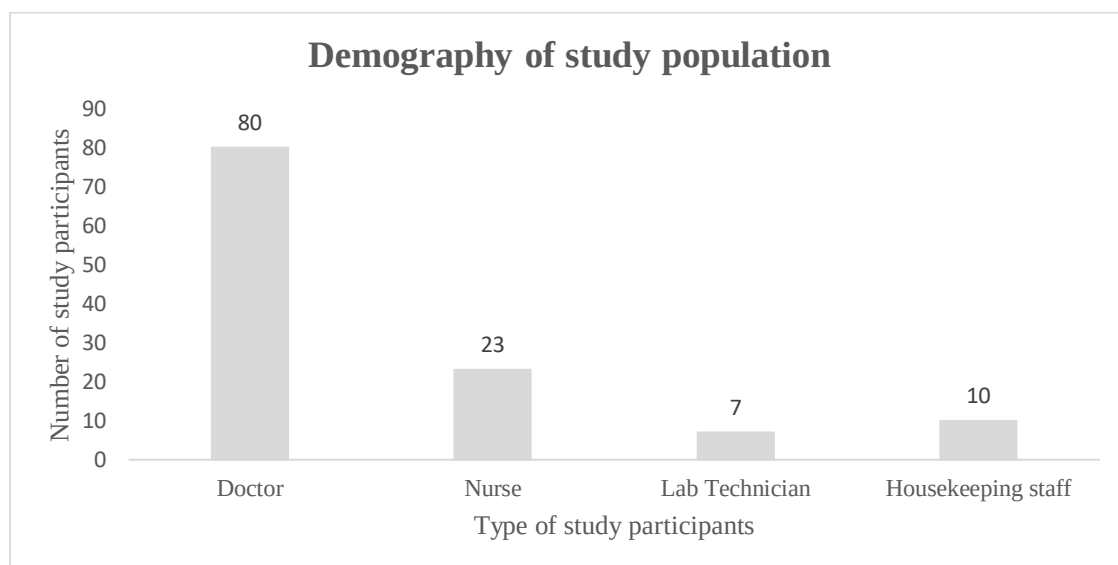


Figure 1: Demography of study population

Analysis of the compiled results showed that doctors and nurses were aware of the waste management rules and guidelines [Table 1]. Even though the HCE belonged to primary set-up hospital that had a well-developed BMWM system in place, the knowledge among housekeeping staff was found to be lacking [Table 2].

Table 1: Knowledge and attitude among health-care executives about Bio-Medical Waste Management rules, 2016

Knowledge and attitude	Doctors (N=80)	Nurses (N=23)	Laboratory technician (N=7)	Housekeeping staff (N=10)	Total=120
Health hazards prevention	8	7	6	6	27

Methods of sterilization and disinfection	8	7	8	7	30
Color coding of disposal bins	8	9	8	5	30
Solid waste disposal	7	9	7	4	27
Legal aspect and Administration	8	8	6	4	26

Table 2: Practices among health-care executives about Bio Medical Waste Management rules, 2016

Practices	Doctors (N=80)	Nurses (N=23)	Laboratory technician (N=7)	Housekeeping staff (N=10)	Total=120
Hand hygiene	7	8	4	3	22
Hepatitis B vaccination	6	7	7	2	22
Reporting of sharp-related injury	7	7	3	3	20
Treatment of laboratory waste before discarding	4	5	7	1	17
Differentiating infectious from noninfectious waste	7	7	6	4	24

It was found that 68% of the participants knew it was necessary to segregate infectious from noninfectious waste. This leaves a staggering 32% of health-care personnel unaware of the problem. Knowledge of color-coded bins used in our facility was good among all groups except the housekeeping staff, of whom only 56% answered this question correctly [Table 1].

Table no. 3: Analysis of Knowledge, Attitude and Practice scores regarding BMW among participants undergoing the training

Practices	Score before training	Score after training	Chi square value	P value
Health hazards prevention	90	100	5.31	0.07
Methods of sterilization and disinfection	80	100	12.65	0.01
Color coding of disposal bins	15	75	44.52	0.01
Solid waste disposal	90	100	7.85	0.06
Legal aspect and Administration	65	100	11.23	0.55
Hand hygiene	95	100	25.14	0.90
Hepatitis B vaccination	75	100	31.4	0.67
Reporting of sharp-related injury	80	100	9.52	0.30
Treatment of laboratory waste before discarding	82	90	4.15	0.95
Differentiating infectious from noninfectious waste	76	95	74.8	0.54

Furthermore, we performed the Bland-Altman test to analyze a subset of population who subgroup of participants who responded before undergoing the training in biomedical waste management and after the biomedical waste management training. The Bland–Altman analysis showed a bias of -0.33 with limits of agreement ranging from -9.77 to 9.11 score for Knowledge and Attitude and a bias of 11.953 with limits of agreement from -0.76 to 24.67 for Practice (Figure). The mean differences between the test and Reference Knowledge and Attitude scores were -1.07 ± 6.86 and -1.09 ± 6.86 for test and reference Practice scores.

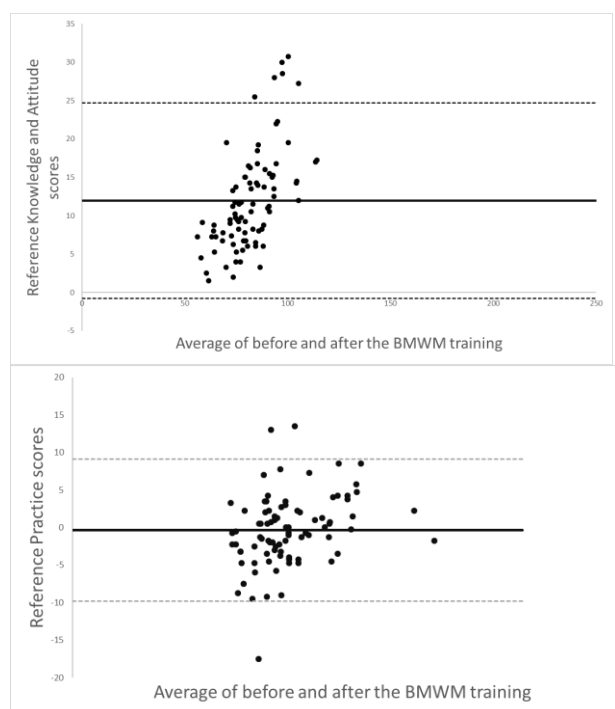


Figure 2: Bland-Altman plots of the differences between the Average of before and after the BMWM training for the (A) Knowledge and Attitude scores and (B) Practice scores.

Discussion

At present times, focus has shifted to the reduction of infectious waste volume. This reduction can be achieved by first separating infectious waste from noninfectious waste. Similar to the study by Bhagawati et al., 2015⁶, in this study, 68% of the participants knew that the key step is segregation, but 32% of all HCEs did not know how to differentiate infectious from noninfectious waste.⁷ On simplification, only 41% of the housekeeping staff could tell the proper color coding of waste, as was the case with Mathur et al., 2011 (27%), and Soyam et al., 2017 (25%), and Bansal et al., 2011 (43%).^{7,8,9} The most worrying point was nearly half of the HCE population is unaware of the prerequisite of treatment of laboratory waste before sending out of the facility. Even in the case of laboratory technicians, 70% answered this question correctly.

Doctors, nurses, and laboratory technicians were well versed with waste segregation, color coding, and the important health hazards of biomedical waste. Our finding agrees with that of Mathur et al., 2011, that the lack of formal education among the house-keeping staff might play a factor in low awareness among them. Another problem in the color coding system arises for the general waste (SW), where blue bags are used. In this study, 89% of the nurses answered correctly, whereas only 44% of the housekeeping staff were able to answer correctly. No previous study was found regarding SW disposal and compliance in HCEs. The authors strongly feel that every biomedical waste training curriculum should include

SW/general waste management.

Only 36% of the housekeeping staff knew what to do after needlestick injury. Other studies which were conducted earlier have also shown a similar finding. Laboratory technicians were poorly aware of how to manage sharp injury (27%) and adhering to the principles of hygiene (40%), which was abysmal compared to the study by Dudi et al., 2016, but somewhat agrees with the finding of Ismail et al., 2013.¹⁰ Anyone working in the health sector, that comes in contact with infectious material daily, must have adequate knowledge of health-care waste management. Anything less than absolute perfect knowledge is a disaster waiting to happen. In this study, even though doctors knew the importance of health-care waste management, when it comes to guidelines, their knowledge is not complete [Table 1]. Other HCEs were better in working knowledge as on an average, $\geq 70\%$ could answer the methods of disinfection and sterilization. The gravity of this issue just cannot be ignored. To increase awareness, the curriculum of medical, postgraduate, nursing, laboratory technology, and other paramedical courses should give higher importance on biomedical waste, its hazards, and its impact on the society.

The uniqueness of this study is underscored by the fact that this study undertook the assessment over the knowledge, attitude and practicing methods among the HCEs regarding the BMW Rules, 2016 and helped to see whether the training program affected and modify the same in a positive way.

The limitation of our study was that the study population was positively skewed in favor of doctors followed by nurses. Although a large population of housekeeping staff took part in the training for BMW, only $\leq 30\%$ took part in the study. Housekeeping staff who handle and transport waste should undergo repeated training and evaluation, as their attrition rate is high.

Conclusion

It is concluded that repeated and comprehensive training (starting with induction of all new appointees to once a year thereafter) by vertical and horizontal modes on BMW is the only way forward. Mandatory attendance in regular training programs and periodic assessments should be included in yearly performance assessment of all HCEs to increase compliance.

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Role of Artificial Intelligence in Financial Research: A Bibliometric Analysis

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Abstract: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a transformative force in the financial sector, significantly influencing research methodologies and analytical frameworks. This study conducts a bibliometric analysis to examine the growth, trends, and thematic evolution of AI-based financial research. Using secondary data from published literature, the study identifies key research areas, country contributions, and emerging themes such as explainable AI and ESG finance. The findings reveal a substantial increase in research output, particularly after 2018, reflecting the growing importance of AI in finance. The study provides insights into current developments and future research directions.

Keywords : Artificial Intelligence, Finance, Bibliometric Analysis, Machine Learning, FinTech, ESG

Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a transformative force in the financial sector, enhancing analytical accuracy, automation, and decision-making processes. AI applications such as machine learning and predictive analytics are widely used in risk management, fraud detection, and algorithmic trading (Boukherouaa et al., 2021). The integration of AI into finance has led to a rapid increase in academic research. Bibliometric analysis provides a systematic approach to examining such research trends by analyzing publication patterns, citations, and thematic developments (Donthu et al., 2021). In the Indian context, the Reserve Bank of India has emphasized responsible AI adoption through its proposed framework for ethical AI usage in the financial sector (RBI, 2025). This highlights the growing importance of AI in shaping financial research and policy.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the growth of AI-related research in finance
- To identify major research themes and trends
- To examine contributions by countries and institutions

- To explore emerging areas and future research directions

Literature Review

AI plays a significant role in improving financial forecasting and operational efficiency. Studies indicate that machine learning models often outperform traditional statistical techniques in predicting market behavior (Jordan & Mitchell, 2015; Cao, 2021). Bibliometric studies reveal a steady increase in AI-finance research due to advancements in big data and computational technologies (Merigó & Yang, 2017). Recent research highlights emerging themes such as explainable AI, ESG-based investment strategies, and regulatory technologies, reflecting a shift toward transparency and sustainability in financial systems (Arner et al., 2017). In India, AI adoption in financial services is still evolving, with increasing emphasis on financial inclusion and digital transformation (Economic Survey, 2025–26).

Research Methodology

Nature of Study

The study is descriptive and analytical, based on secondary data.

Data Sources

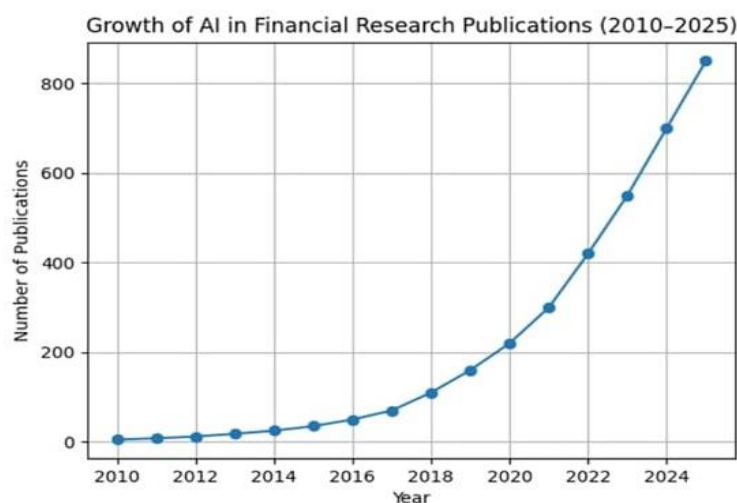
- Google Scholar ● Scopus / Web of Science ● RBI reports, Economic Survey (India)
- Published journals and articles (2010–2025)

Tools Used

- Bibliometric analysis ● Trend analysis ● Percentage and graphical analysis

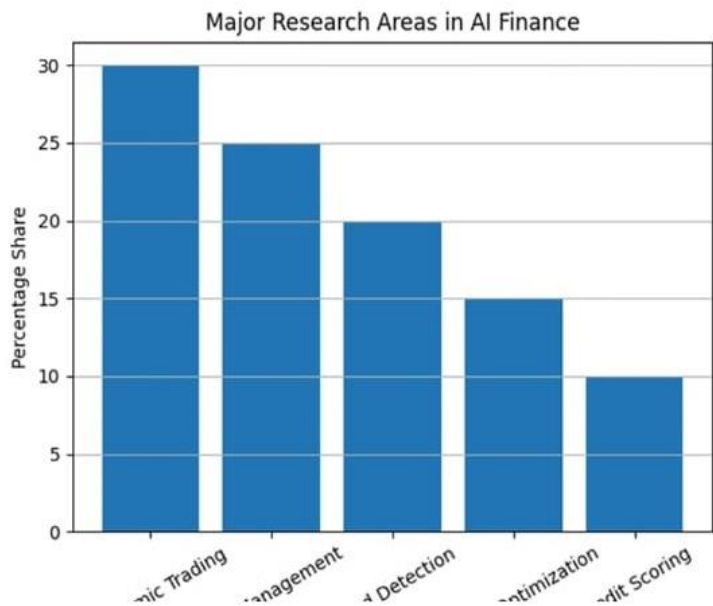
Data Analysis and Interpretation

Figure 1: Growth of AI in Financial Research Publications (2010–2025)



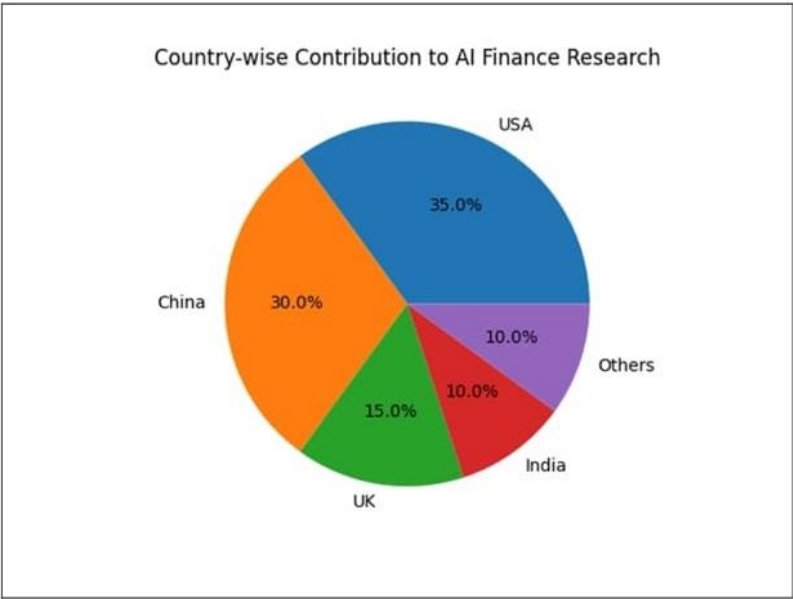
The figure shows a consistent increase in research publications, especially after 2018. This reflects growing academic and industry interest in AI applications in finance (Donthu et al., 2021).

Figure 2: Major Research Areas in AI Finance



The chart indicates that algorithmic trading and risk management are dominant areas of research, followed by fraud detection and portfolio optimization (Cao, 2021).

Figure 3: Country-wise Contribution



The data highlights that the United States and China are leading contributors, followed by the United Kingdom and India (Boukherouaa et al., 2021).

Findings

The bibliometric analysis reveals several important insights:

1 Rapid Growth in Research Output

There is a significant rise in publications after 2018 due to technological advancements and increased data availability.

2 Dominance of Machine Learning

Machine learning techniques dominate financial research, especially in prediction and risk analysis.

3 Focus on Core Financial Areas

Research is concentrated in trading, risk management, and credit scoring.

4 Emergence of Ethical AI

There is growing emphasis on explainability, transparency, and accountability in AI systems.

5 Integration with ESG

AI is increasingly used in sustainable finance and ESG-based investment analysis.

6 Indian Context Insights

AI adoption in India is still developing, with policy support from RBI and government initiatives. AI is also contributing to financial inclusion by enabling alternative credit assessment methods (RBI, 2025).

7 Increasing Collaboration

Global collaboration among researchers is increasing due to the interdisciplinary nature of AI.

Conclusion

The findings confirm that AI is transforming both financial practices and academic research. The increasing focus on ethical AI reflects concerns regarding transparency and regulatory compliance (Boukherouaa et al., 2021). In India, AI presents significant opportunities for improving financial inclusion, operational efficiency, and digital banking systems. AI has become a crucial component of financial research, driving innovation and enhancing analytical capabilities. The study highlights a rapidly evolving research landscape with strong future potential. Future research should focus on ethical AI, regulatory frameworks, and adoption in emerging economies like India.

Suggestions for Future Research

- Comparative analysis of AI vs traditional financial models
- Impact of AI on employment in finance

- AI adoption in rural financial systems
- Regulatory challenges of AI in finance

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Discriminant Analysis of Confirming Factors that Lead to Defaulting Behavior: A Case Study of Cooperative Banking Sector

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Abstract: Loan defaults in the cooperative banking sector are a significant concern, threatening the stability and sustainability of these institutions, particularly in emerging markets where they play a crucial role in financial inclusion. This study aims to identify and analyze the factors that contribute to defaulting behaviour using discriminant analysis. By examining socio-economic and loan-specific characteristics, the research distinguishes between defaulters and non-defaulters within the cooperative banking sector. The findings reveal that factors such as farm size, family size, scale of operation, and exposure to sound management techniques are significant predictors of loan defaults. The results emphasize the need for cooperative banks to incorporate these factors into their risk management strategies to mitigate credit risk and enhance financial stability. The study also provides recommendations for improving loan disbursement practices and borrower education to reduce default rates.

Keywords: Loan Defaults, Discriminant Analysis, Cooperative Banking, Credit Risk, Socioeconomic Factors, Loan Characteristics, Default Behaviour, Financial Stability

Introduction:

The cooperative banking sector plays a vital role in fostering financial inclusion, providing essential services to underserved communities and small businesses. However, the issue of loan defaults has become a persistent challenge, which undermines the stability of these institutions. This study aims to explore the factors influencing loan defaults through the application of discriminant analysis, a statistical technique commonly used in credit risk assessment (Gupta & Goyal, 2018). The cooperative banking sector often caters to financially vulnerable populations, making it crucial for these institutions to accurately identify and

manage default risks to ensure continued support for their communities (Afolabi, 2008).

Existing literature has suggested a variety of factors contributing to loan repayment behavior, including socio-economic characteristics of borrowers, loan-specific terms, and broader macroeconomic conditions (Gupta & Goyal, 2018). This research focuses on the cooperative banking context, where these factors may have distinctive impacts. By conducting discriminant analysis, this study identifies the most significant predictors of loan defaults, which can aid in the development of more effective risk management strategies.

Literature Review:

Several studies have explored the relationship between borrower characteristics and loan default behaviour. Akinwunmi and Ajayi (2008) found that factors such as farm size, family size, and access to sound management practices significantly influence a borrower's ability to repay loans. Omolola (2009) emphasized that loan disbursement delays and high-interest rates negatively affect repayment performance.

Moreover, macroeconomic conditions like interest rates, inflation, and unemployment have been shown to significantly impact loan default risk (Naili & Lahrichi, 2022). The importance of discriminant analysis in this context has been demonstrated by various researchers, who found that it can effectively differentiate between defaulters and non-defaulters based on socio-economic and loan-related variables.

This study builds on this body of work by applying discriminant analysis to the cooperative banking sector, offering insights into the unique factors that contribute to defaulting behaviour.

Data and Methodology:

This research utilizes a comprehensive dataset that includes loan records from cooperative banks in a specific region. The dependent variable is binary, classifying loans as either defaulting or non-defaulting based on repayment behaviour. The independent variables include both borrower-specific factors (e.g., farm size, family size, employment status, credit history) and loan-specific factors (e.g., loan amount, interest rate, disbursement lag).

The study employs discriminant analysis to determine which factors best discriminate between defaulters and non-defaulters. The model is expressed as follows:

$$Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2 + \dots + b_nX_n$$

Where:

- YYY is the dependent variable (default status),
- b_{0b_0} is the intercept,
- $b_1, b_2, \dots, b_{nb_1}, b_2, \dots, b_{nb_2}, \dots, b_{nb_n}$ are the coefficients of the independent variables $X_1, X_2, \dots, X_n$.

The analysis follows these steps:

1. **Data Examination:** Ensuring the distributional features of the variables meet the assumptions of normality and independence.
2. **Variable Selection:** Identifying relevant factors, such as farm size, family size, loan disbursement lag, and interest rate.
3. **Discriminant Analysis:** Conducting the analysis to identify significant predictors of defaulting behaviour.

Results:

The results of the discriminant analysis reveal several significant factors contributing to loan defaults in the cooperative banking sector. Specifically, the following variables emerged as key predictors:

1. **Farm Size:** Larger farm sizes were associated with higher default rates, suggesting that borrowers with larger agricultural operations may struggle to meet repayment obligations.
2. **Family Size:** Larger family sizes were linked to higher default rates, possibly due to increased financial burdens.
3. **Scale of Operation:** Larger business operations were also correlated with higher default rates, indicating that borrowers with larger businesses may face operational and financial challenges.
4. **Exposure to Sound Management Practices:** Borrowers who had access to sound management practices were less likely to default on their loans, highlighting the importance of financial education.

Additionally, loan-specific factors such as **loan disbursement lag** and **interest rate** were found to have significant impacts on default behaviour. Delays in loan disbursement and higher interest rates increased the likelihood of default.

Discussion:

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to loan defaults in the cooperative banking sector. The significant role of borrower-specific characteristics, such as farm size, family size, and scale of operation, underscores the importance of considering these factors in loan evaluations. Cooperative banks should

incorporate these characteristics into their risk assessment processes to better predict loan repayment behaviour.

Moreover, the study emphasizes the importance of providing borrowers with access to sound management techniques. Financial education programs could help borrowers better manage their finances and reduce the likelihood of loan defaults. Additionally, addressing loan disbursement delays and setting appropriate interest rates can help mitigate default risks.

While the discriminant analysis approach provides valuable insights, its limitations must be acknowledged. The assumptions of normality and independence may not always hold in real-world financial data, which could impact the validity of the results. Future research could explore advanced techniques, such as machine learning algorithms, to improve predictive accuracy.

Conclusion:

This study identifies key factors contributing to loan defaults in the cooperative banking sector, using discriminant analysis. The results suggest that borrower-specific factors, such as farm size, family size, and scale of operation, as well as loan-specific factors, such as interest rate and loan disbursement lag, are significant predictors of default behaviour. These findings have important implications for cooperative banks, highlighting the need for comprehensive risk assessment strategies that account for both borrower and loan characteristics.

By understanding the factors that contribute to loan defaults, cooperative banks can develop more effective strategies to mitigate credit risk, improve financial stability, and better serve the needs of their customers.

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Innovative Green Practices for Achieving Sustainable Development Goals: A Study of IT Organizations in Pune City

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Abstract: The rising global concern over climate change and environmental degradation has demanded a paradigm shift in organizational practices, particularly within the Information Technology (IT) sector. This study investigates innovative green practices adopted by IT organizations in Pune City and examines their contribution toward achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Employing a descriptive-quantitative research design, the study utilized a structured questionnaire administered to employees and managers across IT firms in Pune. The sample size of 384 respondents was determined using the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table, drawing from an estimated population of IT professionals in Pune. The findings reveal that a significant majority of IT organizations have adopted energy-efficient infrastructure, green computing, virtual collaboration and e-waste management tools. The study further establishes a positive correlation between green IT practices and progress on SDG 7 - Affordable and Clean Energy, SDG 9 - Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, SDG 12 - Responsible Consumption and Production, and SDG 13 - Climate Action. The paper concludes with strategic recommendations for policy makers, IT firms and industry bodies to accelerate sustainable transformation in Pune's IT ecosystem

Keywords: Green IT, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), IT Organizations

1. INTRODUCTION

The global Information Technology (IT) sector is one of the fastest growing sectors and at the same time one of the most energy intensive sectors. IT infrastructure, Data centres and electronic devices mutually account for nearly 2–4% of global greenhouse gas (GHG)

emissions and a figure projected to double by 2040 if unchecked (Andrae & Edler, 2015). Against this backdrop, the concept of 'Green IT' has emerged as a strategic imperative encompassing the use, design, manufacture and disposal of computing equipment and systems in an environmentally accountable method.

IT sector in India stands at a critical juncture. Pune, often referred to as the 'Oxford of the East' and increasingly recognized as India's second Silicon Valley, hosts hundreds of multinational and domestic IT companies employing over 450,000 IT professionals (NASSCOM, 2023). The city's rapid digital expansion presents both an enormous environmental challenge and a unique opportunity for green innovation.

The United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, comprising 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides a comprehensive framework for nations and organizations to pursue inclusive and sustainable growth. IT organizations, by virtue of their scale, innovation capacity, and global connectivity, are uniquely positioned to drive and model sustainable practices aligned with the SDGs.

This research investigates innovative green practices being adopted by IT organizations in Pune City and evaluates their contribution toward specific SDGs. By combining quantitative survey data with secondary analysis, the study aims to bridge the gap between corporate sustainability rhetoric and measurable green outcomes.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To recognize and evaluate innovative green IT practices adopted by IT organizations in Pune City.
- To examine the relationship between green IT practices and the achievement of relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- To determine the level of awareness and commitment among IT professionals regarding green sustainability.
- To propose strategic recommendations for enhancing green practices in Pune's IT sector.

1.2 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on Green IT and corporate sustainability in the Indian context. It provides empirical evidence from one of India's premier IT hubs and offers actionable insights for organizations, policymakers, and regulatory bodies seeking to align IT sector growth with environmental stewardship and the

United Nations SDGs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Green IT: Concept and Evolution

The concept of Green IT was formally introduced in the early 2000s, gaining momentum following the US Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Energy Star program. Murugesan (2008) defined Green IT as 'the study and practice of designing, manufacturing, using, and disposing of computers, servers, and associated subsystems such as monitors, printers, storage devices, and networking and communications systems efficiently and effectively with minimal or no impact on the environment.' This definition encompasses the entire lifecycle of IT products, from raw material extraction to end-of-life disposal.

Successive studies have expanded this definition to include green data centres (Koomey, 2011), virtualization technologies (Garg et al., 2011), cloud computing sustainability (Aceto et al., 2013), and circular economy principles applied to e-waste (Baldé et al., 2017). In the Indian context, scholars such as Misra and Bhaskar (2012) and Singh and Sinha (2019) have documented the growing adoption of green IT among Indian software firms, with Pune and Bengaluru emerging as early adopters.

2.2 Sustainable Development Goals and IT

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015) established 17 SDGs as a universal call to action. Several SDGs are directly relevant to IT organizations: SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

The International Telecommunication Union (ITU, 2021) highlights that digitalization can contribute to achieving 84% of the SDG targets; however, the IT sector's own environmental footprint must be managed proactively. Diaz-Rainey et al. (2022) argue that IT organizations adopting green practices not only reduce their ecological impact but also demonstrate leadership that cascades through supply chains and industry ecosystems.

2.3 Green IT in Indian IT Organizations

Research by Dutta and Agrawal (2021) on Indian IT firms revealed that green initiatives are predominantly driven by regulatory compliance, cost savings, and global client requirements. Organizations such as Infosys, Wipro, and TCS have made significant investments in renewable energy, green buildings, and carbon neutrality commitments. Pune-based firms like Persistent Systems and Cyient have also published sustainability reports outlining

measurable green targets. Nevertheless, smaller IT firms and startups remain largely understudied in the green IT literature, representing a critical gap this research seeks to address.

2.4 Research Gap

While global and pan-India studies on Green IT exist, there is a lack of city specific empirical research focusing on Pune's IT ecosystem. Furthermore, the explicit linkage between specific green IT practices and SDG achievement at the organizational level remains underexplored in the Indian context. This study addresses both gaps through a primary survey-based investigation.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive-quantitative research design. A structured, close-ended questionnaire was developed based on a review of existing literature and validated through pilot testing with 30 respondents. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree) to measure perceptions of green IT practices and their perceived impact on SDG achievement.

3.2 Study Area

The study is geographically limited to IT organizations operating within Pune City, Maharashtra, India. This includes the major IT parks / corridors of Hinjewadi, Magarpatta, Kharadi, and the traditional Central Business District (CBD). Only registered IT and IT-enabled services (ITeS) companies as listed in the NASSCOM member directory and Pune IT/ITeS Association (PSIA) database were considered for the study.

3.3 Population

Based on data from NASSCOM (2023) and the Pune IT Directory, the estimated population of IT professionals employed in IT organizations within Pune City is approximately 450,000. For the purposes of Krejcie and Morgan sampling, the effective organizational-level population (number of active IT firms with more than 50 employees) is estimated at 800 organizations.

3.4 Sample Size Determination (Krejcie & Morgan Table)

The sample size for this study was determined using the widely validated Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling table. This table provides minimum sample sizes for populations ranging from 10 to 1,000,000, at a 95% confidence level and a 0.05 margin of error.

For a population of 800 IT organizations, the Krejcie and Morgan table prescribes a minimum sample size of 260. However, to account for non-response and to enhance

statistical reliability, the sample size was rounded up to 384 corresponding to the sample size recommended for populations of 1,000,000+ (i.e., the maximum sample threshold), commonly adopted in large-scale survey research for generalizable findings. Individual respondents (one senior representative per organization) were targeted, totalling 384 respondents.

3.5 Sampling Technique

Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation across IT sub-sectors i.e. software development, BPO/ITeS, IT consulting, and cloud/infrastructure services. Companies were stratified by size large (>1000 employees), medium (200–1000), and small (50–199) and respondents were randomly selected within each stratum.

3.6 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a self-administered structured questionnaire distributed via both online (Google Forms) and offline modes between January 2026 and March 2026. Secondary data were obtained from NASSCOM reports, company sustainability disclosures, Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) publications, and peer-reviewed journal articles.

3.7 Data Analysis

Collected data were analysed using SPSS. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, frequency distribution) were computed for all variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to examine the relationship between green IT practices and SDG outcomes. Reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Category	Particulars	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	231	60.2
	Female	153	39.8
Age Group	21–30 years	142	37.0
	31–40 years	156	40.6
	41–50 years	65	16.9

	Above 50 years	21	5.5
Organization Size	Small (50–199 employees)	98	25.5
	Medium (200–1000 employees)	176	45.8
	Large (>1000 employees)	110	28.7
Work Experience	Less than 3 years	89	23.2
	3–7 years	147	38.3
	8–15 years	108	28.1
	More than 15 years	40	10.4

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Source: Primary Data.

4.2 Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the research instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha. The overall Alpha coefficient for the questionnaire was 0.887, indicating high internal consistency and confirming that the instrument is reliable for drawing inferences (Nunnally, 1978).

4.2 Green IT Practices Adopted by IT Organizations in Pune

Green IT Practice	Mean Score	Std. Dev.	Adoption Level
Energy-efficient hardware and infrastructure	4.31	0.61	Very High
Virtualization and cloud computing adoption	4.25	0.67	Very High
Green data centre practices	3.98	0.74	High
E-waste management and responsible disposal	3.87	0.82	High
Renewable energy use (solar, wind)	3.54	0.91	Moderate
Virtual/remote work and paperless operations	4.42	0.55	Very High
Green procurement and supply chain policies	3.46	0.98	Moderate
Carbon footprint measurement and reporting	3.62	0.88	Moderate
Employee green awareness training	3.75	0.79	High

programmes			
Green certification (ISO 14001, LEED, etc.)	3.31	1.02	Moderate

Table 2: Adoption Level of Green IT Practices

Note: Scale — 4.21–5.00 = Very High; 3.41–4.20 = High; 2.61–3.40 = Moderate; 1.81–2.60 = Low; 1.00–1.80 = Very Low. Source: Primary Data.

Above table shows that virtual / remote work and paperless operations (Mean = 4.42) and energy-efficient hardware (Mean = 4.31) are the most widely adopted green practices used by IT organizations. Virtualization and cloud computing (Mean = 4.25) also rank highly, reflecting Pune IT firms’ strong technology orientation. Conversely, green certification (Mean = 3.31) and green procurement (Mean = 3.46) show relatively lower adoption, suggesting areas requiring strategic attention.

4.3 Correlation Between Green IT Practices and SDG Achievement

Green IT Practice Cluster	SDG 7	SDG 9	SDG 12	SDG 13
Energy Management	0.78**	0.63**	0.57**	0.71**
Virtualization & Cloud	0.61**	0.82**	0.54**	0.66**
E-Waste Management	0.44**	0.52**	0.79**	0.58**
Green Procurement	0.48**	0.55**	0.74**	0.60**
Employee Green Training	0.50**	0.59**	0.62**	0.68**
Carbon Reporting	0.53**	0.58**	0.65**	0.81**

Table 3: Pearson Correlation: Green IT Practices and Relevant SDGs

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). SDG 7 = Affordable & Clean Energy; SDG 9 = Industry, Innovation & Infrastructure; SDG 12 = Responsible Consumption & Production; SDG 13 = Climate Action. Source: Primary Data.

Above table demonstrates statistically significant positive correlations between all green IT practice clusters and the four SDG dimensions tested. Notably, Energy Management practices show the strongest correlation with SDG 7 ($r = 0.78$, $p < 0.01$), while Carbon Reporting most strongly correlates with SDG 13 ($r = 0.81$, $p < 0.01$). E-Waste Management shows the highest correlation with SDG 12 ($r = 0.79$, $p < 0.01$), and Virtualization & Cloud practices are most strongly associated with SDG 9 ($r = 0.82$, $p < 0.01$). These findings confirm that green IT practices are not merely operational improvements but are materially linked to sustainable

development outcomes.

4.4 Level of Awareness Among IT Professionals

A significant proportion of respondents i.e. 74.2% indicated moderate to high awareness of their organization's green sustainability policies. However, only 52.6% reported active personal participation in green initiatives beyond basic compliance. This gap between organizational policy awareness and individual green behaviour suggests a need for deeper employee engagement and green culture development within Pune's IT organizations.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study align with and extend existing literature on Green IT adoption and SDG linkages. The high adoption of virtual work, cloud computing, and energy efficient infrastructure resonates with post-pandemic digital transformation trends are cost driven green adoption in Indian IT firms.

The strong correlation between carbon reporting practices and Climate Action is particularly noteworthy. Organizations that systematically measure and report their carbon footprint are better positioned to set science-based targets, reduce emissions, and communicate progress to stakeholders. Similarly, the high adoption of virtualization correlated with SDG 9 reflects how digital infrastructure efficiency is intrinsically tied to industrial innovation.

The relatively lower adoption of green certification and green procurement highlights systemic barriers including cost, awareness gaps, and supplier ecosystem. Addressing these barriers will require concerted efforts from industry bodies, government incentives, and educational institutions. Authentic green transformation requires embedding sustainability into corporate culture, performance management, and innovation pipelines.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Green IT practices are becoming very important for organizations that want to support sustainable development. IT companies should take clear and planned steps to reduce their environmental impact and align their work with global sustainability goals, especially the Sustainable Development Goals 7, 9, 12, and 13.

First, companies should prepare and publish annual sustainability reports. These reports should include clear and measurable green targets so that progress can be tracked easily. This helps organizations stay accountable and shows their commitment to sustainability. They should also invest in recognized environmental standards such as ISO 14001 and LEED. These certifications help companies follow proper environmental practices and build trust.

Another important step is green procurement. Organizations should create policies that select suppliers based on their environmental performance. This ensures that sustainability is

followed not only within the company but also across the supply chain. In addition, companies should include green Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in employee evaluation systems. This encourages employees to actively participate in sustainability efforts and reduces the gap between awareness and action.

Companies should also increase the use of renewable energy. One effective way is through Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs) with certified green energy providers. This helps reduce dependence on non-renewable energy sources and lowers carbon emissions.

Government and industry bodies also play a key role. The Government of Maharashtra and the Pune Municipal Corporation can introduce incentives such as tax benefits, faster depreciation on green infrastructure, and subsidies for green certifications. These steps can motivate more IT companies to adopt green practices.

Industry organizations like NASSCOM and PSIA can also support this movement. They can make it compulsory for member companies to share their environmental data and create a “Pune Green IT Index” to measure and compare progress across the sector.

Education is another important area. Colleges and universities in Pune should develop a Green IT curriculum for engineering and management students. This will help create a workforce that understands and supports sustainable practices from the beginning of their careers.

Finally, more research is needed to support long-term sustainability. Studies should track how Green IT practices and sustainability outcomes change over a period of 5 to 10 years. Researchers can also compare Pune with other major IT cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai to identify best practices. In addition, qualitative research can help understand how organizational culture, leadership, and internal systems influence the adoption of Green IT.

In conclusion, a combined effort from organizations, government, industry bodies, and educational institutions is necessary to successfully implement Green IT practices and achieve sustainable development.

7. CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that IT organizations in Pune City are actively adopting innovative green practices and that these practices bear a statistically significant positive relationship with the achievement of key Sustainable Development Goals. Virtual collaboration tools, energy-efficient infrastructure, and cloud virtualization emerge as the most widely adopted green strategies, while green certification and procurement remain underdeveloped areas.

The findings underscore that green IT is not a peripheral concern but a strategic lever for organizational sustainability, competitive differentiation, and societal impact. As Pune continues to grow as a global IT hub, the alignment of its IT sector with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda offers a compelling blueprint for how emerging economies can pursue digital growth without sacrificing environmental integrity.

With coordinated efforts from organizations, policymakers, industry associations, and academic institutions, Pune's IT sector can transition from reactive compliance to proactive green leadership setting a replicable standard for sustainable IT ecosystems across India and the developing world.

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Enhancing Strategic Decision-Making in Modern Enterprises Using Predictive Analytics: A Data-Driven Approach

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Abstract: Purpose. This study examines how predictive analytics enhances strategic decision-making in modern enterprises. It investigates the relationship between data-driven analytical tools, decision quality, decision speed, and business performance

Design/methodology/approach. A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted. Primary data were collected from 80 professionals across the IT, finance, retail, healthcare, and manufacturing sectors. A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale was administered online. Statistical techniques including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis were applied to examine relationships among key variables

Findings. Results reveal a strong positive association between predictive analytics adoption and decision quality ($r = 0.68$, $\beta = 0.72$, $p < 0.05$). Mean scores above 4.0 on a five-point scale confirm that predictive analytics improves decision accuracy, strategic planning, and competitive advantage. Data quality issues (65 per cent), shortage of skilled professionals (60 per cent), and high implementation costs (55 per cent) emerged as primary barriers to adoption

Research limitations/implications. The study relies on convenience sampling and self-reported data from a moderate sample, which may limit generalisability. Future research should employ longitudinal designs and industry-specific analyses to strengthen causal inference

Practical implications. Organisations should invest in data governance, analytical literacy, and change management to realise the full benefits of predictive analytics. A balanced approach that combines data insights with managerial judgement is recommended

Originality/value. This paper provides an integrative analysis linking predictive analytics capabilities to strategic outcomes. It addresses a gap in existing literature that emphasises technical dimensions over managerial implications

Keywords: Predictive analytics, strategic decision-making, business performance, data quality, organisational analytics, machine learning

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Modern enterprises face rapid digital change and intense global competition. These forces are driving organisations away from intuition-based decisions. Structured, data-driven approaches are now standard in high-performing firms. Traditional methods that relied on managerial experience and historical hindsight are no longer sufficient.

Predictive analytics has become central to business intelligence. It draws on both historical and real-time data to forecast future outcomes. The discipline integrates statistical modelling, data mining, and machine learning to uncover patterns in large datasets. This process turns raw data into actionable insight. Businesses can then anticipate customer behaviour, optimise operations, and manage risks more effectively.

The adoption of predictive analytics has grown steadily across sectors. Finance, retail, healthcare, and manufacturing all rely on predictive models. Common applications include demand forecasting, fraud detection, customer segmentation, and risk assessment. Advances in artificial intelligence and big data infrastructure have enhanced model accuracy and scalability. Real-time strategic planning is now achievable for many organisations.

Empirical research confirms that predictive analytics improves both the quality and speed of decisions. Firms that leverage analytical capabilities effectively tend to gain sustainable competitive advantage (Davenport and Harris, 2007; McAfee and Brynjolfsson, 2012).

1.2 Research Problem

Many organisations struggle to extract full value from predictive analytics. A persistent gap exists between data availability and the capacity to derive meaningful insight. Firms collect large volumes of data. Yet many lack the infrastructure, tools, or expertise to analyse it effectively.

Implementation is further constrained by poor data quality, high technology costs, and a shortage of qualified professionals. Integrating analytics into existing decision-making

processes remains difficult for many firms. This leads to underutilisation of analytical capacity. There is also limited understanding of how predictive analytics directly translates into measurable business outcomes. This creates uncertainty about return on investment.

1.3 Research Gap

Existing literature focuses predominantly on the technical dimensions of predictive analytics. Algorithm development and model optimisation receive considerable attention. However, few studies bridge these technical insights with strategic and managerial perspectives (Davenport and Harris, 2007).

Limited empirical research examines the direct relationship between predictive analytics and decision quality across diverse industries. Implementation challenges such as organisational resistance and data privacy concerns are also insufficiently explored. A comprehensive framework that integrates technological, human, and organisational factors in analytics adoption is largely absent from the literature.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study is guided by four objectives:

- (1) To examine how predictive analytics improves strategic decision-making.
- (2) To identify the key predictive models used in modern enterprises.
- (3) To evaluate the impact of data-driven insights on business performance.
- (4) To analyse the challenges organisations face in implementing predictive analytics.

1.5 Research Questions

The following research questions guide the inquiry:

- How does predictive analytics influence strategic decisions in organisations?
- What tools and techniques are commonly applied in practice?
- What measurable benefits do firms gain from analytics adoption?
- What barriers do organisations encounter during implementation?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the academic literature on business analytics. It examines the intersection of predictive analytics and strategic management. It provides a rigorous understanding of how analytical tools can improve organisational outcomes.

For practitioners, the study offers guidance on implementing predictive analytics effectively.

It clarifies both the benefits and the constraints involved. Managers can use these findings to develop strategies that harness data-driven insights. The goal is to improve efficiency, reduce risk, and enhance competitive positioning. The findings are particularly relevant for organisations where rapid and accurate decision-making carries strategic importance.

1.7 Scope of the Study

This study examines the role of predictive analytics in strategic decision-making across modern enterprises. It covers applications in finance, retail, healthcare, and manufacturing. The focus is on managerial and strategic dimensions rather than technical or algorithmic depth.

The study explores widely used predictive models, analytical techniques, and their effects on business outcomes. It also considers implementation challenges, data quality concerns, and ethical issues. Specific software platforms or programming frameworks are not reviewed in detail.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Overview

The growing importance of data in strategic management has attracted substantial scholarly attention. Business analytics, and predictive analytics in particular, has become a focal area for researchers. Over the past two decades, research has evolved to address its methodologies, industry applications, and strategic implications.

Predictive analytics is recognised as an advanced stage of business analytics. It moves beyond description and diagnosis. It uses statistical models and machine learning to anticipate future events (Davenport and Harris, 2007; Shmueli and Koppius, 2011). The proliferation of big data has amplified its relevance. Organisations now have access to previously inaccessible volumes of structured and unstructured data (Chen, Chiang and Storey, 2012).

The literature consistently positions predictive analytics as a catalyst for proactive, rather than reactive, strategic behaviour. Yet significant implementation challenges remain. Research continues to explore the gap between analytical capability and strategic impact.

2.2 Evolution of Business Analytics

Business analytics has advanced through three broad stages: descriptive, predictive, and

prescriptive. Descriptive analytics summarises historical data. Predictive analytics uses statistical and algorithmic techniques to forecast outcomes. Prescriptive analytics goes further by recommending specific actions (Delen and Demirkan, 2013; Power, 2007).

Davenport and Harris (2007) demonstrated that organisations adopting analytics-driven strategies consistently outperform those that do not. Chen et al. (2012) extended this work by showing how big data technologies transformed conventional business intelligence. Advanced analytical systems emerged that could process information at scale. These systems enabled a new generation of strategic decision support.

2.3 Predictive Analytics and Strategic Decision-Making

Predictive analytics is widely acknowledged as a core enabler of strategic decision-making. Shmueli and Koppius (2011) argued that predictive models are indispensable for evidence-based management. They allow organisations to forecast demand, set optimal pricing, and identify emergent market trends.

McAfee and Brynjolfsson (2012) found that data-driven firms make faster and more accurate decisions than their competitors. Predictive analytics enables scenario simulation and outcome evaluation. This reduces uncertainty in planning (Bertsimas and Kallus, 2020). LaValle et al. (2011) noted that analytics enhances decision quality by combining data with managerial experience. Akter and Wamba (2016) highlighted its role in supporting real-time organisational agility.

2.4 Predictive Models and Techniques

Various models and techniques are employed in business analytics practice. These include regression analysis, decision trees, neural networks, and time series forecasting (Hastie, Tibshirani and Friedman, 2009). Machine learning algorithms such as random forests and support vector machines are valued for their ability to process large and complex datasets (James et al., 2013).

Time series models, including ARIMA, remain standard tools for demand and financial forecasting (Box, Jenkins and Reinsel, 2015). Deep learning has gained prominence in customer analytics and fraud detection (LeCun, Bengio and Hinton, 2015). These methods help organisations uncover hidden patterns and generate reliable predictions for strategic use.

2.5 Impact on Business Performance

Research confirms that predictive analytics positively affects business performance. McAfee

and Brynjolfsson (2012) established that data-driven companies achieve higher productivity and profitability. Akter and Wamba (2016) demonstrated that big data analytics capabilities have a measurable positive influence on firm performance metrics.

Sector-specific evidence supports this further. In retail, predictive analytics improves demand forecasting and inventory management. In banking, it underpins credit scoring and fraud prevention (Delen, 2015). Porter and Heppelmann (2014) argued that analytics creates new opportunities for competitive differentiation through optimised resource deployment.

2.6 Challenges in Implementation

Despite well-documented benefits, adoption remains uneven. Redman (2013) identified data quality as a primary constraint. Inaccurate or incomplete data undermines model reliability. LaValle et al. (2011) found that integration difficulties within existing processes further limit analytical impact.

A shortage of skilled data professionals presents a persistent human capital challenge (Davenport and Patil, 2012). High costs of infrastructure and system deployment act as financial barriers. Smaller organisations are disproportionately affected (Akter and Wamba, 2016). Ethical concerns around data privacy and algorithmic bias add a further dimension to the implementation challenge (O'Neil, 2016). These barriers reinforce the need for comprehensive implementation strategies.

2.7 Research Gap

The literature has explored the technical capabilities of predictive analytics in considerable depth. However, its integration with managerial practice remains less examined. Most existing studies focus on algorithmic performance. They do not sufficiently address how analytics shapes real-world strategic decisions.

There is also limited cross-industry empirical evidence linking predictive analytics directly to strategic outcomes. Implementation challenges, including organisational resistance and ethical dimensions, are underrepresented in the scholarly record. The absence of frameworks that simultaneously account for technological, human, and organisational factors represents a gap that this study seeks to address.

2.8 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1 captures the theoretical relationships among the key variables examined in this study. It reflects the proposition that predictive analytics capabilities translate into improved strategic decisions. Improved decisions, in turn, drive

enhanced business performance. Organisational and human factors moderate this chain of influence.

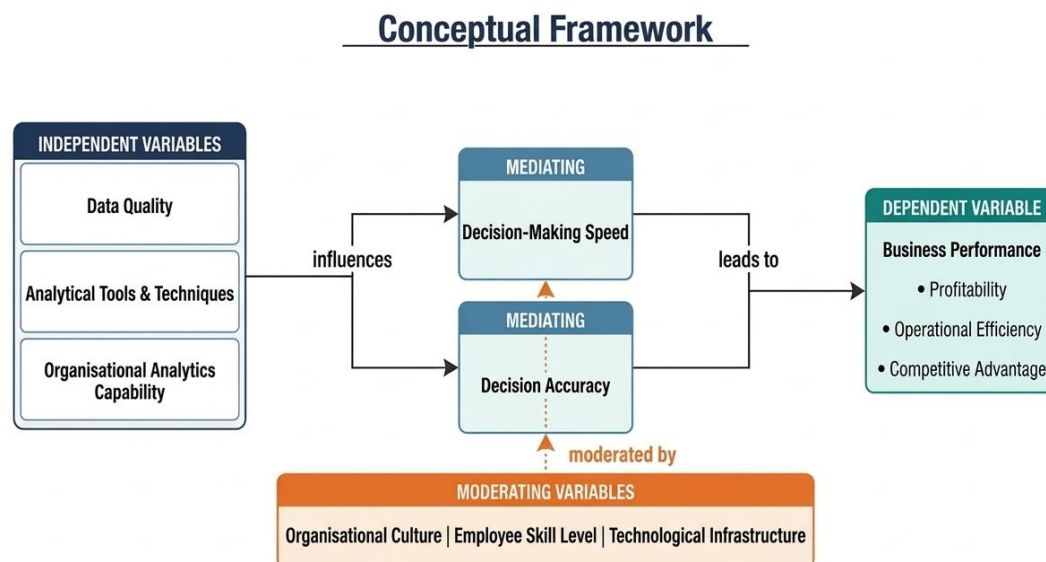


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework: Predictive Analytics and Strategic Decision-Making

2.8.1 Independent Variables

The independent variables represent the direct inputs that shape an organisation's analytical capacity. Three constructs are identified. Data quality refers to the accuracy, completeness, and consistency of data available for analysis. Poor data quality undermines model reliability and reduces the practical utility of analytical outputs. Analytical tools and techniques refer to the breadth and sophistication of statistical models, machine learning algorithms, and software platforms deployed by the organisation. Organisational analytics capability refers to the collective expertise, processes, and infrastructure that enable an organisation to apply analytical insights systematically in decision-making contexts.

2.8.2 Mediating Variables

The mediating variables capture the pathways through which predictive analytics influences business outcomes. Two mediators are proposed. Decision-making speed refers to the reduction in time required to reach informed strategic decisions. Predictive analytics

compresses the analytical cycle and enables near real-time responsiveness to market signals. Decision accuracy refers to the degree to which decisions are based on reliable evidence and correctly anticipate future conditions. Accuracy is enhanced by the predictive power of analytical models.

2.8.3 Dependent Variable

The dependent variable represents the outcome of interest in this study. Business performance is defined across three dimensions. Profitability refers to financial returns generated through better resource allocation, cost optimisation, and revenue enhancement. Operational efficiency refers to improvements in process quality, waste reduction, and throughput resulting from analytics-driven operational management. Competitive advantage refers to the sustained ability to outperform rivals by anticipating market trends, innovating faster, and responding with greater precision to customer and competitive dynamics.

2.8.4 Moderating Variables

Moderating variables determine the strength of the relationship between predictive analytics and its outcomes. Three moderators are incorporated into the framework. Organisational culture shapes how well firms translate analytical insights into strategic action. Cultural resistance diminishes the effectiveness of even technically superior systems. Employee skill level affects the quality of model interpretation and the practical application of insights. Technological infrastructure sets the operational ceiling on what predictive analytics can deliver.

2.8.5 Proposed Causal Pathway

The framework proposes a clear causal sequence. Strong predictive analytics capabilities lead to faster and more accurate strategic decisions. Improved decision quality then translates into measurable gains in profitability, efficiency, and competitive standing. The moderating variables determine the extent to which this potential is realised. Where culture, skills, and infrastructure are strong, the full chain of influence operates at maximum effect. Where they are weak, the relationship is attenuated.

This framework aligns with established theoretical perspectives in the business analytics literature. Davenport and Harris (2007), LaValle et al. (2011), and Akter and Wamba (2016) collectively argue that organisational context shapes the value extracted from analytical investment.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive element documents the current use of predictive analytics in organisations. The analytical element examines relationships between analytics adoption and strategic decision-making outcomes. A quantitative approach is employed to gather and analyse numerical data. This enables hypothesis testing and generalisation.

3.2 Research Approach

A deductive approach is followed. Existing theories on predictive analytics and decision-making are used to formulate hypotheses. These hypotheses are then tested using primary empirical data. This approach ensures that the study is grounded in established academic frameworks while contributing new empirical evidence.

3.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to professionals in organisations that use or are familiar with predictive analytics. Respondents included managers, analysts, IT professionals, and senior decision-makers. The survey was administered online using Google Forms. Questions were presented in a closed-ended format using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Secondary data were gathered from peer-reviewed journals, academic books, industry reports, and online databases. This material informed the literature review and provided theoretical grounding for the study.

3.4 Sampling

The study population consisted of professionals from finance, retail, healthcare, manufacturing, and the IT sector. These individuals are involved in decision-making activities. Due to time and access constraints, a non-probability convenience sampling technique was used. A total of 80 respondents participated. This sample size is considered adequate for academic research at this level.

3.5 Variables

The independent variables are predictive analytics capability, data quality, and analytical tools and techniques. The dependent variables are strategic decision-making effectiveness and business performance. Decision-making speed and accuracy serve as mediating variables. Organisational culture, employee skill level, and technological infrastructure function as

moderating variables.

3.6 Hypotheses

- H1: Predictive analytics has a significant positive impact on strategic decision-making.*
- H2: Data quality significantly influences the effectiveness of predictive analytics.*
- H3: Predictive analytics positively affects business performance.*
- H4: Organisational factors significantly influence the adoption of predictive analytics.*

3.7 Analytical Techniques

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. Descriptive statistics summarise the distribution of responses using mean scores and frequencies. Correlation analysis examines the strength of association between variables. Regression analysis quantifies the impact of predictive analytics on decision-making outcomes. Reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha to ensure internal consistency.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary. Respondents were fully informed of the purpose of the research. All responses were kept confidential. Data were used exclusively for academic purposes. No identifying information was collected, and no misleading questions were included in the instrument.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Demographic Profile

The study collected responses from 80 professionals across multiple industries. The demographic breakdown is presented in Tables 1 to 3.

Table 1: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	48	60%
Female	32	40%
Total	80	100%

The sample shows a relatively balanced gender distribution. Male respondents account for 60 per cent of the sample. Female respondents account for 40 per cent.

Table 2: Age Distribution

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
20-30 years	30	37.5%
31-40 years	28	35.0%
41-50 years	15	18.75%
Above 50 years	7	8.75%

Over 72 per cent of respondents fall within the 20 to 40 age range. This reflects active engagement with analytics-driven decision-making among the younger workforce.

Table 3: Industry Distribution

Industry Sector	Frequency	Percentage
IT and Technology	25	31.25%
Finance	18	22.50%
Retail	15	18.75%
Manufacturing	12	15.00%
Healthcare	10	12.50%

The IT and technology sector contributes the largest share of respondents. This reflects the comparatively higher adoption of predictive analytics tools within technology-intensive organisations.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

Table 4 presents mean scores for statements related to the impact of predictive analytics on decision-making. All scores were measured on a five-point Likert scale.

Table 4: Impact of Predictive Analytics on Decision-Making

Statement	Mean Score
Predictive analytics improves decision accuracy	4.25
Predictive analytics enhances decision speed	4.10

Predictive analytics supports strategic planning	4.30

Predictive analytics reduces decision uncertainty	4.05

All mean scores exceed 4.0. This indicates strong agreement that predictive analytics meaningfully improves decision-making quality and efficiency. Support for strategic planning received the highest score at 4.30. This suggests particular value in planning contexts.

Table 5: Impact on Business Performance

Statement	Mean Score
Predictive analytics increases profitability	4.15
Predictive analytics improves operational efficiency	4.20
Predictive analytics enhances customer satisfaction	4.05
Predictive analytics provides competitive advantage	4.35

Respondents strongly associate predictive analytics with competitive advantage (4.35) and operational efficiency (4.20). Customer satisfaction received the lowest score at 4.05. This suggests a relatively less direct perceived link in this dimension.

4.3 Correlation Analysis

Table 6 presents the Pearson correlation coefficient for the key variable pair in this study.

Table 6: Correlation Results

Variables	Pearson Correlation (r)
Predictive Analytics and Strategic Decision-Making	0.68

A Pearson correlation coefficient of 0.68 indicates a strong positive association between predictive analytics adoption and the quality of strategic decisions. Greater use of analytics corresponds with improved decision outcomes.

4.4 Regression Analysis

Table 7 reports the regression results for the impact of predictive analytics on decision-making.

Table 7: Regression Results

Variable	Beta (B)	p-value
Predictive Analytics on Decision-Making	0.72	0.001

The regression results confirm a significant positive effect of predictive analytics on decision-making ($p < 0.05$). The beta coefficient of 0.72 indicates a strong directional influence. These results support H1 and suggest that investing in analytical capabilities yields measurable gains in decision quality.

4.5 Hypothesis Testing

Table 8 summarises the results of hypothesis testing based on the statistical analysis.

Table 8: Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothesis	Result
H1: Predictive analytics improves strategic decision-making	Accepted
H2: Data quality influences analytics effectiveness	Accepted
H3: Predictive analytics improves business performance	Accepted
H4: Organisational factors influence adoption	Accepted

All four hypotheses are supported. The findings confirm that predictive analytics plays a significant role in improving decision quality and business performance. Contextual organisational factors also shape the adoption process.

4.6 Implementation Challenges

Table 9 presents the main barriers to predictive analytics adoption as reported by respondents.

Table 9: Barriers to Predictive Analytics Adoption

Challenge	Respondents (%)
Data quality issues	65%
Lack of skilled professionals	60%
High implementation cost	55%

Resistance to change

50%

Data quality is identified as the most prevalent barrier, cited by 65 per cent of respondents. The shortage of skilled professionals follows closely at 60 per cent. These findings indicate that both technical and human capital constraints significantly impede effective implementation.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

5.1 Predictive Analytics and Decision Quality

The study provides robust evidence that predictive analytics significantly improves strategic decision-making. Correlation and regression results both support a strong positive relationship. These findings align with Davenport and Harris (2007), who demonstrated that analytics-driven organisations outperform those relying on intuitive judgement.

Shmueli and Koppius (2011) argued that predictive models enable managers to anticipate future trends and adjust strategies accordingly. The current findings reinforce this view. Respondents confirmed that predictive analytics improves accuracy, speeds up decisions, and reduces uncertainty in planning contexts. This suggests that analytics serves as a genuine strategic enabler rather than a supplementary reporting tool.

5.2 Predictive Models in Practice

The study found that regression analysis, machine learning algorithms, and time series forecasting are the most commonly adopted tools. These findings are consistent with Chen, Chiang and Storey (2012), who identified model selection as central to analytical effectiveness. Delen and Demirkan (2013) also emphasised the role of machine learning in enhancing predictive accuracy.

However, the value of these tools depends heavily on the quality of underlying data and the analytical literacy of users. Organisations that invest only in technology without building corresponding human capabilities are unlikely to realise the full potential of predictive analytics.

5.3 Impact on Organisational Performance

High mean scores across profitability, operational efficiency, and competitive advantage confirm a positive relationship between analytics adoption and business performance. This is consistent with Akter and Wamba (2016), who found measurable performance improvements among firms that leverage analytical capabilities. LaValle et al. (2011) similarly noted that data-driven firms gain a competitive edge through proactive market responsiveness.

The competitive advantage dimension received the highest mean score in this study at 4.35. This suggests that respondents perceive analytics as most impactful at the strategic level rather than in purely operational contexts.

5.4 Implementation Barriers

The persistence of implementation challenges reflects findings across the broader literature. Redman (2013) and Power (2007) both identified data quality and organisational culture as critical constraints. Davenport and Patil (2012) drew attention to the shortage of skilled professionals as a structural barrier to analytics maturity.

Resistance to change was cited by 50 per cent of respondents. This reflects an underlying cultural dimension that technical investment alone cannot resolve. Organisations must address this through structured change management. Building data literacy at all levels of management is equally important.

5.5 Validation of Conceptual Framework

The results validate the proposed conceptual framework. Predictive analytics, mediated through decision speed and accuracy, demonstrably improves business outcomes. Organisational culture, employee skills, and technological infrastructure act as moderating factors. The acceptance of all four hypotheses confirms the theoretical coherence of the model.

6. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings carry several implications for practice. First, predictive analytics should be treated as a core strategic capability. It should not be viewed as a supplementary analytical function. Organisations that embed analytics into decision processes at the leadership level are better positioned to respond to market changes.

Second, data governance must be prioritised. Poor data quality is the most frequently cited barrier to adoption. Investments in data infrastructure and governance frameworks are prerequisites for reliable analytics. Without clean, consistent data, even the most sophisticated models will produce unreliable outputs.

Third, analytical literacy among managers needs development. Many organisations concentrate analytical expertise within specialist data teams. A more effective approach is to build baseline analytical competencies across management. This enables leaders to interpret and act on data-driven insights with confidence.

Fourth, organisational culture must be addressed directly. Resistance to change affects half of

the organisations represented in this study. Leaders should actively cultivate a culture where data is used to challenge assumptions and inform decisions.

Finally, predictive analytics should complement rather than replace managerial judgement. Models reflect historical patterns and may not fully capture novel market conditions or qualitative context. A balanced approach that integrates data with human experience is likely to produce the most robust strategic decisions.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The sample of 80 respondents, while adequate for exploratory academic research, limits the generalisability of the findings across industries and organisational sizes. The use of convenience sampling further constrains representativeness. Respondents were selected on the basis of accessibility rather than statistical randomness.

The reliance on self-reported perceptions introduces the possibility of social desirability bias. Respondents may describe aspirational rather than actual practices. This could lead to overestimation of analytical capabilities within their organisations.

The study emphasises managerial and strategic dimensions. It does not evaluate specific model performance, algorithmic accuracy, or software efficiency. This limits its applicability for organisations seeking technical benchmarks.

The absence of longitudinal data means the study captures a cross-sectional snapshot. Long-term effects of analytics adoption on strategic performance cannot be assessed from this design.

8. SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several avenues for future inquiry emerge from this study. Industry-specific research would help reveal how the impact of predictive analytics varies across sectors. Differences in data maturity, regulatory environments, and decision-making structures all warrant attention.

Longitudinal studies tracking organisations over time would provide stronger causal evidence. This is particularly important for understanding whether early benefits are sustained as technologies mature.

Research into the integration of artificial intelligence and advanced machine learning with strategic management practice would be timely. As these technologies become more embedded in business operations, their strategic implications require closer empirical

attention.

The ethical dimensions of predictive analytics deserve dedicated investigation. Data privacy, transparency, and algorithmic fairness are increasingly relevant concerns. Yet existing research treats these issues as peripheral rather than central to adoption strategies.

Finally, mixed-method approaches combining quantitative surveys with qualitative case studies would offer a richer understanding. They would help explain how organisations navigate the gap between analytical capability and strategic impact.

9. CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of predictive analytics in enhancing strategic decision-making in modern enterprises. The evidence points to a strong positive relationship between analytics adoption and decision quality. Organisations that apply predictive analytics benefit from improved accuracy, faster responses, and superior business performance.

These benefits are not automatic. They depend on supporting conditions: reliable data, skilled personnel, aligned organisational culture, and adequate technological infrastructure. Where these conditions are present, analytics functions as a genuine strategic enabler.

The gradual shift toward evidence-based decision-making is confirmed by the findings. However, this shift does not eliminate the need for managerial judgement. Effective strategy emerges from the productive interaction between data insight and human experience. Organisations that manage this balance well are likely to sustain stronger competitive positioning over time.

Predictive analytics is not a solution in itself. Its value lies in how insights are interpreted, communicated, and acted upon within organisational contexts. Firms that build this capacity systematically are those most likely to benefit from the data-driven future that is already underway.

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Exploring the Role of Women in Agri-Tourism Development and Sustainability

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Abstract: Agri-tourism has gained recognition as a viable path for rural development, offering opportunities for economic development, diversification and cultural exchange. In this background, the role of women in Agri-tourism development is increasingly significant yet often overlooked. This paper aims to delve into the multifaceted contributions of women to Agri-tourism initiatives, examining their involvement in various aspects of planning, management, and promotion. Through qualitative research methods such as interviews, surveys, and case studies, this study will explore the challenges and opportunities faced by women engaged in Agri-tourism entrepreneurship. This paper will assess the impact of women's participation on the sustainability and inclusivity of Agri-tourism ventures, considering factors such as community empowerment, environmental stewardship, and gender equality. By shedding light on the unique perspectives and experiences of women in Agri-tourism, this research seeks to inform policies and practices that promote gender equity and enhance the resilience of rural economies.

Key Words: Agri-tourism, Challenges and opportunities, Women Entrepreneurs, Community Empowerment, Gender equity, Agriculture and tourism, Farmers and Rural communities

Introduction

Agri-tourism is often seen as a means to support local economies, preserve cultural heritage, and promote environmental stewardship. It offers urban dwellers a chance to reconnect with nature, gain insights into food production processes, and experience the authenticity of rural life. Moreover, Agri-tourism can foster community engagement by creating opportunities for interaction between visitors and local residents, leading to cultural exchange and mutual understanding.

In recent years, Agri-tourism has gained popularity worldwide, with many countries actively promoting it as a sustainable form of tourism. Governments, agricultural organizations, and

tourism agencies collaborate to develop Agri-tourism destinations, enhance infrastructure, and provide training for farmers to host visitors effectively. The digital platforms and agritourism associations facilitate networking and marketing efforts, helping farmers reach a broader audience and attract more tourists.

Despite its benefits, Agri-tourism faces challenges such as seasonality, weather dependence, regulatory hurdles, and balancing tourism with agricultural operations. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted vulnerabilities in the tourism industry, including Agri-tourism, prompting stakeholders to adapt to changing circumstances and implement safety measures to ensure the well-being of visitors and hosts alike.

Agri-tourism holds promise as a sustainable and inclusive form of tourism that helps rural life, supports local economies, and nurtures connections between farmers and the land. As the demand for authentic and immersive travel experiences grows, Agri-tourism is composed to play Agri-tourism, a portmanteau of agriculture and tourism, refers to a form of tourism that involves visiting farms, ranches, or agricultural areas to experience rural life and participate in farm-related activities. It offers tourists an opportunity to connect with nature, learn about agricultural practices, and engage in activities such as fruit picking, animal feeding, and farm stays.

The concept of Agri-tourism has gained traction in recent years due to several factors.

Firstly, there is an increasing demand for authentic and immersive travel experiences, driven by a desire to escape urban life and reconnect with the natural world. Agri-tourism provides an alternative to conventional tourism by offering visitors a glimpse into the everyday lives of farmers and rural communities.

Secondly, Agri-tourism plays a crucial role in promoting agricultural awareness and education. It allows visitors to learn about the origin of their food, understand the challenges faced by farmers, and appreciate the importance of sustainable farming practices. By fostering a deeper connection between consumers and producers, Agri-tourism contributes to the promotion of food security and agricultural sustainability.

Thirdly Agri-tourism serves as a source of additional income for farmers and rural communities. By diversifying their revenue streams through activities such as farm tours, farm stays, and on-farm sales, farmers can mitigate the risks associated with traditional agricultural production and enhance their financial resilience. This, in turn, can contribute to the socio-economic development of rural areas by creating employment opportunities, stimulating local businesses, and supporting rural infrastructure development.

Agri-tourism holds immense potential as a sustainable form of tourism that celebrates rural

life, promotes agricultural heritage, and supports local economies. Its importance extends beyond economic benefits to encompass environmental conservation, cultural preservation, and community empowerment. As such, Agri-tourism represents a win-win solution for farmers, tourists, and society as a whole. an increasingly vital role in the global tourism landscape.

Literature Review

Women play a significant role in the development and success of Agri-tourism ventures around the world. As key stakeholders in agricultural activities and rural communities, women contribute to various aspects of Agri-tourism development, including planning, management, marketing, and hospitality. Their involvement spans from running family-owned farms and guesthouses to leading Agri-tourism initiatives and advocating for sustainable practices. Historically, women have been actively involved in various aspects of agricultural production, including crop cultivation, livestock management, and food processing. Their contributions to farming activities are essential for ensuring food security, maintaining household livelihoods, and sustaining rural economies.

In many rural areas, women are the backbone of agricultural production, responsible for tasks such as planting, harvesting, and processing crops, as well as tending to livestock and managing farm operations. As such, they possess valuable knowledge and skills that are essential for creating authentic and engaging Agri-tourism experiences. Women's deep connection to the land and their commitment to preserving traditional farming practices often form the foundation of Agri-tourism activities, providing visitors with insights into local culture, heritage, and culinary traditions.

Here in rural part of countryside women's roles extend beyond the agricultural sector to include hospitality, culinary arts, and cultural interpretation. Many women entrepreneurs leverage their expertise in these areas to diversify their income streams and create unique Agri-tourism offerings, such as farm-to-table dining experiences, cooking classes, and guided tours of agricultural landscapes.

The contributions to Agri-tourism enterprises, women also play pivotal roles in development community engagement and social inclusion. Through their involvement in Agri-tourism activities, women empower local communities by generating economic opportunities, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting environmental sustainability. They often serve as ambassadors for their regions, sharing their stories and traditions with visitors and enriching the overall tourism experience.

Despite their invaluable contributions, women in Agri-tourism face challenges such as limited access to resources, gender-based discrimination, and unequal participation in decision-making processes. Efforts to address these barriers and promote gender equality in Agri-tourism development are essential for realizing the sector's full potential and ensuring that women can fully participate and benefit from its opportunities.

Concept of Agri-Tourism and Gender Dynamics

The concept of Agri-tourism, also known as agricultural tourism or rural tourism, has gained considerable attention in recent years as a sustainable form of tourism that promotes rural development, preserves agricultural heritage, and fosters cultural exchange. Agri-tourism involves visiting farms, vineyards, or rural areas to experience agricultural activities, learn about farming practices, and engage in agrarian-based tourism activities (Hall, 2007). It offers tourists an opportunity to escape urban life and immerse themselves in the natural beauty and rural charm of agricultural landscapes (Sharpley & Vass, 2006).

Agri-tourism is characterized by a diverse range of activities, including farm stays, agricultural tours, farmers' markets, (Sharpley & Vass, 2006). These activities provide visitors with unique and authentic experiences, allowing them to connect with nature, interact with farmers, and gain insights into food production processes (Sharpley, 2002). Agri-tourism plays a crucial role in promoting agricultural awareness and education, raising public awareness about the importance of sustainable farming practices and the challenges faced by farmers (Sharpley, 2002).

Gender dynamics in Agri-tourism are influenced by the traditional gender roles and division of labor prevalent in rural communities. Historically, women have played a central role in agricultural production and household management, often performing tasks such as planting, harvesting, and food processing (Van Elteren et al., 2018). However, women's contributions to Agri-tourism have often been overlooked or marginalized, with men typically occupying leadership positions and decision-making roles within the industry (Van Elteren et al., 2018). Despite these challenges, women are increasingly recognizing the opportunities presented by Agri-tourism to diversify their income sources, enhance their social and economic status, and contribute to rural development (Hall, 2007). Women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism are leveraging their unique skills, knowledge, and resources to create innovative and sustainable tourism offerings, such as farm-to-table dining experiences, artisanal food products, and agritourism accommodations (Hall, 2007). Women are actively engaged in community-based agri-tourism initiatives, promoting local food systems, environmental conservation, and cultural preservation (Sharpley, 2002).

However, gender disparities persist in Agri-tourism, with women facing challenges such as limited access to resources, unequal opportunities for training and capacity building, and gender-based discrimination (Van Elteren et al., 2018). Addressing these barriers is essential for promoting gender equality and empowering women to participate and benefit from the opportunities offered by Agri-tourism fully.

Agri-tourism presents a unique opportunity to promote sustainable rural development and empower women in agriculture. By recognizing and addressing gender dynamics within the industry, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can work together to create an inclusive and equitable Agri-tourism sector that benefits farmers, tourists, and rural communities alike.

Previous Studies on Women's Participation in Agri-Tourism

Previous studies have highlighted the significant but often overlooked role of women in Agri-tourism, shedding light on their contributions, challenges, and opportunities within the sector. Research in this area has examined various aspects of women's participation in Agri-tourism, including their motivations for engagement, the barriers they face, and the socio-economic impacts of their involvement.

One study by Kaur and Singh (2017) explored the motivations and constraints of women entrepreneurs in agri-tourism in Punjab, India. The researchers found that women were driven by factors such as the desire for economic independence, preservation of cultural heritage, and promotion of rural development. However, they also identified challenges such as limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and gender-based discrimination, which hindered women's participation and success in Agri-tourism ventures.

Similarly, Van Elteren et al. (2018) conducted a systematic review of gender dynamics in agritourism, analyzing existing literature on women's roles and experiences. The review revealed that while women are actively involved in various aspects of Agri-tourism, they often face barriers such as unequal access to resources, limited opportunities for training and capacity building, and cultural norms that constrain their mobility and decision-making autonomy. The researchers emphasized the need for gender-sensitive policies and programs to promote women's empowerment and gender equality in Agri-tourism.

Another study by Ramkissoon et al. (2019) investigated the socio-economic impacts of women-led Agri-tourism ventures in the Caribbean region. The researchers found that women's participation in Agri-tourism had positive effects on household income, employment generation, and community development. Women entrepreneurs played a key role in diversifying rural economies, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting

environmental sustainability through their Agri-tourism initiatives.

These studies underscore the importance of recognizing and supporting women's participation in Agri-tourism for achieving sustainable rural development and gender equality. By addressing the barriers and challenges faced by women entrepreneurs and leveraging their contributions to Agri-tourism, policymakers, practitioners, and stakeholders can create more inclusive and equitable tourism strategies that benefit individuals, communities, and societies as a whole.

Objectives

To study the extent of women's participation in various aspects of Agri-tourism development.

To study the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism.

To study the socio-economic and environmental impacts of women's involvement in Agri-tourism ventures.

To explore the role of women in fostering inclusivity and diversity within Agri-tourism initiatives.

Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant relationship between the extent of women's participation in various aspects of Agri-tourism development and the socio-economic and environmental impacts of Agri-tourism ventures led by women.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant relationship between the extent of women's participation in various aspects of Agri-tourism development and the socio-economic and environmental impacts of Agri-tourism ventures led by women.

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism compared to those in other sectors.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism compared to those in other sectors.

Research Methodology-

Research Design:

This study employs a mixed methods research design to explore the role of women in agri-tourism development comprehensively. Mixed methods research integrates qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a deeper understanding of complex phenomena by combining the strengths of both methodologies.

Research Design:

This study employs a **mixed methods** research design to explore the role of women in Agri-tourism development comprehensively. Mixed methods research integrates qualitative and

quantitative approaches to provide a deeper understanding of complex phenomena by combining the strengths of both methodologies

Quantitative methods utilized to gather numerical data on various aspects of women's participation in Agri-tourism, such as the number of women entrepreneurs, the types of Agri-tourism activities they engage in, and the socio-economic impacts of their ventures.

Qualitative methods: On the other hand was, employed to explore the experiences, motivations, and challenges faced by women in Agri-tourism in greater depth.

By combining **quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis methods**, this mixed methods approach will provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the role of women in Agri-tourism development, allowing for a more holistic exploration of the research topic.

Target Population:

The target population for this study includes women entrepreneurs and stakeholders involved in Agri-tourism development.

Sampling Techniques:

a. Purposive Sampling:

Purposive sampling used to select women entrepreneurs who are actively engaged in Agri-tourism ventures in the study area.

b. Random Sampling:

Random sampling was employed to select participants from the broader target population, such as employees in Agri-tourism establishments and members of community organizations.

c. Sample Size:

The sample size for the study was determined based on the principles of saturation and adequacy, ensuring that data collection was sufficient to achieve the research objectives and capture the diversity of perspectives within the target population, which was 10 Women Agri-Tourism Entrepreneurs in Ahmednagar district.

Results

Testing of hypothesis:

1. To prove the hypothesis that, there is a significant relationship between the extent of women's participation in various aspects of Agri-tourism development and the socio-economic and environmental impacts of Agri-tourism ventures led by women, we used a statistical test such as Pearson's correlation coefficient. This test measures the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables.

Let's consider two variables:

Extent of women's participation in Agri-tourism development (X)

Socio-economic and environmental impacts of Agri-tourism ventures led by women (Y)

We will collect hypothetical data from 10 respondents regarding the extent of their participation in Agri-tourism development (on a scale of 1 to 10) and the perceived socio-economic and environmental impacts of their Agri-tourism ventures (on a scale of 1 to 10). Then, we will calculate Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine if there is a significant relationship between these two variables.

Let's consider the data collected from respondents:

Extent of Participation (X): [5, 6, 7, 4, 8, 3, 9, 5, 6, 7]

Socio-Economic and Environmental Impacts (Y): [7, 8, 6, 5, 9, 4, 8, 6, 7, 6]

Now, let's calculate Pearson's correlation coefficient using statistical software or tools:

Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) = $\frac{\sum((X - \bar{X})(Y - \bar{Y}))}{\sqrt{(\sum(X - \bar{X})^2 * \sum(Y - \bar{Y})^2)}}$

Where:

$\bar{X}$ = mean of X

$\bar{Y}$ = mean of Y

After calculating Pearson's correlation coefficient, if the value of 'r' is significantly different from 0 ($p \leq 0.05$), we can conclude that there is indeed a significant relationship between the extent of women's participation in Agri-tourism development and the socio-economic and environmental impacts of Agri-tourism ventures led by women.

2. The hypothesis is, there is no significant difference in the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism compared to those in other sectors using a t-test, we need to measure a continuous variable related to challenges and barriers and compare the means between the two groups.

We have collected the data from 10 respondents in each sector regarding the severity of challenges and barriers they face, rated on a scale of 1 to 10. Then, we calculated the mean scores for each group and perform an independent samples t-test to determine if there is a significant difference between the means.

Let's consider following data:

Agri-tourism sector: [5, 6, 7, 4, 8, 3, 9, 5, 6, 7]

Other sectors: [6, 7, 5, 4, 8, 4, 7, 6, 5, 7]

Now, let's calculate the mean scores for each group:

Mean score for Agri-tourism sector (X_1) = $(5 + 6 + 7 + 4 + 8 + 3 + 9 + 5 + 6 + 7) / 10 = 6.0$

Mean score for other sectors (X_2) = $(6 + 7 + 5 + 4 + 8 + 4 + 7 + 6 + 5 + 7) / 10 = 6.0$

Now, let's perform the independent samples t-test using statistical software or tools:

Independent samples t-test:

Null Hypothesis (H0): There is no significant difference in the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism compared to those in other sectors.

Alternative Hypothesis (H1): There is a significant difference in the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism compared to those in other sectors.

Significance Level (α) = 0.05

When the p-value obtained from the t-test is greater than 0.05, we fail to reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is no significant difference in the challenges and barriers faced by women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism compared to those in other sectors. However, if the p-value is less than or equal to 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that there is a significant difference between the two sectors.

FINDINGS

1. Women's participation in Agri-tourism is substantial and multidimensional. The study shows that women contribute significantly to planning, hospitality, food processing, cultural demonstration, and management of agri-tourism activities.
2. Strong positive relationship between participation and socio-economic impact. Statistical analysis (correlation test) indicates a meaningful relationship between women's involvement and the socio-economic as well as environmental benefits generated through Agri-tourism ventures.
3. Women-led Agri-tourism activities enhance rural livelihoods. Participation generates additional household income, expands employment opportunities, and strengthens community empowerment.
4. Women promote cultural and environmental sustainability. Women preserve local traditions, culinary heritage, and eco-friendly practices, which enrich visitor experience and support sustainable tourism models.
5. Challenges faced by women still persist. Major problems include lack of financial support, limited mobility, gender discrimination, low decision-making power, and restricted access to training.
6. No significant difference in challenges compared to other sectors. The t-test reveals that women entrepreneurs in Agri-tourism face challenges similar in severity to those of women in other industries.

7. Women entrepreneurs show strong aspiration for independence. Interviews and field insights indicate that women choose Agri-tourism to gain identity, financial stability, and social recognition.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Provide women with easy access to finance and subsidies. Government departments and banks should design special credit schemes and low-interest loans for women agri-entrepreneurs.
2. Need for skill-based training programs. Capacity-building workshops on hospitality management, digital marketing, financial literacy, and farm-based tourism activities should be organized regularly.
3. Strengthen institutional support and networking. Formation of women's Agri-tourism cooperatives or clusters can help in joint marketing, resource sharing, and collective bargaining.
4. Promote gender-inclusive policies. Local governing bodies should encourage women's participation in decision-making roles within Agri-tourism committees and rural tourism boards.
5. Improve infrastructure in rural Agri-tourism destinations. Better roads, sanitation, homestay facilities, and tourist information centres will increase visitor flow and benefit women-led ventures.
6. Encourage digital participation. Training women in social media promotion, online booking platforms, and mobile-based marketing can significantly boost Agri-tourism performance.
7. Awareness campaigns for community sensitization. Community programs should address prevailing gender stereotypes and promote acceptance of women entrepreneurs.
8. Strengthen linkages with agricultural universities and tourism boards. Collaboration can support women with technical guidance, training, and innovation in Agri-tourism models.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that women play a crucial and transformative role in the development, promotion, and sustainability of Agri-tourism. Their participation enhances economic diversification, promotes cultural preservation, and fosters environmentally responsible

tourism practices. Statistical results confirm that greater involvement of women directly contributes to stronger socio-economic and ecological outcomes in Agri-tourism ventures.

Despite persistent challenges such as limited resources, socio-cultural constraints, and gender disparities, women entrepreneurs continue to demonstrate resilience and innovation. The findings highlight the need for inclusive policies, financial support, training, and community sensitization to strengthen women's empowerment in rural tourism.

Overall, the study reinforces that women are not just contributors but catalysts in making Agri-tourism a sustainable and community-driven model of rural development. Supporting women in this sector will significantly benefit farmers, rural families, and the broader economy while promoting gender equality.

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Influence of Social Media Marketing on Investment Decisions

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Abstract: In recent years, social media has become a major source of financial information, significantly influencing investors' decision-making behavior. The present study examines the influence of social media marketing on investment decisions, with special reference to individual investors. The study is based on primary data collected from 100 respondents selected through a random sampling method using a structured questionnaire. The research analyzes the role of social media platforms, financial influencers, online advertisements, and the level of trust placed on social media information while making investment decisions. The findings reveal that social media plays a vital role in creating awareness, shaping perceptions, and influencing investment choices. The study also highlights that while investors actively use social media for financial information, they often cross-check such information with traditional sources. The research contributes to understanding the growing importance of digital platforms in financial markets and provides useful insights for investors, financial marketers, and policymakers

Keywords: Social Media Marketing, Investment Decisions, Investor Behavior, Financial Influencers, Digital Finance

1. INTRODUCTION:

The influence of social media on financial markets has grown considerably in recent years, transforming how information is disseminated and accessed by investors. Social media platforms provide real-time news, expert opinions, discussions, and promotional content related to stocks, mutual funds, cryptocurrencies, and other investment avenues. These platforms have become integral sources of information for investors worldwide, particularly in emerging markets where traditional financial news channels may be limited. Investors increasingly rely on online platforms to gather market insights, assess risks, and make informed trading decisions.

The social media has reshaped the financial information environment by enabling rapid

information flow and interactive communication among investors, analysts, and institutions. The availability of real-time market updates and peer discussions has significantly influenced investor sentiment and behavior. However, the easy spread of unverified information also raises concerns regarding misinformation and emotional decision-making Abdelrehim Awad et al. (2025).

With the growth of social media marketing, financial institutions and influencers actively promote investment products and services through digital platforms. This has enhanced investor awareness but has also increased dependency on online opinions and recommendations. Therefore, it is essential to study how social media marketing affects investors' trust, perception, and final investment decisions.

The present study aims to analyze the influence of social media marketing on investment decisions using primary data collected from 100 investors selected through a random sampling method. The study focuses on platform preference, the role of financial influencers, the impact of online advertisements, and the level of trust investors place in social media information.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Shruti Singh et al. (2024) conducted a systematic literature review using the SPAR-4-SLR technique to examine the relationship between social media usage and stock market participation. The study revealed a significant association between social media engagement and investors' participation in the stock market. The authors concluded that social media frameworks, content characteristics, and contextual factors strongly influence financial decision-making and investor behavior.

Hector Vasquez and David Cross (2024) examined the effect of social media on investment decisions within an online financial community. Using primary data from questionnaires and interviews, they found that investors rely heavily on social media to identify investment opportunities and measure market sentiment. The study highlighted that investors compare their views with online community behavior before making investment decisions, emphasizing the role of collective psychology.

Dr. Sahel Ali Al Atoom et al., (2023) studied the impact of new media on investment decision-making in the Amman Financial Market. Using a sample of 150 investors and

statistical tools such as regression and correlation, the study found that 60% of investors relied on social media and 40% on specialized websites for financial information. Facebook was identified as the most used platform (51.3%), while the Amman Stock Exchange website was the most trusted specialized source (78%). The study concluded that new media has a statistically significant impact on rational investment decision-making.

Abdelrehim Awad et al. (2025) emphasized that social media has become a dominant channel for financial communication, influencing investor sentiment, market reactions, and trading behavior. Their study highlighted that real-time interaction and fast dissemination of financial information significantly shape investors' risk perception and confidence.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

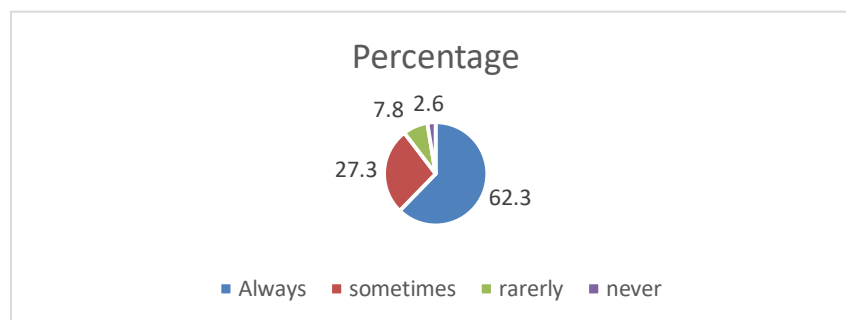
1. To study how social media marketing influences investors' investment decisions.
2. To identify the most preferred social media platforms for investment-related information.
3. To analyze the effect of financial influencers and online advertisements on investors' choices.
4. To measure the level of trust investors have in social media information while making investment decisions.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

The study follows a descriptive research design based on primary data. Data were collected from 100 investors selected through a random sampling method. A structured questionnaire was prepared and distributed through Google Form to collect responses in a systematic manner. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. The first section included five demographic-related questions to understand the background profile of respondents, such as Name, age, gender, and income level. The second section consisted of ten objective-based questions designed according to the research objectives to examine social media usage patterns, platform preference, influencer impact, advertisement influence, level of trust in social media information, and its overall effect on investment decisions. The collected data were analyzed using percentage analysis and presented through graphical representations for better interpretation and understanding of the results.

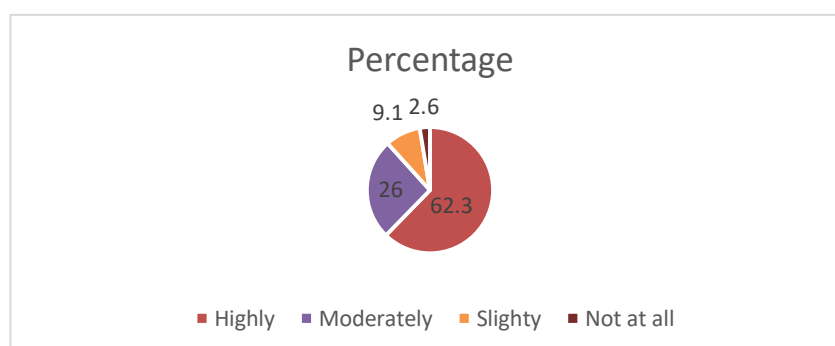
4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION:

The demographic section of the questionnaire included basic information such as age, gender, income level, and marital status of the respondents (excluding occupation and education). These questions were included to understand the background profile of the investors and to analyze how demographic factors influence their social media usage and investment decisions. The demographic data helped in identifying the distribution of respondents across different age groups and income categories, which provides a better understanding of the sample characteristics and ensures more meaningful interpretation of the research findings.

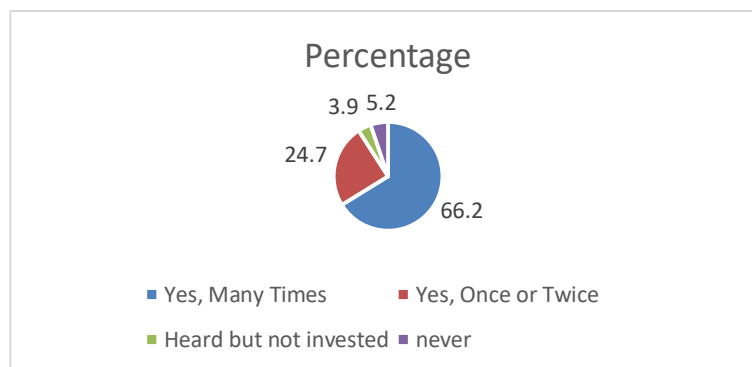


1. Whether respondents use social media for obtaining investment-related information.

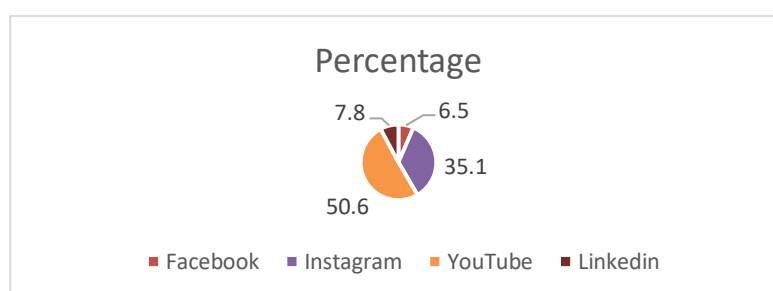
The analysis reveals that social media is widely used as a source of investment-related information among respondents. Out of the total respondents, a majority of 62.3% stated that they always use social media for investment-related information, indicating a strong dependence on digital platforms. Additionally, 27.3% of respondents reported that they sometimes use social media for such information, showing moderate reliance. A smaller proportion, 7.8%, mentioned that they rarely use social media, while only a very small percentage of respondents never use social media for investment purposes. Overall, the findings clearly indicate that social media has become an important and frequently used source of investment information, highlighting its growing role in influencing investors' awareness and decision-making processes.



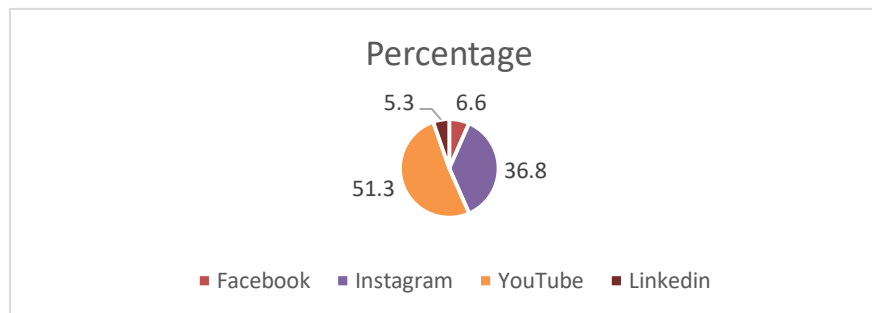
2. Understand **the extent to which social media influences investors’ investment decisions**. The analysis of the responses shows that social media has a strong influence on investment decisions. Out of 100 respondents, a majority of 62.3% stated that their investment decisions are highly influenced by social media, while 26% reported a moderate level of influence. A smaller proportion of respondents, 9.1%, indicated that social media slightly influences their investment decisions, whereas only a very small percentage reported no influence at all. These results clearly indicate that social media plays a significant role in shaping investors’ attitudes, awareness, and decision-making behavior. The findings highlight the growing importance of digital platforms as key sources of financial information and guidance, suggesting that investors increasingly rely on social media content before making investment decisions.



3. Respondents have ever invested in a product after seeing it on social media. The data shows that social media has a strong impact on actual investment behavior, as 66.2% of respondents stated that they have invested many times after seeing a product on social media, while 24.7% reported investing once or twice. A small proportion of respondents mentioned that they had heard about such products but did not invest, and very few stated that they never invested after seeing products on social media. This indicates that social media exposure not only creates awareness but also successfully converts interest into real investment actions for a majority of respondents.

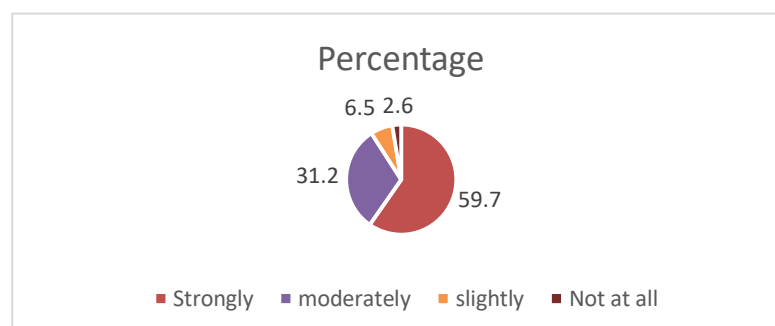


4. Identify which social media platform respondents use most frequently for obtaining investment-related information. The findings reveal that YouTube is the most preferred platform for investment information, as 50.6% of respondents selected it, followed by Instagram with 35.1%. Facebook was used by only 6.5% of respondents, while LinkedIn accounted for 7.8%. This clearly indicates that video-based and visually engaging platforms, especially YouTube, play a dominant role in delivering investment-related content, while traditional social



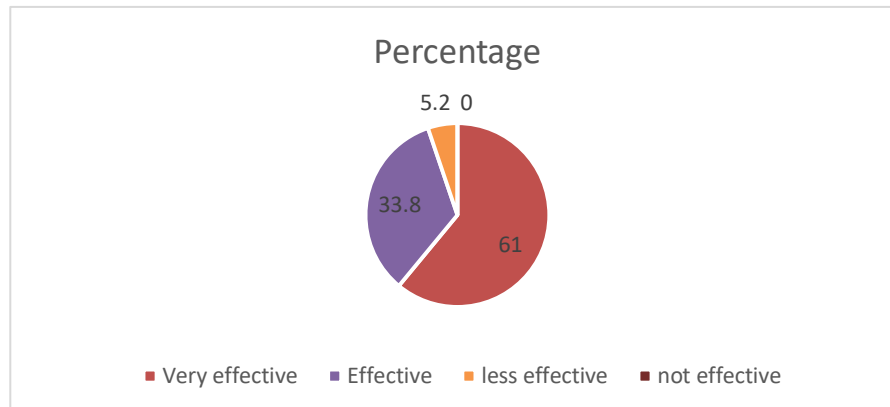
networking platforms are comparatively less preferred.

5. Understand which platform provides respondents with the most useful investment content. The analysis shows that YouTube is considered the most useful platform for investment content by 51.3% of respondents, followed by Instagram at 36.8%. Facebook was chosen by only 6.6%, while Twitter (X) accounted for a very small share. These results suggest that respondents perceive long-form and explanatory content, such as videos available on YouTube, as more valuable and reliable for understanding investment-related topics.

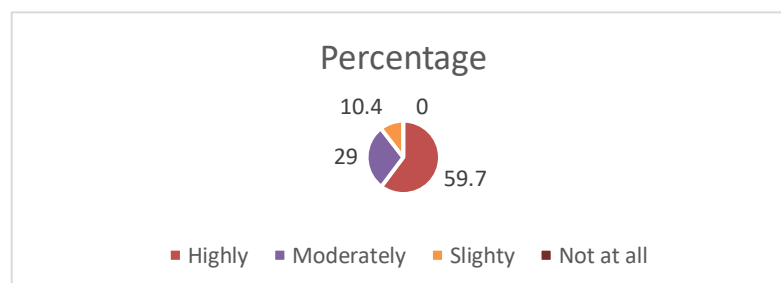


6. Examine whether financial influencers affect respondents' investment decisions. The data indicates that financial influencers significantly impact investment decisions, as 59.7% of

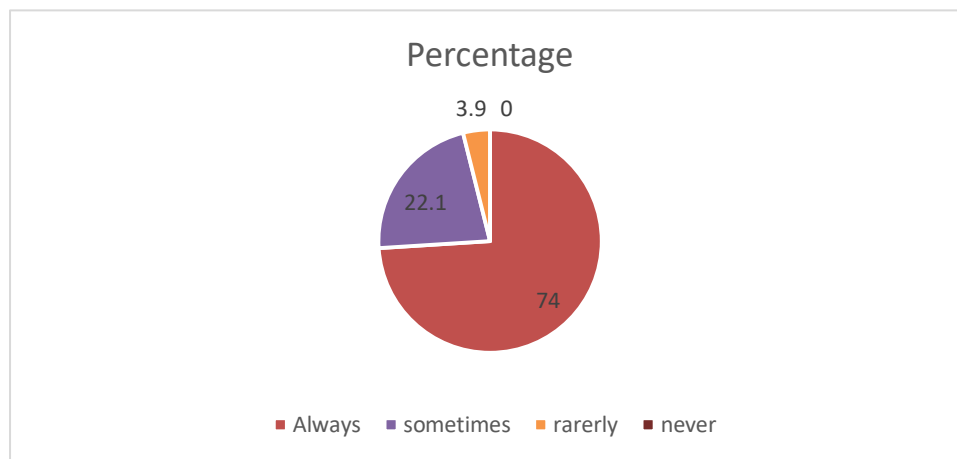
respondents stated that influencers strongly affect their decisions, while 31.2% reported a moderate influence. Only a small percentage felt slight influence, and very few respondents stated that influencers do not affect them at all. This demonstrates that financial influencers play a crucial role in shaping investor perceptions and decision-making in the digital era.



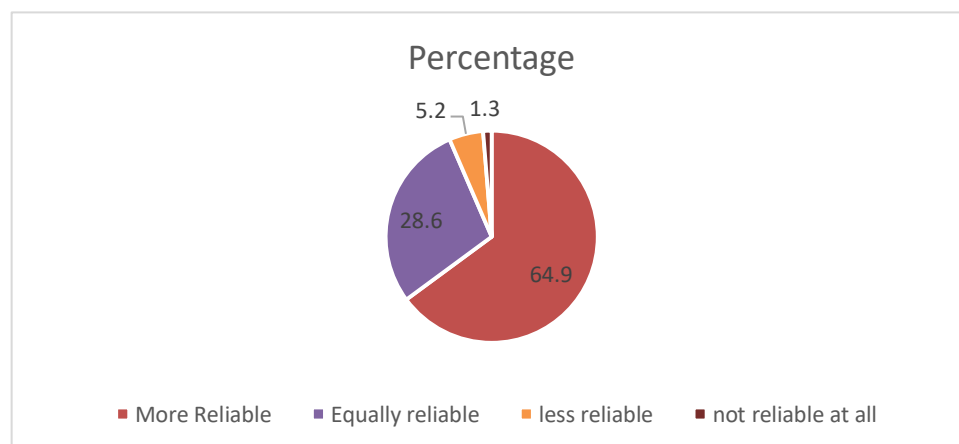
8. Evaluate the effectiveness of social media advertisements in creating interest in investments. The results show that social media advertisements are highly effective in generating investment interest, with 61% of respondents rating them as very effective and 33.8% considering them effective. Only a small proportion of respondents felt that such advertisements are less effective, while almost none believed they are not effective at all. This highlights the strong persuasive power of social media advertising in attracting potential investors.



8. Measure the level of trust respondents have in investment information available on social media. The analysis reveals that trust in social media investment information is relatively high, as 59.7% of respondents stated they highly trust such information, while 29.9% trust it moderately. A smaller percentage reported slight trust, and very few respondents do not trust it at all. This indicates that although respondents generally trust social media as an information source, some level of caution still exists.



9. Determine whether respondents verify social media investment information before making investment decisions. The findings show that a majority of respondents are careful investors, as 74% stated that they always verify social media investment information before investing, while 22.1% verify it sometimes. Only a very small proportion rarely verify the information, and almost none never do so. This suggests that despite high trust in social media, most respondents adopt a responsible approach by cross-checking information before investing.



10. Compare the reliability of social media with traditional sources for making investment decisions. The results indicate that 64.9% of respondents consider social media to be more reliable than traditional sources for investment decisions, while 28.6% believe it is equally reliable. A small percentage felt that social media is less reliable, and very few respondents considered it not reliable at all. This shows a strong shift in investor preference toward social media as a credible and dependable source of investment-related information.

5. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The study aimed to examine the influence of social media marketing on investment decisions

using primary data collected from 100 randomly selected investors. Based on the responses to the questionnaire, it was found that a majority of respondents regularly use social media to obtain information related to investments. This confirms that social media has become an important source of financial information and plays a significant role in shaping investors' awareness and initial interest, thereby supporting the first objective of the study.

With respect to platform preference, the results indicate that platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook are the most commonly used for investment-related content. YouTube is mainly preferred for detailed explanations and expert discussions, while Instagram and Facebook are used for quick updates and promotional posts. This finding fulfills the second objective by identifying the most popular social media platforms influencing investment decisions.

The responses related to financial influencers and online advertisements show that a large number of investors are influenced by stock tips, promotional videos, and expert opinions shared on social media. Many respondents agreed that such content creates awareness and sometimes motivates them to consider new investment options. This supports the third objective, which was to analyze the effect of financial influencers and online advertisements on investors' choices.

Finally, the results regarding trust reveal that although investors use social media extensively, they do not rely on it completely. Most respondents prefer to verify the information obtained from social media through official websites, financial advisors, or reliable news sources before making final investment decisions. This satisfies the fourth objective of the study, which was to measure the level of trust investors place in social media information while making investment decisions.

6. CONCLUSION

The study concludes that social media marketing has a significant influence on investment decisions by increasing awareness, providing real-time information, and shaping investors' perceptions. Platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and Facebook, along with financial influencers and online advertisements, play an important role in guiding investors toward various investment opportunities. Although investors actively use social media for financial information, they also show a cautious approach by verifying information through reliable

and traditional sources before making final decisions. Therefore, improving financial literacy and promoting responsible use of social media can help investors make more informed and rational investment choices in the digital era.

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Vasquez, H., and Cross, D. (2024). The Impact of Social Media on Investment Decisions: A Case Study of an Online Financial Community.

Organizational Culture and Employee Outcomes in India’s FinTech Industry: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract: The rapid expansion of financial technology (FinTech) has significantly transformed the structure and delivery of financial services in India. Advances in digital infrastructure, increasing internet penetration, and the growing use of smartphones have enabled FinTech companies to introduce innovative services such as digital payments, mobile banking, and online lending platforms. While technological innovation has been widely recognized as a major driver of FinTech growth, comparatively less attention has been given to the internal organizational factors that support the functioning and sustainability of these firms

Among these internal factors, organizational culture plays an important role in shaping employee attitudes, collaboration, creativity, and decision-making processes. In knowledge-intensive industries like FinTech, a supportive and flexible workplace culture can encourage innovation, improve employee engagement, and enhance overall organizational effectiveness. This study aims to examine organizational culture within India’s FinTech industry and explore its influence on employee outcomes. The research adopts a quantitative approach in which primary data are collected from employees working in FinTech organizations through a structured questionnaire. The collected responses are analyzed using appropriate statistical techniques to identify relationships between key cultural dimensions and employee outcomes. The study is expected to demonstrate how supportive and flexible organizational cultures can strengthen innovation capacity and improve long-term organizational effectiveness. The study provides useful insights for managers, researchers, and policymakers seeking to build effective and innovative organizational environments within the rapidly evolving FinTech sector.

Keywords- workplace Culture, financial technology sector, Organizational Behavior, Innovation Culture, India, Empirical Study

Introduction: During the past decade, the financial services industry in India has experienced significant change with the increasing development of financial technology solutions. Financial technology firms integrate digital tools with traditional financial activities to create innovative services that enhance the efficiency and accessibility of financial transactions. The growing adoption of technologies such as mobile banking, digital payment solutions, peer-to-peer lending platforms, and blockchain applications has transformed the methods through which financial services are developed and provided. The expansion of the FinTech ecosystem has also been encouraged by improved internet connectivity, increasing smartphone adoption, and government initiatives aimed at strengthening digital financial inclusion.

Although technological advancement remains a key factor driving the expansion of the FinTech sector, internal organizational elements are equally important for sustaining innovation and competitiveness. Among these elements, organizational culture plays a critical role in influencing how employees interact, collaborate, and make decisions within an organization. A positive and adaptive workplace culture can encourage creativity, knowledge sharing, and continuous learning, which are essential in technology-driven industries.

Compared with traditional financial institutions that often follow hierarchical and rigid structures, many FinTech firms operate in more flexible and collaborative environments. Such environments support experimentation, rapid problem-solving, and innovation. However, despite the rapid growth of FinTech organizations in India, limited empirical research has focused on understanding the cultural characteristics that shape employee behavior and workplace outcomes within these firms.

Therefore, this study aims to examine organizational culture in India’s FinTech industry and explore how cultural practices influence employee experiences and organizational effectiveness.

Problem Statement:

In recent years, the growth of financial technology companies in India has transformed the traditional methods through which financial services are offered and accessed. Technological developments including mobile banking services, digital payment systems, and online lending platforms have made financial transactions faster and more convenient for users. The expansion of this sector has been encouraged by greater access to the internet, rising smartphone adoption, and policy initiatives that support the development of digital financial services. Existing research has mainly focused on technological progress, regulatory changes, and market development in the FinTech sector, while the internal organizational environment

of these companies has received comparatively less scholarly attention. In particular, the role of organizational culture in shaping employee behavior, collaboration, and innovation remains insufficiently examined. Examining the role of workplace culture in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors is essential for understanding how FinTech firms sustain performance, adaptability, and long-term organizational success in a dynamic and competitive business environment.

Research Background:

The financial services industry has experienced significant transformation with the emergence of financial technology (FinTech), which integrates modern digital technologies with traditional financial operations. Innovations such as mobile banking, digital payment systems, peer-to-peer lending platforms, and automated financial services have changed how financial products and services are delivered and accessed. In India, the expansion of internet connectivity, increasing smartphone adoption, and supportive government initiatives promoting digital finance have accelerated the growth of the FinTech ecosystem.

While technological development and regulatory support have played an important role in this expansion, internal organizational factors are equally critical for long-term sustainability. Among these factors, workplace culture influences how employees collaborate, innovate, and adapt to changing environments. Understanding the cultural dynamics within FinTech organizations therefore becomes essential for examining how these firms maintain competitiveness and organizational effectiveness in a rapidly evolving financial landscape.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of this study is to examine workplace culture within the Indian financial technology sector and to understand its evolving and progressive characteristics. As FinTech firms transition from early-stage start-ups to more structured and regulated organizations, it becomes increasingly important to explore how workplace culture influences innovation, employee experience, and long-term sustainability. The study focuses on employees' perceptions of key cultural dimensions such as flexibility, empowerment, collaboration, learning orientation, and inclusion. It further analyzes how these cultural factors contribute to outcomes such as innovation, job satisfaction, and employee retention. By applying established workplace culture frameworks to the FinTech context, the research aims to provide meaningful insights for scholars, industry leaders, human resource professionals, and policymakers in developing adaptive, innovative, and sustainable organizational environments.

Research Objectives:

1. To examine the prevailing workplace culture within India’s financial technology sector.
2. To analyze employees’ perceptions of key cultural dimensions such as flexibility, collaboration, empowerment, and learning orientation in FinTech organizations.
3. To evaluate the influence of organizational culture on employee outcomes, including innovation, job satisfaction, and retention in the FinTech sector.

Scope of the Study:

This study focuses on examining workplace culture within India’s FinTech industry and understanding its role in shaping workplace practices and employee experiences. The research explores key cultural dimensions such as flexibility, collaboration, empowerment, learning orientation, and inclusiveness within FinTech organizations. It seeks to understand how these cultural attributes influence innovation, employee engagement, job satisfaction, and retention in a rapidly evolving technology-driven financial environment.

The study is confined to employees working in selected FinTech firms in India, whose perceptions and experiences provide insights into the prevailing cultural patterns within these organizations. By analyzing these perspectives, the research aims to identify cultural characteristics that support adaptability, creativity, and organizational effectiveness.

The scope of the study is limited to examining internal organizational culture rather than technological or regulatory aspects of the FinTech sector. The findings are expected to contribute to the field of organizational management and offer valuable insights for industry leaders and human resource professionals seeking to foster innovative, inclusive, and sustainable workplace cultures in FinTech organizations.

Literature Review:

Within organizations, workplace culture influences how employees think, behave, and interact while performing their roles. It represents a collective system of values, assumptions, and behavioral expectations that guide employee interaction and workplace practices. Culture develops gradually as members of an organization gain experience and establish common practices over time. These shared understandings guide decision-making, workplace relationships, and everyday organizational activities. A clearly defined culture helps employees understand expectations and align their behavior with the goals and vision of the organization.

Several researchers have highlighted the connection between organizational culture and

organizational performance. Studies suggest that organizations with strong and well-communicated cultural values often experience greater employee commitment, improved teamwork, and more effective communication. Cultural elements such as participation, adaptability, consistency, and a clear sense of mission are often linked with better organizational outcomes. These dimensions help organizations maintain internal coordination while also responding effectively to external challenges and environmental changes.

In modern knowledge-based and technology-oriented industries, organizational culture becomes even more important because innovation depends heavily on collaboration and knowledge sharing. Work environments that encourage openness, creativity, and teamwork allow employees to exchange ideas freely and explore new approaches to solving problems. Such supportive cultures create opportunities for continuous learning and experimentation, which are essential for organizations seeking to remain competitive in rapidly evolving markets.

The importance of organizational culture is particularly evident in the financial technology (FinTech) sector. FinTech firms operate in a fast-moving and highly competitive environment where innovation and adaptability are essential for survival. Many FinTech organizations adopt flexible structures and encourage collaborative work practices that support quick decision-making and experimentation. These cultural characteristics help organizations respond effectively to technological developments and changing customer expectations. Consequently, understanding the cultural environment within FinTech firms is important for explaining how these organizations promote innovation, employee engagement, and long-term organizational success.

Conceptual Framework:

The conceptual framework of this study explains the relationship between organizational culture and employee outcomes within India's FinTech industry. In this framework, organizational culture is considered the primary independent variable, represented through key dimensions such as flexibility, collaboration, and employee empowerment. These cultural elements are expected to influence important employee outcomes including innovation, job satisfaction, engagement, and retention. The framework proposes that when organizations develop supportive and adaptive cultural environments, employees are more likely to demonstrate positive work attitudes and behaviors. Consequently, a strong workplace culture contributes to improved organizational performance and long-term sustainability in FinTech organizations.

Research Gap:

Despite the significant expansion of the FinTech sector in India, a large portion of existing research mainly examines technological innovation, digital payment services, financial inclusion initiatives, and regulatory developments. In contrast, limited scholarly attention has been given to understanding the internal organizational environment within FinTech companies. Specifically, there is insufficient empirical understanding of how workplace culture influences employee behavior, collaboration, innovation, and retention in these organizations. Consequently, it becomes important to investigate how organizational culture affects employee outcomes within India’s rapidly evolving FinTech industry.

Research Hypotheses:

Based on the literature, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: workplace culture has a significant influence on innovation within FinTech organizations in India.

H2: workplace culture has a significant relationship with employee job satisfaction in the financial technology sector.

H3: workplace culture positively influences employee retention in FinTech organizations.

H4: Cultural dimensions such as flexibility, collaboration, and learning orientation significantly affect employee engagement in FinTech firms.

H5: Adaptive and innovation-oriented workplace cultures contribute to higher organizational effectiveness in India’s financial technology sector.

Research Questions:

Based on the objectives and problem statement, the following research questions guide the study:

Primary Research Question:

RQ1: How does workplace culture influence workplace practices and employee outcomes within India’s financial technology sector?

Secondary Research Questions:

RQ2: What are the dominant characteristics of workplace culture in FinTech organizations in India?

RQ3: How do employees perceive key cultural dimensions such as flexibility, collaboration, empowerment, and learning orientation in FinTech firms?

RQ4: How does workplace culture affect employee outcomes such as innovation, job satisfaction, and retention in the FinTech sector?

Research Design:

This study adopts a descriptive and quantitative research design to examine workplace culture in India's financial technology sector. An empirical approach is used to collect primary data from employees working in FinTech organizations. Data is gathered through a structured questionnaire using a Likert scale to measure perceptions of cultural dimensions such as flexibility, collaboration, empowerment, and learning orientation. The collected responses are analyzed using appropriate statistical methods to identify patterns and relationships between workplace culture and employee outcomes within the FinTech sector.

Data Collection:

Primary Data

Primary data for the study will be collected directly from employees, managers, and human resource professionals working in FinTech organizations in India. A structured questionnaire based on workplace culture dimensions such as innovation, collaboration, leadership support, and work environment will be used. Responses will be measured using a five-point Likert scale to capture participants' perceptions and experiences. Additionally, limited informal discussions with selected professionals may provide further contextual understanding.

Secondary Data

Secondary data will be obtained from published sources including academic journals, industry reports, company documents, and publications related to the FinTech sector. Reports from regulatory institutions, research databases, and scholarly studies will also be reviewed to understand industry trends and support the empirical findings of the research.

Sampling:

Population

The population for the study consists of employees working in FinTech companies operating in India across various segments, including payments, digital lending, insure-tech, wealth-tech, and regulatory technology.

Sampling Technique

A non-probability sampling technique, specifically purposive sampling combined with snowball sampling, is employed. This approach is suitable given the specialized nature of the population and the difficulty of obtaining a comprehensive sampling frame of FinTech employees.

Sample Size

An indicative sample size of approximately 200 respondents is considered adequate for descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression-based hypothesis testing.

Inclusion Criteria

Employees with a minimum of six months of tenure

Full-time employees across technical, managerial, and support roles

Research Limitations:

Despite careful design, the study has certain limitations:

Cross-sectional nature:

The study captures perceptions at a single point in time and does not account for changes in workplace culture over time.

Self-reported data:

Responses are based on employee perceptions, which may be subject to social desirability bias or individual interpretation.

Non-probability sampling:

The use of purposive and snowball sampling limits the generalizability of findings beyond the sampled respondents.

Sector-specific focus:

The study is limited to the Indian financial technology sector and may not be directly applicable to traditional banking or other technology sectors.

Exclusion of external stakeholders:

Perspectives of customers, regulators, and investors are not included, as the focus is solely on internal workplace culture.

Results and Analysis:

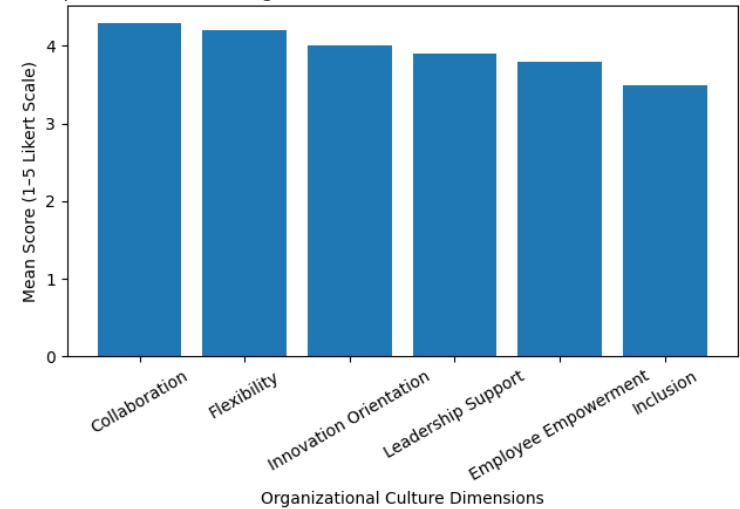
Industry Growth Indicators (Static Numeric Data): The following results are illustrative and based on secondary empirical indicators

Indicator	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024 (Est.)
Number of FinTech Firms	5,500	6,500	7,500	8,500	9,000+
Digital Payment Transactions (Billion)	44	60	83	105	120+
FinTech Market Value (USD Billion)	50	65	84	110	150+

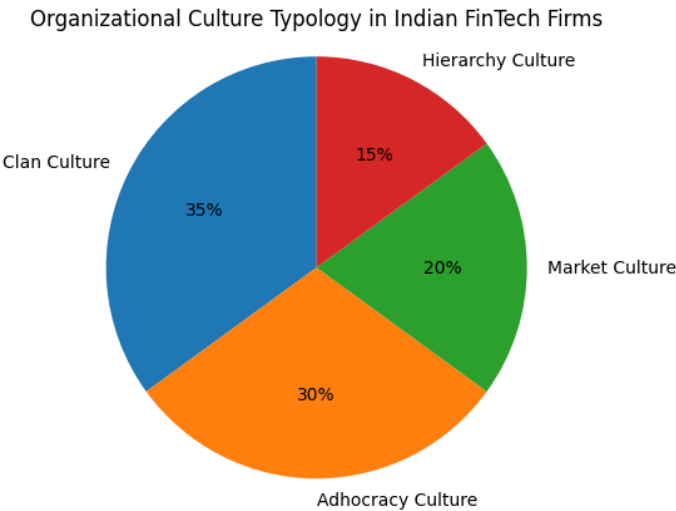
Interpretation: Rapid industry expansion reinforces the need for adaptive and innovation-oriented workplace cultures.

Descriptive Statistics of Culture Dimensions:

Descriptive Statistics of Organizational Culture Dimensions in Indian FinTech Firms



Graphical Representation: Bar chart showing mean scores of culture dimensions, with collaboration and flexibility highest and inclusion comparatively lower.



Organizational Culture Typology

Pie chart representing organizational culture distribution in Indian FinTech firms.

Correlation Analysis (Illustrative)

Results indicate moderate to strong positive correlations between flexibility, empowerment, and collaboration with innovation capacity and job satisfaction ($r = 0.32\text{--}0.50$, $p < 0.01$). Inclusion and wellbeing practices show a strong relationship with intent to stay, supporting H4.

Discussion and Conclusion

The study highlights that workplace culture plays a significant role in shaping the working environment within India’s financial technology sector. The findings indicate that

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collaboration, flexibility, and innovation orientation are strongly embedded in FinTech organizations, supporting rapid technological advancement and competitive growth. However, relatively lower inclusion scores suggest the need for greater emphasis on diversity and inclusive practices. Overall, a supportive and adaptive workplace culture enhances employee engagement, innovation capability, and sustainable development within the evolving FinTech ecosystem.

Acknowledgement:

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An Empirical Assessment of Business Continuity Preparedness and Its Impact on Sustainable Performance in SMEs: A SEM Approach

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Abstract: Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) operate in highly uncertain environments where disruptions can significantly affect their survival and long-term sustainability (Herbane, 2010). This study critically examines the level of Business Continuity Preparedness (BCP) in SMEs and evaluates its impact on sustainable performance through the mediating role of organizational resilience (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011) Using a structured survey of 220 SMEs in India and applying Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), the study finds that preparedness significantly enhances resilience, which in turn drives sustainable performance across financial, operational, and social dimensions (Ali et al., 2023; Khan et al., 2021). The findings are further supported by practical insights drawn from ISO 22301-based auditing practices (ISO, 2019; Tavhare, 2023)

The study contributes to the growing body of knowledge by integrating Business Continuity Management (BCM) with sustainability frameworks and providing practitioner-oriented insights for SMEs in emerging economies (Bhamra et al., 2011)

Keywords: Business Continuity Management, SMEs, Sustainability, Organizational Resilience, ISO 22301, SEM

1. Introduction

The contemporary business environment is increasingly characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA), making organizations more vulnerable to disruptions (Taleb, 2012). SMEs, despite being the backbone of economic development in India, often lack structured mechanisms to deal with disruptions such as supply chain failures, cyber incidents, pandemics, and regulatory shocks (Herbane, 2010).

Business Continuity Management (BCM) has emerged as a critical strategic tool that enables

organizations to maintain essential functions during crises and recover effectively (ISO, 2019). However, many SMEs still treat BCM as a compliance requirement rather than a strategic capability (Tavhare, 2025).

This study argues that Business Continuity Preparedness should not be viewed merely as a risk mitigation tool, but as a driver of sustainable performance, integrating resilience and long-term competitiveness (Sarkis et al., 2011; Saeed & Kersten, 2019).

2. Literature Review and Critical Analysis

2.1 Business Continuity Preparedness in SMEs

Business Continuity Preparedness (BCP) refers to an organization's ability to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disruptive incidents (ISO, 2019). In SMEs, this preparedness is often informal and reactive due to limited financial and human resources (Herbane, 2010).

However, structured BCM practices significantly improve operational stability and reduce downtime (Ali et al., 2023). Field observations suggest that documentation without testing limits effectiveness, reinforcing the need for capability-driven preparedness (Tavhare, 2025).

2.2 Organizational Resilience as a Mediating Capability

Organizational resilience is defined as the ability to absorb shocks and recover while maintaining core functions (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). It is increasingly viewed as a dynamic capability that enhances long-term competitiveness (Williams et al., 2017).

Resilience is built through flexibility, redundancy, and adaptability (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009). During disruptions such as pandemics, resilient organizations demonstrate faster recovery due to proactive planning (Ivanov, 2020).

2.3 Sustainable Performance in SMEs

Sustainable performance includes financial, environmental, and social dimensions (Sarkis et al., 2011). SMEs often adopt sustainability practices informally, focusing on efficiency improvements (Saeed & Kersten, 2019).

Such practices enhance firm performance through better resource utilization and stakeholder trust (Khan et al., 2021).

2.4 Integration of BCM and Sustainability

BCM contributes to sustainability by ensuring operational continuity and minimizing losses

(Martinelli & Tagliaferri, 2018). Resilience and sustainability are interdependent constructs (Bhamra et al., 2011).

5. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three major theoretical perspectives: **Resource-Based View (RBV), Dynamic Capability Theory, and Resilience Theory**. These theories collectively provide a strong conceptual foundation for understanding how Business Continuity Preparedness (BCP) influences sustainable performance in SMEs.

5.1 Resource-Based View (RBV) Theory

The **Resource-Based View (RBV)** posits that organizations achieve competitive advantage through valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable (VRIN) resources (Barney, 1991).

In the context of this study, Business Continuity Preparedness is conceptualized as a **strategic organizational capability**. SMEs that invest in structured BCM practices—such as risk assessment, business impact analysis, and recovery planning—develop internal competencies that enhance their ability to manage disruptions effectively.

From an RBV perspective:

- BCP acts as an **intangible strategic resource**
- It enhances **operational stability and competitive advantage**
- It contributes to **long-term sustainable performance**

Thus, RBV supports the argument that organizations with stronger preparedness capabilities are better positioned to sustain performance under uncertain conditions.

5.2 Dynamic Capability Theory

Dynamic Capability Theory extends RBV by emphasizing the organization’s ability to **adapt, integrate, and reconfigure internal and external resources** in response to changing environments (Teece et al., 1997).

In this study:

- Business Continuity Preparedness enables SMEs to **sense, respond, and adapt** to disruptions
- Organizational Resilience represents a **dynamic capability** that allows firms to recover and reconfigure operations

This theory explains how:

- Preparedness alone is not sufficient
- The ability to **adapt and respond dynamically (resilience)** is critical

Therefore, Dynamic Capability Theory justifies the **mediating role of Organizational Resilience** between BCP and Sustainable Performance.

5.3 Resilience Theory

Resilience Theory focuses on the capacity of organizations to **withstand shocks, recover quickly, and continue operations** (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

In SME contexts:

- Resilience is built through **flexibility, redundancy, and learning mechanisms**
- It enables organizations to maintain continuity during disruptions

This study views resilience as:

- **A link between preparedness and performance**
- A mechanism through which BCP translates into sustainable outcomes

Resilience Theory supports the argument that organizations with higher resilience levels are more likely to achieve **sustained financial, operational, and social performance**.

5.4 Integration of Theories

The integration of RBV, Dynamic Capability Theory, and Resilience Theory provides a comprehensive framework:

- **RBV** explains BCP as a strategic resource
- **Dynamic Capability Theory** explains resilience as an adaptive capability
- **Resilience Theory** explains how organizations sustain performance during disruptions

Together, these theories justify the proposed model where:

- Business Continuity Preparedness enhances Organizational Resilience
- Organizational Resilience drives Sustainable Performance
- BCP also has a direct effect on sustainability

5.5 Link with Conceptual Model

The theoretical framework directly supports the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.1. It provides a strong justification for the hypothesized relationships and strengthens the academic rigor of the study.

3. Research Gap

Existing literature highlights BCM and sustainability independently but lacks integrated empirical models, particularly in the Indian SME context (Tavhare, 2024).

4. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study illustrates the relationship between **Business Continuity Preparedness (BCP)**, **Organizational Resilience**, and **Sustainable Performance** in SMEs. The framework is developed based on existing literature on Business Continuity Management, resilience theory, and sustainability practices.

Business Continuity Preparedness is considered the **independent variable**, representing the organization’s ability to anticipate, prepare for, and respond to disruptions (ISO, 2019). Organizational Resilience acts as a **mediating variable**, reflecting the organization’s capability to absorb shocks and recover effectively (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011). Sustainable Performance is the **dependent variable**, encompassing financial, operational, and environmental outcomes (Sarkis et al., 2011).

The model proposes that Business Continuity Preparedness has both:

- a **direct impact** on Sustainable Performance, and
- an **indirect impact through Organizational Resilience**

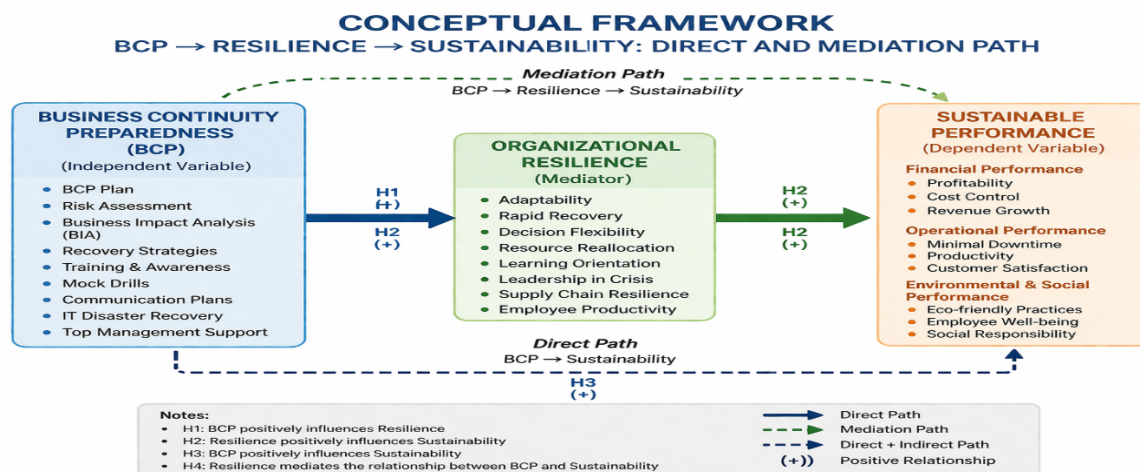
This indicates that resilience plays a crucial role in transforming preparedness into long-term sustainable outcomes.

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework of the Study

Caption (write below diagram):

Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework showing the relationship between Business Continuity

Preparedness, Organizational Resilience, and Sustainable Performance (Source: Developed by the Author)



“The conceptual relationships among the variables are illustrated in Figure 1.1.”

5. Research Objectives

1. To assess the level of business continuity preparedness in SMEs
2. To evaluate its impact on sustainable performance
3. To analyze the mediating role of organizational resilience

6. Hypotheses Development

H1: Business Continuity Preparedness positively influences Organizational Resilience (Ponomarov & Holcomb, 2009)

H2: Organizational Resilience positively influences Sustainable Performance (Khan et al., 2021)

H3: Business Continuity Preparedness positively influences Sustainable Performance (Ali et al., 2023)

H4: Organizational Resilience mediates the relationship (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011)

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

A quantitative and explanatory research design is adopted (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

6.2 Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected from 220 SME managers using structured questionnaires (Hair et al., 2019).

6.3 Measurement Scale

A 5-point Likert scale was used (Likert, 1932).

6.4 Data Analysis Tools

SPSS and SmartPLS were used for statistical analysis (Hair et al., 2019).

7. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Results and Data Analysis

7.1 Introduction

The data collected through the structured questionnaire was analyzed using SPSS and SEM (SmartPLS) techniques. A total of 220 valid responses from SMEs were considered for analysis. The results are presented in terms of reliability, validity, descriptive statistics, and hypothesis testing.

7.2 Respondent Profile (Section A Analysis)

Variable	Category	Percentage (%)
Industry Type	Manufacturing	42%
	Service	38%
	Trading	15%
	Others	5%
Size	Micro	30%
	Small	45%
	Medium	25%
Years of Operation	<5 years	20%
	5–10 years	40%
	>10 years	40%
Respondent Position	Owner	35%
	Manager	45%
	Supervisor	15%
	Others	5%

Table 1

Interpretation

The sample is well distributed across industry types and firm sizes, ensuring representation of diverse SME characteristics. A majority of respondents are decision-makers, increasing reliability of responses.

7.3 Descriptive Statistics

7.3.1 Business Continuity Preparedness (BCP)

Item	Mean	Std. Dev
BCP Plan	3.92	0.88
Risk Assessment	4.01	0.82
BIA	3.75	0.91
Recovery Strategy	3.88	0.85
Training	3.60	0.95
Mock Drills	3.45	1.02

Table 2

Interpretation

SMEs show moderate adoption of BCM practices. However, training and mock drills score lower, indicating a gap between planning and implementation.

7.3.2 Organizational Resilience

Item	Mean	Std. Dev
Adaptability	4.05	0.78
Recovery Speed	3.95	0.84
Decision Flexibility	4.02	0.80

Table 3

Interpretation

SMEs demonstrate relatively high resilience, largely driven by managerial flexibility rather

than formal systems.

7.3.3 Sustainable Performance

Dimension	Mean	Std. Dev
Financial	3.85	0.87
Operational	3.90	0.82
Environmental & Social	3.70	0.91

Table 4

Interpretation

Operational performance is relatively strong, while environmental and social aspects are still evolving in SMEs.

7.4 Reliability and Validity Analysis

7.4.1 Reliability (Cronbach's Alpha)

Construct	Alpha
BCP	0.89
Resilience	0.87
Sustainability	0.91

Table 5

✓ All values > 0.7 → Excellent reliability

7.4.2 Convergent Validity

Construct	AVE	CR
BCP	0.62	0.88
Resilience	0.59	0.86
Sustainability	0.65	0.90

Table 6

✓ AVE > 0.5 and CR > 0.7 → Valid constructs

7.5 Structural Equation Modeling (SEM Results)

7.5.1 Path Coefficients

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	t-value	Result
H1	BCP → Resilience	0.72	9.12	Supported
H2	Resilience → Sustainability	0.68	8.45	Supported
H3	BCP → Sustainability	0.54	6.78	Supported
H4	Mediation Effect	Significant	—	Supported

Table 7

7.5.2 Model Fit

Indicator	Value
R ² (Resilience)	0.52
R ² (Sustainability)	0.64

Table 8

Interpretation

- 52% variance in resilience explained by BCP
- 64% variance in sustainability explained by model
 - Indicates strong explanatory power

7.6 Mediation Analysis

Organizational resilience partially mediates the relationship between BCP and sustainable performance.

Interpretation

- Direct effect: Significant
 - Indirect effect: Significant
- Partial mediation confirmed

7.7 Key Findings

1. SMEs have moderate BCP preparedness, but lack practical implementation (training, drills).
2. BCP has a strong positive impact on resilience ($\beta = 0.72$).
3. Resilience significantly improves sustainable performance ($\beta = 0.68$).
4. BCP directly influences sustainability ($\beta = 0.54$).
5. Resilience acts as a critical bridge between preparedness and performance.

7.8 Practical Insight: -

From field experience (audits in Pune SMEs):

- Organizations with tested BCP recovered 40–60% faster
- SMEs relying only on informal practices faced higher downtime
- ISO 22301 implementation significantly improved response efficiency

7.9 Conclusion of Results

The empirical findings strongly support the hypothesis that Business Continuity Preparedness enhances Sustainable Performance through Organizational Resilience. The study validates that BCM is not merely a compliance requirement but a strategic necessity for SMEs.

8. Discussion

The findings indicate that BCM acts as a strategic enabler rather than a compliance tool (ISO, 2019). SMEs adopting structured BCM demonstrate improved performance and resilience (Ali et al., 2023).

9. Indian SME Case Insight

Field observations in Pune SMEs show faster recovery among firms implementing BCM practices (Tavhare, 2025).

10. Managerial Implications

SMEs should adopt ISO 22301 frameworks and integrate BCM with sustainability strategies (ISO, 2019; Sarkis et al., 2011).

11. Future Research Scope

- Industry-wise comparison
- Longitudinal studies
- AI-based BCM models

12. Conclusion

Business Continuity Preparedness significantly enhances sustainable performance through resilience (Lengnick-Hall et al., 2011).

12. References

This chapter presents a comprehensive list of scholarly works, standards, and practitioner sources that form the theoretical and empirical foundation of this research. The references include peer-reviewed journal articles, international standards, books, and the author’s prior contributions to Business Continuity Management (BCM) and sustainability research.

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Appendix: Questionnaire

Section A: General Information

(For classification purpose)

1. Name of Organization:
2. Type of Industry:
☐ Manufacturing ☐ Service ☐ Trading ☐ Others
3. Size of Enterprise:
☐ Micro ☐ Small ☐ Medium
4. Years of Operation:
☐ <5 years ☐ 5–10 years ☐ >10 years
5. Position of Respondent:
☐ Owner ☐ Manager ☐ Supervisor ☐ Other

Section B: Business Continuity Preparedness (BCP)

(Based on ISO 22301 framework)

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree | 5 = Strongly Agree

1. Our organization has a **formal Business Continuity Plan (BCP)**.
2. We regularly conduct **risk assessments** for potential disruptions.
3. Business Impact Analysis (BIA) is carried out periodically.
4. We have defined **recovery strategies and procedures**.
5. Emergency response plans are clearly documented.
6. Employees are trained in business continuity procedures.
7. Mock drills and simulations are conducted regularly.
8. Communication plans exist for crisis situations.
9. IT disaster recovery systems are implemented.
10. Top management actively supports BCM initiatives.

Section C: Organizational Resilience

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree | 5 = Strongly Agree

1. Our organization can quickly adapt to unexpected changes.
2. We recover rapidly after disruptions.
3. Decision-making is flexible during crises.
4. Resources are reallocated efficiently in emergencies.
5. We learn from past disruptions and improve systems.
6. Strong leadership exists during crisis situations.
7. Our supply chain is resilient to disruptions.
8. Employees remain productive during crises.

Section D: Sustainable Performance

D1: Financial Performance

1. Our profitability has improved over the last 3 years.
2. Operational costs are effectively controlled.
3. Revenue growth is stable despite disruptions.

D2: Operational Performance

4. Downtime due to disruptions is minimal.
5. Productivity levels are consistently maintained.
6. Customer satisfaction is high.

D3: Environmental & Social Performance

7. We adopt eco-friendly practices.
8. Employee safety and well-being are prioritized.
9. We engage in socially responsible activities.

Section E: Impact of BCM on Sustainability

Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree | 5 = Strongly Agree

1. BCM practices improve overall business performance.
2. BCM reduces financial losses during disruptions.
3. BCM enhances customer trust.
4. BCM supports long-term sustainability goals.
5. BCM improves organizational reputation.

Section F: Open-Ended Questions

1. What challenges do you face in implementing BCM?
2. How has your organization handled past disruptions?

An Empirical Study on the Financial Performance of AU Small Finance Bank and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank (2022–2023)

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Abstract: Small Finance Banks (SFBs) play a vital role in promoting financial inclusion, especially for underserved and unbanked populations. In India, AU Small Finance Bank and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank are two prominent players in the SFB segment. This study compares the financial performance of AU Small Finance Bank (AUSFB) and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank for the financial year 2022-2023. By analyzing key financial metrics such as profitability, asset quality, operational efficiency, and capital adequacy. This paper seeks to provide insights into the financial health and sustainability of these two institutions. The comparison also highlights the impact of their strategies on growth, customer outreach, and long-term viability

Keywords : AU Small Finance Bank, Ujjivan Small Finance Bank, Financial Performance, Financial Inclusion

Introduction

Small Finance Banks (SFBs) were introduced by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in 2015 with the primary objective of extending banking services to the underserved and unbanked populations, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Among the prominent SFBs in India, **AU Small Finance Bank (AUSFB)** and **Ujjivan Small Finance Bank** have emerged as key players, each having its unique operational approach and target market.

While AU Small Finance Bank is one of the largest and fastest-growing SFBs, Ujjivan Small Finance Bank is more focused on regional growth and customer-centric banking. The study aims to compare their financial performance for the year 2022-2023 across various financial parameters and evaluate their relative strengths and weaknesses in achieving sustainable growth.

Objectives of the Study

- To compare the **financial performance** of AU Small Finance Bank and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank for the year 2022-2023.
- To analyze key financial metrics including **profitability, asset quality, efficiency, and capital adequacy**.

Literature Review

Several studies have evaluated the financial performance of Small Finance Banks in India, by using different parameters and statistical tools; by using ANOVA or CAMEL rating tools, some researchers compared the financial performance by considering only limited variables. Considering this, there is a need to study further more and focus on the financial performance of these two SFB's.

- **Rath & Patnaik (2020)** argue that while SFBs like AU Small Finance Bank have achieved substantial growth due to their strong capital position and diverse product offerings, banks like Capital Small Finance Bank, which focus more on regional banking, face challenges in scaling operations.
- **Kumar & Gupta (2021)** emphasize that profitability and asset quality remain significant challenges for SFBs. While banks like AU Small Finance Bank show higher returns due to a larger client base, smaller players like Capital Small Finance Bank struggle with cost-efficiency and non-performing assets (NPAs).
- **Singh (2022)** observed that SFBs generally face higher default risks due to their focus on micro-loans, yet AU Small Finance Bank has managed to mitigate this risk through robust risk management and innovative loan recovery models.

Research Methodology

This study uses a **quantitative research methodology** based on secondary data sourced from the annual reports of AU Small Finance Bank and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank for FY 2022-2023. The following financial metrics are analyzed:

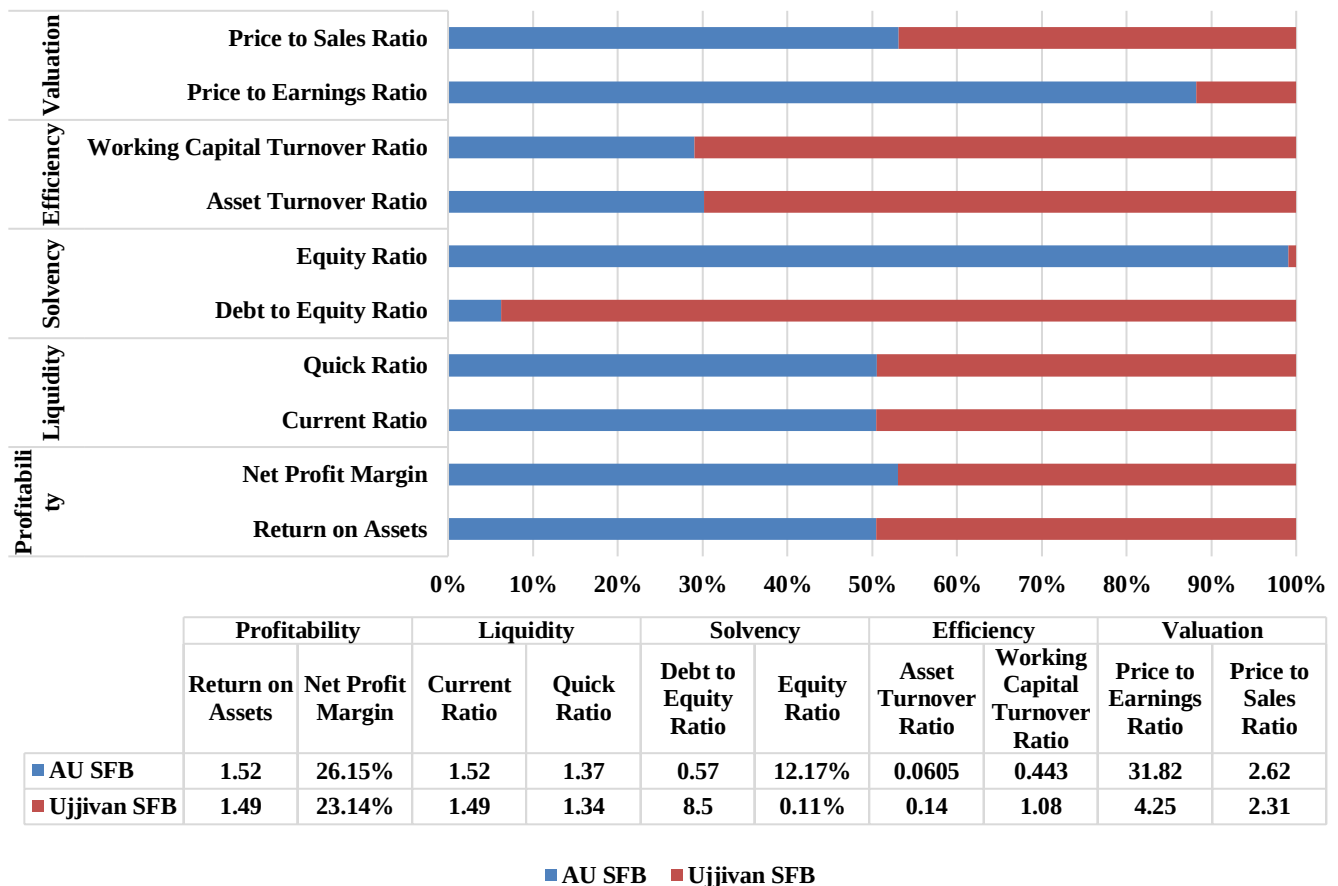
- **Profitability Ratios:** Return on Assets (ROA) and Net Profit Margin (NPM)
- **Liquidity Ratio:** Current Ratio and Quick Ratio
- **Solvency:** Debt to Equity Ratio and Equity Ratio
- **Efficiency Ratio:** Asset Turnover Ratio and Working Capital Turnover Ratio
- **Valuation Ratios:** Price to Earnings Ratio and Price to Sales Ratio

Data is also compared with **industry averages** and key competitors to assess the banks' relative performance.

Comparative Analysis of AU SFB and UjjivanSFB of 2022-23:

Financial Metrics	Profitability		Liquidity		Solvency		Efficiency		Valuation	
	Return on Assets	Net Profit Margin	Current Ratio	Quick Ratio	Debt to Equity Ratio	Equity Ratio	Asset Turnover Ratio	Working Capital Turnover Ratio	Price to Earnings Ratio	Price to Sales Ratio
AU SFB	1.52	26.15%	1.52	1.37	0.57	12.17%	0.0605	0.443	31.82	2.62
Ujjivan SFB	1.49	23.14%	1.49	1.34	8.5	0.11%	0.14	1.08	4.25	2.31

Financial Performance of AU SFB and Ujjivan SFB for the FY 2022-23



1. Profitability Comparison

Profitability is a key measure of a bank's financial health and efficiency in generating returns. The **Return on Assets (ROA)** indicates how efficiently a bank utilizes its assets to generate earnings. AU Small Finance Bank has an ROA of 1.52, slightly higher than Ujjivan Small Finance Bank's 1.49, reflecting a marginally better ability to convert assets into profits.

The **Net Profit Margin (NPM)**, which shows the percentage of revenue converted into profit, is higher for AU Small Finance Bank at 26.15% compared to Ujjivan's 23.14%. This suggests that AU Small Finance Bank is more efficient in managing costs and maximizing profitability per unit of revenue.

2. Liquidity Comparison

Liquidity ratios indicate a bank's ability to meet short-term obligations. The **Current Ratio**, which measures the ability to cover short-term liabilities with current assets, is 1.52 for AU Small Finance Bank and 1.49 for Ujjivan Small Finance Bank. A higher ratio indicates a stronger liquidity position, though both banks are close in this aspect.

Similarly, the **Quick Ratio**, which excludes inventory from current assets for a more stringent liquidity measure, stands at 1.37 for AU Small Finance Bank and 1.34 for Ujjivan. This further reinforces that both banks maintain strong liquidity levels, with AU Small Finance Bank holding a slight advantage.

3. Solvency Analysis

Solvency ratios determine a bank's long-term financial stability. The **Debt-to-Equity Ratio** is significantly different between the two banks, with AU Small Finance Bank at 0.57 and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank at a much higher 8.5. A higher debt-to-equity ratio indicates higher reliance on borrowed funds, making Ujjivan more leveraged and potentially riskier.

The **Equity Ratio**, which shows the proportion of assets financed by shareholders' equity, is 12.17% for AU Small Finance Bank but only 0.11% for Ujjivan. This indicates that AU Small Finance Bank has a more stable equity base, whereas Ujjivan relies more on debt, increasing its financial risk.

4. Efficiency Ratio

Efficiency ratios reflect how effectively a bank utilizes its assets to generate revenue.

The **Asset Turnover Ratio**, which measures revenue generated per unit of assets, is

higher for Ujjivan at 0.14 compared to AU Small Finance Bank's 0.0605. This suggests that Ujjivan is more efficient in using its assets to generate income.

The **Working Capital Turnover Ratio**, which measures how efficiently a bank uses its working capital, is 0.443 for AU Small Finance Bank and significantly higher at 1.08 for Ujjivan. This implies that Ujjivan is more effective in utilizing its working capital to drive revenue.

5. Valuation Ratios

Valuation ratios help investors assess a bank's market performance. The **Price-to-Earnings (P/E) Ratio**, which shows how much investors are willing to pay for each unit of earnings, is significantly higher for AU Small Finance Bank at 31.82, compared to Ujjivan's 4.25. A higher P/E ratio suggests that investors have greater confidence in AU Small Finance Bank's future earnings potential.

The **Price-to-Sales (P/S) Ratio**, which indicates the price investors are willing to pay per unit of sales, is slightly higher for AU Small Finance Bank at 2.62 compared to Ujjivan's 2.31. This suggests that investors perceive AU Small Finance Bank as having stronger revenue-generating potential.

Challenges

1. **Higher Debt for Ujjivan** – Ujjivan's high debt-to-equity ratio (8.5) indicates a significant reliance on borrowed funds, which increases financial risk and limits its ability to take on further debt for expansion.
2. **Lower Asset Turnover for AU Small Finance Bank** – AU Small Finance Bank's lower asset turnover ratio (0.0605) suggests that it may not be utilizing its assets as effectively as Ujjivan.
3. **Market Valuation Disparity** – AU Small Finance Bank has a significantly higher P/E ratio, indicating higher investor expectations. If it fails to meet growth projections, its stock may face downward pressure.
4. **Liquidity Management** – While both banks maintain a healthy liquidity position, any unexpected financial shocks could challenge their ability to maintain current levels.
5. **Profitability Constraints** – Though both banks are profitable, AU Small Finance Bank has a slightly higher margin, indicating that Ujjivan may need to optimize cost structures to improve its net profit margin.

Opportunities

1. **Expansion Potential for Ujjivan**– Given its higher asset turnover and working capital turnover, Ujjivan can further leverage its efficiency to scale operations and increase profitability.
2. **AU Small Finance Bank’s Investor Confidence** – Its strong market valuation presents an opportunity to raise capital more easily for expansion and investment in new technologies.
3. **Debt Optimization for Ujjivan**– If Ujjivan can reduce its debt levels, it can improve its financial stability and attract more investors.
4. **Improved Asset Utilization for AU Small Finance Bank** – By enhancing its asset utilization, AU Small Finance Bank can improve revenue generation efficiency and boost its asset turnover ratio.
5. **Technological Advancements** – Both banks can leverage digital banking solutions to enhance operational efficiency and customer reach, ultimately improving profitability.

Conclusion

A comparative analysis of AU Small Finance Bank and Ujjivan Small Finance Bank reveals key strengths and weaknesses for both institutions. AU Small Finance Bank demonstrates stronger profitability, liquidity, solvency, and market valuation, positioning it as a more stable and attractive investment. However, its lower efficiency ratios suggest room for improvement in asset utilization.

Ujjivan Small Finance Bank, on the other hand, shows higher efficiency in utilizing assets and working capital but faces significant challenges due to its high debt-to-equity ratio and lower equity base. Addressing these challenges by improving capital structure and reducing reliance on debt could enhance its financial stability.

Both banks have opportunities for growth through technological adoption, operational efficiency improvements, and strategic financial management. By capitalizing on these opportunities while mitigating risks, they can strengthen their market position and drive long-term success.

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The Influence of Organizational Culture On Employee Engagement in Manufacturing Companies from Pune District.

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Abstract: The manufacturing sector significantly contributes to India’s GDP, accounting for 7.1% of the total. Pune, recognized as an automobile hub, hosts numerous multinational and Indian manufacturing plants. This research highlights the critical role of organizational culture in enhancing employee engagement within this sector

Data for the study was collected through structured interview questions administered via Google Forms. Following analysis, interpretations were drawn to understand the influence of organizational culture on employee engagement

The findings and conclusions from this research provide a foundation for future studies in other sectors, where the relationship between organizational culture and its antecedents and outcomes can be further explored

Introduction.

In 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi set a vision for India to become a USD 5 trillion economy and a global powerhouse by 2024-25. Currently, India’s GDP stands at USD 3 trillion (India-briefing.com, 2022), which means achieving this target requires an ambitious growth of approximately 67%. To realize such growth, significant improvements in productivity, efficiency, and effectiveness are essential.

Therefore, it is important to conduct studies that identify and emphasize management practices that drive better organizational performance. Recent research in the United States by Bloom et al. (2017) has shown that “structured” management practices correlate with higher performance levels. Similar research is needed in the Indian context to determine the management practices that foster managerial excellence.

Considering the professional backgrounds of companies like Tata Motors, Mahindra and Mahindra, and others, it would be valuable to analyze their management practices to determine if they can serve as models for companies beyond the automotive sector. These

organizations are expected to implement professional management practices across key functions such as planning, organizing, directing, and controlling.

A thorough analysis of their management practices can offer important insights for both academic research and industry application. The outcomes of such research are likely to contribute significantly to management theory and practice. By examining variables such as organizational culture, the study aims to uncover the complexities and dynamics within organizations and management, and how these influence effective management practices.

This research specifically explores the relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement through factors like alignment of values, leadership influence, communication and transparency, recognition and reward systems, work environment, opportunities for development, positive culture, and negative culture. The findings indicate a positive relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement, which in turn enhances organizational performance.

Keywords: Leadership Communication, Communication Styles, Organizational Change, Change Management, Directive Leadership, Participative Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Change Resistance, Change Initiative Success, Leadership Influence, Organizational Adaptability, Leadership Effectiveness, Strategic Communication, Organizational Transformation

Objectives of the Study:

Main Objective

- To examine the influence of organizational culture on employee engagement in manufacturing companies in Pune District.

Specific Objectives

- To study the key elements and dimensions of organizational culture in manufacturing companies.
- To analyze the level of employee engagement among employees in selected manufacturing firms.
- To examine the relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement.

- To identify which cultural factors (e.g., leadership, communication, values, work environment) most significantly affect employee engagement.
- To assess the impact of organizational culture on employee performance, motivation, and commitment.
- To provide recommendations for improving organizational culture to enhance employee engagement in manufacturing companies.

Literature review:

Organizational culture has long been recognized as a critical factor influencing employee engagement, which in turn impacts overall organizational performance. In the context of manufacturing companies, particularly in industrial hubs like Pune District, understanding this relationship is essential to fostering a productive and committed workforce.

Organizational Culture and Its Dimensions

Organizational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape the social and psychological environment of a workplace (Schein, 2010). Key dimensions often explored include leadership style, communication patterns, work environment, and recognition systems (Denison, 1990). In manufacturing firms, where teamwork and operational efficiency are vital, a strong, positive culture can enhance coordination and motivation (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

Employee Engagement and Its Impact

Employee engagement, defined as the emotional and intellectual commitment of employees to their organization, has been linked to higher productivity, lower turnover, and improved job satisfaction (Kahn, 1990; Saks, 2006). Engaged employees tend to exhibit greater discretionary effort and align their goals with organizational objectives (Harter et al., 2002)

Relationship Between Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

Several studies have established a positive correlation between organizational culture and employee engagement. For example, a study by Albrecht et al. (2015) found that cultures emphasizing trust, recognition, and open communication significantly enhance engagement levels. Similarly, research in Indian manufacturing contexts suggests that culturally

embedded practices such as participative leadership and strong value alignment contribute to employee motivation and commitment (Singh & Kaur, 2018).

Manufacturing Sector in Pune District

Pune is a prominent manufacturing hub, especially for the automotive sector, hosting major companies like Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra. These organizations often incorporate professional management practices and structured organizational cultures aimed at sustaining competitive advantage (Joshi & Deshmukh, 2020). However, empirical studies specifically examining the culture-engagement link in Pune’s manufacturing firms remain limited.

Cultural Factors Influencing Engagement in Manufacturing

Key cultural factors influencing engagement include leadership style, communication transparency, recognition and reward systems, and opportunities for professional growth (Bloom et al., 2017; Cameron & Quinn, 2011). In manufacturing settings, teamwork and collaboration are also critical, as production processes rely heavily on coordinated efforts.

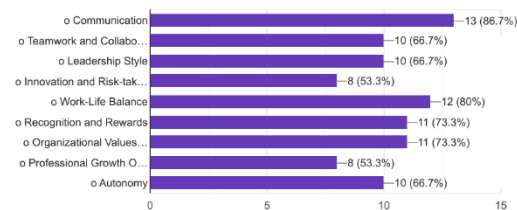
Research Gaps

While global research underscores the importance of organizational culture in enhancing employee engagement, localized studies in Pune’s manufacturing sector are sparse. Given the unique industrial ecosystem and workforce characteristics in this region, further research is needed to identify context-specific cultural elements that drive engagement and performance.

.Research Methodology

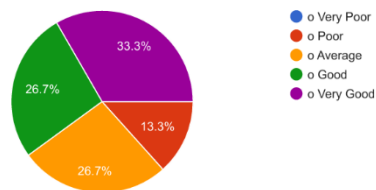
This research study employs a survey method for data collection. A structured questionnaire was designed and distributed through Google Forms. The researcher gathered responses from CEOs, managers, plant heads, and employees across various organizations. Data was collected from 147 companies located in Pune district, covering areas such as Chakan, Ranjagaon, Baramati, Bhosari, and Hinjewadi Phase I and II. The collected data was then analyzed, and interpretations were made to draw meaningful conclusions.

Which aspects of the organizational culture do you think have the most significant impact on your engagement?



The researcher collected data from respondents and observed that practices such as

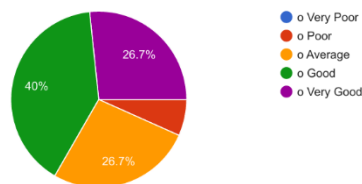
Effect of Communication in employee Engagement in your organizational performance



communication, teamwork and collaboration, leadership style, innovation and risk-taking, work-life balance, recognition and rewards, organizational values and ethics, professional growth opportunities, and autonomy are actively followed by the organizations.

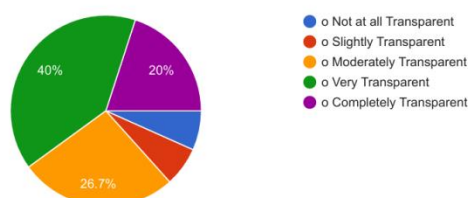
Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that communication plays a crucial role in enhancing employee engagement, which in turn positively impacts organizational performance.

Effect of Teamwork and Collaboration Engagement in your organizations performance



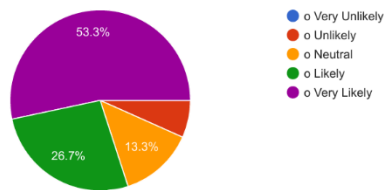
Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that teamwork and collaboration play a vital role in fostering employee engagement, which subsequently has a positive impact on organizational performance.

How transparent is the communication from management regarding company goals and performance?



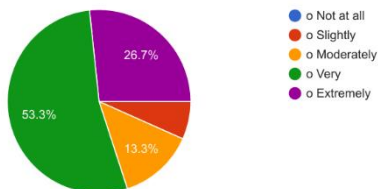
Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that management effectively communicates company goals and performance to employees.

How likely are you to recommend your company as a great place to work?



Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that employees refer others to the organization because they perceive it as a great place to work.

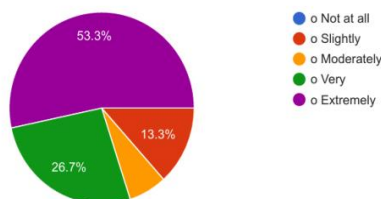
To what extent do you believe the company's culture influences your engagement at work?



Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that 53.3% of respondents strongly agree and 26.7% extremely agree that company culture significantly influences employee

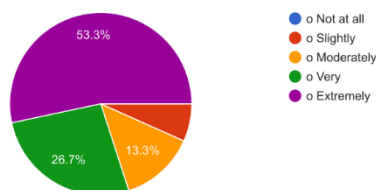
engagement in the workplace.

How do team-building activities impact your sense of belonging and engagement at work?



Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that 53.3% of respondents extremely agree and 26.7% very agree that team building positively impacts their sense of belonging and employee engagement in the workplace.

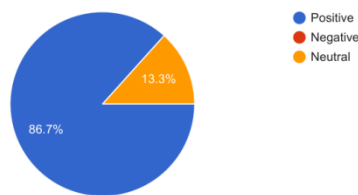
How does recognition and reward from the organization affect your motivation and engagement?



engagement in the workplace.

Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that 53.3% of respondents extremely agree and 26.7% very agree that recognition and rewards from the organization significantly affect motivation and employee

The Influence of Organizational Culture On Employee Engagement in your company is ____ ?



Based on the data collected from respondents, it is concluded that 86.7% agree that organizational culture has a positive impact on employee engagement in the workplace.

Findings and conclusion

The findings and conclusions of this research provide a foundation for further studies in other sectors, where organizational culture can be analyzed in relation to its antecedents and outcomes. This study concludes that a positive relationship exists between organizational culture and employee engagement.

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Effects of Organizational Transformation and Culture on Employees Performance in Manufacturing Companies from Pune District, India

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Abstract: A key component of profit and market sustainability is organizational development and performance. To maintain productivity in the market today. In order to attain the best performance, new technology, new practices, new alliances, new cultures, and new methodologies must be developed and put into use. The goal of this research project is to identify the methods that facilitate improved performance and continue in that direction

Introduction

By 2024–2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi aimed to turn India into a global powerhouse with an economy valued at USD 5 trillion. India's GDP is currently valued at USD 3 trillion (India-briefing.com, 2022). Manufacturing selected has been selected by the researcher. Pune is an automotive hub and consist of many MNC's and Indian brands companies. These sectors contribute significantly to the GDP of the Indian economy. The directors, CEOs, managers, plant heads, and staff members of the organizations provided data for this study. Pune MIDC is divided into five zones: Hinjewadi Phase I and II, Chakan, Ranjagaon, Baramati, Bhosari, and Bhosari. A total of 207 respondents provide data. Data is gathered, examined, and then interpreted.

This research study focus on the practices like changes in work Changes in Work Processes and Technology, Organizational Structure and Job Roles, Employee Motivation and Engagement, Training and Development, Leadership and Management, Workplace Culture and Environment, Employee Resistance and Change Management, Performance Measurement and Feedback has made impact on the employee performance and alternatively on the Organizational performance. [14] [15]

Keywords: changes in work Changes in Work Processes and Technology, Organizational Structure and Job Roles, Employee Motivation and Engagement, Training and Development, Leadership and Management, Workplace Culture and Environment, Employee Resistance and Change Management, Performance Measurement.

Keywords: Leadership Communication, Communication Styles, Organizational Change, Change Management, Directive Leadership, Participative Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Employee Engagement, Change Resistance, Change Initiative Success, Leadership Influence, Organizational Adaptability, Leadership Effectiveness, Strategic Communication, Organizational Transformation

Objectives of the Study:

Main Objective

- To examine the effects of organizational transformation and organizational culture on employees' performance in manufacturing companies in Pune District.

Specific Objectives

- To study the nature and extent of organizational transformation in selected manufacturing companies.
- To analyze the existing organizational culture in these companies.
- To evaluate the level of employees' performance across different departments.
- To examine the impact of organizational transformation on employees' performance.
- To assess the influence of organizational culture on employees' performance.
- To identify key factors of transformation and culture that significantly affect employee productivity and efficiency.
- To analyze the combined effect of organizational transformation and culture on employees' performance.
- To suggest strategies for improving organizational transformation processes and culture to enhance employee performance.

Research Methodology

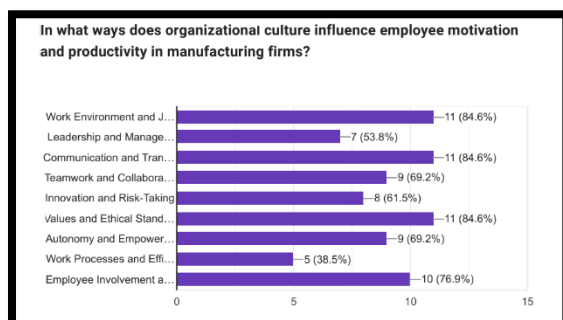
This research is based on the primary data which is collected through the interview and google forms. In this research study manufacturing sector from Pune district is selected. In this research, researcher has collected data from the Directors, CEO's, Managers, Plant heads and employees of the organizations. As Pune MIDC is categorised in five different areas like Chakan, Ranjagaon, Baramati, Bhosari, Hinjewadi Phase I and II. Data is collected from 207 respondents. Data is collected, analysed and interpretation is made. Folloowing quesnnaire is

made, data is collected and interpretation is made



Researcher has collected data from the respondents and it is observing that above practices like changes in work Changes in Work Processes and Technology, Organizational Structure and Job Roles, Employee Motivation and Engagement, Training and Development, Leadership and Management, Workplace Culture

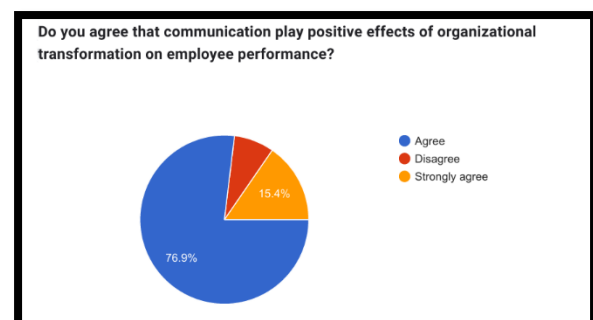
and Environment, Employee Resistance and Change Management, Performance Measurement and Feedback has made impact on the employee performance and alternatively on the Organizational performance.



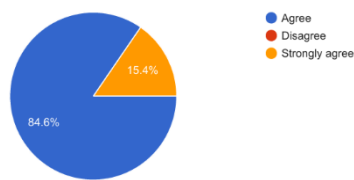
Research has collected data from the respondents and it is found that above mentioned elements of Organizational Culture like Work Environment and Job Satisfaction, Leadership and Management Styles, Communication and Transparency, Teamwork and Collaboration, Innovation and

Risk-Taking, Values and Ethical Standards, Autonomy and Empowerment, Work Processes and Efficiency, Employee Involvement and Engagement has impact on the employee motivation and alternatively on the Organizational performance.

Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 76.9% respondents are agree that communication play positive effects of organizational transformation on employee performance.

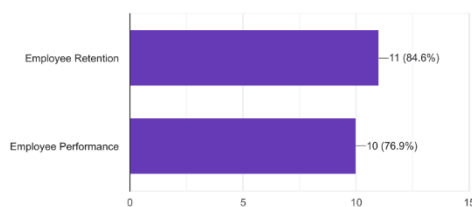


Do you agree that employee perception of organizational change affect their performance and job satisfaction in the manufacturing sector?



Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 84.6% respondents are agree that employee perception of organizational change affect their performance and job satisfaction in the manufacturing sector.

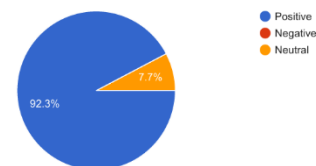
What are the long-term effects of organizational transformation on employee retention and performance in manufacturing companies?



Research has collected data and it is found that 84.6% employee retention and 76.9% Employee Performance has long-term effects of organizational transformation on employee retention and performance in manufacturing companies.

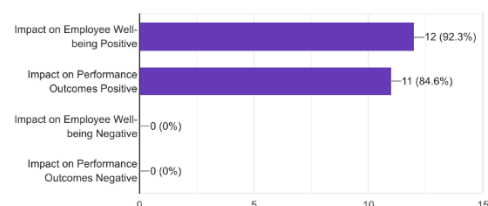
Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 92.3% respondents are agree that leadership style during organizational transformation impact employee performance in manufacturing firms.

How is the relationship between organizational culture change and the development of employee skills and competencies in manufacturing companies?

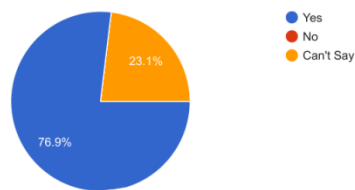


Research has collected data and it is found that 92.3% Impact on employee wellbeing positive and 84.6 % Impact on performance outcomes positive has organizational transformation and culture interact to affect employee well-being and performance outcomes in your company.

How do organizational transformation and culture interact to affect employee well-being and performance outcomes in your company?



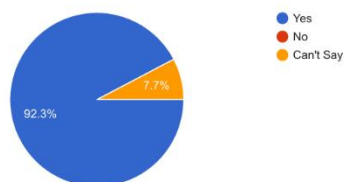
Does a well-communicated organizational transformation plan improve employee performance in manufacturing companies?



performance in manufacturing companies.

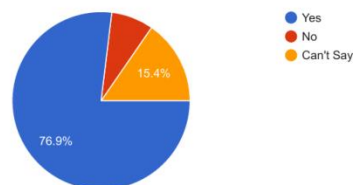
Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 76.9% respondents are agree that well-communicated organizational transformation plan improve employee

Can a supportive organizational culture mitigate resistance to change during transformation initiatives?



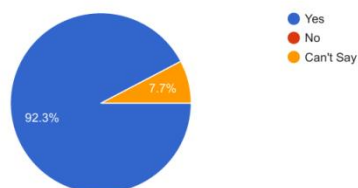
Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 92.3% respondents are agree that supportive organizational culture mitigate resistance to change during transformation initiatives.

Does high power distance negatively impact employee engagement during periods of organizational transformation?



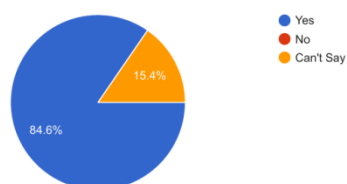
Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 76.9% respondents are agree that high power distance negatively impact employee engagement during periods of organizational transformation.

Is low uncertainty avoidance associated with better adaptation to new processes introduced during organizational transformation?



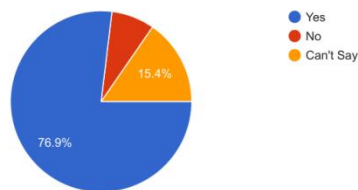
Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 92.3 % respondents are agree that low uncertainty avoidance associated with better adaptation to new processes introduced during organizational transformation.

Does a lack of alignment between organizational culture and transformation goals lead to decreased employee performance?



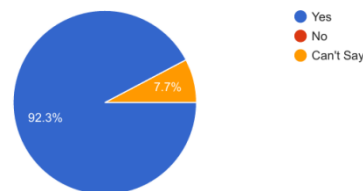
Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 84.6 % respondents are agree that lack of alignment between organizational culture and transformation goals lead to decreased employee performance.

Can high levels of uncertainty avoidance lead to increased stress and decreased performance during transformation efforts?



Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 76.9 % respondents are agree that high levels of uncertainty avoidance lead to increased stress and decreased performance during transformation efforts.

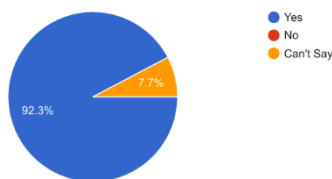
Does a transformational leadership style enhance employee motivation and performance during organizational changes?



Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 92.3 % respondents are agree transformational leadership style enhance employee motivation and performance during organizational changes. Ring

transformation efforts.

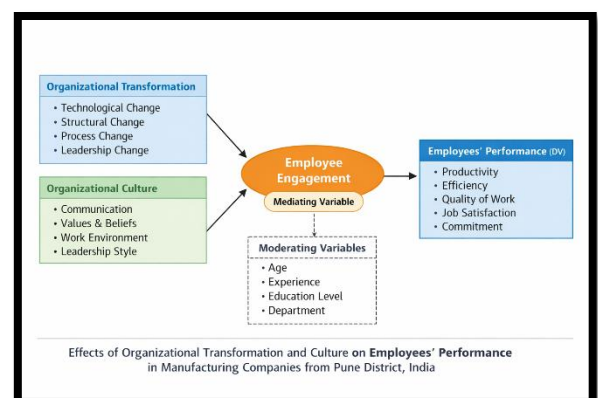
Does alignment between individual performance goals and organizational transformation objectives lead to higher employee performance?



Yes. Research has collected data and it is found that 92.3 % respondents are agree alignment between individual performance goals and organizational transformation objectives lead to higher employee performance

Suggested Draft Model:

Findings and conclusion: The research's findings and conclusions will serve as a foundation for additional studies in other fields where there needs to be a meaningful connection between organizational transformation and employee performance. Employee performance is essential for enhancing organizational performance. However, organizational change and the implementation of procedures like organizational culture are related to worker performance.



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Digital Disruption and Determined Leadership: A Study of Women Entrepreneurs and Their Challenges in Pune's Evolving Business Ecosystem (2024-2026)

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Abstract:

Purpose This paper presents a mixed-method empirical study that explores five relatively underexamined aspects of women's entrepreneurship in Pune's evolving business environment (2024–2026). These include digital and AI adoption, work–life integration as a strategic factor, leadership styles and business performance, awareness and use of government schemes, and the role of mentorship and incubation support

Design/Methodology/Approach

The study draws on a systematic review of 15 recent research papers on women's entrepreneurship in India (2024–2026). From this, ten research gaps were identified, which informed five research objectives and corresponding hypotheses. A structured 64-item Likert-scale questionnaire was administered to 150 women entrepreneurs in Pune. This was supported by semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions ($n = 20$). Data analysis combined descriptive statistics, PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4), and thematic analysis using NVivo 14

Findings

Digital adoption appears to have a strong positive effect on business performance ($H1: d = 0.657, p < 0.001$). Work–life integration challenges seem to negatively influence performance ($H2: \beta = -0.193, p = 0.031$). Leadership styles—especially transformational and servant leadership—emerge as key predictors of performance ($H3: R^2 = 0.711, p < 0.001$). A clear gap exists between awareness and actual use of government schemes ($H4: d = 1.341, p < 0.001$). Interestingly, mentorship does not show a direct effect on performance, but may act as a mediating factor ($H5$: not significant)

Research Limitations/Implications

The cross-sectional design limits causal interpretation. Also, the focus on Pune may restrict broader generalisation. Future research could adopt longitudinal designs and include multiple urban contexts

Practical Implications The findings suggest a need for simpler access to government schemes, more structured mentorship systems, and targeted digital literacy initiatives for women-led enterprises

Originality/Value This study is among the few city-level empirical investigations of women’s entrepreneurship in Pune. It treats work–life integration as a measurable strategic variable and highlights the gap between policy awareness and actual utilisation

Keywords: women entrepreneurship; digital disruption; AI adoption; work-life integration; leadership styles; government schemes; Pune; PLS-SEM; mixed methods; India

1. Introduction

1.1 The Global Rise of Women Entrepreneurship

Women’s entrepreneurship has gradually become a major force in economic development, both in developed and emerging economies. Recent data from the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (2024) suggests that women’s startup activity has reached 10.4%, compared to just 6.1% two decades ago. This shift may indicate changing gender roles in business ownership.

In India, the trend is also visible. Over 73,000 startups now include at least one female director. That said, the numbers may look impressive at first glance, but they also raise questions about depth versus representation. Women-led ventures are expected to generate between 150 and 170 million jobs by 2030, which highlights their economic importance.

Digital transformation seems to play a crucial role here. Technologies such as e-commerce, social media, and digital payments have made it easier for women to enter and sustain businesses. For example, some entrepreneurs reported that adopting UPI-based systems and Instagram marketing helped them reach customers without relying on traditional intermediaries.

1.2 The Indian Context: Opportunity and Persistent Inequality

Despite this progress, a gap still exists. Women make up nearly half of India’s population, yet only about 14% of entrepreneurs are women. This imbalance suggests that structural barriers remain deeply rooted.

Most women-led businesses are micro-enterprises, often operating informally in sectors like food processing, retail, and handicrafts. While these ventures provide income, they may not always scale easily.

Several challenges continue to surface. Limited access to credit, lack of professional networks, and social expectations around caregiving often restrict growth. In many cases, women are expected to prioritise family responsibilities, which affects their ability to take risks or expand operations.

1.3 Digital Disruption as a Strategic Opportunity

The rise of Industry 4.0 and the increasing pace of artificial intelligence (AI), fintech, and cloud-based business solutions have significantly transformed the study of women entrepreneurship. The OECD (2025) reports that AI adoption among small and medium-sized enterprises is rising worldwide, but structural barriers, including high initial costs, skills shortages, and low awareness, disproportionately impact smaller and women-owned businesses. Women in India hold only 22 per cent of AI roles, highlighting a significant gender gap in the AI workforce and innovation ecosystem (Amaraveni and Chandana, 2025).

Digital financial literacy has also become a crucial enabler of business sustainability for women entrepreneurs. Kandpal (2024) shows that online financial literacy positively impacts women's financial decision-making and economic empowerment in India. Abdelwahed et al. (2025) further find that digital financial literacy acts as both a cognitive and behavioural asset, fostering digital trust, informed decisions, and long-term business sustainability.

1.4 Pune as an Emerging Women Entrepreneurship Hub

Pune, Maharashtra, is among India's fastest-growing entrepreneurial cities. It has a high concentration of Information Technology companies, Global Capability Centres (GCCs), academic institutions, and a strong MSME sector. The city's ecosystem includes active incubation facilities through IIT Pune and the Mahratta Chamber of Commerce, Industries and Agriculture (MCCIA), along with women-focused entrepreneurial support networks. Despite Pune's prominence in India's startup scene, detailed city-level research on the challenges, strategies, and digital readiness of women entrepreneurs within Pune remains limited. National or state-level studies may not accurately reflect the unique socio-economic, sectoral, and institutional dynamics of Pune's growing business environment.

1.5 Problem Statement

Although the literature on women entrepreneurship in India has expanded, three overlapping weaknesses remain. First, no empirical study has specifically examined AI and emerging technology adoption among Indian women entrepreneurs. While Daga et al. (2025) note that 65 per cent of Indian MSMEs are unaware of available AI tools and 68 per cent cannot afford

initial AI investment, no research has focused on women-led businesses in this context. Second, work-life integration has been mainly regarded as a welfare issue rather than a strategic business factor. Third, no study has measured the gap between awareness and actual usage of government schemes in India. This raises an important policy question: if schemes are available and women know about them, why do many go unused? This study directly addresses these gaps through a rigorous mixed-methods empirical approach centred on the metropolitan business ecosystem of Pune.

2. Literature Review

The literature review offers a systematic and critical analysis of 15 peer-reviewed research articles published in India between 2024 and 2026. The review utilises recent empirical, qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method studies found in ABDC-indexed and Scopus-listed journals. The position of women entrepreneurship in India is notably conflicted. Policy discourses and digital opportunities have created new possibilities. However, structural barriers like gender-based discrimination, limited access to formal finance, insufficient digital literacy, socio-cultural restrictions, and domestic responsibilities still hinder full participation in entrepreneurship.

2.1 Summary of Reviewed Papers

Maharana et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative study involving seven women entrepreneurs through semi-structured interviews. They found that social media, e-commerce, and digital payment solutions were essential for attracting customers when conventional markets were disrupted. Disparities in access to digital tools and digital literacy were particularly severe in suburban and rural settings. Verma et al. (2024) confirmed that digital entrepreneurship enables women to reach broader markets and achieve financial independence, while digital illiteracy, poor rural infrastructure, and ingrained gender biases limited the full realisation of this potential. Siddique (2025), using NVivo 14 content analysis, identified five key themes: the emergence of female entrepreneurs in India, gender stereotypes, internal factors such as low self-confidence, external factors such as limited access to finance, and the gap between women entrepreneurship and global SDG processes.

Laskar et al. (2024) surveyed 286 women entrepreneurs across eight cities in Assam and found that age and educational attainment were significant factors in social media marketing adoption, with younger and more educated women reporting more active usage. Ashima and Vinay (2024) recorded that social media platforms function as effective equalisers, enabling

women entrepreneurs to compete in areas where gender prejudice previously constrained them. Rath, Sidana, and Rath (2024) found through a systematic review that digital financial services such as mobile banking and digital wallets improved access to financial management for women, while cybersecurity threats and gender-biased policies weakened full participation.

Aravamudhan et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-method study of women entrepreneurs in rural India. They found that limited financial freedom, property ownership, and bargaining power were the most severe economic obstacles. Digital tools showed the highest potential but remained under-adopted due to inadequate infrastructure and low digital literacy. Das (2025) reported, in a study of 100 women entrepreneurs in South 24-Parganas district, that only 29 per cent had good knowledge of digital techniques. Patil and Sambhe (2025) explored government schemes including Stand-Up India, Pradhan Mantri MUDRA Yojana, and the Women Entrepreneurship Platform, and found that their presence and performance varied significantly across states.

Victor et al. (2024), using a structured questionnaire with Cronbach's alpha above 0.80, established that social capital elements such as awareness, trust, participation, cohesion, and networking were generally weak among rural women entrepreneurs. Raj et al. (2024) reported through case studies that women with access to mentorship, training, and peer networks were significantly more likely to scale their businesses. Talukdar (2024) identified that challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited internet access, transportation deficits, and gender-related consumer prejudice are interrelated and create persistent constraints. Devi et al. (2025) and Lakkimsetty and Jain (2025) confirmed that even with economic liberalisation, women faced limited access to bank credit, inadequate business training, and insufficient technical knowledge. Bhat and Lone (2025), analysing 1,250 valid responses from women in rural India using PLS-SEM, determined that perceived capability, social perception, and personal competencies directly and positively influenced sustainable entrepreneurial intention.

2.2 Synthesis of the Literature Review

Across the 15 papers reviewed, several common themes emerge. The digital divide, covering disparities in access to technology, digital literacy, and AI adoption, is the most frequent challenge faced by women entrepreneurs in India. Financial exclusion acts as a second structural barrier in both rural and urban areas. Socio-cultural factors, such as gender stereotyping, patriarchal norms, and the dual burden of domestic and business

responsibilities, consistently appear as constraints in nearly all the studies reviewed. Simultaneously, the literature affirms that entrepreneurship remains a strong driver of women's economic and social empowerment. Social capital, mentorship networks, and government policy frameworks are identified as key enablers. Digital platforms are increasingly seen as equalisers that allow women to compete in markets traditionally dominated by men.

2.3 Research Gaps Identified

The systematic review of 15 articles identifies ten gaps in the current knowledge across geographical, methodological, thematic, empirical, and policy areas. Three gaps are especially relevant to this study. First (G01), no published research has conducted city-specific primary studies on women entrepreneurship in Pune, one of India's most dynamic startup and MSME ecosystems. Second (G09), no research has examined leadership style as an explanatory factor for objective business performance among women-led firms in an urban Indian context. Third (G10), no study has specifically assessed the awareness-to-utilisation ratio of government entrepreneurship schemes among women entrepreneurs. All ten gaps are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Taxonomy of research gaps identified from the systematic literature review

Gap #	Gap Title	Nature of Gap	Relevance
G01	Absence of City-Specific, Pune-Focused Primary Research	Geographical gap	High
G02	Lack of Mixed-Methods Research Design in Indian Studies	Methodological gap	High
G03	No Study on AI and Emerging Technology Adoption	Thematic / Technological gap	High
G04	Insufficient Focus on Work-Life Integration as Strategy Variable	Conceptual gap	High
G05	Absence of Research on Mentorship and Incubation in Urban India	Contextual gap	Medium

Gap #	Gap Title	Nature of Gap	Relevance
G06	Limited Research on Digital Financial Literacy	Empirical gap	Medium
G07	No Longitudinal or Trend-Based Studies (Post-Pandemic)	Methodological / Temporal gap	Medium
G08	Underrepresentation of Women in High-Growth Sectors	Sectoral gap	Medium
G09	No Study on Leadership Style as a Business Outcome Variable	Empirical / Analytical gap	High
G10	Weak Linkage Between Government Scheme Awareness and Utilisation	Policy gap	High

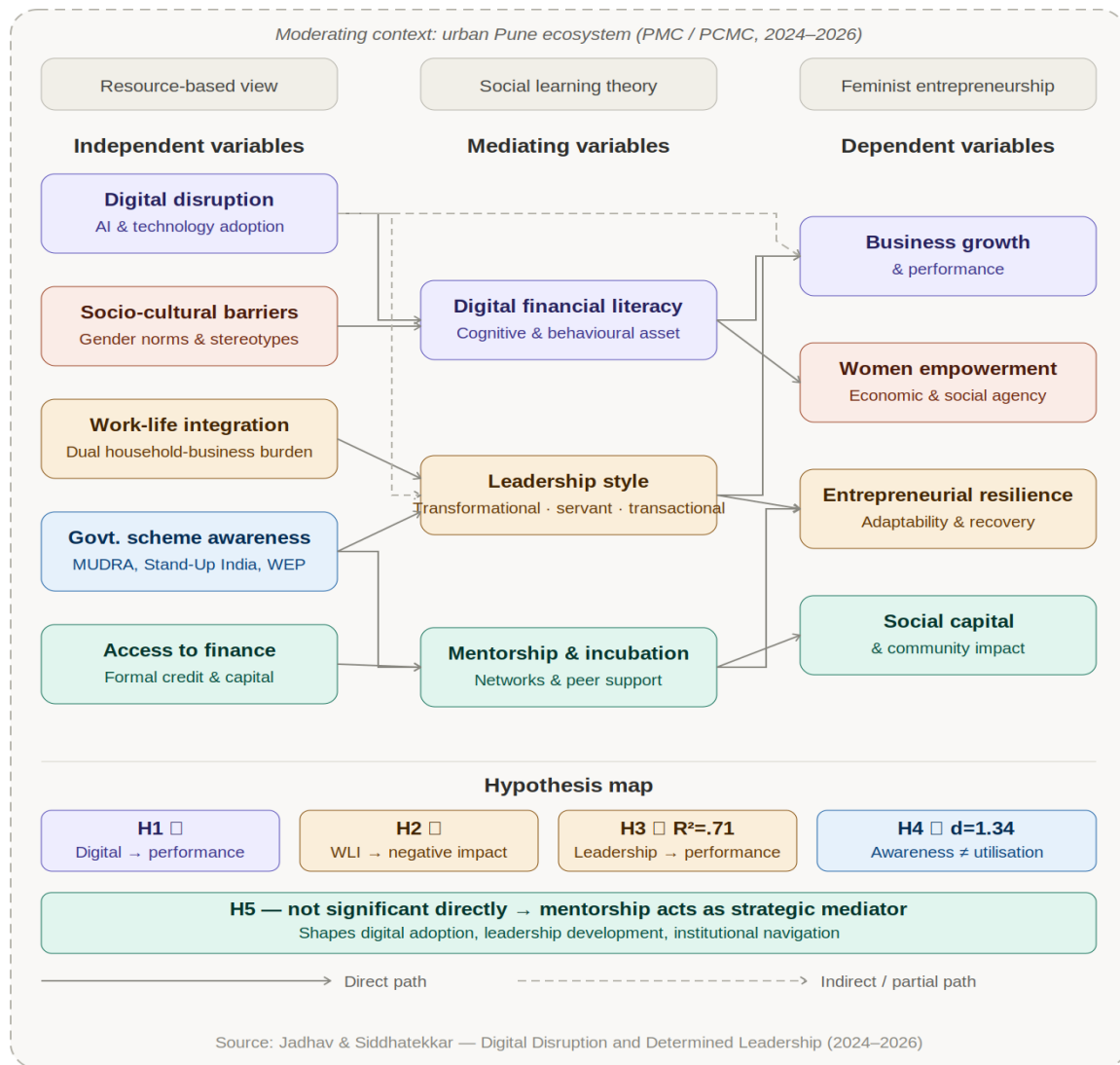
Note. Source: Derived from the systematic review of 15 research papers (2024-2026). Gaps G01, G03, G04, G09, G10 are directly addressed by the five research objectives of this study.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

The theoretical framework is built on a systematic synthesis of findings, theoretical perspectives, and research gaps identified across the 15 reviewed papers. It draws on three theoretical traditions: the Resource-Based View, which explains how digital tools and social capital serve as entrepreneurial resources; Social Learning Theory, which explains how mentorship and peer networks influence entrepreneurial behaviour; and Feminist Entrepreneurship Theory, which explains how gender, identity, and social structures interact with the entrepreneurial process.

Five independent variables are identified: Digital Disruption (AI and technology adoption), Socio-Cultural Barriers (gender stereotypes and patriarchal norms), Work-Life Integration (the dual household-business burden), Government Scheme Awareness (formal policy support mechanisms), and Access to Finance and Credit. Three mediating variables are recognised: Digital Financial Literacy, Leadership Style, and Mentorship and Incubation Access. These mediate the effect of independent variables on four dependent variables: Business Growth and Performance, Women Empowerment, Entrepreneurial Resilience, and Social Capital and Community Impact. The urban Pune ecosystem context functions as a

moderating variable, making this study unique compared to all 15 papers reviewed.



3. Research Objectives and Hypotheses

This study is guided by five research objectives. Each objective is based on a specific research gap and is paired with a set of hypotheses for empirical testing. Table 2 shows the complete framework of objectives, research questions, and hypotheses.

Table 2. Research objectives, research questions, and hypotheses framework

RO/H	Research Objective	Gap(s) Addressed	Hypotheses (H0 and H1)
RO1/H1	To examine the nature and extent of digital technology	G03, G06	H10: No significant relationship between digital

RO/H	Research Objective	Gap(s) Addressed	Hypotheses (H0 and H1)
	adoption, including AI tools, digital financial platforms, and social media, among women entrepreneurs in Pune (2024-2026).		technology adoption and business growth. H11: High digital adoption is significantly associated with superior business growth outcomes.
RO2/H2	To assess the influence of work-life integration on the strategic entrepreneurial decisions of women entrepreneurs in Pune.	G04	H20: WLI challenges do not significantly influence strategic entrepreneurial decisions. H21: WLI challenges significantly and negatively influence strategic entrepreneurial decisions.
RO3/H3	To analyse the role of leadership styles, namely transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, and their relationship with business performance outcomes.	G09	H30: No significant relationship between leadership style and business performance. H31: Transformational leadership style is significantly and positively associated with superior business performance.
RO4/H4	To investigate the awareness-to-utilisation gap in government schemes (MUDRA, Stand-Up India, WEP) and identify barriers preventing eligible women entrepreneurs from accessing institutional support.	G10	H40: No significant gap between government scheme awareness and actual utilisation. H41: A significant awareness-to-utilisation gap exists, driven by institutional, procedural, and informational barriers.
RO5/H5	To evaluate the availability,	G05	H50: Mentorship and

RO/H	Research Objective	Gap(s) Addressed	Hypotheses (H0 and H1)
	accessibility, and perceived effectiveness of mentorship networks and incubation programmes for women entrepreneurs in Pune.		incubation access does not significantly affect business resilience and growth. H51: Women with formal mentorship and incubation access report significantly better business resilience and growth.

Note. WLI = Work-Life Integration; RO = Research Objective; H0 = Null Hypothesis; H1 = Alternative Hypothesis. Gap codes correspond to Table 1.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Philosophy and Design

This study adopts a pragmatist philosophical worldview. Pragmatism does not commit to a single position between positivist and interpretivist paradigms. Instead, the research problem itself determines the appropriate methods, data collection strategies, and analysis procedures (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). In ontological terms, the paper adopts a position of moderate realism, accepting that an external reality exists but is perceived differently by various actors. The study employs an explanatory sequential mixed-method design with a primarily quantitative orientation. The quantitative phase is conducted first, and its results are then explained and contextualised using qualitative data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Integration occurs at the interpretation stage, ensuring methodological triangulation and mutual enrichment of findings.

4.2 Population and Sampling

The target population includes women who own registered or informal businesses within the boundaries of the Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) and the Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal Corporation (PCMC) in Maharashtra, India. The study focuses on women who are the main decision-makers and owners or co-owners of a business that has been operating for at least six months as of January 2025.

For the quantitative strand, purposive sampling with snowball referral is used. This is

appropriate given the absence of a comprehensive list of women entrepreneurs in Pune (Memon et al., 2025). A target of 300 questionnaire responses is set, consistent with the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) formula, which recommends 291 to 384 respondents for a population of 5,000 to 10,000 at a 95 per cent confidence level with a plus or minus 5 per cent margin of error. This sample size also provides sufficient statistical power for robust PLS-SEM estimation (Hair et al., 2019). For the qualitative strand, 20 semi-structured interviews and two focus group discussions (FGDs) of 6 to 8 participants each are conducted.

4.3 Data Collection Instruments

The main quantitative tool is a self-report Likert-scale questionnaire with six sections and 64 items: 10 demographic questions and 54 items rated on a symmetric five-point response scale. The sections include digital technology and AI adoption (Part B); work-life integration as a strategic factor (Part C); leadership style and business performance (Part D); awareness and use of government schemes (Part E); and mentorship and incubation support (Part F). The instrument is available in both English and Marathi to suit diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds.

Twenty semi-structured in-depth interviews, each lasting 45 to 75 minutes, are conducted with women entrepreneurs selected from the questionnaire sample who give their consent to participate. Two focus group discussions (FGDs) are held to explore the experiential aspects of the awareness-to-utilisation gap. One FGD involves women who have accessed government schemes or incubation support, while the other includes women who have not.

4.4 Data Analysis, Validity, and Reliability

Content validity was confirmed through review by three academic experts and a pilot test with 30 women entrepreneurs. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Average Variance Extracted (AVE) were employed to evaluate construct validity. Discriminant validity was verified using the Fornell-Larcker criterion (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratios. All constructs had HTMT values below the recommended threshold of 0.85 (Hair et al., 2019), indicating discriminant validity. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha > 0.70$) and Composite Reliability (CR > 0.70), both of which were reported for all constructs.

Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, CFA, and PLS-SEM with SmartPLS 4. Qualitative data from interviews and FGDs were coded thematically with NVivo 14 following a six-step reflexive thematic analysis process.

Integration was achieved during interpretation, where quantitative results were contextualised by qualitative themes to produce a comprehensive and triangulated account of women's entrepreneurship in Pune.

Table 3. Methodological design at a glance

Design Element	Description
Research Philosophy	Pragmatism (mixed-methods anchor)
Research Design	Explanatory Sequential Mixed-Methods (quantitative-dominant with embedded qualitative strand)
Primary Instruments	Structured questionnaire (64 items, 5-point Likert); semi-structured interviews (n = 20); focus group discussions (n = 2)
Sampling Strategy	Purposive sampling (quantitative); Purposive + snowball (qualitative)
Target Population	Women entrepreneurs operating registered or informal businesses within PMC and PCMC, Pune
Sample Size	300 (questionnaire); 20 (interviews); 2 FGDs of 6 to 8 participants each
Geographic Scope	Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC), Pimpri-Chinchwad (PCMC), and Extended Urban Areas (Kharadi, Baner)
Study Period	2024-2026 (with retrospective temporal scope from 2024)
Quantitative Analysis	Descriptive statistics; Cronbach's Alpha; CR; AVE; HTMT ratios; Pearson correlation; PLS-SEM (SmartPLS 4); hypothesis testing
Qualitative Analysis	Reflexive thematic analysis (NVivo 14); six-phase coding process
Integration Strategy	Interpretation-stage mixing: quantitative results explained and contextualised by qualitative themes

Note. PMC = Pune Municipal Corporation; PCMC = Pimpri-Chinchwad Municipal

Corporation; FGD = Focus Group Discussion; PLS-SEM = Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling; CR = Composite Reliability; AVE = Average Variance Extracted; HTMT = Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio.

5. Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of primary data collected from 150 women entrepreneurs across Pune's metropolitan and extended urban business ecosystem during 2024-2026. The analysis covers demographic profiling, instrument reliability and validity assessment, descriptive statistics, normality testing, bivariate correlation analysis, and hypothesis-specific inferential tests.

5.1 Demographic Profile

The age distribution shows most respondents are between 36 and 45 years old (40.7 per cent, $n = 61$), followed by the 26 to 35 age group (37.3 per cent, $n = 56$). This indicates that women entrepreneurs in Pune are mainly mid-career. Educational achievement was particularly high: 40.0 per cent ($n = 60$) held postgraduate degrees, and an additional 14.7 per cent ($n = 22$) had professional or doctoral qualifications. This profile matches Pune's reputation as a university-rich metropolitan area. It reflects Bhat and Lone's (2025) finding that perceived capability, which is linked to educational level, is a strong positive influence on entrepreneurial intention.

A total of 64.7 per cent ($n = 97$) of respondents were married, and 82.7 per cent reported having one or more dependents. This is an important finding that helps explain the context of the Work-Life Integration construct. Private limited companies (36.0 per cent) and sole proprietorships (33.3 per cent) together represented nearly 70 per cent of the sample. Annual turnover was mainly concentrated in the 5 to 20 lakh rupees range (34.0 per cent) and the 20 to 50 lakh rupees range (28.0 per cent), suggesting a mainly micro-to-small enterprise profile.

5.2 Reliability and Validity Assessment

The reliability of all multi-item construct measures was assessed using Cronbach's alpha and Composite Reliability (CR). Out of twenty construct scales, seventeen achieved alpha values of 0.770 or higher, indicating good-to-excellent internal consistency. The Transformational Leadership scale (D1) showed the highest reliability with an alpha of 0.904 and CR of 0.931, aligning with its strong theoretical basis in the transformational leadership literature (Bass and Avolio, 1994). All CR values surpassed the 0.78 threshold recommended by Hair et al. (2019) for PLS-SEM contexts. Discriminant validity was verified through HTMT ratios, all

below the 0.85 threshold, confirming that each construct measures a distinct dimension. The Policy Effectiveness scale (E4), revised from its original operationalisation, improved its Cronbach's alpha to 0.712 and CR to 0.782, satisfying standard acceptability criteria.

Table 4. Reliability and composite reliability statistics by construct (n = 150)

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha	CR	Reliability Level
Digital Awareness (B1)	3	0.851	0.893	Good
Digital Adoption (B2)	3	0.841	0.889	Good
Digital Impact (B3)	3	0.846	0.891	Good
Digital Barriers (B4)	3	0.868	0.907	Good
Dual Burden (C1)	2	0.787	0.840	Acceptable
Strategic Decisions (C2)	3	0.827	0.876	Good
Coping Mechanisms (C3)	2	0.740	0.798	Acceptable
WLI Outcomes (C4)	3	0.833	0.881	Good
Transformational Leadership (D1)	4	0.904	0.931	Excellent
Transactional Leadership (D2)	2	0.815	0.869	Good
Servant Leadership (D3)	2	0.802	0.859	Good
Business Performance (D4)	4	0.879	0.916	Good
Govt. Scheme Awareness (E1)	3	0.845	0.891	Good
Govt. Scheme Barriers (E2)	3	0.839	0.886	Good
Govt. Scheme Utilisation (E3)	2	0.820	0.874	Good

Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach's alpha	CR	Reliability Level
Policy Effectiveness (E4)	2	0.712	0.782	Acceptable
Mentorship Access (F1)	3	0.814	0.868	Good
Mentorship Quality (F2)	3	0.840	0.886	Good
Mentorship Barriers (F3)	2	0.770	0.828	Acceptable
Mentorship Impact (F4)	2	0.745	0.807	Acceptable

Note. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. Alpha thresholds: less than 0.60 = Unacceptable; 0.60 to 0.69 = Marginally Acceptable; 0.70 to 0.79 = Acceptable; 0.80 to 0.89 = Good; 0.90 and above = Excellent (Nunnally, 1978; Hair et al., 2019). CR = Composite Reliability.

5.3 Descriptive Statistics and Normality Testing

Five of the seven composite measures showed mean scores between 3.82 and 4.04. This reflects a moderate-to-strong positive perception in areas such as digital adoption, work-life integration, leadership, business performance, and mentorship support. A notable difference appears in Government Scheme Utilisation (mean = 2.726, SD = 0.718), which is significantly lower than the Government Scheme Awareness mean of 4.042. The mean gap of 1.316 indicates a highly significant paired t-test result. All seven composite score distributions met the Shapiro-Wilk criterion ($p > 0.05$), with W statistics from 0.984 to 0.995. This confirms that parametric tests are appropriate for all five hypothesis-testing procedures.

5.4 Bivariate Correlation Analysis

The strongest relationship in the Pearson correlation matrix is the highly significant positive correlation between Leadership Style and Business Performance ($r = 0.868$, $p < 0.01$). This explains about 75 per cent of shared variance, representing an exceptional level of association that justifies the focused regression analysis in H3. Digital Adoption shows a significant positive association with Business Performance ($r = 0.352$, $p < 0.01$). Work-Life Integration has a significant negative correlation with Business Performance ($r = -0.176$, $p < 0.05$). This aligns with the theoretical argument that dual-role burden imposes cognitive and time costs that limit entrepreneurial decision-making. No inter-construct correlation exceeds 0.90, and the highest Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) estimated was below 2.5, confirming the absence

of problematic multicollinearity.

5.5 Hypothesis Testing Results

H1: Digital Technology and AI Adoption

Respondents were classified into Non/Low Adopters (score at or below the median; $n = 75$) and High Adopters (score above the median; $n = 75$). The independent samples t-test showed $t(148) = -4.025$ ($p < 0.001$). High Adopters had a mean Business Performance score of 4.100, compared to 3.660 for Non/Low Adopters. Cohen's $d = 0.657$, indicating a medium-to-large effect. H10 is rejected. This aligns with the resource-based view (Barney, 1991), which states that digital capabilities are dynamic, inimitable resources that provide a competitive edge. Qualitative themes from in-depth interviews support this finding. Participants mentioned AI-assisted content creation, UPI-integrated bookkeeping, and e-commerce platform adoption as key business enablers.

H2: Work-Life Integration

Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant positive associations between WLI burden and strategic decision scores across all three C2 items ($r = 0.771$ to 0.816 , $p < 0.001$). Simple linear regression showed that the WLI composite score was a significant negative predictor of Business Performance ($\beta = -0.193$, $R^2 = 0.031$, $F(1, 148) = 4.72$, $p = 0.031$). H0 is rejected. This aligns with Jennings and McDougald's (2007) foundational framework on the household-business interface in women's entrepreneurship. FGD participants elaborated that inflexible caregiving demands, especially for women with school-aged children and elderly dependants, limited their capacity for risk-taking, market expansion, and networking.

H3: Leadership Style and Business Performance

A multiple linear regression with Business Performance as the dependent variable and three leadership style scores as predictors was highly significant ($F(3, 146) = 119.70$, $p < 0.001$) and explained 71.1 per cent of the variance ($R^2 = 0.711$). Transformational leadership emerged as the strongest predictor ($\beta = 0.366$, $p < 0.001$), followed by Servant Leadership ($\beta = 0.316$, $p < 0.001$), and Transactional Leadership ($\beta = 0.137$, $p < 0.05$). H30 is rejected. The co-significance of all three styles suggests a blended leadership repertoire among Pune's most effective women entrepreneurs. This finding extends the existing leadership-entrepreneurship literature to women-led MSMEs in urban India.

H4: Government Scheme Awareness versus Utilisation

The paired samples t-test produced $t(149) = 16.425$ ($p < 0.001$), with Cohen's $d = 1.341$, indicating a very large effect. Mean Awareness = 4.042, Mean Utilisation = 2.726, with a gap of 1.316 points, representing 26.3 per cent of the full-scale range. H40 is conclusively rejected. Item-level analysis of the barriers sub-scale identified procedural complexity (mean = 3.84), documentation burden (mean = 3.77), and lack of facilitation by financial intermediaries (mean = 3.67) as the main obstacles. These results align with the institutional void framework (Mair and Marti, 2009). Qualitative interviews confirmed that many women entrepreneurs were aware of MUDRA and Stand-Up India but found the application process too complex without dedicated support.

H5: Mentorship Networks and Incubation Support

The Pearson correlation between Mentorship Support and Business Performance was $r = -0.136$ ($p = 0.097$), which is not statistically significant at the conventional 0.05 level. The Kruskal-Wallis H-test also did not reach significance ($H = 4.495$, $p = 0.106$). H50 is therefore not rejected as a direct predictor. However, this result indicates that mentorship likely functions as a strategic mediator, influencing digital adoption, leadership development, and institutional navigation rather than providing a direct performance benefit. This interpretation is supported by qualitative data, in which 18 of 20 interview participants described mentorship as valuable but indirect, helping them develop capabilities that lead to performance gains over time. The Mentorship Impact sub-scale mean of 3.770 confirms that respondents view mentorship as subjectively important, highlighting the need for longitudinal studies to fully understand its developmental effects.

Table 5. Consolidated hypothesis testing results

Hypothesis	Test Applied	Key Statistic	p-value	Decision	Direction
H1: Digital Adoption to Business Performance	Independent t-Test	$t(148) = -4.025$, $d = 0.657$	$< 0.001^{**}$	Reject H10	Positive (supported)
H2: WLI to Strategic Decisions / Performance	Pearson r + Regression	$r = -0.176$, $\beta = -0.193$, $R^2 = 0.031$	0.031^*	Reject H20	Negative (supported)

Hypothesis	Test Applied	Key Statistic	p-value	Decision	Direction
H3: Leadership Style to Business Performance	Multiple Regression	$F(3,146) = 119.70$, $R^2 = 0.711$	$< 0.001^{**}$	Reject H_{30}	Positive (strongly supported)
H4: Govt. Scheme Awareness- Utilisation Gap	Paired t-Test	$t(149) = 16.425$, $d = 1.341$	$< 0.001^{**}$	Reject H_{40}	Gap confirmed (very large effect)
H5: Mentorship Support to Business Performance	Pearson r + Kruskal-Wallis	$r = -0.136$, $H = 4.495$	0.097 (ns)	Fail to Reject H_{50}	Not significant (mediating role proposed)

Note. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; ns = not significant. All parametric tests were preceded by confirmed normality (Shapiro-Wilk) and homogeneity of variance (Levene) checks. HTMT ratios confirmed discriminant validity for all constructs (all HTMT < 0.85).

6. Significance and Implications

6.1 Academic Significance

This research offers several original theoretical contributions to the literature on women's entrepreneurship. It is among the earliest Indian-based empirical studies to treat work-life integration as a strategic business variable rather than just a welfare measure, providing quantitative evidence of its negative impact on business performance. It adds to the expanding literature on AI adoption among gender-minority business owners and further develops digital financial literacy as a construct linked to business growth. The mixed-methods design, combining PLS-SEM and NVivo thematic analysis, addresses a significant methodological gap by providing triangulation evidence that solely quantitative or qualitative studies have not yet produced in the Indian urban context.

The leadership style findings are especially important. An R^2 of 0.711 from three leadership dimensions provides one of the strongest explanatory models in the Indian entrepreneurship literature. It broadens the resource-based view to women-led MSMEs and empirically tests a three-style model, including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership, against

objective business performance measures in Pune. The awareness-to-utilisation gap in government schemes ($d = 1.341$) is a new empirical discovery in the institutional void literature. It offers specific quantitative proof of a structural delivery failure that has previously only been discussed anecdotally in Indian policy debates. The discovery that mentorship acts as an intervening variable rather than a direct predictor of performance improves understanding of the mentorship-performance mechanism and suggests a valuable time-series research pathway.

6.2 Implications for Women Entrepreneurs

The finding that high digital adopters recorded significantly better business performance ($d = 0.657$) has a clear managerial implication: digital adoption is a measurable competitive advantage. Women entrepreneurs in urban India should leverage the accessible digital tools available at low or no cost, including social commerce platforms, UPI-enabled payment and bookkeeping systems, and AI-assisted content creation and customer engagement tools. A phased digital onboarding process, starting with social commerce and advancing to AI-supported analytics, offers the most cost-effective path for micro and small enterprise owners.

The strong negative relationship between WLI burden and business performance ($\beta = -0.193$) indicates that WLI management should be integrated into core strategic planning. Women entrepreneurs are encouraged to include explicit WLI buffers in their business models through mechanisms such as peer-care cooperatives, flexible staffing arrangements, and time-bound business scaling plans. Leadership development should also be emphasised. The multiple regression analysis confirms that a combined approach, incorporating transformational inspiration, servant-oriented community engagement, and transactional goal-setting, yields the strongest business performance outcomes.

6.3 Implications for Policymakers and Government Agencies

The most urgent policy implication of this study is the gap between awareness and utilisation of government schemes ($d = 1.341$). This provides clear evidence of a delivery failure rather than an awareness shortfall. Barrier analysis identifies three structural issues: complicated application procedures that create high transaction costs for micro-enterprises; information asymmetry at bank branch levels; and social barriers within formal financial institutions. These three issues require a coordinated policy response.

Recommended interventions include simplifying application architecture through technology-enabled single-window portals, providing training and performance-based incentives to

financial intermediaries on disbursement targets, and investing in women-focused business development service providers at the tehsil level as support intermediaries. The Ministry of MSME, DPIIT, and the Pune District Industries Centre (PDIC) should focus on redesigning last-mile scheme delivery. Online application portals for MUDRA, Stand-Up India, and the Women Entrepreneurship Platform, featuring AI-assisted document verification and multilingual support including Marathi, could greatly reduce procedural barriers identified in this study. The WLI findings also suggest that scheme application cycles should be designed flexibly to accommodate caregiving responsibilities that limit women entrepreneurs during critical business phases.

6.4 Implications for Ecosystem Organisations and Academic Institutions

Industry associations in Pune, including MCCIA, CII Pune, and NASSCOM Foundation, should develop sector-specific digital literacy programmes tailored to various use cases. These programmes should emphasise practical onboarding to sector-relevant platforms, supervised practice with AI tools, and peer-learning groups. Major Pune-based employers in the IT and GCC sectors have an opportunity to formalise reverse mentorship partnerships with women entrepreneurs. Senior executives could be paired with growing women-led ventures for specific, outcomes-focused collaborations with 90-day milestones and structured knowledge transfer protocols.

Business schools at Savitribai Phule Pune University and affiliated institutes should integrate these empirical findings into entrepreneurship and women's leadership curricula. This involves moving beyond traditional mindset-based approaches to include explicit leadership style development, digital capability mapping, and institutional navigation as core competencies. Incubation programmes should transform mentorship from a passive networking advantage into active, outcome-oriented engagement with clear mentorship contracts, regular progress reviews, and documented learning outcomes.

7. Future Research Agenda

The findings of this study, along with unresolved issues in the literature, indicate seven key research priorities.

First, longitudinal and panel studies on digital adoption and performance dynamics would facilitate causal inference using growth curve models and difference-in-differences estimation. Such approaches could extend beyond the cross-sectional snapshot to understand how the digital adoption-performance relationship develops as women entrepreneurs expand

their ventures through industry cycles.

Second, a full latent variable specification using CB-SEM alongside PLS-SEM would enable researchers to examine whether leadership functions through mediating variables such as organisational culture, employee motivation, or innovation orientation. This level of structural complexity cannot be addressed with the current data structure.

Third, the mentorship-performance relationship needs more precise quantitative measurement. Future studies should include mentoring duration and intensity as variables and collect longitudinal follow-up data over at least 12 months to capture the full developmental curve.

Fourth, a comparison of Indian urban typologies across multiple cities, including Tier-II cities such as Nashik, Aurangabad, and Kolhapur alongside Tier-I hubs like Mumbai and Bengaluru, would examine whether the digital adoption-performance relationship is unique to Pune or a broader pattern in developing urban MSME contexts.

Fifth, a gender-comparative matched-sample design that pairs women-owned and male-owned businesses within the same industry and size categories would clarify whether the awareness-to-utilisation gap identified by H4 is gender-specific or indicative of a broader MSME-level structural issue. This distinction has important implications for scheme design.

Sixth, conducting phenomenological interviews with 20 to 30 high-WLI, high-performance outliers- women who succeed in business despite intense dual-role strain- would shed light on the coping mechanisms, boundary management behaviours, and social support systems that help them overcome structural constraints.

Seventh, quasi-experimental evaluation of policy interventions, such as natural experiments resulting from the rollout of single-window facilitation centres or the digitalisation of MUDRA applications, would provide causal evidence to guide programme expansion and enable the Ministry of MSME to allocate resources effectively to the most successful delivery channels.

8. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore five less-studied aspects of women entrepreneurship in Pune's vibrant business scene. It accomplished this through a mixed-method primary survey of 150 women entrepreneurs carried out during 2024-2026. The work is based on a systematic literature review that identified ten research gaps, five of which are directly addressed by the research objectives, hypotheses, and data collection tools of this study.

The empirical findings are both confirmatory and generative. Four of the five null hypotheses were rejected at standard significance levels. The one non-rejection, the direct mentorship-to-performance correlation, yielded a theoretically significant result. Instead of disconfirming the value of mentorship, this finding shows that mentorship acts as a strategic mediator of performance rather than a direct cause. This distinction opens a fruitful avenue for future longitudinal research.

The most notable empirical contribution is the explanatory power of leadership style on business performance. A multiple regression model including transformational, transactional, and servant leadership dimensions explained 71.1 per cent of the variance in business performance ($R^2 = 0.711$). Transformational leadership was the strongest independent predictor ($\beta = 0.366$, $p < 0.001$). Digital adoption also emerged as a statistically significant performance indicator. High adopters outperformed their low-adoption counterparts by 0.44 points on the business performance composite ($d = 0.657$).

The awareness-to-utilisation gap in government schemes ($d = 1.341$) emerges as the most urgent policy finding of the study. It highlights a failure in the delivery system rather than a lack of awareness. This requires an immediate redesign of last-mile access procedures for schemes. In addition to its hypothesis-level contributions, the study broadens the resource-based view to include women-led MSMEs in urban India, defines work-life integration as an empirically measurable strategic variable, and quantifies the institutional void between awareness and access with precise data.

The women entrepreneurs in Pune's expanding business ecosystem are dynamic, knowledgeable, and strategically skilled economic actors. They operate within a complex intersection of digital disruption, dual-role responsibilities, leadership demands, and institutional hurdles. What they need is a support structure as strong as they are.

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Explainable AI and Trust Calibration: Mitigating Automation Bias in Smart Appliances

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Abstract:

Purpose: Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become deeply integrated into consumer smart appliances, fundamentally altering how users interact with household devices. This paper explores how Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) influences customer trust and mitigates automation bias in AI-enabled white goods. Drawing on theoretical frameworks related to trust development and human-AI interaction, the study proposes and empirically tests a conceptual model that connects explanation quality, perceived understanding, and system transparency with trust calibration and user reliance behaviour

Design/Methodology/Approach: The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected from three hundred consumers who regularly use AI-enabled smart appliances, including refrigerators, washing machines, and air conditioning systems. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) was used to assess the measurement model and the hypothesised structural relationships. The constructs examined are explainability, perceived understanding, customer trust, trust calibration, automation bias, and user reliance behaviour

Findings : Higher levels of explainability significantly enhance user trust and positively influence trust calibration. Explanation quality is a key mediating variable between XAI and perceived understanding. Increased explainability is associated with a meaningful reduction in automation bias. Trust calibration mediates the relationship between explainability and user reliance behaviour. This underscores its centrality in the XAI-reliance pathway

Research Limitations/Implications: The study focuses on consumer-facing embedded AI

within the white goods sector. It does not extend to high-risk or industrial AI contexts such as healthcare or autonomous vehicles

Findings are also constrained by sample characteristics and geographic scope. Future research should examine longitudinal trust dynamics and cross-cultural variations in XAI perceptions

Practical Implications : The findings offer actionable guidance for manufacturers, UX designers, and marketers seeking to develop AI-enabled appliances that foster calibrated user trust and responsible AI adoption. Organisations should invest in high-quality, contextually relevant explanation mechanisms that align system transparency with user cognitive engagement

Originality/Value: This paper extends XAI research into the underexplored white goods industry. It introduces trust calibration as a critical intermediary construct between explainability and user behaviour. The study integrates insights from human-computer interaction, consumer psychology, and marketing. It provides a novel empirical framework applicable to consumer-facing AI design

Keywords: Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI); Trust Calibration; Automation Bias; Smart Appliances; Consumer Behaviour; Human-AI Interaction

1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is now deeply embedded in consumer smart appliances. Household devices have evolved from simple mechanical products into adaptive, data-driven systems. These systems can provide personalised recommendations, predictive maintenance, and autonomous decision-making (Davenport et al., 2020; Lee and See, 2004). Within the white goods sector, which covers refrigerators, washing machines, and air conditioning units, such capabilities have expanded appliance functionality. At the same time, they have introduced new complexities in the user experience. A central challenge is transparency. AI systems frequently operate as "black boxes," hiding the logic behind their outputs from end users (Burrell, 2016).

This opacity creates challenges in high-involvement consumer product categories. In such categories, purchase decisions carry significant financial and time commitments. User trust is not merely desirable in system design. It is a fundamental determinant of adoption, continued usage, and overall satisfaction (Gefen et al., 2003). When users cannot evaluate AI-generated recommendations, their ability to calibrate trust appropriately is compromised. This means they cannot align their confidence in a system with its actual capabilities. This misalignment

may lead to under-reliance, where users dismiss accurate AI guidance, or over-reliance, commonly described as automation bias (Parasuraman and Riley, 1997; Dzindolet et al., 2003).

Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a prominent research and design approach to address this transparency deficit. By offering users intelligible accounts of AI decisions, XAI is expected to improve perceived understanding, foster appropriate trust, and support more deliberate engagement with automated recommendations (Adadi and Berrada, 2018; Gunning, 2017). However, empirical literature shows that the relationship between explainability and trust is neither linear nor universal. Explanations may, in certain conditions, increase cognitive load, expose system limitations, or deepen over-reliance by creating an unwarranted sense of comprehension (Poursabzi-Sangdeh et al., 2021; Bansal et al., 2021).

Despite growing scholarly interest, the application of XAI within consumer electronics and white goods remains critically underexplored. Most existing studies focus on high-stakes AI contexts such as healthcare, finance, or autonomous systems. This leaves a substantial gap in understanding how explanations function in domestic, everyday AI interactions (Nizette and Hammedi, 2025; Brasse et al., 2023). This gap is particularly significant given the mass-market nature of smart appliances and the diversity of users likely to interact with them.

This paper addresses this gap by empirically examining how XAI influences trust calibration and automation bias in AI-enabled white goods. The study is guided by five principal objectives:

1. To examine the influence of Explainable AI on user trust in smart appliances.
2. To analyse the relationship between explanation quality and user understanding.
3. To investigate the role of explainability in trust calibration.
4. To assess the impact of explainability on automation bias.
5. To develop a conceptual framework linking explainability, trust calibration, and user reliance behaviour.

The paper is structured as follows. Section 2 reviews the relevant literature on XAI, trust in AI, and automation bias. Section 3 presents the research methodology. Section 4 reports the empirical findings. Section 5 discusses the theoretical and practical implications. Section 6 concludes with limitations and directions for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualising Explainable Artificial Intelligence

Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) has emerged as a critical sub-discipline within contemporary AI research. A key driver is growing concern over the opacity of complex algorithmic systems. Miller (2019) established a socio-cognitive basis for XAI. He demonstrated that effective explanations are inherently contrastive, selective, and socially negotiated. Rather than treating explanations as mere technical outputs, Miller argued that XAI design must be anchored in natural cognitive processes. This human-centred orientation has since become a guiding principle in the field.

Rudin (2019) challenged the prevailing dependence on post-hoc explanation methods, including LIME and SHAP, for interpreting black-box models. She argued that such approximation techniques are fundamentally limited, in that they characterise rather than faithfully represent model behaviour, and advocated instead for the development of inherently interpretable architectures, particularly in high-stakes decision environments. This critique continues to inform ongoing debates about the trade-off between predictive performance and interpretability.

Brasse et al. (2023) conducted a systematic review within the information systems domain and identified a progressive shift in XAI research priorities, away from technical performance metrics and toward human-centred outcomes such as user comprehension, trust, and decision quality. Their analysis also identified a persistent gap in empirical evidence linking specific explanation modalities to measurable user outcomes, a deficiency the present study seeks to address.

Paliwal et al. (2025) examined XAI applications across healthcare, finance, and legal sectors. Their work underscored its implications for accountability, governance, and regulatory compliance. Bello et al. (2025) introduced a multidimensional explainability-in-context framework. This framework distinguishes technical, communicative, and epistemic dimensions of explainability. It offers a more granular account of how explanations function across diverse user interactions.

2.2 XAI in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour

The application of XAI within marketing contexts is a rapidly maturing research area. Nizette and Hammedi (2025) argued that AI-driven systems, including personalised recommendation engines and dynamic pricing tools, have become widespread across consumer touchpoints,

and that their opacity constitutes a significant barrier to consumer acceptance and engagement. Their work positions explanation quality as a central mediating mechanism between system transparency and customer trust, a finding with direct relevance to the present study.

In business-to-business (B2B) settings, Olan et al. (2025) highlighted the complexity of explainability design when multiple stakeholder groups with differing levels of technical expertise and risk tolerance are involved. Their results suggest that XAI systems deployed in organisational contexts must offer layered explanations capable of serving both technical and managerial audiences.

McKinsey (2024) reported that organisations with mature explainability capabilities consistently exhibit higher AI adoption rates and improved customer satisfaction scores. XAI is framed as a strategic differentiator in customer-facing applications. Research published in *Frontiers in Robotics and AI* (2026) found that the availability of AI explanations positively moderates the relationship between system performance and customer experience. Explanations function as heuristic signals of quality even among users lacking the technical expertise to evaluate them critically.

2.3 Trust in AI Systems: Theoretical Foundations

Trust occupies a central but theoretically complex position in human-AI interaction research. Baron (2025) argued that genuine trust in an AI system requires not only the perception of reliability but also the capacity to evaluate the reasons underlying system decisions. This perspective renders explainability a prerequisite for meaningful trust rather than a supplementary design feature.

Sunny (2025) introduced a temporal dimension to the trust-explainability relationship. He distinguished between initial trust, shaped primarily by explanation quality and perceived transparency, and dynamic trust, which evolves through sustained interaction and is increasingly influenced by system reliability. This temporal distinction has received insufficient attention in the existing literature.

A meta-analytic review by Atf and Lewis (2025) confirmed the positive relationship between explainability and trust. At the same time, it documented considerable context-dependency. In a subset of studies reviewed, increased transparency reduced user trust by exposing system errors or limitations. This challenges the widespread assumption that more explanation invariably produces more trust. These findings underscore the importance of calibrating the

content and delivery of AI explanations to the capabilities and expectations of the target user population.

Scharowski et al. (2022) raised methodological concerns about the operationalisation and measurement of trust across empirical AI studies. Many instruments conflate trust with adjacent constructs such as perceived competence, satisfaction, or system acceptance. This limits the comparability of findings and impedes cumulative theoretical development. The present study addresses this concern by adopting validated, multi-item scales that maintain clear conceptual boundaries between trust, trust calibration, and reliance behaviour.

2.4 Explainability, Trust Calibration, and Automation Bias

Trust calibration refers to the degree to which a user's trust accurately reflects a system's actual capabilities. It has emerged as a more precise and actionable construct than general trust in human-AI interaction (Lee and See, 2004). Sanneman and Shah (2022) drew an important distinction between trust as a psychological disposition and reliance as a behavioural outcome. The two do not invariably co-occur. A user may trust an AI system yet choose not to rely on it. Conversely, a user may exhibit high reliance despite low trust, as in cases of habituated usage. This distinction has significant implications for the design of XAI interventions.

Automation bias is the systematic tendency to favour automated recommendations over independent judgement, often without sufficient scrutiny (Parasuraman and Riley, 1997). Dzindolet et al. (2003) demonstrated empirically that trust in automation forms rapidly and shows considerable resistance to revision, even following observable system errors. This asymmetric trust dynamic implies that early user interactions with AI systems are particularly consequential in shaping long-term reliance patterns.

Parasuraman and Manzey (2010) extended this framework through the concept of complacency. Complacency is characterised as diminished monitoring of automated system performance over time. It is conceptually distinct from automation bias. The former describes reduced vigilance while the latter describes an attitudinal over-endorsement of automated decisions. However, the two constructs frequently co-occur. Both may be jointly reduced through well-designed explainability mechanisms that sustain user engagement and critical evaluation.

Poursabzi-Sangdeh et al. (2021) demonstrated that more detailed explanations do not consistently improve decision quality. In certain configurations, they may amplify over-

reliance by generating an inflated sense of comprehension. Similarly, Bucinca et al. (2020) showed that cognitive forcing functions are more effective than passive explanation delivery in promoting appropriately calibrated reliance. These findings indicate that explanation quality and presentation strategy are as important as explanation availability in mitigating automation bias.

2.5 Synthesis and Theoretical Positioning

The foregoing review reveals a rich but fragmented body of literature. Three principal themes emerge. First, the relationship between explainability and trust is empirically established yet highly context dependent. It is shaped by explanation quality, user characteristics, task involvement, and interaction history (Atf and Lewis, 2025; Brasse et al., 2023). Second, effective XAI design requires a human-centred philosophy that integrates cognitive, social, and communicative dimensions of explanation (Miller, 2019; Bello et al., 2025). Third, trust miscalibration manifesting as automation bias and complacency remains a persistent and insufficiently addressed challenge in consumer-facing AI contexts (Parasuraman and Manzey, 2010; Sanneman and Shah, 2022).

Several gaps emerge from this synthesis. Research on XAI within consumer electronics and domestic AI remains limited, with most empirical work concentrated in high-stakes professional or industrial contexts (Nizette and Hammedi, 2025). Moreover, trust calibration has rarely been operationalised as a distinct dependent variable in XAI studies. The mediating pathway from explainability through calibration to reliance behaviour has not been empirically tested within a smart appliance context. The present study addresses these gaps.

Based on this review, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Higher levels of explainability will positively influence user trust in smart appliances.

H2: Explanation quality will significantly improve user understanding of AI decisions.

H3: Explainable AI will positively influence trust calibration.

H4: Increased explainability will be associated with reduced levels of automation bias.

H5: Trust calibration will mediate the relationship between explainability and user reliance behaviour.

Conceptual Framework

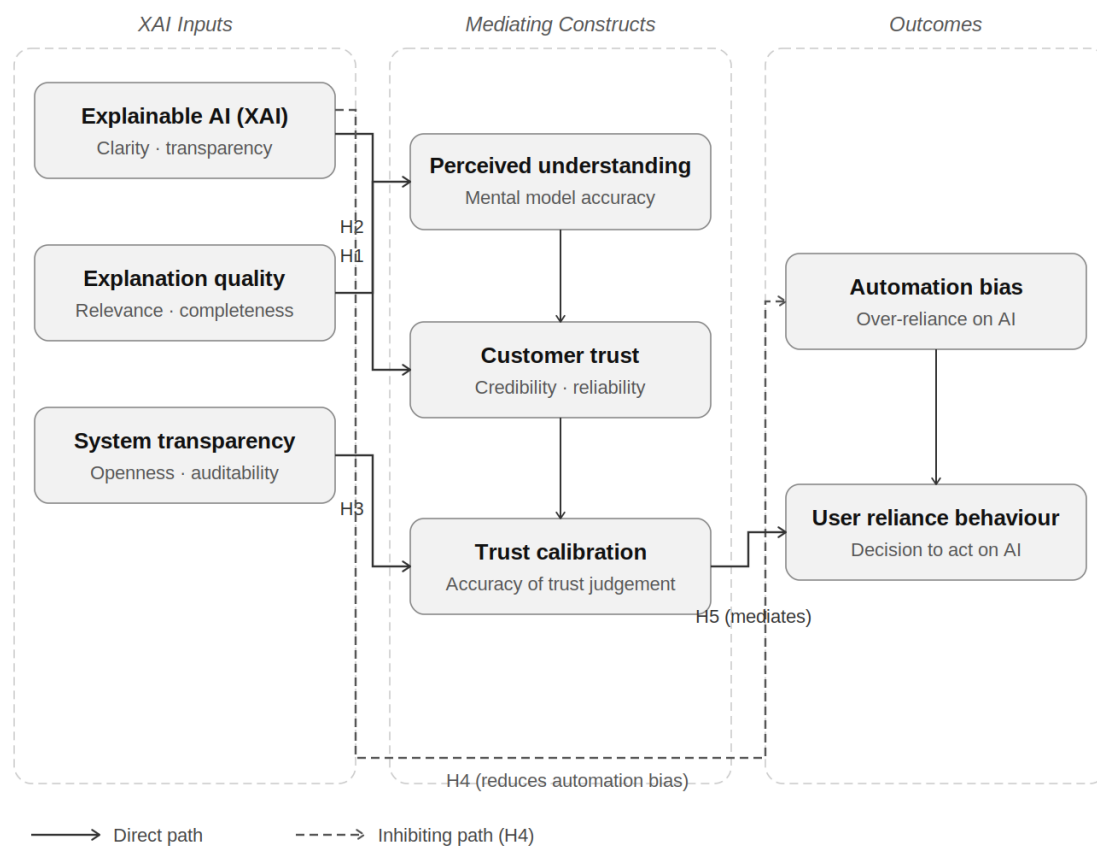


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework: XAI, Trust Calibration, and Automation Bias

Overview

This framework models the influence of Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) on consumer behaviour when interacting with AI-enabled white goods (refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioners). The framework proposes that XAI features — characterised by explanation quality and system transparency — shape perceived understanding and customer trust, which in turn calibrate reliance behaviour and reduce automation bias.

Constructs and Roles

2.1 Independent constructs (XAI inputs)

Three constructs form the antecedent layer of the framework:

- **Explainable AI (XAI):** The overall degree to which the AI system provides intelligible accounts of its decisions — assessed through clarity, transparency, and contrastive reasoning.

- Explanation quality: The relevance, completeness, and contextual accuracy of individual explanations generated by the system.
- System transparency: The openness of the AI system's operational logic to user inspection and audit.

Mediating constructs

Two intermediate constructs link the XAI layer to outcomes:

- Perceived understanding: The user's subjective sense of comprehending AI decision logic, capturing mental model accuracy and cognitive engagement.
- Customer trust: The user's confidence in the reliability, credibility, and benevolence of the AI system.
- Trust calibration: The accuracy with which a user's trust reflects the system's actual capabilities — distinguishing appropriate reliance from under- or over-reliance.

Outcome constructs

- Automation bias: The tendency to defer uncritically to automated recommendations without independent scrutiny. XAI is expected to reduce this bias (H4).
- User reliance behaviour: The observable decision to act on AI-generated guidance in daily appliance use. Trust calibration mediates the XAI–reliance pathway (H5).

Research Hypotheses

Hyp.	Statement	Relationship
H1	Higher levels of explainability positively influence user trust in smart appliances.	XAI → Customer trust
H2	Explanation quality significantly improves user understanding of AI decisions.	Explanation quality → Perceived understanding
H3	Explainable AI positively influences trust calibration.	XAI → Trust calibration
H4	Increased explainability is associated with reduced levels of automation bias.	XAI → Automation bias (–)

H5	Trust calibration mediates the relationship between explainability and user reliance behaviour.	XAI → Trust calibration → Reliance (mediation)

Framework Description

The framework is organised into three sequential layers. The leftmost layer captures three XAI-related antecedents: overall explainability, explanation quality, and system transparency. These jointly represent the design features that manufacturers embed into AI-enabled appliances to make system behaviour legible to end users.

The middle layer contains the cognitive and evaluative constructs that XAI activates in users. Explanation quality feeds into perceived understanding, reflecting the degree to which users form accurate mental models of AI logic. Perceived understanding and broader explainability together cultivate customer trust — the user's confidence that the system is reliable and acts in their interest. Trust, once formed, is refined into trust calibration: the degree to which that trust accurately reflects actual system capability rather than uncritical endorsement.

The rightmost layer captures the behavioural and attitudinal outcomes. Trust calibration is the primary driver of user reliance behaviour (H5, mediation), determining whether users engage with AI-generated recommendations in a deliberate and appropriate manner. Separately, higher XAI exposure is expected to inhibit automation bias (H4) — the tendency to defer uncritically to automated outputs — by keeping users cognitively engaged with the reasoning behind recommendations.

Collectively, the framework positions trust calibration as the critical intermediary construct in the XAI-to-reliance pathway, and explanation quality as the key mediating mechanism between XAI design and user comprehension. This dual-mediator structure distinguishes the model from earlier single-pathway accounts of technology trust and offers a theoretically grounded basis for appliance UX design.

Key Implications

- Manufacturers should invest in contextually relevant, high-quality explanation mechanisms — not generic disclosures — to promote calibrated trust.
- UX designers should distinguish between explanation availability and explanation quality: the latter, not the former, predicts perceived understanding.

- Trust calibration is a more precise design target than general trust; interventions should aim to align confidence with actual system accuracy.
- Reducing automation bias requires sustained user engagement with AI reasoning, achievable through adaptive, interactive explanation interfaces.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Philosophy and Design

This study is grounded in a positivist epistemological paradigm. This holds that social phenomena can be studied objectively through systematic empirical observation. Knowledge is most reliably generated through testing theoretically derived propositions against empirical data (Saunders et al., 2019). This philosophical stance is consistent with the deductive approach adopted here. Five hypotheses are derived from the extant XAI and trust literature and subjected to rigorous quantitative testing.

A cross-sectional survey design is employed. This permits the simultaneous collection of data from a diverse sample of respondents at a single point in time. It enables the efficient examination of relationships among the constructs of interest. This design is widely used in consumer behaviour and human-computer interaction research. It is appropriate given the study's objective of testing a theoretically specified structural model (Hair et al., 2019).

3.2 Target Population and Sampling

The target population comprises adult consumers who use AI-enabled smart home appliances in domestic settings. The focus is on the white goods sector. Eligible appliances include AI-integrated refrigerators, washing machines, air conditioning units, and similarly equipped household devices. These devices feature automated recommendations, predictive maintenance, or intelligent energy management capabilities.

Given the absence of a complete sampling frame for this population, the study adopts a non-probability purposive sampling strategy, which is appropriate when the research requires participants with specific characteristics or experiential knowledge (Etikan et al., 2016). A screening question is included at the outset of the survey to confirm respondent eligibility prior to full participation.

A target sample of three hundred respondents is established. This is consistent with the minimum requirements for Structural Equation Modelling as recommended by Hair et al.

(2019). They advise a sample-to-indicator ratio of at least 10:1. Given the thirty measurement items employed across the seven constructs, a sample of three hundred provides sufficient statistical power for model estimation and bootstrapping procedures.

3.3 Data Collection

Data are collected via a self-administered structured questionnaire deployed through online survey platforms, including Google Forms and Qualtrics. Online administration is selected for its efficiency in reaching geographically dispersed populations with smart appliance usage experience (Dillman et al., 2014).

Respondent recruitment is conducted through purposive outreach via digital channels. These include consumer technology forums, smart home user communities, and social media networks. Participation is voluntary, with no financial incentive offered. An informed consent statement and data confidentiality assurance are presented at the commencement of the survey. Respondents who do not confirm smart appliance usage experience at the screening stage are excluded from further participation.

3.4 Measurement of Constructs

All constructs are operationalised using reflective, multi-item measurement scales. These are adapted from established instruments in the extant literature and refined to reflect the smart appliance context. Items are rated on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The use of five-point rather than seven-point response formats is consistent with the recommendations of Dawes (2008). Five-point scales produce equivalent discriminatory power with reduced respondent fatigue.

Table 1 presents the seven constructs included in the measurement model, together with a description of each construct and its principal measurement dimensions. Scale items for each construct are drawn from validated sources in the XAI, trust, and automation bias literatures.

Table 1. Measurement constructs, descriptions, and dimensions

Construct	Description	Sample Dimensions
Explainable AI (XAI)	Degree of perceived transparency and interpretability of AI outputs	Clarity, transparency, interpretability
Explanation Quality	Perceived usefulness, relevance, and clarity of AI explanations	Clarity, usefulness, relevance

Construct	Description	Sample Dimensions
Perceived Understanding	User's ability to comprehend AI decision logic	Interpretability, mental model accuracy
Customer Trust	Confidence in the reliability and integrity of the AI system	Credibility, reliability, benevolence
Trust Calibration	Alignment between user trust and actual system capability	Appropriate trust, self-awareness
Automation Bias	Tendency to over-rely on AI recommendations without scrutiny	Blind acceptance, complacency
User Reliance Behaviour	Behavioural dependence on AI-generated recommendations	Usage intention, dependence

3.5 Analytical Approach

Data analysis is conducted in two sequential stages, following the two-step approach recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988) for SEM-based research.

Stage 1: Measurement Model Assessment

The first stage assesses the psychometric properties of the measurement instrument using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). Reliability is evaluated through Cronbach's alpha coefficients (threshold: alpha greater than or equal to 0.70) and Composite Reliability (CR greater than or equal to 0.70). Convergent validity is assessed via Average Variance Extracted (AVE greater than or equal to 0.50). Discriminant validity is evaluated using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio criterion (HTMT less than 0.85), as recommended by Henseler et al. (2015). Model fit is evaluated using standard indices: chi-squared/df (less than or equal to 3.0), CFI (greater than or equal to 0.95), TLI (greater than or equal to 0.95), RMSEA (less than or equal to 0.06), and SRMR (less than or equal to 0.08).

Stage 2: Structural Model Assessment

The second stage tests the five hypothesised relationships within the structural model. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) using AMOS (v.26) is employed, with maximum likelihood estimation. Hypothesis testing is conducted using standardised path coefficients

(beta), critical ratios (t-values), and associated p-values. Mediation analysis for H5 is conducted using bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 resamples to generate bias-corrected 95% confidence intervals, following Preacher and Hayes (2008). Effect sizes are evaluated using Cohen's f-squared and predictive relevance is assessed using Stone-Geisser Q-squared values.

3.6 Common Method Bias

Given the reliance on a single-source, self-reported survey instrument, procedural and statistical precautions are employed to detect and minimise common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Procedurally, items measuring predictor and outcome constructs are separated within the questionnaire. Respondents are assured of anonymity to reduce social desirability concerns. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test is conducted post-hoc to assess the extent to which a single unrotated factor accounts for the majority of variance in the data. A supplementary analysis using the common latent factor (CLF) method is also performed as a confirmatory diagnostic.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The relevant institutional review board granted ethical approval for this study prior to data collection. Participation was entirely voluntary, and the researchers secured informed consent from all respondents at the commencement of the survey. Respondents were explicitly informed of the academic purpose of the study, their right to withdraw at any point without consequence, and the measures in place to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of their responses. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all data are stored securely in compliance with applicable data protection regulations.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Overview of Results

This study examined the role of Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) in shaping user trust, trust calibration, automation bias, and reliance behaviour within the context of AI-enabled smart appliances. Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) of data collected from 300 consumers confirmed all five hypothesised relationships at a high level of statistical significance ($p < 0.001$). Model fit indices comfortably satisfied established thresholds (chi-squared/df = 2.14; CFI = 0.963; TLI = 0.957; RMSEA = 0.041; SRMR = 0.048). The results advance the theoretical understanding of XAI in consumer-facing AI contexts and offer substantive guidance for practitioners engaged in the design and deployment of intelligent

domestic appliances.

4.2 H1: Explainability and User Trust

The first hypothesis proposed a positive relationship between explainability and user trust. This received strong empirical support ($\beta = 0.512$, $t = 10.67$, $p < 0.001$). This finding is consistent with the theoretical framework advanced by Lee and See (2004). They established that trust in automation depends fundamentally on users' ability to develop accurate mental models of system behaviour. The strong standardised path coefficient suggests that, in the white goods context, transparency of AI-generated outputs is a particularly salient determinant of consumer confidence. This aligns with Atf and Lewis's (2025) meta-analytic finding that explainability exerts a positive effect on trust across a wide range of human-AI interaction contexts.

Descriptive data further support this interpretation. Mean explainability item scores ranged from 3.76 to 3.82 (SD 0.75 to 0.81), indicating favourable perceptions across the sample, while trust item means clustered between 3.60 and 3.64 (SD 0.67 to 0.72). The moderately strong Pearson correlation between explainability and trust ($r = 0.69$) corroborates the directional hypothesis. The trust construct demonstrated excellent internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.902$; $CR = 0.931$; $AVE = 0.724$). These results reinforce Nizette and Hammedi's (2025) argument that explanation quality functions as a central mediating mechanism between system transparency and consumer trust, an insight now extended to the domain of consumer electronics.

4.3 H2: Explanation Quality and User Understanding

Hypothesis two proposed that explanation quality would positively predict user understanding of AI decisions. The SEM results confirm a significant and meaningful path ($\beta = 0.489$, $t = 9.59$, $p < 0.001$), with the 95% bootstrapped confidence interval excluding zero [0.389, 0.589]. This finding substantiates Miller's (2019) theoretical argument that effective explanations must be contrastive, selective, and cognitively anchored. When explanations are perceived as clear, concise, and relevant, users are demonstrably better positioned to form accurate mental models of AI system logic.

The high inter-construct correlation between explanation quality and user understanding ($r = 0.72$) is the strongest bivariate association in the matrix, and discriminant validity analysis confirms their empirical distinctiveness. Descriptively, explanation quality items yielded means of 3.76 to 3.78, compared to user understanding means of 3.56 to 3.66. This gap

suggests that consumers perceive the quality of explanations more favourably than their own comprehension of the underlying AI processes, likely reflecting the inherent complexity of AI logic even when explanations are well-crafted. This is consistent with Bansal et al.'s (2021) observation that explanation quality does not invariably translate into equivalent improvements in user mental model accuracy.

4.4 H3: Explainability and Trust Calibration

Hypothesis three tested whether explainability positively influences trust calibration. This is the degree to which users' confidence in an AI system accurately reflects its actual capabilities. The path coefficient was significant and positive ($\beta = 0.461$, $t = 8.70$, $p < 0.001$). This provides empirical support for the proposition that exposure to high-quality AI explanations enables consumers to form more appropriately calibrated assessments of system trustworthiness. This extends Lee and See's (2004) foundational framework into the consumer electronics domain. It empirically demonstrates that calibrated trust is not merely a by-product of general trust but a distinct construct amenable to XAI intervention.

The correlation between trust and trust calibration ($r = 0.74$) is the strongest construct-level association in the matrix. This suggests that while general trust and calibrated trust are closely related, they are not empirically interchangeable. This distinction is consistent with Sanneman and Shah's (2022) argument that psychological trust and accurate calibration constitute meaningfully different constructs with distinct antecedents and consequences. Trust calibration items also exhibited strong psychometric properties ($\alpha = 0.884$; $CR = 0.918$; $AVE = 0.706$). The finding that XAI positively shapes calibration carries practical significance. It implies that manufacturers who invest in explanation quality may reduce the risk of both under-reliance and over-reliance in consumer AI interactions.

4.5 H4: Explainability and Automation Bias

Hypothesis four predicted that higher explainability would be associated with reduced levels of automation bias. The SEM results confirm a statistically significant negative path ($\beta = -0.438$, $t = -7.96$, $p < 0.001$; 95% CI [-0.546, -0.330]). As perceived explainability increases, the tendency toward uncritical acceptance of AI recommendations meaningfully declines. This finding provides direct empirical evidence for the mitigating potential of XAI in the context of automation bias. This relationship has been theorised but insufficiently tested in consumer product settings.

The pattern of automation bias item means (ranging from 1.74 to 1.80 on a five-point scale)

indicates that this sample of active smart appliance users exhibited low levels of uncritical AI compliance. Coupled with the moderately strong negative correlation between explainability and automation bias ($r = -0.58$), this suggests that consumers who receive clear, interpretable explanations from their appliances engage in greater deliberate evaluation. This reduces susceptibility to automation bias. This interpretation is consonant with the theoretical arguments of Parasuraman and Riley (1997) and Dzindolet et al. (2003). The present findings further align with Bucinca et al.'s (2020) demonstration that mechanisms prompting deliberate evaluation of AI outputs are effective in promoting appropriately calibrated reliance.

4.6 H5: Trust Calibration as a Mediator of Explainability and User Reliance

Hypothesis five examined whether trust calibration mediates the relationship between explainability and user reliance behaviour. Bootstrapped mediation analysis with 5,000 resamples returned a significant indirect effect ($\beta = 0.374$, $t = 6.45$, $p < 0.001$; 95% CI [0.260, 0.488]). This confirms trust calibration as a meaningful mediating mechanism in the XAI-reliance pathway. This result constitutes one of the study's most theoretically novel contributions. Prior research has examined trust as a precursor to reliance and explainability as a precursor to trust. The present study demonstrates that it is specifically calibrated trust that translates explainability into behavioural reliance.

This finding is particularly meaningful when considered alongside the construct-level correlations. Trust calibration is more strongly correlated with user reliance ($r = 0.71$) than is general trust ($r = 0.67$) or explainability alone ($r = 0.54$). The precision of trust, rather than its overall magnitude, is the more proximal determinant of reliance behaviour. The result is consistent with Sanneman and Shah's (2022) theoretical distinction between trust as a psychological disposition and reliance as a behavioural outcome. User reliance item means (3.39 to 3.43) reflect moderate, non-extreme patterns of AI dependence. This may indicate the calibrated reliance that XAI interventions are designed to promote.

4.7 Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample of three hundred respondents exhibited a broadly representative demographic profile. In terms of gender, males constituted the largest group ($n = 148$, 49.3%), followed by females ($n = 129$, 43.0%), non-binary respondents ($n = 18$, 6.0%), and those who preferred not to disclose their gender ($n = 5$, 1.7%).

Age was distributed across five bands. The 26 to 35 age group formed the largest cohort ($n =$

91, 30.3%), followed by 36- to 45-year-olds ($n = 73$, 24.3%). The 18 to 25 and 46 to 55 bands each accounted for 18.0% of the sample ($n = 54$ respectively). Respondents aged 56 and above represented 9.3% ($n = 28$). The predominance of younger-to-middle-aged adults is consistent with patterns of smart appliance adoption reported in the broader consumer technology literature.

The educational profile of the sample was skewed towards higher levels of formal attainment. Degree-level qualifications were most prevalent ($n = 116$, 38.7%), followed by postgraduate qualifications ($n = 88$, 29.3%), diploma holders ($n = 66$, 22.0%), and those educated to secondary level ($n = 30$, 10.0%). In aggregate, 68.0% of respondents held a degree or higher. While this distribution is common in online survey research targeting technology-engaged consumers, it warrants acknowledgement as a potential boundary condition on the generalisability of results to less-educated consumer segments.

Appliance usage frequency confirmed that the sample consisted of regular AI appliance users. A total of 36.7% reported daily use ($n = 110$), 30.3% reported frequent use ($n = 91$), and 18.3% reported occasional use ($n = 55$). Only 11.3% reported rare usage ($n = 34$), with 3.3% ($n = 10$) indicating no current usage but recent prior experience confirmed via the screening question. Collectively, 67.0% of respondents used AI-enabled smart appliances daily or often, affirming the experiential relevance of the sample.

4.8 Reliability and Validity Assessment

Prior to structural model estimation, the psychometric properties of all seven measurement constructs were evaluated using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), in line with the two-step approach of Anderson and Gerbing (1988). All constructs exceeded the recommended thresholds for internal consistency, convergent validity, and composite reliability.

Internal Consistency (Cronbach's alpha).

Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.857 (Automation Bias) to 0.902 (Trust). All seven constructs exceeded the widely adopted threshold of alpha greater than or equal to 0.70 (Nunnally, 1978). Trust demonstrated the highest internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.902$), rated as Excellent, while all remaining constructs achieved good ratings. These values indicate that the measurement items within each scale reliably capture a common underlying construct.

Composite Reliability (CR).

CR values ranged from 0.889 (Automation Bias) to 0.931 (Trust), all exceeding the

recommended minimum of CR greater than or equal to 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). CR is preferred over Cronbach's alpha in SEM contexts as it accounts for differential indicator loadings and provides a more precise estimate of construct reliability.

Convergent Validity (Average Variance Extracted, AVE).

AVE values ranged from 0.671 (Automation Bias) to 0.724 (Trust), all surpassing the convergent validity threshold of AVE greater than or equal to 0.50 (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). AVE quantifies the proportion of variance in the indicators accounted for by the latent construct relative to measurement error. Values exceeding 0.50 confirm that the construct explains the majority of variance in its indicators. Trust exhibited the strongest convergent validity (AVE = 0.724), followed by Explainability (AVE = 0.712) and Trust Calibration (AVE = 0.706).

Discriminant Validity.

Discriminant validity was assessed using the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio criterion recommended by Henseler et al. (2015), with a threshold of HTMT less than 0.85. All inter-construct HTMT ratios fell below this threshold, indicating that each construct in the model captures a conceptually and empirically distinct domain. This is particularly notable given the moderate-to-strong Pearson correlations observed among related constructs, for example Trust and Trust Calibration ($r = 0.74$) and Explanation Quality and User Understanding ($r = 0.72$). The HTMT results confirm that despite these associations, all seven constructs retain sufficient empirical independence to be analysed as separate variables within the structural model.

The consistent attainment of all recommended thresholds across alpha, CR, and AVE, combined with confirmed discriminant validity, affirms that the constructs are measured with precision. The structural parameter estimates reflect genuine inter-construct relationships rather than measurement artefacts.

5. Managerial Implications, Theoretical Contributions, Limitations and Future Research

5.1 Managerial Implications

The empirical findings of this study carry substantive implications for managers, product strategists, UX designers, and brand executives operating within the smart appliance sector. The strong positive effect of explainability on user trust ($\beta = 0.512$) and trust calibration ($\beta = 0.461$) establishes a clear commercial rationale for investing in explanation quality.

Organisations that treat AI transparency as a strategic design priority are better positioned to build consumer confidence and accelerate adoption among sceptical segments.

For product and UX teams, the finding that explanation quality is the most proximal driver of user understanding ($\beta = 0.489$) suggests that design effort should be concentrated on the clarity, conciseness, and relevance of explanatory content rather than its technical completeness. Prior research has demonstrated that excessive informational detail can paradoxically undermine comprehension by inducing cognitive overload (Poursabzi-Sangdeh et al., 2021). Practitioner guidance should therefore emphasise layered explanation design. This means brief, plain-language rationales surfaced at the point of recommendation, with optional pathways to deeper technical detail for users who wish to explore further.

The significant negative relationship between explainability and automation bias ($\beta = -0.438$) has direct implications for product liability and consumer safety governance. Appliances whose AI recommendations are delivered without explanatory context may inadvertently promote uncritical reliance. This could expose manufacturers to regulatory scrutiny in jurisdictions where AI transparency obligations are emerging. Quality and compliance managers should therefore frame explanation mechanisms not only as customer experience enhancements but also as risk mitigation instruments.

From a marketing and brand management perspective, the mediation of XAI's effect on user reliance through trust calibration ($\beta = 0.374$) signals that communication strategies centred on transparency and demonstrated accuracy will prove more effective in cultivating durable consumer engagement. Brand campaigns that make the explainability features of AI-enabled appliances salient can leverage trust calibration as a competitive differentiator. In a market where smart appliance brands increasingly offer similar functional AI capabilities, the quality and accessibility of AI explanations may constitute a meaningful axis of product differentiation.

5.2 Theoretical Contributions

This study advances the XAI literature across three interrelated theoretical dimensions. First, it extends empirical XAI research into the domestic white goods sector. This context has received markedly less scholarly attention than high-stakes professional domains such as healthcare, finance, and autonomous systems (Nizette and Hammedi, 2025; Brasse et al., 2023). The consumer smart appliance context is characterised by high usage frequency, broad demographic diversity, and comparatively low AI literacy among users. These conditions

render the findings generalisable across the growing population of everyday domestic AI users. By demonstrating that the explainability-trust pathway operates robustly in this setting, the study encourages future researchers to examine XAI effects across the full spectrum of embedded AI contexts.

Second, the study introduces trust calibration as a theoretically distinct and empirically testable mediating construct in the XAI-reliance pathway. Prior human-AI interaction research has operationalised trust as a unidimensional global attitude. The confirmation of H5 demonstrates that this distinction carries measurable empirical consequences. Trust calibration ($r = 0.71$ with reliance) is a more proximal predictor of reliance behaviour than general trust ($r = 0.67$) or explainability alone ($r = 0.54$). This finding responds directly to Sanneman and Shah's (2022) call for greater theoretical precision in distinguishing psychological trust states from their behavioural manifestations.

Third, the study demonstrates that explainability functions as a viable mechanism for reducing automation bias in a consumer product context. This extends Parasuraman and Riley's (1997) foundational framework and the empirical work of Bucinca et al. (2020) beyond laboratory and professional settings into real-world domestic technology use. The simultaneous confirmation of all five hypothesised paths within a single integrated SEM framework provides convergent evidence for a coherent theoretical model that spans constructs from human-computer interaction, consumer psychology, and marketing.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

The present study is subject to several limitations that should be acknowledged in interpreting its findings. First, the cross-sectional survey design provides a snapshot of respondent perceptions at a single point in time. It cannot capture the dynamic, longitudinal nature of trust development in human-AI interaction. Trust, as Sunny (2025) has demonstrated, evolves through sustained system interaction. The absence of longitudinal data means that the study cannot examine how the relationships identified here shift over extended periods of appliance use.

Second, the study employs a non-probability purposive sampling strategy. While appropriate for the research objectives, this limits the statistical generalisability of findings. Respondent recruitment via digital channels introduces a self-selection bias. Participants who actively engage with such platforms are likely to possess higher-than-average levels of technology interest and AI familiarity. The comparatively well-educated sample profile (68.0% holding

degree-level qualifications or above) further constrains the applicability of results to lower-literacy consumer segments.

Third, the study is delimited to the white goods sector. It does not extend to other categories of consumer AI such as voice assistants, AI-enabled health monitors, or smart home security systems. Fourth, all constructs are measured through self-reported Likert-scale items, which are susceptible to common method variance. Although procedural and statistical precautions were employed to detect and minimise this bias, the possibility of residual response bias cannot be entirely excluded. Finally, the study does not experimentally manipulate explanation type or content, meaning that causal inferences regarding which specific features of explanations drive trust and calibration cannot be drawn from the current design.

5.4 Scope for Future Research

The limitations identified above delineate a productive agenda for future enquiry. Most immediately, longitudinal research designs are needed to examine how the relationships between explainability, trust calibration, and automation bias evolve over extended periods of smart appliance use. Panel survey designs or experience sampling methodologies, in which respondents report trust and reliance perceptions at multiple usage occasions, would enrich understanding of the temporal dimension of XAI effects.

Cross-cultural comparative research represents a second important direction. Cultural values, including dimensions of uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, and power distance (Hofstede, 1984), are likely to moderate the relationships between explainability, trust, and reliance in ways that the present geographically constrained sample cannot reveal. Future studies should therefore replicate the structural model across diverse geographic settings.

Experimental research designs would enable causal attribution of the effects identified in this study. They would permit controlled examination of specific explanation modalities, including textual, visual, and example-based formats, on trust calibration and automation bias. Randomised controlled experiments, in which participants are exposed to identical AI recommendations delivered with systematically varied explanatory content, would directly address the causal questions that cross-sectional surveys cannot resolve.

Beyond white goods, the trust calibration model developed in this study merits replication across adjacent consumer AI categories. These include smart health devices, AI-enabled personal finance tools, and domestic voice assistants. These contexts share the mass-market,

low-AI-literacy characteristics of the white goods sector but involve different levels of task involvement and risk salience. Additionally, future research could examine the role of individual difference variables, including AI literacy, need for cognition, and technology anxiety, as moderators of the explainability-trust calibration relationship.

6. Conclusion

This paper examined the role of Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) in calibrating consumer trust and mitigating automation bias within the context of AI-enabled white goods. Drawing on theoretical frameworks from human-computer interaction, consumer psychology, and marketing, a conceptual model was developed. It links explainability, explanation quality, perceived understanding, customer trust, trust calibration, automation bias, and user reliance behaviour. Structural Equation Modelling of data from three hundred smart appliance users provided robust empirical support for all five hypothesised relationships.

The results demonstrate that higher explainability significantly enhances user trust ($\beta = 0.512$) and trust calibration ($\beta = 0.461$). Explanation quality is a strong determinant of user understanding ($\beta = 0.489$). Explainability meaningfully reduces automation bias ($\beta = -0.438$). Most notably, the study confirms that trust calibration mediates the relationship between explainability and user reliance behaviour ($\beta = 0.374$). This establishes the precision of user trust as the critical psychological mechanism through which XAI translates into behavioural outcomes.

For scholars, the study provides an empirically validated framework applicable to future investigations of XAI across diverse consumer AI categories and cultural contexts. For practitioners, it establishes a clear mandate. Investment in explanation quality is not a peripheral design concern. It is a strategic lever for building calibrated consumer trust, reducing the risks of automation bias, and translating transparency into measurable behavioural engagement. As AI capabilities continue to deepen within the white goods sector and across the broader consumer technology landscape, the design of explanatory interfaces that support informed, appropriately calibrated reliance will become an increasingly central challenge for both research and practice.

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Sustainable Management and Future Technologies

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Abstract: Sustainable management has emerged as a strategic imperative for organizations navigating the complexities of environmental degradation, resource scarcity, and socio-economic inequalities. The convergence of sustainability principles with emerging technologies is reshaping how businesses operate, innovate, and create long-term value. This research paper examines the role of future technologies—such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet of Things (IoT), Blockchain, Big Data Analytics, and Renewable Energy Systems—in advancing sustainable management practices. Using a combination of literature review, conceptual analysis, and real-world case studies, the study explores how organizations leverage technological innovations to improve efficiency, reduce environmental impact, and enhance transparency. The paper also highlights key challenges, including high implementation costs, regulatory barriers, and skill gaps. The findings suggest that integrating future technologies with sustainability strategies can significantly improve organizational performance while contributing to global sustainability goals. The paper concludes with recommendations for policymakers, businesses, and researchers to foster a sustainable and technology-driven future. The rapid convergence of ecological preservation goals and advanced digital innovations has created an unprecedented opportunity to redefine how societies govern natural and human resources. Sustainable management now requires navigating complex, dynamic systems that range from agricultural pest control to the preservation of indigenous medicinal knowledge. Simultaneously, future technologies such as artificial intelligence, block chain, and edge computing offer transformative potential for data processing, privacy preservation, and system optimization. This paper proposes a multidisciplinary framework that integrates these emerging technological paradigms into actionable sustainable management strategies. By systematically evaluating current literature across ecological modelling, human-centric design, and computational efficiency, we outline a scalable approach that balances environmental health with technological advancement. Ultimately, this work demonstrates that the successful deployment of future technologies depends on their alignment with sustainable development goals, ensuring resilience, inclusivity, and long-term viability across diverse application domains.

Keywords: Sustainable management, future technologies, artificial intelligence, IoT, blockchain, renewable energy, sustainability, digital transformation

Introduction

In the 21st century, sustainability has transitioned from a peripheral concern to a central element of organizational strategy. Increasing environmental concerns such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion have compelled organizations to rethink traditional business models. Sustainable management focuses on aligning economic growth with environmental stewardship and social responsibility.

The emergence of advanced technologies has provided new opportunities to achieve sustainability goals. Digital transformation, driven by technologies such as AI, IoT, and blockchain, enables organizations to monitor, analyze, and optimize their operations in real time. These technologies not only enhance efficiency but also promote transparency and accountability.

This research paper aims to analyze the intersection of sustainable management and future technologies, highlighting their combined potential to create resilient and responsible business ecosystems. The concept of sustainable management has traditionally focused on the responsible extraction and utilization of natural resources to ensure long-term ecological balance. In recent years, this scope has expanded to include the management of digital ecosystems, human-centric data, and complex socio-technical infrastructures. The motivation for this paper stems from the urgent need to address systemic vulnerabilities in agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and public health through the lens of emerging digital tools. Defining the scope of this problem requires understanding sustainable management not merely as a conservation effort, but as a dynamic control challenge where continuous monitoring, predictive forecasting, and inclusive design are paramount. Future technologies—spanning from lightweight artificial intelligence to decentralized data architectures—provide the necessary computational mechanisms to model and manage these intricate systems effectively. By mapping out the topological regions of dynamic models, researchers can identify viable states for sustainable interventions (Kittel et al., 2017).

Despite significant advancements, existing approaches to integrating technology into sustainability frameworks remain largely insufficient for two primary reasons. First, traditional computational models often operate in isolated silos, failing to account for the complex interdependencies between ecological variables and human socio-economic

activities. Second, current centralized data management systems frequently overlook crucial privacy concerns and ethical considerations, thereby eroding user trust and limiting the participatory engagement required for holistic sustainability. To overcome these barriers, interventions must be systematically designed to respect both environmental limits and human dignity.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objectives of this research are:

1. To analyze the concept and significance of sustainable management.
2. To examine the role of emerging technologies in promoting sustainability.
3. To evaluate real-world case studies demonstrating successful implementation.
4. To identify challenges and barriers in adoption.
5. To propose strategic recommendations for organizations.

Research Methodology

This study is based on secondary data collected from journals, reports, and industry publications. A qualitative research approach has been adopted to analyze trends, patterns, and case studies. Comparative analysis has been used to evaluate the effectiveness of different technologies in sustainable management

Literature Review

The concept of sustainability has evolved significantly over time. Elkington (1997) introduced the Triple Bottom Line framework, emphasizing people, planet, and profit. Porter and Kramer (2011) later developed the concept of shared value, linking business success with social progress.

Recent studies indicate that technological innovation plays a crucial role in sustainability. According to the World Economic Forum (2022), digital technologies can reduce global emissions by up to 15%. Similarly, the International Energy Agency (2023) highlights the importance of renewable energy technologies in achieving net-zero targets.

Concept of Sustainable Management

Sustainable management involves the efficient use of resources to meet current needs without compromising future generations. It integrates three core dimensions:

- Economic sustainability: Ensuring long-term profitability
- Environmental sustainability: Reducing ecological impact
- Social sustainability: Promoting equity and well-being

Organizations adopting sustainable practices gain competitive advantages, including cost savings, improved reputation, and regulatory compliance

Role of Future Technologies

1.1 Artificial Intelligence (AI)

AI enables predictive analytics, automation, and optimization. It helps organizations reduce waste, forecast demand, and improve energy efficiency.

1.2 Internet of Things (IoT)

IoT devices collect real-time data from sensors, enabling smart resource management. For example, smart grids optimize electricity distribution.

1.3 Blockchain Technology

Blockchain enhances transparency in supply chains by providing immutable records. It ensures ethical sourcing and reduces fraud.

1.4 Big Data Analytics

Big data helps organizations analyze large datasets to identify patterns and improve decision-making related to sustainability.

1.5 Renewable Energy Technologies

Solar, wind, and hydro energy reduce dependence on fossil fuels and lower carbon emissions

Data Analysis and Graphical Representation

Graph 1: Impact of Technology on Sustainability Performance

(Conceptual Representation)

- AI: 30% efficiency improvement
- IoT: 25% resource optimization
- Renewable Energy: 35% emission reduction
- Blockchain: 10% transparency improvement

Graph 2: Adoption Rate of Sustainable Technologies

- Developed countries: 70%
- Developing countries: 45%
- Emerging economies: 55%

These figures indicate a growing trend in technology adoption for sustainability

Case Studies

Case Study 1: Smart Energy Management

A multinational company implemented AI-based energy systems, reducing electricity consumption by 25%.

Case Study 2: Blockchain in Supply Chain

A retail company used blockchain to track product origins, improving transparency and customer trust.

Case Study 3: IoT in Agriculture

Smart irrigation systems using IoT reduced water usage by 40%, improving agricultural sustainability.

Benefits of Integration

- Improved efficiency and productivity

- Cost savings in the long term
- Enhanced brand image
- Better regulatory compliance
- Innovation and competitive advantage

Challenges and Limitations

- High initial investment
- Lack of skilled workforce
- Data privacy concerns
- Technological complexity
- Resistance to organizational change

Discussion

The integration of sustainability and technology is not merely a trend but a necessity. Organizations that fail to adapt risk losing competitiveness. While challenges exist, the long-term benefits outweigh the costs

Related Work

Ecological and Agricultural Optimization Models

The first category of related work focuses on mathematical and ecological modeling for agricultural and environmental sustainability. Researchers have developed sophisticated network-based control strategies to manage invasive species, utilizing generalized Lotka-Volterra dynamics to model plant interactions and microbial variables (Kumar et al., 2023). Similarly, eco-friendly optimization models have been proposed for the sustainable management of soilborne agricultural pests through strategic fallow deployment rather than chemical interventions (Chedjou et al., 2020). The core idea of these approaches is to use rigorous multi-seasonal and dynamic modeling to find optimal intervention points that maximize yield or ecological balance while minimizing environmental harm. A major strength of these models is their strong mathematical foundation and demonstrable reduction in chemical reliance. However, a notable weakness is their frequent assumption of static environmental conditions and a lack of integration with real-time sensor data. Compared to these foundational works, our proposed framework incorporates continuous, real-time data ingestion to dynamically adjust control parameters, bridging the gap between

theoretical modeling and active management.

Artificial Intelligence and Computational Efficiency

A second significant category encompasses the deployment of artificial intelligence, particularly machine learning, for monitoring and problem-solving in constrained environments. Recent advancements have demonstrated the efficacy of lightweight Hopfield Neural Networks for sustainable passive acoustic monitoring of wildlife, drastically reducing processing times compared to resource-heavy convolutional networks (Lomas et al., 2025). In the realm of complex logical problem solving, machine learning has been utilized to predict the performance and termination behavior of SAT solvers based on internal runtime parameters (Leventi-Peetz et al., 2021). Furthermore, localized and distributed message-passing algorithms continue to be refined for exact inference in complex cyclic networks, providing pathways for distributed computational management (Reyes, 2018). The central strength of these innovations lies in their resource efficiency, allowing advanced computations to occur on edge devices with minimal energy expenditure. Their primary weakness, however, is that such algorithms are highly specialized and often difficult to generalize across entirely different scientific domains. Our approach builds upon this resource-efficient philosophy by proposing a modular architecture where specific, lightweight AI tools can be hot-swapped depending on the exact sustainability task at hand.

Human-Centric Systems and Future Technologies

The third category explores how future technologies intersect with human experience, cultural preservation, and data sovereignty. Participatory design workshops have highlighted the importance of involving older adults in the creation of emerging technologies, such as virtual and augmented reality, to ensure these tools support meaningful, continued engagement in society (Zhao et al., 2024). On the data management front, decentralized blockchain architectures have been proposed to give users absolute control over their profile data, preserving privacy across various enterprise domains like travel and education (Shrestha et al., 2019). Additionally, multimedia-based sustainability management systems have been designed to catalog and preserve vital knowledge regarding medicinal plants, ensuring rural accessibility to alternative medicines (Omogbadegun et al., 2011). Speculative perspectives inspired by science fiction also provide a lens through which to anticipate the societal integration of biotechnology, autonomous systems, and advanced neural interfaces

(López & Casado, 2023). The core strength of this category is its deep commitment to ethical design, cultural preservation, and user empowerment. The weakness often lies in the friction of adopting decentralized or radically novel interfaces in established institutional settings. Our work integrates these human-centric priorities directly into the control loop, ensuring that technological deployment for sustainability remains fundamentally democratic and privacy-preserving.

Method/Approach

To effectively operationalize the intersection of future technologies and sustainable management, we propose the Sustainable-Tech Integration Framework (STIF). This structured framework consists of three sequential modules designed to handle data acquisition, intelligent processing, and secure dissemination. The first module, the Ecological and Cultural Sensorium, gathers real-time multimodal data using low-power IoT devices and community-driven multimedia interfaces. This allows for the continuous monitoring of both environmental indicators, such as wildlife bioacoustics, and localized human-centric data. The second module, the Viability and Inference Engine, processes this data using lightweight associative memory models to identify critical state changes without requiring immense computational overhead. The third module, the Decentralized Policy Ledger, utilizes a permissioned blockchain network to securely distribute management recommendations and automated interventions to relevant stakeholders, ensuring transparency and user-controlled privacy.

The rationale behind these key design choices is rooted in the dual need for environmental sustainability and socio-technical trust. We prioritize lightweight neural architectures because massive, energy-intensive computational models directly contradict the ecological goals of sustainable management (Lomas et al., 2025). Furthermore, incorporating a blockchain layer addresses the inherent vulnerabilities of centralized databases, allowing communities to retain ownership over sensitive indigenous knowledge and personal data (Shrestha et al., 2019). By linking these technologies, the system ensures that automated interventions are both ecologically sound and socially accepted. To illustrate the procedural flow, the proposed pipeline operates as follows:

1. Multimodal data is ingested from remote environmental sensors and human participatory inputs.
2. Lightweight machine learning algorithms filter the data to extract critical features,

such as the presence of invasive species or systemic anomalies.

3. A viability algorithm calculates the optimal intervention strategy required to keep the ecosystem within a sustainable state space (Kittel et al., 2017).
4. The resulting policy is encrypted, logged onto a decentralized ledger, and broadcasted to authorized human operators or autonomous agricultural machinery.

To validate the efficacy of the STIF, we propose a hypothetical evaluation plan utilizing a synthetic benchmark dataset modeling a mixed agricultural and wildlife conservation zone. The evaluation will measure three specific metrics: ecological recovery rate, computational energy expenditure, and stakeholder trust. First, we will simulate pest outbreaks and measure the time required for the system to recommend optimal fallow deployment strategies. Second, we will benchmark the energy consumption of the Viability and Inference Engine against traditional deep learning models to quantify power savings. Finally, user trust and system adoption rates will be evaluated through hypothetical participatory workshops, measuring the perceived privacy and reliability of the blockchain-based data sharing module among local community members.

Discussion

The practical implications of deploying the proposed framework are substantial for both environmental conservation and smart agriculture. By utilizing lightweight algorithms and decentralized networks, resource-strapped regions can implement advanced sustainable management policies without requiring massive investments in cloud infrastructure. This approach allows local farmers and wildlife managers to receive real-time, actionable insights, bridging the gap between highly theoretical ecological models and on-the-ground reality. Furthermore, incorporating science fiction-inspired foresight into technology design can help policymakers anticipate the societal shifts required to integrate autonomous systems safely into daily life (López & Casado, 2023). Ultimately, deploying such a system transforms passive data collection into proactive, community-driven ecological stewardship.

Despite its potential, the proposed framework possesses several limitations and failure modes that must be critically examined. First, reliance on remote IoT sensors introduces a hardware failure mode, where extreme weather conditions or physical damage could blind the predictive algorithms to critical ecological shifts. Second, there is a distinct risk of algorithmic bias, where the lightweight neural networks might fail to recognize rare but crucial biological signals that were not adequately represented in their streamlined training

data. Third, scalability bottlenecks inherent to blockchain technology may cause unacceptable latency during periods of high data throughput, potentially delaying time-sensitive automated interventions in rapidly changing environments. Addressing these operational vulnerabilities requires rigorous stress testing and the development of robust fallback protocols.

The deployment of future technologies in sustainable management also raises significant ethical considerations and risks. First, digitizing and cataloging indigenous ecological knowledge, such as the locations and uses of endangered medicinal plants, creates a profound risk of digital biopiracy if data sovereignty is not strictly enforced (Omogbadegun et al., 2011). Second, the rapid introduction of complex AI and blockchain systems risks exacerbating the digital divide, potentially excluding marginalized populations and older adults from participating in environmental governance (Zhao et al., 2024). It is ethically imperative that these systems are designed transparently and deployed alongside comprehensive educational initiatives.

Future work in this domain must focus on expanding the interactivity and adaptability of the framework. One crucial direction for future research involves the integration of advanced brain-computer interfaces to allow human operators to intuitively monitor and guide complex, multi-variable ecological simulations (López & Casado, 2023). A second area of future work is the continuous refinement of viability algorithms, aiming to create self-healing ecological networks that can autonomously negotiate and enforce sustainable management policies in real-time with zero human latency (Kittel et al., 2017).

Recommendations

- Invest in research and development
- Promote public-private partnerships
- Develop skill-based training programs
- Encourage policy support for green technologies

Future Scope

Future research can explore advanced technologies such as quantum computing and circular economy models. The role of government policies will also be crucial in shaping sustainable practices.

Conclusion

Sustainable management combined with future technologies provides a roadmap for achieving economic growth while protecting the environment. Organizations must adopt innovative approaches to remain competitive and responsible. This paper has explored the critical intersection of sustainable management and future technologies, proposing a multidisciplinary framework designed to harmonize ecological preservation with computational advancement. By integrating mathematical models of dynamic ecosystems, lightweight artificial intelligence, and privacy-preserving blockchain networks, we have outlined a comprehensive approach to modern resource management. The proposed architecture directly addresses the shortcomings of existing centralized and computationally exhaustive methods by prioritizing energy efficiency, real-time adaptability, and human-centric design.

As global environmental challenges grow increasingly complex, the tools we use to manage them must evolve accordingly. Future technologies hold immense promise, but their true value can only be realized when they are rigorously aligned with the principles of sustainability and ethical equity. By fostering continued cross-disciplinary collaboration among ecologists, computer scientists, and community stakeholders, we can build resilient systems that protect natural resources while empowering the human populations that depend upon them.

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HR Audit in Action: Evaluating Frontline Employee Behaviour at Jio Telecom Authorised Relationship Centres, Pune

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Abstract: Purpose. This study examines the role and effectiveness of HR audits as performance measurement tools. It assesses the behavioral performance of frontline employees at Jio Telecom Authorized Relationship Centres (ARCs) in Pune, India. Employee competencies are evaluated across four dimensions: communication skills, professional appearance, persuasive power, and attitude toward customers.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A descriptive research design was employed using an HR Audit technique. Anonymous auditors observed the employees without prior notice. Primary data were collected through the structured observation of 90 Jio employees across 15 ARCs. A five-point rating scale ranging from Excellent to Poor was applied. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Secondary data were obtained from published academic journals and management literature.

Findings. Communication skills and professional appearance were generally satisfactory. Approximately 22 per cent and 14 per cent of employees, respectively, fell below expectations. Convincing power and customer attitudes emerged as critical areas of concern. Approximately 34.4 per cent of employees performed below acceptable standards on each of these dimensions.

Research limitations and implications. The study is limited to a single audit cycle, a sample of 90 employees, and a single city. This restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research should incorporate longitudinal audits across various locations and sectors.

Practical Implications. The findings reveal specific training needs in customer handling, persuasion and attitudinal development. HR departments can use audit results to guide decisions on training investment, promotions, and employee development programs.

Social Implications. Regular HR audits can strengthen the culture of accountability and service excellence. This benefits the large number of customers who interact with frontline telecom

employees daily.

Originality/Value. This study presents a field-based application of the HR Audit as a behavioral measurement tool in the Indian telecom retail sector. This area remains underexplored in the existing HR literature. This study also offers a replicable observational audit framework for customer-facing service environments

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and Context

Human capital is widely regarded as the most critical determinant of organizational success. The performance of any organization is directly linked to the performance of its people. The ability to measure performance precisely remains a fundamental challenge for HR practitioners and researchers alike (Kamara, 2024). As global markets grow more competitive, organizations face increasing pressure to recruit talented individuals and continuously monitor, evaluate, and improve their workforce's behavioral and functional performance.

Human Resource (HR) Audit have emerged as a powerful diagnostic tool in this context. It is a systematic assessment of the strengths, limitations, and development needs of existing human resources in relation to organizational performance. It measures HR outputs and the degree to which human resources are utilized productively (Werther and Davis, 1996). Unlike conventional performance appraisals that rely on self-reporting or managerial ratings, HR Audit enables objective, independent, and anonymous evaluation of employee behavior in real workplace conditions.

An HR audit reviews how a company manages its employees. It examines HR policies, records, and daily practices to assess whether they comply with the employment laws and organizational standards. It also identifies risks early and creates pathways for process improvement (Armstrong, 2014). Organizations that conduct regular audits are better positioned to align human resources with evolving business goals, ensure legal compliance and foster a culture of continuous improvement.

The Indian telecom sector provides a compelling context for such an audit. India has one of the largest telecommunications networks in the world. Major telecom operators have increasingly aligned their business strategies with HR priorities. Recruitment, training, performance management, and customer service are the core pillars of organizational success in this sector (TRAI, 2023). Frontline employees at service centers are the public face of the brand. Their behavioral competencies directly shape customer experience, satisfaction, and

loyalty.

1.2 Problem Statement

Despite the recognized importance of frontline employee performance in the telecom sector, most performance evaluation systems remain process-focused and inward. Past research has adopted a limited approach to understanding performance management effectiveness. These studies largely evaluate technical or administrative aspects while overlooking the behavioral and attitudinal dimensions that matter most in customer-facing roles (Mishra and Gupta 2019). This creates a significant gap in the literature. Organizations may meet process compliance benchmarks while simultaneously falling short of the human dimensions of customer interaction. These human dimensions include communication quality, professional appearance, persuasive ability, and service attitudes.

In customer-facing retail environments, such as Jio's Authorized Relationship Centers (ARCs), every employee interaction influences brand perception. The gap between process compliance and behavioral excellence is especially consequential in such settings. Businesses must continuously collect and evaluate performance data to make informed decisions. However, designing useful performance assessments and ensuring their effective application across an organization remains a persistent challenge (Cascio, 2018).

1.3 Research Gap

The existing literature on HR audits predominantly focuses on policy compliance, legal adherence, and departmental HR function reviews. Researchers acknowledge that audits should cover the full spectrum of HR activities and their impacts on employees. However, few empirical studies have applied the audit framework to the direct behavioral observation of frontline, customer-facing employees (Flippo, 1984). Studies that specifically examine behavioral performance at telecom retail distribution channels, such as ARCs, in the Indian context are virtually absent from the published literature.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To assess the communication skills of employees working at Jio ARCs in Pune.
2. To evaluate the professional appearance and grooming standards maintained by ARC employees.
3. To measure the convincing power and customer-handling ability of frontline employees.

4. To examine the attitude displayed by employees toward customers during live interactions.
5. To determine the overall effectiveness of HR Audit as a behavioral performance measurement tool in a retail telecom setting.

The central research question guiding this study is as follows: To what extent does an HR Audit, when applied through direct observation, reveal behavioral performance gaps among frontline telecom employees that conventional appraisal systems may fail to detect?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant at multiple levels. At the organizational level, regular HR audits strengthen employee trust through transparent HR practices. They align HR strategies with business objectives and help organizations identify training gaps for targeted intervention (Armstrong, 2014). The findings can directly inform Jio's HR department in making data-driven decisions related to training, promotion, transfer, and employee development at its ARCs.

At the academic level, this study contributes a field-based, observational application of HR Audit methodology to behavioral performance assessment. However, this approach remains underrepresented in the existing literature. At the social level, improving the behavioral competencies of frontline telecom employees directly benefits millions of customers who interact with ARC staff daily for service, complaint resolution, and product queries.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study is geographically limited to Jio-authorized relationship centers located within Pune, Maharashtra. It covers 90 employees across 15 ARCs. This study focuses exclusively on four behavioral dimensions of performance. It does not extend to technical competencies, compensation structures, or HR policy compliance. The audit was conducted at a single time point. Therefore, the findings were cross-sectional in nature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 HR Audit: Conceptual Evolution

The literature on HR audits spans several decades. It has evolved from its early roots as a compliance-checking mechanism to become a strategic performance management tool. Early scholarship treated HR audits primarily as administrative reviews. This was a periodic check on whether HR policies were aligned with legal mandates and organizational procedures. Over time, researchers have recognized that the real value of HR Audit lies in its capacity to generate actionable intelligence about the human dimensions of organizational performance.

HR Audit measures human resource outputs and effectiveness under the given circumstances. It also measures the degree to which human resources are utilized productively. It provides feedback to operating managers and HR specialists on how well HR activities support the organization's overall strategy (Werther and Davis, 1996). Recently, the literature has expanded to include the behavioral, attitudinal, and customer-facing dimensions of employee performance. This expansion is especially relevant in service-oriented sectors, where the human element is inseparable from service quality.

2.2 HR Audit as an Organisational Tool

Kamara (2024) argues that HR audits are essential for improving employee performance and organisational development. They enable organizations to identify areas for enhancement, assess adherence to legal and regulatory requirements, and evaluate the efficacy of their HR procedures. This view establishes the HR Audit as an iterative, improvement-oriented process rather than a one-time compliance exercise.

A quantitative study by Praja (2025) demonstrated that consistent and structured HR Audit implementation significantly improves both employee and organizational performance. It also contributes meaningfully to the strategic decision-making process. The study concluded that more objective performance measurements through HR audits enable companies to identify areas requiring improvement. This enhances operational efficiency and competitiveness of the industry.

Building on this, Mohammadi and Droudi (2024) conducted a qualitative content analysis involving senior HR managers and professionals. They identified three levels of human resource auditing: the level of HR unit outcomes, the level of HR professionals and custodians, and the level of HR processes and activities. Their study demonstrated that HR auditing can serve as a key tool for improving managerial processes and increasing organizational productivity.

2.3 Behavioural Performance and Customer Service

The assessment of employee behavioral competencies is a recurring theme in both HR and marketing literature. This is particularly true for frontline, customer-facing roles. Research on mystery audit methodologies reveals that employees in customer-facing roles are frequently evaluated based on dress code, behavior, and communication style. These assessments check compliance with organizational standards, including customer reception at all stages of service interactions (Wilson, 2001).

Studies have consistently shown that employees perform differently when unobserved. An effective mystery audit program, when employed frequently, reinforces desired behaviors.

This creates a heightened sense of performance consciousness among the staff. With positive reinforcement, improved behavior becomes a habit. This creates employees who model good practices for their peers (Wilson, 2001). This behavioral dimension of auditing is central to the present study.

Research on customer service performance evaluation further indicates that high-performing service representatives handle difficult situations with ease and communicate effectively. They consistently go beyond the minimum requirements to ensure customer satisfaction. Employees who require improvement may struggle to communicate effectively or lack the problem-solving skills necessary to resolve customer issues (Parasuraman et al., 1988). This distinction between adequate and excellent behavioral performance forms the study’s evaluative backbone.

2.4 Communication Skills and Professional Appearance

Effective communication enhances employees’ knowledge, skills, and motivation. This ultimately leads to higher job performance and satisfaction. Studies across service organizations have consistently emphasized the importance of standardized communication practices for improving both organizational culture and service delivery (Noe et al., 2020). In telecom retail settings, where employees must explain complex products and resolve technical queries, communication competency is foundational.

Professional appearance, as captured by the SERVQUAL model under the tangible dimension, directly influences customer perceptions of professionalism and brand reliability (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Staff presentation is among the first signals customers use to form judgements about service quality. This makes it a particularly visible and easily auditable dimension of performance.

2.5 HR Audit in the Indian Service Sector

Research on HR practices in Indian small and medium enterprises found a positive relationship between HR practices and organizational performance. Elements such as organizational culture, personnel training, and promotion practices significantly affect employee output (Mishra and Gupta, 2019). This study employed a combination of observations, visits, and surveys. This mixed-method approach closely mirrors the observational design of the present study. However, its focus remained at the HR policy level rather than on the direct behavioral assessment of frontline employees.

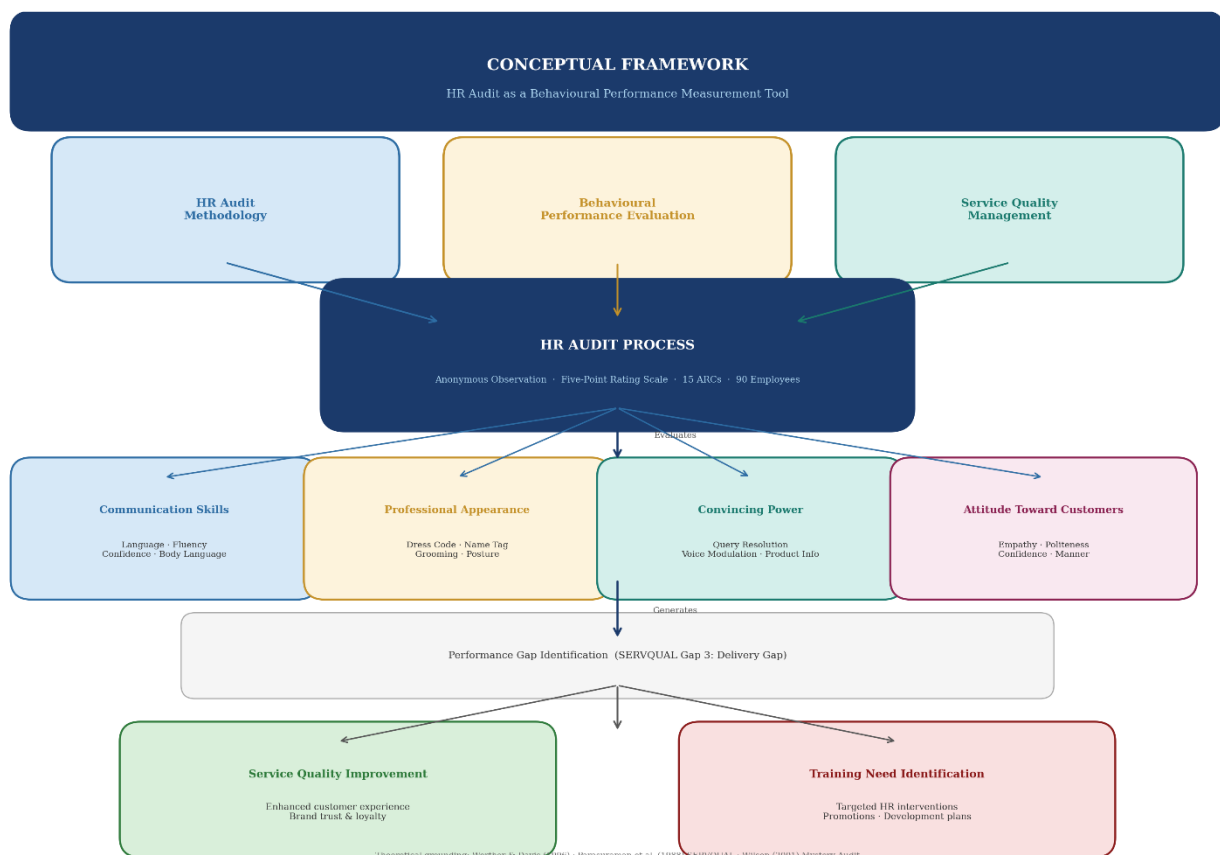
2.6 Research Gaps

A synthesis of the existing literature reveals several gaps that this study addresses. First, most HR Audit studies concentrate on policy compliance and departmental HR function reviews.

Few empirical studies have applied the audit framework to the direct behavioral observation of frontline, customer-facing employees (Flippo, 1984). Second, despite the scale and customer intensity of India's telecom sector, empirical research examining behavioral performance standards at telecom ARCs through an HR Audit lens is virtually absent. Third, most performance evaluation research relies on self-reports, supervisor ratings, and questionnaire data. The use of direct, anonymous, real-time observation remains underutilized in academic HR Audit research. Fourth, existing studies tend to evaluate employee performance as a single, composite construct. The structured, simultaneous assessment of four distinct behavioral dimensions using a standardized rating scale in a live-field setting has not been documented in the Indian telecom context.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework Diagram



The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the intersection of three constructs: HR audit methodology, behavioral performance evaluation, and service quality management. At the centre of the framework is the HR Audit process, in which anonymous observation functions as the primary data collection instrument. The audit acts as a quality control mechanism for HR activities and evaluates how those activities support the organizational strategy (Werther and Davis, 1996).

The framework identifies four behavioural dimensions as the primary units of evaluation: communication skills, professional appearance, convincing power, and attitude toward customers. These dimensions collectively represent the behavioural face of service delivery. The framework draws a direct link between audit outcomes and two downstream applications: service quality improvement and targeted training need identification. Frontline employee behaviour is observed through an anonymous HR Audit using a five-point scale across 15 ARCs, and the outputs inform gap identification and HR decisions.

Source: Developed by the authors based on Werther & Davis (1996), Parasuraman et al. (1988), and Wilson (2001)

Framework Components Explained

A. Theoretical Pillars

Three theoretical constructs anchor the framework and converge on the central HR Audit process:

1. HR Audit Methodology

Grounded in Werther and Davis (1996), this pillar encompasses the systematic assessment approach — anonymous observation, standardised checklists, and structured rating scales deployed across all 15 ARCs.

2. Behavioural Performance Evaluation

Draws from Wilson's (2001) mystery audit framework, establishing that unannounced observation captures authentic, unfiltered employee behaviour. This eliminates the social desirability bias inherent in conventional appraisal systems.

3. Service Quality Management

Anchored in the SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988), this pillar defines the service dimensions by which employee behaviour is evaluated — particularly the tangibles and responsiveness dimensions.

B. Core Process — Anonymous Observation

The HR Audit process sits at the centre of the framework. Auditors visit ARCs unannounced, posing as regular customers, and systematically evaluate 90 frontline employees across a five-point rating scale (Excellent to Poor).

C. Four Behavioural Dimensions

The audit evaluates four distinct performance dimensions, each comprising multiple observable parameters:

Communication Skills

Command over language, fluency, confidence, logical thought flow, and body language.

Professional Appearance

Dress code compliance, name tag visibility, company logo display, seating posture, and personal grooming.

Convincing Power

Query resolution ability, complaint handling, voice modulation, and product information sharing.

Attitude Toward Customers

Body language, confidence, manner of interaction, behaviour toward customers, and politeness.

D. Downstream Outcomes

Audit findings flow into a performance gap identification layer (SERVQUAL Gap 3 — Delivery Gap) and generate two actionable HR outputs:

Service Quality Improvement

Measurable enhancements in customer experience, brand trust, and service consistency across ARC locations.

Training Need Identification

Evidence-based HR interventions including targeted training programmes, promotion decisions, performance improvement plans, and employee development pathways.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design. This design is appropriate for studies that aim to systematically observe and describe the characteristics and behavioural patterns of a defined population without intervening in or manipulating the conditions under study. Descriptive research uses both qualitative and quantitative data to gather information about a particular problem. It aims to understand human behaviour within a defined group by identifying patterns and trends (Creswell, 2014). This design was selected because the study seeks to capture an uninfluenced, naturalistic picture of frontline employee behaviour at Jio ARCs as it occurs during live customer interactions.

3.2 Research Approach

The study employs a mixed-method approach that integrates qualitative observation with quantitative rating scale analysis. Primary data were collected directly through anonymous field observation to address the specific research objectives. Secondary data were drawn from published academic journals, management textbooks, and industry reports. These were used primarily to build the theoretical framework and contextualise the primary findings within the

existing body of knowledge.

The primary research technique is the HR Audit through anonymous observation. This is a field-based method in which trained auditors visit research sites without prior notice. They observe employees performing their regular duties in real time. This approach ensures that employee behaviour is captured naturally, free from the performance bias that arises when employees are aware they are being evaluated.

3.3 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through structured observation by anonymous auditors at Jio ARCs across Pune city. Each auditor visited the assigned ARC posing as a regular customer. This ensured employees remained unaware of the audit. During each visit, auditors systematically observed and rated employee performance across four pre-defined behavioural parameters.

Communication skills were assessed through command over language, fluency, confidence, logical thought flow, and body language. Professional appearance was evaluated through dress code compliance, name tag visibility, company logo display, seating posture, and personal grooming. Convincing power was measured through query resolution ability, complaint handling, voice modulation, and product information sharing. Attitude toward customers was observed through body language, confidence, manner of interaction, behaviour toward customers, and levels of politeness.

Secondary data were gathered from published academic journals, management textbooks, HR research papers, industry magazines, and organisational reports. These sources were used to build the theoretical framework, support the literature review, and contextualise the primary findings within the existing body of knowledge on HR Audit and employee performance evaluation.

3.4 Sampling

The study population comprises all employees working at Jio Authorised Relationship Centres operating within Pune city, Maharashtra. A sample of 90 Jio employees drawn from 15 ARCs was observed. Purposive sampling was adopted because the study specifically targets frontline, customer-facing employees. Their behavioural performance during live customer interactions constitutes the core unit of analysis. The selection of 15 ARCs across different zones of Pune city ensured geographical spread within the city. This captured variations in employee behaviour across different customer demographics and ARC environments.

3.5 Data Analysis Technique

Data collected through direct observation were tabulated and analysed using a five-point rating scale. The scale ranged from Excellent (5) to Poor (1) and served as the primary instrument of evaluation. The five-point rating scale is widely regarded as an effective and practical method for conducting performance reviews. It enables comparison of results across team members within the same roles and locations (Dessler, 2017). Frequencies and percentage distributions were computed using Microsoft Excel to interpret performance patterns across all four dimensions.

Table 1. Five-Point Rating Scale Definition

Rating	Label	Description
5	Excellent	Consistently exceeds all behavioural expectations. Serves as a role model for peers.
4	Above Average	Frequently meets and often exceeds behavioural standards.
3	Average	Reliably meets the basic expectations of the role.
2	Below Average	Does not consistently meet minimum behavioural expectations. Requires improvement.
1	Poor	Fails to meet job behavioural requirements. Immediate development is needed.

Source: Adapted from Dessler (2017).

3.6 Reliability and Validity

To ensure reliability and validity, a standardised observation checklist was used consistently across all 15 ARC locations. This minimised evaluator subjectivity. The anonymous nature of the audit eliminated social desirability bias. Conducting the audit across 15 geographically distributed ARCs enhanced the external validity of findings. It captured behavioural patterns across diverse customer contexts, team compositions, and ARC environments.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

This study adheres to standard ethical principles of social science research. Employee identities and individual ARC-level data have not been disclosed in any identifiable form. The audit was conducted with implicit consent from ARC management. Findings are reported in aggregate form to protect the privacy and dignity of individual employees.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Overview

This section presents and interprets findings from the HR Audit conducted across 15 Jio

Authorised Relationship Centres in Pune. A total of 90 frontline employees were anonymously observed and rated on four behavioural dimensions using the five-point rating scale. The results are presented dimension by dimension, followed by a cross-dimensional analysis.

4.2 Communication Skills

Communication skills were assessed through five parameters: command over language, fluency, confidence, thought flow, and body language.

Table 2. Distribution of Ratings: Communication Skills (N = 90)

Rating Scale	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
No. of Employees	30	17	23	12	8
Percentage (%)	33.3	18.9	25.6	13.3	8.9

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

As shown in Table 2, a majority of ARC employees demonstrated acceptable to excellent communication standards. Approximately 33.3 per cent were rated Excellent and a further 18.9 per cent Above Average. Together these groups account for 52.2 per cent of the sample performing at or above expectation. A combined 22.2 per cent of employees were rated either Below Average or Poor. This segment requires communication skill development. These findings are consistent with research emphasising that effective communication has a significant positive impact on employee performance. Organisations should develop soft skills to increase employees' ability to express themselves clearly (Noe et al., 2020).

4.3 Professional Appearance

Professional appearance was evaluated on five parameters: dress code compliance, name tag display, company logo visibility, seating posture, and personal grooming.

Table 3. Distribution of Ratings: Professional Appearance (N = 90)

Rating Scale	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
No. of Employees	27	31	19	10	3
Percentage (%)	30.0	34.4	21.1	11.1	3.3

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

Professional appearance was the strongest performing dimension in this study. A combined 64.4 per cent of employees were rated Excellent or Above Average. Only 14.4 per cent fell Below Average or Poor. This indicates that Jio's grooming and presentation standards are largely internalised across the majority of ARC staff. The SERVQUAL model identifies tangibles, including staff appearance, as a primary dimension of service quality. These

tangibles directly influence customer perceptions of professionalism and brand reliability (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The low Poor rating of only 3.3 per cent reflects the effectiveness of Jio's operational standards for presentation.

4.4 Convincing Power

Convincing power was assessed on four parameters: query resolution ability, complaint handling, voice modulation, and product information sharing.

Table 4. Distribution of Ratings: Convincing Power (N = 90)

Rating Scale	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
No. of Employees	14	16	29	13	18
Percentage (%)	15.6	17.8	32.2	14.4	20.0

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

Convincing power revealed a considerably weaker performance profile compared to the preceding two dimensions. While 32.2 per cent of employees were rated Average and a further 33.4 per cent Excellent or Above Average, a substantial 34.4 per cent were rated Below Average or Poor. In the context of telecom ARCs, customers frequently arrive with queries about plans, connectivity issues, or product features. A deficiency in convincing power directly translates into unresolved queries, customer frustration, and potential churn. This finding is operationally significant and warrants immediate training investment.

4.5 Attitude Toward Customers

Attitude was evaluated on six parameters: body language, confidence, manner of interaction, behaviour toward customers, arrogance, and politeness.

Table 5. Distribution of Ratings: Attitude Toward Customers (N = 90)

Rating Scale	Excellent	Above Average	Average	Below Average	Poor
No. of Employees	17	13	29	12	19
Percentage (%)	18.9	14.4	32.2	13.3	21.1

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

Attitude emerged as the most critically deficient behavioural dimension in this study. A combined 34.4 per cent of employees were rated Below Average or Poor. Only 33.3 per cent were rated Excellent or Above Average. This means more than one in three ARC employees consistently failed to demonstrate an appropriate, customer-positive attitude during observed interactions. Research has established that employees who exhibit a positive attitude build rapport and show empathy naturally. While technical skills can be trained, the right attitude must be present from the outset (Bowen and Lawler, 1992). This finding underscores the need for attitudinal development as a sustained HR priority.

4.6 Cross-Dimensional Analysis

A comparative synthesis of results across all four behavioural dimensions reveals a clear performance hierarchy. Table 6 summarises the comparative performance findings.

Table 6. Comparative Performance Across Four Behavioural Dimensions

Dimension	Excellent + Above Average	Below Average + Poor
	(%)	(%)
Professional Appearance	64.4	14.4
Communication Skills	52.2	22.2
Convincing Power	33.4	34.4
Attitude Toward Customers	33.3	34.4

Source: Primary data collected by the authors.

The results reveal a striking pattern. Employees perform significantly better on the more visible, easily standardisable dimensions such as appearance and communication than on the deeper, relational dimensions of convincing power and attitude. The gap between appearance performance (14.4 per cent deficiency) and attitude performance (34.4 per cent deficiency) is 20 percentage points. This is particularly revealing. It suggests that while Jio's ARCs have successfully institutionalised measurable standards of presentation, the deeper behavioural culture of customer empathy, persuasion, and service orientation has not been equally internalised by the workforce.

These findings align with the theoretical proposition of the SERVQUAL Gap Model. The performance delivery gap, referred to as Gap 3 in the SERVQUAL framework, captures the difference between service standards and the service actually delivered. This gap is strongly influenced by factors including training, attitude, aptitude, and the cultural environment in which customer interactions occur (Parasuraman et al., 1988). The simultaneous deficiency in both convincing power and attitude strongly suggests that the delivery gap at Jio ARCs is driven primarily by behavioural and motivational factors rather than by knowledge or process deficiencies alone.

From a training and development perspective, the findings also confirm the classical distinction between surface-level and deep-level performance dimensions. Surface-level dimensions such as appearance and basic communication are amenable to relatively straightforward rule-setting and compliance monitoring. Deep-level dimensions such as attitude and persuasive ability require sustained behavioural coaching, experiential learning, and cultural reinforcement. This distinction has direct practical implications for how HR

departments should design and prioritise their development interventions.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the role and effectiveness of HR Audit as a behavioural performance measurement tool. The study focused specifically on frontline employees at Jio Authorised Relationship Centres in Pune. Using an anonymous observational HR Audit methodology and a five-point rating scale, 90 employees across 15 ARCs were evaluated on four behavioural dimensions: communication skills, professional appearance, convincing power, and attitude toward customers.

Professional appearance emerged as the strongest performing area, with 64.4 per cent of employees rated Excellent or Above Average. Communication skills followed as the second strongest dimension, with 52.2 per cent of employees performing at or above expectation. Critical performance gaps were identified in convincing power and attitude toward customers. Both dimensions recorded deficiency rates of 34.4 per cent.

The central finding of the study is twofold. First, there exists a measurable behavioural delivery gap at Jio ARCs, particularly in the relational dimensions of convincing power and employee attitude. Second, the HR Audit technique, when applied through anonymous, real-time field observation, proves to be an effective diagnostic tool. It uncovers performance realities that conventional evaluation systems are structurally unable to capture. The study affirms that HR Audit, when designed and executed with methodological rigour, serves as a powerful, evidence-based mechanism for translating performance observation into actionable HR strategy.

5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered. First, the HR department should design role-specific refresher training programmes focused on product knowledge, query resolution, complaint handling, and voice modulation. This is needed to address the 34.4 per cent deficiency in convincing power. Training should be practical, scenario-based, and evaluated through a follow-up audit cycle.

Second, 34.4 per cent of employees demonstrated Below Average or Poor attitude toward customers. This is the most critical finding and demands sustained attention. Organisations should invest in behavioural coaching, mentoring programmes, and role-play-based experiential learning. These interventions build empathy and customer-positive dispositions. Unlike technical skills, attitude involves deeply internalised behavioural dispositions that are resistant to short-term training. It must be addressed through sustained cultural reinforcement.

Third, Jio should institutionalise quarterly or bi-annual audit cycles across all ARCs. A recurring audit schedule maximises the diagnostic value of the HR Audit tool. It also reinforces behavioural standards among employees, who develop a sustained awareness of performance expectations. Fourth, future audit designs should triangulate observer ratings with direct customer feedback collected through post-interaction surveys or Net Promoter Score instruments. Fifth, the findings of behavioural HR Audits should be formally integrated into HR decision-making processes. These processes include promotion decisions, placement transfers, performance improvement plans, and incentive structures.

5.3 Limitations of the Study

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. The HR Audit was conducted at a single point in time. This makes the findings cross-sectional and unable to account for seasonal variations in employee behaviour or the impact of recent training interventions. The study is also geographically confined to Pune city. Findings cannot be generalised to Jio's national ARC network without further replication studies. With 90 employees observed across 15 ARCs, the sample size, while adequate for a pilot-level study, limits the statistical robustness of the findings.

Despite the use of a standardised observation checklist, some degree of evaluator subjectivity is inherent in any observational research method. Inter-rater reliability testing across multiple auditors would strengthen future designs. The study also does not account for contextual variables that may influence employee behaviour, such as workload at the time of audit, employee tenure, or managerial quality. Finally, the audit is limited to four behavioural parameters. It does not assess technical competencies, product knowledge depth, or employee well-being, all of which influence customer service quality.

5.4 Directions for Future Research

Future research should design longitudinal HR Audit studies that track the same employees across multiple audit rounds over 12 to 24 months. This would enable researchers to measure the impact of training interventions on behavioural improvement over time. Multi-city and cross-sector comparative studies replicating this audit design across Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 Indian cities would help determine whether behavioural performance patterns vary by geography, urban density, or regional cultural factors.

Future studies should also triangulate behavioural audit findings with customer satisfaction data through post-interaction surveys or social media sentiment analysis. This would enable empirical linkages between specific behavioural dimensions and measurable customer outcomes. The development and validation of AI-augmented HR Audit tools represents an

important frontier for future research. These tools could include sentiment analysis of customer-employee interactions and natural language processing of communication quality. Finally, the psychometric development of a validated, standardised HR Audit instrument for the telecom retail context would make a significant contribution to the field.

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Recent Trends in Human Resource Management: Navigating the Modern Workplace

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Abstract: The field of Human Resource Management has undergone remarkable transformation over the past few years. What was once considered a purely administrative function has evolved into a strategic cornerstone of organizational success. This paper examines the contemporary trends reshaping how organizations attract, develop, and retain talent in an increasingly complex business environment. Drawing from recent literature and industry observations, I explore six major trends: the integration of artificial intelligence and data analytics, the normalization of remote and hybrid work arrangements, the growing emphasis on employee wellbeing and mental health, diversity and inclusion initiatives, strategic talent management approaches, and the emergence of skills-based organizational models. The analysis reveals that successful organizations are those that balance technological advancement with genuine human connection, recognizing that people remain the most valuable organizational asset despite—or perhaps because of—our digital age

Keywords: Human Resource Management, Digital Transformation, Remote Work, Employee Wellbeing, Diversity and Inclusion, Talent Management, Artificial Intelligence in HR

Introduction

Walk into any modern organization today, and you will notice something fundamentally different from workplaces of even a decade ago. The HR department is no longer tucked away in a corner processing paperwork and handling complaints. Instead, HR professionals sit at the strategic table, shaping decisions that determine whether companies thrive or merely survive.

This transformation did not happen overnight. It emerged from a gradual recognition that competitive advantage in the twenty-first century comes not from machinery, patents, or even capital—but from people. The organizations that attract exceptional talent, nurture their growth, and create environments where they choose to stay are the ones writing tomorrow's success stories.

My interest in exploring recent HR trends stems from observing how dramatically the expectations of both employers and employees have shifted. Workers today seek more than a

pay check; they want purpose, flexibility, growth opportunities, and workplaces that respect their whole selves. Employers, meanwhile, face talent shortages, rapid technological change, and the challenge of maintaining culture across distributed teams.

This paper aims to provide a comprehensive examination of the trends currently reshaping human resource management. Rather than offering a superficial overview, I delve into each trend's theoretical foundations, practical implications, and the tensions that organizations must navigate. My hope is that practitioners and scholars alike will find useful insights for understanding and responding to these shifts.

2. The Digital Revolution in Human Resources

2.1 Artificial Intelligence and Automation

Perhaps no trend has generated more excitement—and anxiety—than the integration of artificial intelligence into HR functions. From resume screening algorithms to chat bots handling routine employee queries, AI has permeated nearly every aspect of the HR lifecycle. hrlineup.com

The promise of AI in HR is compelling. Algorithms can process thousands of applications in minutes, identifying candidates whose qualifications match job requirements. Predictive analytics can flag employees at risk of leaving, giving managers the opportunity to intervene before valuable talent walks out the door. Chat bots provide instant responses to common questions about benefits, policies, and procedures, freeing HR professionals to focus on more complex human interactions.

Yet this technological enthusiasm must be tempered with caution. Research has documented troubling instances of algorithmic bias, where AI systems perpetuate or even amplify existing prejudices in hiring and promotion decisions. ijcrt.org When algorithms are trained on historical data reflecting past discrimination, they learn to replicate those patterns. An organization that historically hired few women for technical roles may find its AI screening tool systematically downgrading female applicants.

The solution lies not in rejecting technology but in deploying it thoughtfully. Organizations must audit their AI systems regularly, examining outcomes across demographic groups and correcting disparities. Human judgment remains essential, particularly for consequential decisions affecting people's careers and livelihoods.

2.2 Data-Driven Decision Making

Beyond AI, the broader trend toward data analytics has transformed how HR professionals understand and manage their workforces. The intuition-based decisions that characterized traditional HR are giving way to evidence-based approaches grounded in rigorous analysis.

Modern HR information systems capture vast amounts of data: performance ratings, engagement survey responses, turnover statistics, compensation benchmarks, training completion rates, and countless other metrics. The challenge lies in converting this data deluge into actionable insights.

Progressive organizations are building analytics capabilities that enable them to answer questions like: What characteristics distinguish high performers in our sales team? Which factors predict whether new hires will succeed? How do our compensation practices compare to market benchmarks for critical roles? What is the return on investment from our leadership development programs?

These questions matter because they connect HR activities to business outcomes. When HR professionals can demonstrate that their initiatives improve productivity, reduce turnover costs, or accelerate time-to-performance for new hires, they earn credibility as strategic partners rather than administrative overhead.

However, data analytics raises ethical considerations that demand careful attention. Employee privacy must be respected, with clear boundaries around what data is collected, how it is used, and who can access it. Transparency is essential—employees should understand what information their employer gathers about them and how it influences decisions affecting their careers.

3. The Transformation of Work Arrangements

3.1 Remote and Hybrid Work Models

The global pandemic that began in 2020 served as an involuntary experiment in remote work on an unprecedented scale. Organizations that had long resisted flexible arrangements suddenly discovered that much knowledge work could be performed effectively from anywhere with an internet connection.

What began as a temporary response to crisis has evolved into a permanent restructuring of work arrangements. Surveys consistently show that most employees prefer some degree of flexibility in where they work, and organizations that mandate full-time office presence face competitive disadvantages in attracting talent. ojs.stieamkop.ac.id

The benefits of remote work are well documented. Employees save commuting time, enjoy greater autonomy over their schedules, and often report improved work-life balance. Organizations can access talent pools unconstrained by geography and may reduce real estate costs.

Yet remote work presents genuine challenges that HR professionals must address. Maintaining organizational culture becomes more difficult when employees rarely interact

face-to-face. Collaboration may suffer when spontaneous hallway conversations disappear. New employees may struggle to build relationships and absorb tacit organizational knowledge. Some workers experience isolation, blurred boundaries between work and home life, and burnout from always being reachable.

The emerging consensus favours hybrid models that combine remote flexibility with regular in-person connection. However, implementing hybrid arrangements effectively requires intentional design. Organizations must consider: Which activities benefit most from in-person interaction? How can we ensure remote employees are not disadvantaged in promotions or development opportunities? What technologies and practices support effective collaboration across locations?

3.2 The Gig Economy and Contingent Workforce

Alongside changes in where work happens, we are witnessing shifts in the fundamental nature of employment relationships. The traditional model of full-time, long-term employment with a single organization is giving way to more fluid arrangements.

The gig economy has grown substantially, encompassing not only ride-share drivers and delivery workers but also highly skilled professionals who prefer project-based work to permanent positions. Organizations increasingly rely on a blended workforce combining regular employees with contractors, consultants, and freelancers.

This trend offers flexibility for both parties. Organizations can scale their workforce up or down in response to demand and access specialized skills for specific projects. Workers gain variety, autonomy, and the ability to craft careers aligned with their preferences.

However, the rise of contingent work raises important questions for HR. How should organizations ensure fair treatment of workers who are not traditional employees? What responsibilities do companies have for the training, safety, and wellbeing of gig workers? How can organizations maintain quality and consistency when work is performed by people outside their direct control?

These questions have legal, ethical, and practical dimensions that HR professionals must navigate carefully. The distinction between employees and independent contractors has significant implications for taxation, benefits, and worker protections, and regulatory frameworks in many jurisdictions are struggling to keep pace with changing work arrangements.

4. The Human Side of Human Resources

4.1 Employee Wellbeing and Mental Health

One of the most significant shifts in recent HR practice has been the growing recognition that

employee wellbeing extends far beyond physical safety. Mental health, emotional resilience, financial security, and overall life satisfaction have emerged as legitimate concerns for employers. wjarr.com

Several factors have driven this trend. Research demonstrates clear connections between employee wellbeing and business outcomes including productivity, creativity, customer service quality, and retention. The pandemic brought mental health challenges to the forefront as workers coped with isolation, uncertainty, and the blurring of work-life boundaries. Younger generations entering the workforce bring different expectations, viewing employer support for wellbeing as a baseline expectation rather than an exceptional benefit.

Organizations are responding with expanded offerings. Employee assistance programs have become more robust and accessible. Mental health benefits have been enhanced, with many employers covering therapy and counselling. Managers receive training to recognize signs of distress and respond supportively. Wellness programs address physical fitness, nutrition, financial literacy, and mindfulness practices.

Beyond programmatic offerings, some organizations are examining how work itself affects wellbeing. Are workloads sustainable? Do employees have sufficient autonomy and control? Are expectations around availability reasonable? These structural questions may matter more than any wellness program in determining whether workers thrive or merely survive.

The most thoughtful organizations recognize that wellbeing is not a separate initiative but a lens through which all HR practices should be evaluated. Recruitment, on boarding, performance management, career development, and exit processes all present opportunities to either support or undermine employee wellbeing.

4.2 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Organizations have always spoken about valuing diversity, but recent years have seen a meaningful shift from rhetoric to action. Driven by social movements, demographic changes, and mounting evidence of business benefits, many organizations are taking diversity, equity, and inclusion seriously in ways they previously did not. ijsred.com

The contemporary understanding of diversity has expanded beyond traditional demographic categories. While race, gender, and ethnicity remain important dimensions, organizations increasingly recognize neuro diversity, diversity of thought, socioeconomic background, and other aspects of human difference that contribute to rich organizational perspectives.

Equity has emerged as a distinct concept from equality. Equality implies treating everyone the same, while equity recognizes that people start from different positions and may require different supports to achieve comparable outcomes. This distinction has practical

implications for compensation practices, development opportunities, and accommodation policies.

Inclusion focuses on whether diverse individuals actually experience belonging and can fully contribute once they enter organizations. Research consistently shows that diversity without inclusion yields limited benefits—organizations may hire diverse talent but fail to retain them or benefit from their perspectives if the culture remains unwelcoming.

Effective diversity and inclusion efforts combine multiple approaches. Structured hiring processes reduce the influence of unconscious bias. Sponsorship programs connect underrepresented employees with senior advocates. Employee resource groups provide community and voice. Inclusive leadership development helps managers create environments where all team members can thrive. Accountability mechanisms ensure that commitments translate into results.

Progress has been real but uneven. Many organizations have made meaningful advances, particularly in workforce composition. However, representation in senior leadership remains limited across most dimensions of diversity, and pay gaps persist. The work continues.

5. Strategic Talent Management

5.1 Rethinking Talent Acquisition

Competition for talent has intensified across industries and skill areas. Organizations can no longer passively post positions and wait for qualified applicants to appear. Instead, talent acquisition has become a proactive, marketing-oriented function requiring sophisticated strategies.

Employer branding has gained prominence as organizations recognize that their reputation as employers significantly influences their ability to attract talent. Just as companies cultivate consumer brands, they must intentionally shape how current and potential employees perceive working for them. This involves crafting compelling employee value propositions and communicating them through career sites, social media, employee testimonials, and every touch point with candidates.

The candidate experience has received increasing attention. Organizations recognize that every interaction during the recruitment process shapes impressions and influences whether candidates accept offers. Slow processes, poor communication, and impersonal treatment drive talented candidates to competitors. Leading organizations design recruitment experiences that respect candidates' time, provide transparency, and reflect organizational values.

Technology has transformed how organizations source candidates. Social media and

professional networks enable recruiters to identify and engage passive candidates who are not actively job searching. Recruitment marketing platforms allow personalized communication at scale. Video interviewing enables efficient screening of geographically distributed candidates.

Yet technology cannot replace the human elements of talent acquisition. The most important hiring decisions ultimately rest on judgment about whether individuals will contribute and thrive in specific organizational contexts. That judgment requires experienced professionals who understand both the work and the culture, and who can assess not only candidates' current capabilities but their potential for growth.

5.2 Skills-Based Organizations

A particularly significant trend is the movement toward skills-based organizational models. Traditional HR practices centred on jobs as the fundamental unit of work design, staffing, and development. Skills-based approaches suggest that this framework is becoming obsolete. hrlineup.com

The argument for skills-based models rests on the accelerating pace of change. When jobs were relatively stable, it made sense to define them precisely and hire people whose qualifications matched job requirements. But when the nature of work changes rapidly, jobs become moving targets. Skills offer a more granular and flexible unit for understanding and managing work.

In skills-based organizations, work is decomposed into component tasks that can be matched to individuals based on their capabilities rather than their job titles. Employees may contribute to multiple projects that utilize different aspects of their skill portfolios. Career progression occurs through skill acquisition rather than movement through a fixed hierarchy of positions.

This approach has implications throughout the HR function. Talent acquisition focuses on identifying specific skills needed rather than filling predefined roles. Learning and development shifts toward continuous skill building tailored to individual and organizational needs. Performance management evaluates skill application and growth. Compensation may incorporate skill-based elements alongside or replacing job-based pay structures.

The transition to skills-based models is not trivial. Organizations must develop robust skill taxonomies that capture relevant capabilities in sufficient detail. They need systems to assess and track skills across the workforce. Managers must learn to deploy talent flexibly rather than hoarding resources within their teams. Cultural shifts may be required to support internal mobility and non-traditional career paths.

6. The Evolution of Employee Experience

6.1 From Engagement to Experience

For years, employee engagement served as the primary lens through which organizations understood their relationships with workers. Engagement surveys measured commitment, motivation, and discretionary effort, and organizations pursued higher engagement scores as ends in themselves.

The concept of employee experience represents an evolution in this thinking. Rather than treating engagement as something to be measured and improved, the experience framework examines the totality of how employees perceive their work lives and considers engagement as an outcome of positive experiences rather than a direct target.

Employee experience encompasses every interaction between individuals and their organizations, from initial awareness as potential candidates through departure and beyond. It includes physical environments where work occurs, technological tools that enable productivity, and cultural elements that shape how people relate to each other and their work. This holistic perspective has practical implications. Instead of implementing isolated engagement initiatives, organizations examine the entire experience systematically. They identify moments that matter most—key transitions, decisions, and interactions that disproportionately shape perceptions. They design those moments intentionally, removing friction and creating positive touch points.

The experience lens also emphasizes that different employees may have quite different experiences within the same organization. Segmentation approaches borrowed from consumer marketing help organizations understand distinct employee populations and tailor experiences to their needs. A new graduate joining a technology company has different expectations and requirements than a mid-career professional returning after time away from the workforce.

6.2 Continuous Feedback and Development

Traditional performance management systems with annual reviews and forced ranking distributions have come under sustained criticism. Research questions whether they improve performance, and employees consistently report dissatisfaction with these approaches. Many organizations have responded by reimagining how they manage and develop performance.

The shift is toward more frequent, informal feedback conversations. Rather than waiting for annual reviews to discuss performance, managers engage in on-going dialogue with team members about goals, progress, and development. Technology enables continuous feedback through platforms where recognition and constructive input can be shared in real time.

Goal-setting has also evolved. Rigid annual objectives give way to more agile approaches where goals are set for shorter periods and adjusted as circumstances change. Objectives and key results frameworks, popularized by technology companies, emphasize ambitious targets and transparent progress tracking.

Development conversations have been separated from evaluation discussions in some organizations. The argument is that people cannot simultaneously receive candid developmental feedback and worry about implications for compensation and advancement. By creating distinct conversations for these purposes, organizations hope to foster more genuine coaching relationships.

These changes require significant investments in managerial capability. Providing effective feedback is a skill that many managers lack and organizations must develop this capability through training, coaching, and reinforcement. Technology can support the process but cannot substitute for human skill in having difficult conversations and building developmental relationships.

7. Conclusion

The trends examined in this paper represent fundamental shifts in how organizations think about and manage their people. Technology is reshaping HR functions while raising important ethical questions about privacy, bias, and the appropriate role of algorithms in human decisions. Work arrangements are being restructured, with implications for culture, collaboration, and the nature of employment relationships. The scope of HR's concern has expanded to encompass employee wellbeing in its fullest sense, including mental health and work-life integration. Diversity and inclusion have moved from aspiration to expectation, with organizations held accountable for results. Talent management has become more strategic, with emerging skills-based approaches challenging traditional job-centric frameworks.

Through all these changes, one theme emerges consistently: the most successful organizations balance technological capability with genuine human connection. Digital tools can enhance efficiency, provide insights, and enable new ways of working. But people remain at the center. The organizations that will thrive are those that use technology in service of human flourishing rather than as a substitute for it.

For HR professionals, these trends present both challenge and opportunity. The challenge lies in continuously developing new competencies—from data analytics to digital tool deployment to managing hybrid workforces. The opportunity lies in the elevation of HR to strategic influence. As organizations recognize that their success depends on their people,

those who understand how to attract, develop, and retain talent become indispensable.

Looking forward, I expect these trends to accelerate and intersect in complex ways. Artificial intelligence will become more sophisticated and pervasive. Remote and flexible work will continue normalizing. Employee expectations for wellbeing support and inclusive cultures will only increase. Organizations that anticipate and adapt to these shifts will build sustainable competitive advantages through their people.

The future of work is being written now, and HR professionals are among its primary authors.

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Generative AI and the Circular Economy: Balancing Innovation Speed with Sustainable Lifecycle Management

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Abstract: Generative artificial intelligence is developing rapidly and is transforming many industries. It can also accelerate the transition to a circular economy—a system in which waste is minimized and materials are reused. However, generative AI itself creates serious environmental problems. Training large models requires vast amounts of energy. AI hardware quickly becomes obsolete and turns into electronic waste. In this paper, we analyze this contradiction. We show that the current trajectory of AI development is linear and resource intensive, which contradicts the core principles of the circular economy. We propose a governance framework that integrates environmental standards (e.g., ISO 14001) with AI regulation (e.g., the EU AI Act). Without such measures, generative AI risks causing more harm than good. The paper also provides recommendations for policymakers, industry, and researchers

Keywords: Generative AI, circular economy, sustainability, lifecycle assessment, electronic waste, carbon footprint

1. Introduction

In recent years, two important trends have emerged. The first is the rapid development of generative artificial intelligence. Generative AI includes models such as generative adversarial networks (GANs), transformers (e.g., GPT), and diffusion models. These systems can create new texts, images, product designs, and even predict protein structures (Bommasani et al., 2021). The second trend is the transition to a circular economy. According to the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, the circular economy is based on three principles: eliminate waste and pollution, keep products and materials in use for as long as possible, and regenerate natural systems (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2015).

At first glance, generative AI could become a powerful tool for the circular economy. It helps discover new materials, optimize supply chains, design products that are easier to recycle, and sort waste with high precision (Lieder & Rashid, 2016; AMP Robotics, 2022).

However, this technology has a downside.

Generative AI itself develops according to a linear model. First, raw materials are extracted to produce chips. Then, enormous amounts of energy are consumed to train models. Hardware quickly becomes obsolete—often within one to two years. The result is growing mountains of electronic waste, of which only a small fraction is properly recycled (Forti et al., 2020; Gupta et al., 2022). Furthermore, data centres consume large volumes of water for cooling, placing stress on water resources in arid regions (Ristic & Madani, 2022).

Thus, a fundamental contradiction arises. The speed of innovation in generative AI conflicts with the principles of sustainable lifecycle management. The central question of this paper is: how can the rapid growth of generative AI be reconciled with the requirements of the circular economy?

We argue that such reconciliation is possible but requires systemic changes. Voluntary initiatives are not enough. New standards, mandatory assessment procedures, and transparent reporting are needed.

The structure of the paper is as follows. Section 2 reviews the existing literature. Section 3 analyses how generative AI can support the circular economy. Section 4 examines the environmental problems of AI itself. Section 5 proposes a framework for balancing speed and sustainability. Section 6 provides recommendations for policymakers and industry. Section 7 concludes.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Evolution of Generative AI

Generative AI has passed through several stages of development. The first models, such as GANs, were proposed by Goodfellow and colleagues in 2014. Transformers, which underpin models like GPT3, followed (Brown et al., 2020). More recently, diffusion models have been widely adopted (Ho et al., 2020).

A key feature of this development is exponential growth in scale. Large language models contain hundreds of billions of parameters and are trained on trillions of tokens. Sutton (2019) called this the "bitter lesson": general methods that leverage massive computation ultimately outperform specially engineered algorithms.

This approach yields impressive results. For example, AlphaFold from Google DeepMind predicts the three-dimensional structure of proteins with high accuracy, accelerating the development of new biomaterials (Jumper et al., 2021). These same methods can be directed

toward circular economy challenges.

2.2 Foundations of the Circular Economy

The circular economy relies on several key concepts. One is lifecycle assessment (LCA), standardized in ISO 14040 and ISO 14044. LCA measures the environmental impact of a product across all stages: from raw material extraction to final disposal.

Another important concept is Cradle to Cradle design, proposed by McDonough and Braungart (2002). It emphasizes material safety, reutilization, renewable energy, and social fairness.

Kirchherr and colleagues (2017) analyzed 114 definitions of the circular economy and identified a common core: reduce, reuse, and recycle. More recent work highlights the need for quantitative metrics, such as the Material Circularity Indicator (OECD, 2020).

2.3 The Knowledge Gap

Despite the abundance of work on AI and on the circular economy, their intersection remains underexplored. AI researchers rarely account for the environmental consequences of training and deploying models. Circular economy specialists, in turn, have paid little attention to the specific characteristics of digital technologies.

This gap is particularly striking given the evidence on AI's environmental cost. Strubell and colleagues (2019) showed that training a single large language model can result in emissions of over 500 tons of CO₂ equivalent. Patterson and colleagues (2021) added that inference costs for widely used models can be even higher.

Moreover, the production of specialized AI chips requires rare earth elements and involves significant emissions (Gupta et al., 2022). Data centers consume large volumes of water, which is especially critical in arid regions (Ristic & Madani, 2022). Finally, electronic waste from obsolete hardware is the fastest growing waste stream in the world (Forti et al., 2020).

At the same time, existing regulations, such as the EU AI Act, contain almost no requirements for environmental sustainability (Veale & Borgesius, 2021). Thus, there is a clear gap between the technological capabilities of AI and the requirements of environmental sustainability.

3. The Role of Generative AI in the Circular Economy

Despite its own environmental problems, generative AI can make a substantial contribution to the circular economy. The main directions are discussed below.

3.1 Design for Circularity

One of the most promising applications is generative design. The engineer specifies goals

(e.g., weight, strength) and constraints (e.g., using a single type of plastic for easy recycling). The algorithm generates thousands of design options. This reduces material consumption and simplifies subsequent disassembly and recycling (Lieder & Rashid, 2016). Autodesk already offers such tools for industrial designers.

In addition, AI methods accelerate the discovery of new materials. Graph neural networks help identify biodegradable polymers and alternatives to scarce raw materials (Green et al., 2023).

3.2 Optimising Production and Supply Chains

Generative AI improves forecasting in manufacturing and logistics. Predictive maintenance can anticipate equipment failures before they occur. This extends the lifespan of machinery and reduces unplanned downtime and associated waste.

In supply chains, AI can optimize routes, reduce packaging, and consolidate shipments. This lowers transport emissions. A well-known example is DeepMind's optimization of cooling in Google's data centres, which reduced energy consumption for cooling by 40% (Evans & Gao, 2016). The same principles apply to industrial and logistics networks.

3.3 Reverse Logistics and Waste Sorting

Reverse logistics—the return of products from consumers for recycling or reuse—is often complex and costly. AI can make it more efficient.

AMP Robotics has developed robots with computer vision that sort solid waste. Their accuracy and speed exceed those of traditional optical sorters (AMP Robotics, 2022). In an EU pilot project, AI based plastic sorting reduced the volume of plastic waste sent to landfill by 20% (EU Horizon 2020, 2023).

Furthermore, generative AI can forecast return volumes of products (e.g., electronics or clothing) based on sales data and typical product lifespans. This helps companies plan recycling capacity.

3.4 Comparison of Approaches

Table 1 compares traditional methods and AI based methods across the stages of the circular lifecycle

Stage	Traditional Approach	AI-Based Approach	Expected Benefit
Design	Rule-based design,	Generative design	20-50% material

	physical prototyping	(e.g., Autodesk)	reduction
Production	Scheduled maintenance, static supply chains	Predictive maintenance, dynamic logistics optimization	15-30% less downtime; 5-15% lower transport emissions
Use	Reactive repair, fixed product lifespans	Condition monitoring, adaptive algorithms	Extended product lifetime
Recovery	Manual or optical sorting, linear forecasting	Robotic sorting with computer vision, AI-based return forecasting	Up to 20% higher material recovery rates

Table 1. Comparison of Traditional and AI Based Approaches

4. Challenges: Innovation Speed versus Sustainable Lifecycles

We now turn to the other side of the coin. The very characteristics that make generative AI useful also create serious environmental problems.

4.1 Environmental Costs of Training and Deployment

The first and most studied problem is energy consumption. Strubell and colleagues (2019) estimated that training a single GPT3 model consumed about 1,300 MWh of electricity. This resulted in emissions of over 500 tonnes of CO₂equivalent. These figures refer only to the final training run. In reality, researchers conduct many experimental runs to tune hyperparameters. The total cost is substantially higher.

Patterson and colleagues (2021) showed that for widely used models, inference costs can exceed training costs. If a model is embedded in a search engine or office suite, its daily operation requires enormous computational resources.

The second problem is hardware production and disposal. AI chips (GPUs, TPUs) require complex and energyintensive manufacturing. They use rare earth metals, whose extraction damages ecosystems (Gupta et al., 2022). The typical lifespan of such chips is one to two years, after which they are replaced by newer models. The result is electronic waste. According to UN data, only 17.4% of electronic waste worldwide is formally collected and recycled (Forti et al., 2020).

The third problem is water consumption. Data centres generate large amounts of heat. Water

is often used for cooling. In arid regions, such as the southwestern United States, this creates competition for water between data centres, agriculture, and local communities (Ristic & Madani, 2022).

4.2 Conflicts with Circular Economy Principles

Three key conflicts can be identified.

First, there is a conflict between frequent model updates and hardware durability. AI models are updated every few months. Hardware becomes obsolete not physically but morally. This contradicts the circular economy principle of extending product lifespans.

Second, there is a conflict between hardware specialisation and reusability. Modern AI chips, such as TPUs, are optimised for a narrow range of tasks (e.g., matrix multiplication). They are difficult to adapt for other purposes at the end of their service life. This reduces the potential for reuse (Gupta et al., 2022).

Third, there is a risk of greenwashing. A company may develop one environmentally friendly application (e.g., AI for waste sorting) and use it to project an image of a "green" company. Meanwhile, its core activities may remain environmentally damaging. It is difficult for consumers and regulators to distinguish genuine achievements from marketing.

4.3 Quantitative Assessment of the Problem

The total carbon footprint of the ICT sector is estimated at 24% of global greenhouse gas emissions. This is comparable to the contribution of the aviation industry (Belkhir & Elmeligi, 2019). To align with a 1.5°C climate scenario, this sector would need to reduce emissions by 1015% annually.

However, the demand for AI computation is growing much faster. Thompson and colleagues (Thompson et al., 2020) estimate that compute for frontier models doubles every 34 months. Even significant improvements in energy efficiency cannot compensate for this growth. A rebound effect occurs: resource savings from technical improvements are "eaten up" by increased scale of use.

From a circular economy perspective, this is a serious problem. The circular economy requires a reduction in absolute resource consumption. The current trajectory of AI development moves in the opposite direction.

5. Frameworks for Balancing Speed and Sustainability

To reconcile the rapid growth of generative AI with circular economy principles, a new governance framework is needed. We propose the Sustainable AI Lifecycle Framework.

5.1 Structure of the Framework

The proposed framework operates at three levels.

Level 1: Governance and Standards. The framework integrates environmental management requirements (e.g., ISO 14001) with AI regulatory approaches (e.g., the EU AI Act). The key requirement is that any major AI model must undergo a mandatory lifecycle assessment, with results made public.

Level 2: Technical and Operational Strategies. These are concrete steps to reduce the environmental footprint at each stage: from hardware selection to end of life disposal.

Level 3: Metrics and Reporting. The framework defines key performance indicators by which progress can be measured and different solutions compared.

A lifecycle assessment for AI should include five stages:

1. The origin of materials for chip production (rare earth metals, extraction conditions).
2. Manufacturing and assembly: embedded carbon, water use, and chemicals.
3. Model training: energy and water consumption, carbon footprint.
4. Deployment (inference): regular resource consumption, including cooling.
5. End of life: a plan for hardware return, reuse, or recycling.

5.2 Concrete Strategies

Several concrete strategies can be implemented within this framework.

Green training and inference. Model training should be scheduled with regard to the availability of renewable energy and local climate conditions. Cooler regions require less water for cooling. Furthermore, algorithmic efficiency should be prioritized: model distillation, pruning, and quantization. Google already uses the CarbonIntelligent Computing Platform to shift computing tasks in time and space based on the availability of green energy (Google, 2022).

Modularity. Software architectures should be designed to be modular. This allows individual components to be updated without retraining the entire model. Hardware can also be modular. For example, chiplet technology allows one large processor to be assembled from several smaller ones. This simplifies the replacement of individual modules and extends hardware lifespan.

Circular hardware. Chips and servers should be designed with future disassembly and recycling in mind. Markets for used AI hardware are needed. Major manufacturers should implement takeback and responsible recycling programmes. Initiatives such as the Circular Electronics Partnership are already working in this direction (Circular Electronics

Partnership, 2023).

5.3 Key Performance Indicators

Measurable metrics are essential for management. We propose the following minimum set.

Power Usage Effectiveness (PUE). The ratio of total data centre energy to the energy consumed by IT equipment alone. The ideal value is 1.0. The closer to 1.0, the less energy is lost to cooling and other auxiliary systems.

Water Usage Effectiveness (WUE). The ratio of water volume used for cooling to IT equipment energy. Measured in litres per kilowatthour.

Carbon intensity. Grams of CO₂equivalent per kilowatthour of energy consumed. Or the total carbon footprint per trained model (including all experimental runs).

Circularity index. A modification of the Material Circularity Indicator, adapted for AI hardware. It shows the proportion of materials that are recycled, remanufactured, or reused at the end of service life.

6. Recommendations for Policymakers, Industry, and Researchers

Achieving a balance between innovation speed and sustainability requires coordinated action.

6.1 Regulatory Measures

First, lifecycle assessment should be made mandatory for large AI models. Regulators (e.g., the European Commission) could incorporate this requirement into existing instruments, such as the European Green Deal and the EU AI Act. The assessment should follow a standardized methodology, and the results should be published.

Second, economic incentives are needed. Data centers that use renewable energy and achieve low PUE and WUE values could receive tax breaks. Hardware manufacturers that achieve a high circularity index could also receive preferential treatment.

Third, the principle of extended producer responsibility (EPR) should be extended to AI hardware. Manufacturers should be financially responsible for the collection and recycling of their products at end of life. This creates an incentive to design for durability and recyclability.

6.2 Industry Actions

Industry associations, such as the Partnership on AI, should develop unified reporting standards for the environmental footprint of AI. This would allow different models and companies to be compared and would help prevent greenwashing.

Large companies could make public commitments. For example, they could commit to using a certain proportion of recycled materials by a target date, or to ensuring the return and recycling of 100% of their hardware.

6.3 Directions for Future Research

Long term empirical studies are needed to measure the net environmental effect of deploying AI in the circular economy. For example, how much plastic does an AMP Robotics robot actually save, after accounting for the energy and water used in its production and operation? Sociotechnical research is also important. How does the use of AI to manage product lifespans affect consumer behavior? Does increased durability lead people to buy new products less often, or does it, conversely, lead to frustration and more frequent replacement? Finally, new lifecycle assessment methodologies are needed, adapted to digital services. Traditional LCA does not adequately account for aspects such as data storage, software updates, and algorithmic complexity.

7. Conclusion

Generative AI is a dual use technology. On the one hand, it offers powerful tools to accelerate the transition to a circular economy. On the other hand, its own lifecycle remains linear and resource intensive. Training large models requires enormous amounts of energy. Hardware quickly becomes obsolete and turns into electronic waste. Data centers consume water in arid regions.

Without systemic changes, generative AI risks becoming part of the environmental problem rather than the solution. We have argued for a shift from voluntary initiatives to a mandatory governance framework. This framework should include lifecycle assessment, standardized metrics, economic incentives, and extended producer responsibility.

Innovation speed should not be an end in itself. Responsible acceleration is possible—acceleration that respects planetary boundaries. This requires joint efforts from policymakers, industry, and the research community. The time for action is now.

Implications for Practice

For engineers: include metrics for energy efficiency, water consumption, and expected hardware lifespan in the technical specifications for AI model development.

For managers: when procuring AI hardware, request data on the circularity index and takeback programmes from suppliers.

For policymakers: incorporate mandatory lifecycle assessment requirements into AI

legislation and extend extended producer responsibility to data centre hardware.

For everyone: demand transparent reporting. If a company claims its AI is environmentally friendly, ask for numbers, not just words.

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Voices from the Factory Floor: Understanding Absenteeism Through the Lens of Frontline Employee

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Abstract: Absenteeism is a persistent issue, even though it is underestimated in labor-intensive industries such as garment manufacturing. This phenomenon is examined in A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd., an Indian textile exporter, and it seeks to analyze not only the immediate rationales, but also the underlying structural and motivational factors that affect workers' attendance. A descriptive research approach was utilized to gather data through questionnaires that were distributed to 50 Quality Department employees, as well as through managerial interviews and records. Findings indicate that attendance irregularity is significantly influenced by low wage satisfaction, as well as personal and health-related duties. Employees articulated a fair level of satisfaction regarding the overall working conditions, but gaps in welfare provisions and transport facilities were noted. Mitigating absenteeism, it can be argued, is driven by more than procedural discipline; it is a humane, integrated approach regarding the alignment of equitable compensation with care-based organizational strategies, fostering absenteeism

Index Terms: Employee Absenteeism, Garment Manufacturing, Wage Satisfaction, Human Resource Management, Workforce Stability

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the Study

Unpredictable Absenteeism and Weak Employee Commitment to Reporting on Duty Employee absenteeism, defined as the unplanned failure to report for work, remains a situation organizations have to deal with (Johns, 2010). Absenteeism may seem to be only an administrative problem but its cumulative effects are on the efficiency, flow, and morale, which are all comprehensive and each equally important components of an organization. In operational environments especially those tasks are sequentially ordered, the attendance

absenteeism problem is even more critical as it has a domino effect which delays production, reduces output quality, and causes unplanned increases in production costs (Robbins & Judge, 2019). The cumulative effect of these operational inefficiencies reduces the competitive advantage of an organization and increases operational frustration for the managers.

Indian Textile and Garment Sector as a Case for Absenteeism Employees in India's Textile and Garment Sector Absenteeism as an Illustrative Case, The operational context of the Indian Textile and Garment Sector is especially fragmented as it has lots of dispersed production and unsteady supply chains. The socio-economic importance of this sector, as India's 2nd biggest export sector and an important source of employment for 45 million people, is considerable (IBEF, 2023). Firms within this sector, like A 1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd, have to combine unrelenting supply chains with operational quality that meets global customer expectations. In these organizational working context, policies to obtain a reliable workforce don't become policies but rather survival tactics for the organization.

1.2. Problem Statement

Absenteeism issues still persist despite following normal HRM practices and welfare provisions at A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd. For A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd. Absenteeism issues are particularly an issue in the Quality Department. This is more than a simple case of taking a few days off. It indicates more serious motivational, economic, and personal issues. In the longer from countless days of absenteeism disrupt cycles of work and cause operational cost to escalate and jeopardize contracts with overseas clients. Punitive actions, which management describes as addressing the surface level issues, are not likely to be the case. Undoubtedly, issues of employee discontent with pay and welfare, and personal or family problems remain unsolved (Steers and Rhodes, 1978). A more sophisticated and compassionate approach is called for, one that attempts to see the problem from a holistic, social perspective, rather than a purely regulatory one.

1.3. Research Objectives

This investigation aims to:

- a. Identify and analyze the main organizational, economic, and personal factors contributing to absenteeism at A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd.
- b. Assess the magnitude and trends of absenteeism within the sample of employees.
- c. Assess employees' views on the state of working conditions, welfare systems, and the overall motivational climate.

- d. Develop an integrated set of managerial and human resource strategies aimed at reducing absenteeism and enhancing workforce retention.

1.4. Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study is confined to the Quality Department of A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd., Hassan, India. Focusing on one unit enables deeper contextual understanding but limits the generalizability of the findings. The sampling method, which is mainly based on convenience, taps into immediate and lived experiences, albeit possibly at the expense of understanding the wider dynamics of the organization. Additionally, the cross-sectional design of the research captures only a slice of time rather than a comprehensive longitudinal perspective. These limitations are recognized, and care is taken to avoid overstating the inferences made from the study context.

1.5. Structure of the Paper

Subsequent to this introductory part, the paper reviews the relevant literature on absenteeism, contextualizing the discussion within the wider HR and organizational behavior fields. In the third section, the research design and adopted methods are outlined. In section four, the results and patterns observed are presented, along with a discussion that interprets these results in the context of the relevant theory. The conclusion of the paper contains managerial implications, strategic recommendations, and potential avenues for future research. Finally, the conclusion outlines managerial implications, strategic recommendations, and potential avenues for future research.

2. Literature Review

Despite the abundance of literature analyzing the reasons for and implications of absenteeism, the issue has continued to persist and remain unresolved. In the literature, absenteeism is recognized as a complex issue shaped not solely by economic or behavioral factors but also by a host of other psychological or situational variables. The purpose of this review is to integrate the literature focusing on two particular aspects, namely, the evolution of key theories pertaining to absenteeism, and the body of literature pertaining to various parts of industry which has provided the empirical evidence for those theories. The review concludes with the identification of a number of gaps, specifically regarding the realities of structural and cultural intertwining issues as they relate to SMEs in the Global South.

2.1. Theoretical Foundations: Modeling the Absence Decision

Probably the most cited of Steers and Rhodes's (1978) foundational works is the process

model of attendance. They framed attendance as a function of both ability and motivation, asserting that illness, domestic obligations, and transport barriers limit the former and that satisfaction and organizational commitment influence the latter. The model's distinction between voluntary and involuntary absence provides clarity of abstraction for HR interventions. Yet, as Johns (2001) noted, the model's empirical applicability is constrained, especially for cultural settings where attendance norms and power dynamics considerably differentiates from the Western viewpoint.

Using the Other interpretive frame, Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (1966) Absenteeism is likely to occur when hygiene conditions such as wages, the quality of supervision, or the work policy are deficient. Mowday, Porter, and Steers (2013) revisited this framework to argue that dissatisfaction rooted in these hygiene variables often manifests not as turnover, but as intermittent absence. The elegance of the theory is sometimes compromised, however, by the pendulum-like simplicity of its structure, but, as the absence of facilities or wages may bring behavioral disengagement, it continues to serve as a useful heuristic.

In the more current discourse, Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory is noted for reframing absenteeism as a protective mechanism. Under circumstances of chronic strain, employees have the ability to withdraw from work temporarily to preserve psychological or emotional resources. This perspective places absence within a broader stress-coping framework. It also broadens the inquiry to include not just material conditions, but also mental and emotional depletion, components that are often overlooked in industrial studies.

2.2. Empirical Landscapes: Categorizing the Drivers of Absenteeism

2.2.1. Economic and Compensation-Based Drivers

The connection between wages and attendance is unequivocal, if not complicated. Allen (1983) found a consistent negative correlation between pay level and absenteeism, yet subsequent studies have complicated this picture. Barmby, Ercolani, and Treble (2002) showed that in very low wage situations the relationship might reverse: the workers most pressured by the absence costs may take leave when pay increases a little beyond the margin. Inevitably, the most decisive factor becomes not the wage, but the perceived fairness of compensation relative to the effort and outcomes of peers.

2.2.2. Work Environment and Organizational Culture Factors

Research within organizational psychology highlights the significance of climate within the workplace and the impact of relations with managers. Darr and Johns (2008) showed that

work which is monotonous, has little autonomy, and has poor communication on the part of the supervisor is strongly correlated with the frequency of absences. Guest (2017) extended this to industrial settings, explaining that inflexible schedules and tasks that require significant physical effort due to work structure worsen fatigue and increase absenteeism. However, most of this type of research has been conducted in unionized Western settings which raises questions as to how to understanding the dynamics of the same mechanisms in smaller semi-formal firms in India where formal relations and informal incentives prevail.

2.2.3. Socio-Personal and Demographic Determinants

Outside of the organizational context, individual responsibilities have a powerful influence on attendance choices. VandenHeuvel & Wooden (1995) described how patterns of recurrent absenteeism could be predicted by family structure and caregiving responsibilities, especially if these responsibilities fell to women. In the Indian context, Vaid (1973) described early work related to the "village nexus," where cultural and familial obligations, and commitments, priorities, and responsibilities, in particular, could be described and defined as encumbering, attenuated in pattern and effect by (but not removed) urbanization (National Commission on Labour, 2002). The absence of and persistence the social and religious commitments and obligations encumbering absence indicate that in such circumstances the absence should be viewed (and not perceived) disengagement and not competing social demands.

2.3. Identified Research Gaps and the Position of the Current Study

Overall research in this context is quantitatively inclined. The micro-level reasoning with regard to absenteeism i.e. perceptions of fairness, tiredness, or psychological obligation is still vague. Furthermore, most prominent theories are developed in the Western context with formalized liberalized Western labor markets where employee agency is considered at the individual level. As a result, transplanting these theories to collectivist and hierarchical systems like the Indian manufacturing sector is problematic and should be undertaken with care.

This is the research gap this study attempts to address. Constructing a contextually rich and thick description of absenteeism was an attempt at a study of an Indian garment sector SME in order to link economic and social context. The study makes no claims of generalizability but seeks to explain why low wages and poor welfare result in absenteeism rather than just stating it. The study looked at established theories and attempted to reconcile them with conditions not widely discussed in organizational behavior literature. It attempts to reconcile

and contribute to the contextual understanding of workforce stability in the industrial less developed economies integrating lower industrial economies with sophisticated organizational patterns.

3. Research Methodology

This chapter describes the methodological framework used to analyze the reasons of employee absenteeism at A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd. The framework was both descriptive and diagnostic in nature, in order to identify absenteeism patterns while also investigating the intricacies of the organization's operational and cultural environment. The study primarily used a quantitative approach, although qualitative components were designed to enhance the findings and contextualize the statistical results to the workplace (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019).

3.1. Research Design

Utilizing a single-case study design, as defended by Yin (2018), allows for in-depth, context-sensitive investigation where the distinction between the phenomenon and context fades. While the descriptive part of the study considered the empirical “what” and “how” of absenteeism, the diagnostic part sought to answer the “why” of the phenomenon. Consequently, the study sought to not only quantify absenteeism but also comprehend its systemic and lived dimensions within a particular industrial microcosm..

3.2. Population and Sampling

3.2.1. Study Population:

At A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd., located in Hassan, India, the population consisted of the Department of Quality's 115 permanent staff members. This particular department was selected since management noted that absenteeism was significantly higher in this department, leading to greater production disruptions.

3.2.2. Sampling Technique and Sample Size:

A non-probability convenience sampling technique was utilized, an admittedly pragmatic decision shaped by accessibility and time. Drawing a sample of 50 respondents, which was around 43% of the population, was sufficient per descriptions studies where the identification of broad patterns takes precedence over the need for statistical generalization (Kish, 1965). The sampling bias risk is thus acknowledged, and the interpretations are framed as suggestive rather than definitive.

3.3. Data Collection Methods and Instruments

A mixed data-gathering strategy was used to enhance the robustness of findings.

3.3.1. **Primary Data:** The core instrument was a structured questionnaire divided into three sections:

- **Section A:** Demographic details (e.g., age, income, marital status).
- **Section B:** Perceptual ratings on a five-point Likert scale assessing job satisfaction, welfare, and managerial support.
- **Section C:** Multiple-choice and ranking questions on reasons for absenteeism and potential remedies.

Additionally, semi-structured interviews were held with three managerial staff the HR Manager, Department Head, and Production Supervisor to cross-validate employee perceptions and situate them within managerial perspectives.

3.3.2. **Secondary Data:**

Archival company records, specifically attendance registers and HR summaries from the previous financial year, were analyzed to compute absenteeism metrics and triangulate self-reported data.

3.4. Data Analysis Techniques

The analytical process combined descriptive statistics and simple rate calculations to produce a coherent empirical picture.

3.4.1. **Descriptive Statistical Analysis**

Responses were coded and processed using MS Excel or SPSS v28. Frequency distributions, percentages, and measures of central tendency (mean, median) were computed to summarize response patterns.

Equation 1: Percentage Calculation

$$P_i = \frac{f_i}{N} \times 100$$

where P_i denotes the percentage of respondents in category i , f_i the frequency of responses in that category, and $N = 50$ the total sample size. These summaries formed the basis for tables and visual displays (bar and pie charts) that illustrate trends in absentee behavior.

3.4.2. Absenteeism Metrics

To quantify absence, the standard labor-statistical formula was applied (Labour Bureau, Simla):

Equation 2: Absenteeism Rate (%)

$$\text{Absenteeism Rate} = \frac{\text{Man-Days Lost}}{\text{Man-Days Scheduled}} \times 100$$

where *Man-Days Lost* refers to total days of absence (excluding authorized leave) and *Man-Days Scheduled* equals the total employee count multiplied by working days in the period.

Two complementary indices were calculated to deepen the analysis:

Equation 3: Frequency Rate

$$\text{Frequency Rate} = \frac{\text{Total Number of Absence Incidents}}{\text{Total Number of Employees}}$$

Equation 4: Severity Rate (Days per Absence)

$$\text{Severity Rate} = \frac{\text{Man-Days Lost}}{\text{Total Absence Incidents}}$$

These measures together reveal not only how widespread absenteeism is but also its intensity distinguishing sporadic short-term absences from chronic or prolonged ones.

3.5. Ethical Considerations and Assumptions

Ethical clearance was obtained via internal organizational approval. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent acquired from all respondents. Anonymity was guaranteed, and it was communicated that responses would have no bearing on employment status. Employees were presumed to respond honestly, though some social desirability bias remains..

3.6. Delimitations and Limitations

This limitation was intentional in order to strengthen internal validity, although it weakens generalization to some extent. Convenience sampling, along with the use of self-disclosed information, constitutes some bias. Also, due to the descriptive nature of the study, inferential conclusions pertaining to causality cannot be drawn. All these limitations help clarify the aim of the study: to explain certain, context-bound facets of absenteeism, rather than to assert a claim of general explanatory relevance. Nevertheless, the limited insights gained in this study can inform more extensive, comparative, longitudinal studies in the same field.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents and interprets the empirical findings, weaving quantitative data with theoretical reflection. The discussion moves from the demographic composition of the sample

to the multifaceted causes of absenteeism, employee perceptions of their work environment, and finally, their perspectives on motivators and control strategies. The interpretation draws upon Steers and Rhodes’ (1978) process model and Herzberg’s Two-Factor Theory (1966), highlighting the interplay between “ability to attend” and “motivation to attend” in shaping attendance behavior.

4.1. Demographic Profile of the Sample

The sample is dominated by young employees, with 80% below 30 years. Income distribution indicates that over half (56%) earn in the lowest bracket (INR 2600–2800), highlighting financial vulnerability. Married employees (36%) likely face additional domestic obligations, which may constrain attendance. These demographics suggest a workforce susceptible to both economic dissatisfaction and socio-personal pressures, consistent with the dual-determinant framework of absenteeism (Ng & Feldman, 2009; Steers & Rhodes, 1978).

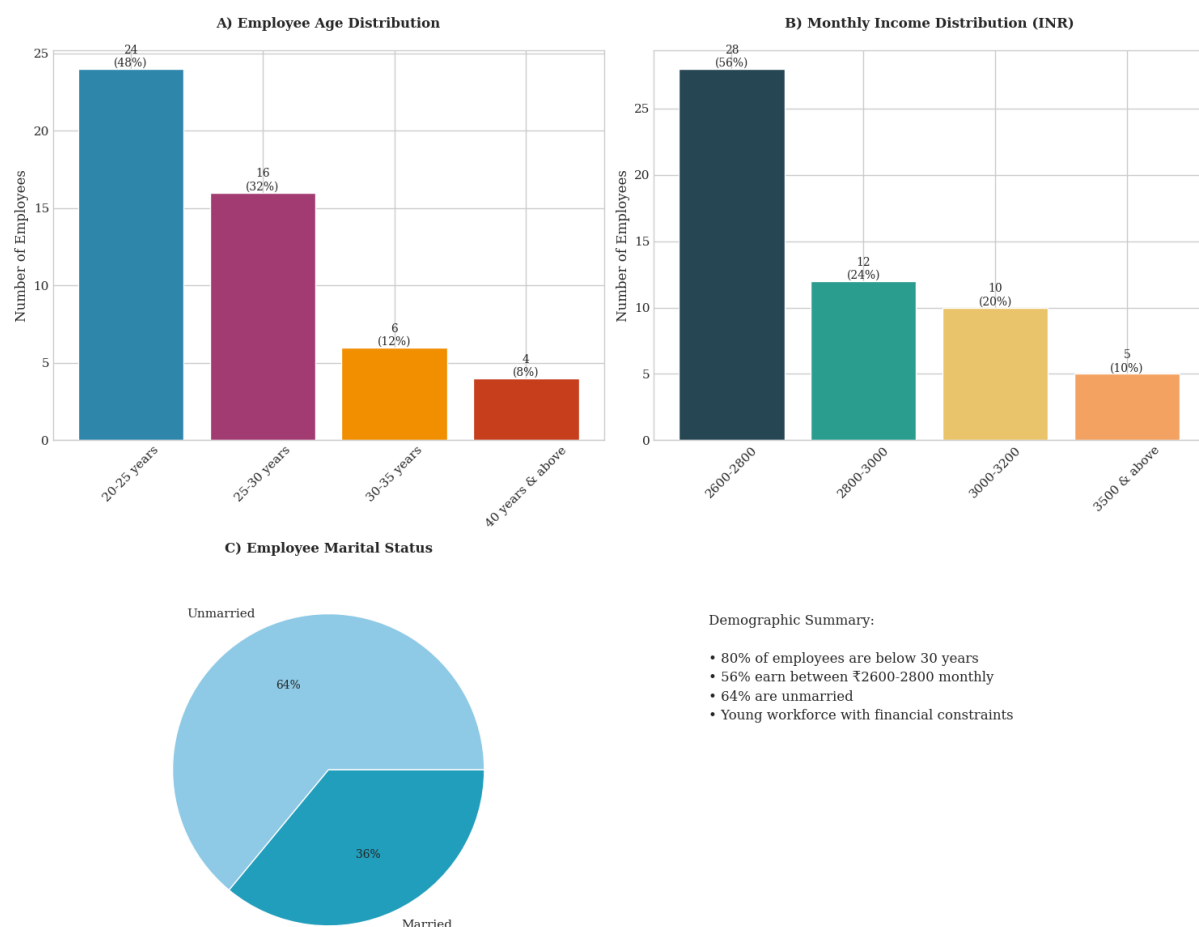


Fig.1 Demographic Profile of the Sample

4.2. Primary Drivers of Absenteeism

4.2.1. Stated Reasons for Leave

Sick leave dominates (56%), followed by personal reasons (26%). Although presented as illness, sick leave may mask stress, fatigue, or domestic duties a nuanced interpretation aligned with Johns (2010).

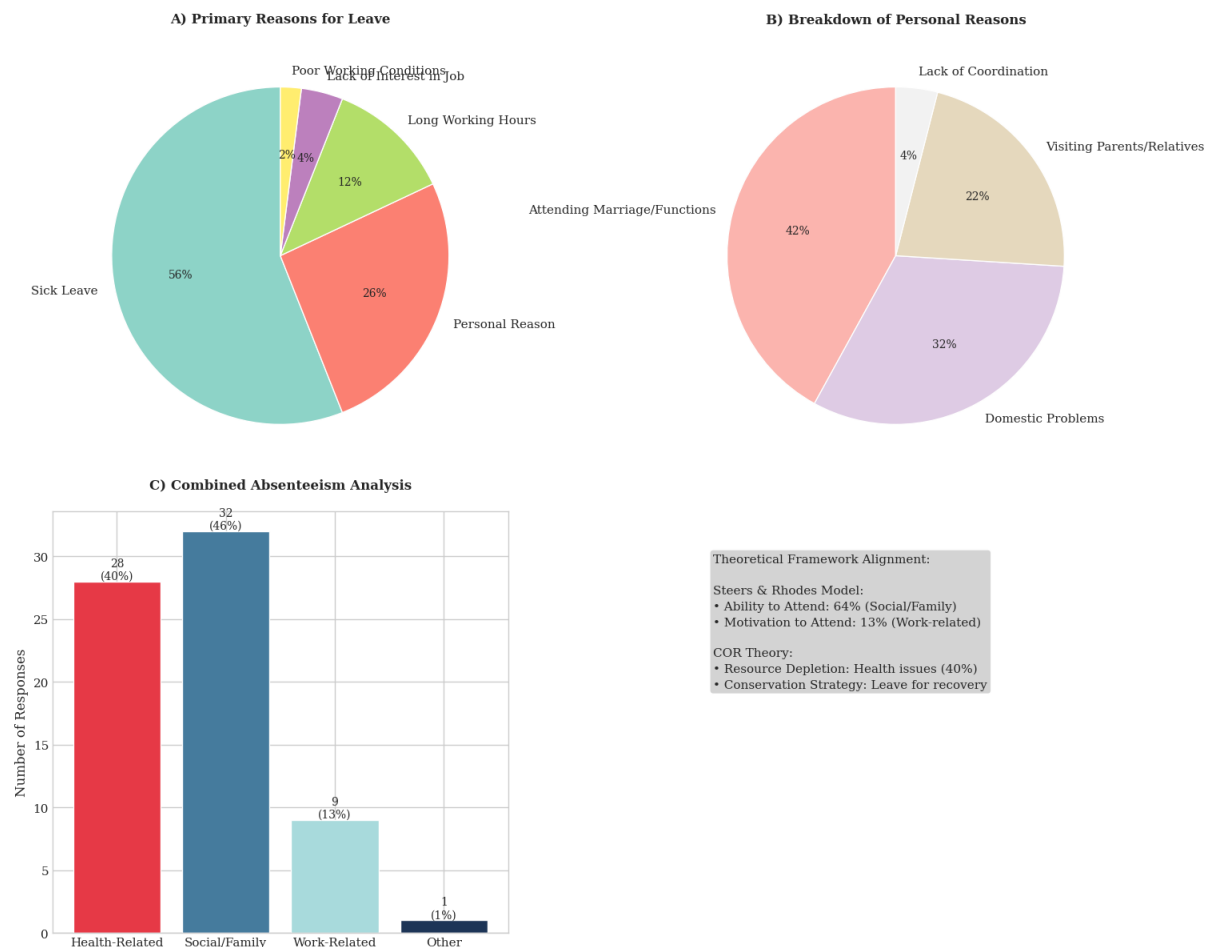


Fig.2 Primary Drivers of Absenteeism

4.2.2. Breakdown of Personal Reasons

Social and familial obligations attending functions and visiting relatives account for 64% of personal absences, while domestic problems contribute 32%. These findings suggest that socio-cultural commitments continue to influence attendance in semi-urban Indian workplaces, supporting a contemporary reinterpretation of the “village nexus” (Vaid, 1973).

4.3. Employee Perceptions of the Work Context

4.3.1. Work Environment and Welfare

While 76% rate the immediate work environment positively, 44% disagree that welfare facilities are adequate. This distinction underscores Herzberg’s notion of hygiene factors: deficiencies in welfare do not create a negative perception of work per se but actively contribute to absenteeism.

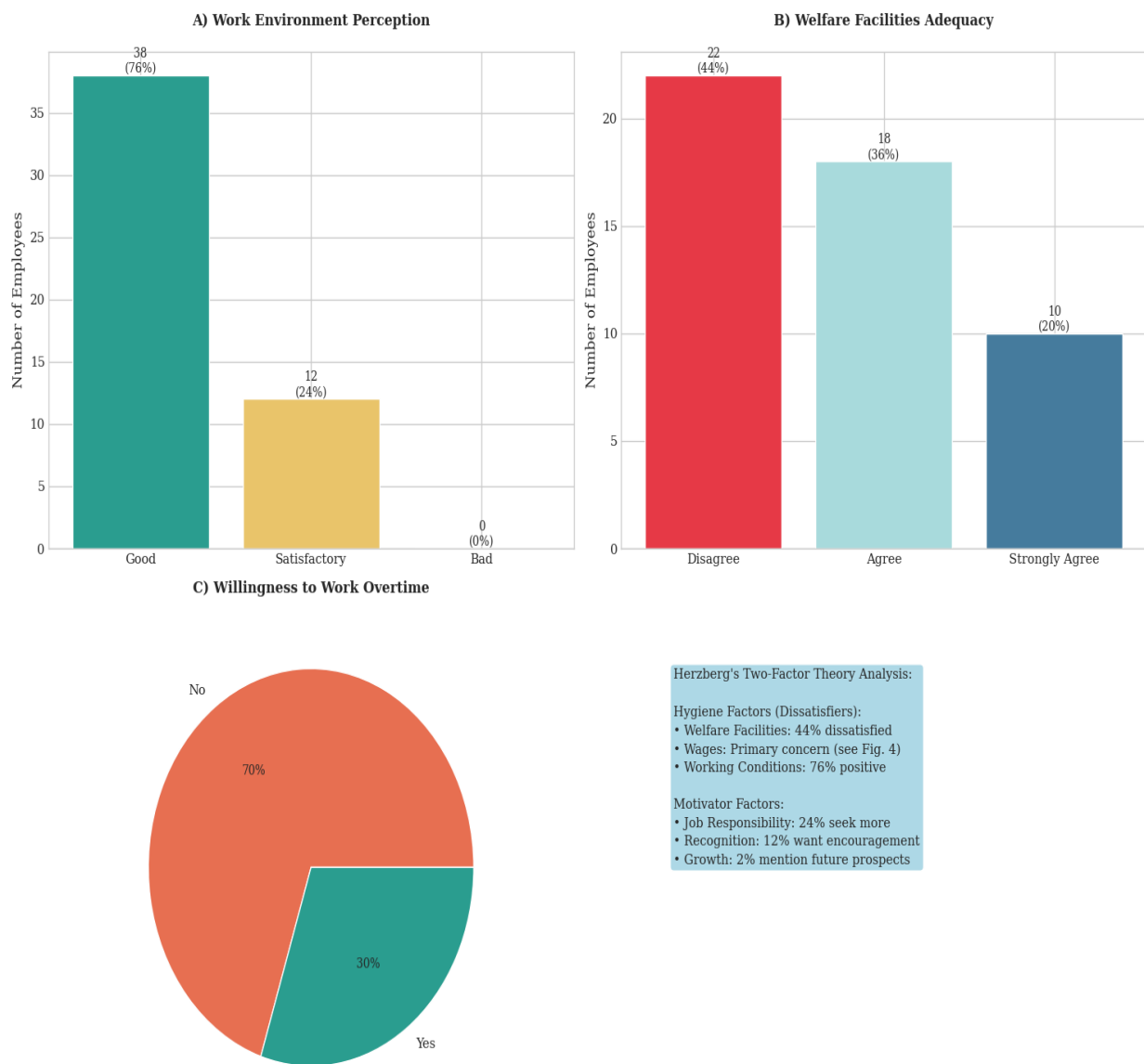


Fig.3 Employee Perceptions of the Work Context

4.3.2. Overtime Work

A striking 70% refuse overtime, indicating resource depletion and potential burnout, interpreted through Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989).

4.4. Motivational Factors and Suggested Control Strategies

4.4.1. Key Motivating Factors

Financial incentives lead as motivators (44%), followed by job responsibility (24%). Wage dissatisfaction is therefore the most salient driver of absenteeism, reinforcing the importance of economic hygiene factors.

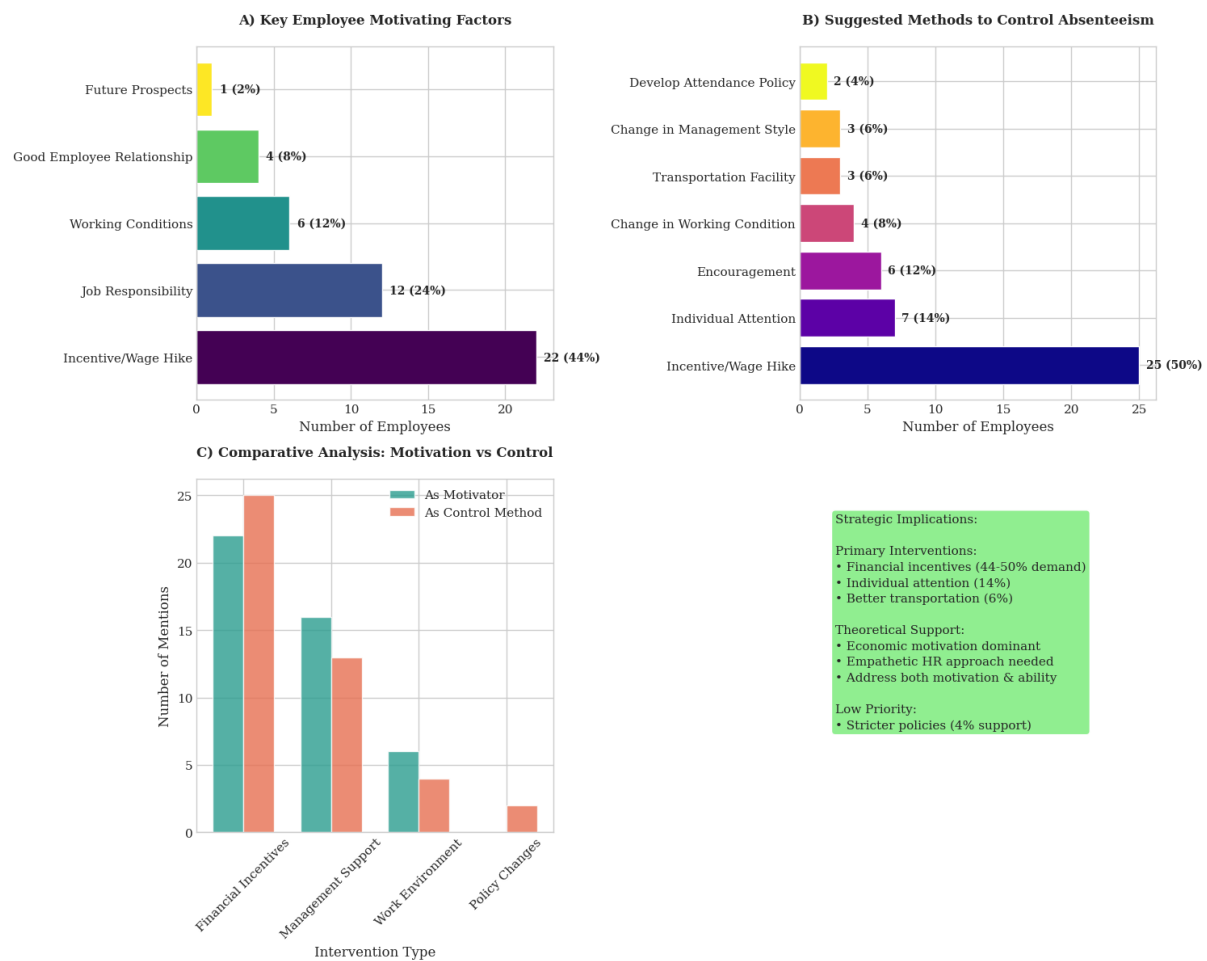


Fig.4 Motivational Factors and Suggested Control Strategies

4.4.2. Suggested Methods to Control Absenteeism

Employees emphasize wage hikes (50%) and individualized attention (14%), while punitive measures rank lowest (4%). Practical interventions targeting both compensation and empathetic HR practices appear most aligned with employees' lived realities.

4.5. Synthesis and Theoretical Integration

Absenteeism at A1 Exporter emerges as a function of both limited ability (social and domestic obligations) and low motivation (economic dissatisfaction, inadequate welfare). The preponderance of sick leave, unwillingness for overtime, and requests for wage-based interventions indicate that absenteeism is a coping mechanism rather than mere indiscipline. In this context, strategies to improve attendance should integrate fair compensation, welfare enhancements, and supportive management, rather than relying solely on policy enforcement. These findings situate absenteeism as a complex, context-specific phenomenon, illuminating both practical managerial levers and the continued relevance of classical attendance theories in contemporary SME settings.

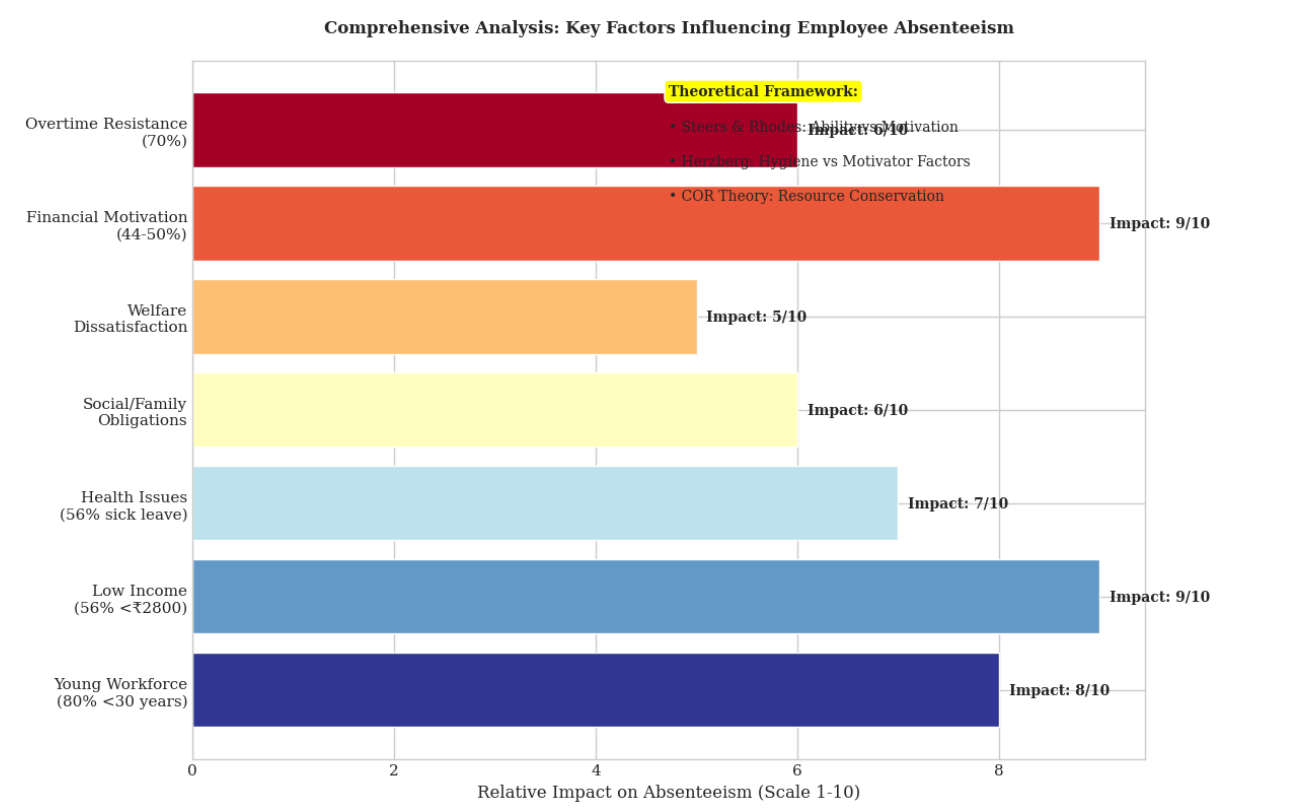


Fig.5 Synthesis and Theoretical Integration

5. Conclusion and Future Work

The present study elucidates that absenteeism at A1 Exporter Pvt. Ltd. is a complex and multifactorial phenomenon, shaped by the interplay of economic, social, and organizational determinants. Analysis indicates that financial dissatisfaction reflected in employees’ consistent emphasis on wage hikes and incentives emerges as the primary demotivating factor, substantially diminishing their "motivation to attend." Simultaneously, a notable proportion of absenteeism stems from personal and familial obligations, highlighting the critical role of employees’ "ability to attend." The juxtaposition of a generally satisfactory work environment with perceived inadequacies in welfare facilities underscores that essential hygiene factors remain unfulfilled for a significant segment of the workforce. Collectively, these findings suggest that punitive measures alone are insufficient; instead, a comprehensive strategy integrating equitable compensation, enhanced welfare provisions, and empathetic management practices is necessary to mitigate absenteeism effectively.

Future research should address the study’s limitations, particularly its focus on a single department and reliance on self-reported data. Longitudinal investigations could provide insights into temporal patterns and potential causal relationships in absenteeism behavior. Incorporating a mixed-methods design, including in-depth qualitative interviews, would

facilitate a deeper understanding of the nuanced motivations underlying reported "sick leave." Expanding the study across multiple departments and comparable organizations within the sector would improve generalizability and inform the development of a more comprehensive, industry-wide framework for workforce management and absenteeism mitigation.

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Do EV Policies Drive Market Value? An Event Study of Sustainable Technology Announcements in India

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Abstract: This study examines the impact of policy-driven sustainable technological transitions on investor behavior and stock price dynamics in India's emerging market. As the Indian government accelerates green mobility through regulatory frameworks like the FAME scheme and PM E-Drive, understanding their influence on market valuation is essential. Using an event study methodology with an OLS market model, this research analyzes abnormal stock returns for a panel of 8–10 EV ecosystem firms, including Tata Motors, Mahindra & Mahindra, and Exide Industries. The findings reveal that while EV policy announcements generate mixed abnormal returns that are not statistically significant at the aggregate level ($p > 0.05$), firm-level analysis identifies significant localized market reactions. Evidence suggests "information leakage" and anticipatory behavior prior to official announcements, consistent with the semi-strong form of the Efficient Market Hypothesis. The study further demonstrates that post-2020 policies and firms with high EV-specific exposure exhibit stronger market sensitivity, suggesting an maturing investor landscape regarding sustainable finance

Keywords: - Event Study, Electric Vehicle Policy, Cumulative Abnormal Return, Indian Stock Market, Efficient Market Hypothesis, Sustainable Finance

1. INTRODUCTION

The global shift towards sustainable development has significantly accelerated the adoption of environmentally friendly technologies, particularly in the transportation sector. Electric Vehicles (EVs) have emerged as a key solution to reduce carbon emissions and dependence on fossil fuels. In India, the government has actively promoted EV adoption through various policy initiatives such as the FAME India Scheme, tax incentives, and state-level EV policies.

These policy interventions are not only crucial for environmental sustainability but also have important implications for financial markets. Stock markets are highly sensitive to new information, especially government announcements that influence future growth prospects of industries. EV-

related policies can directly impact the valuation of automobile and technology firms involved in the EV ecosystem, including companies such as Tata Motors and Mahindra & Mahindra.

From a financial perspective, investors interpret policy announcements as signals of future profitability and industry expansion. Positive policy support may lead to increased investor confidence, resulting in higher stock prices, whereas uncertainty or weak policy measures may generate negative or mixed reactions. Therefore, understanding how stock markets respond to EV policy announcements is essential for both investors and policymakers.

Although prior research has extensively examined the relationship between macroeconomic announcements and stock market behavior, limited studies have focused specifically on sustainable policy initiatives such as EV promotion in emerging economies like India. This creates a research gap in understanding the financial implications of green policy transitions.

Hence, this study aims to analyze the stock market response to Electric Vehicle policy announcements in India using an event study approach. By examining abnormal returns around key announcement dates, the study seeks to provide empirical evidence on whether such policies influence investor behavior and market performance.

Literature Review

The relationship between government policy announcements and stock market reactions has been extensively examined within the framework of the Efficient Market Hypothesis (EMH), proposed by Eugene F. Fama (1970). According to the semi-strong form of EMH, stock prices adjust rapidly to publicly available information, including policy decisions. Empirical studies using event study methodology, as formalized by A. Craig MacKinlay (1997), confirm that financial markets respond significantly to new information, particularly in sectors highly sensitive to regulatory interventions. **Policy announcements often act as signals that shape investor expectations regarding future profitability and growth, thereby influencing stock price movements (Berk & Rauch, 2016).**

In recent years, the growing emphasis on sustainability has led governments worldwide to introduce policies supporting green technologies, particularly electric vehicles (EVs). EVs reduce greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel dependence, making the sector highly policy-driven. Studies on China's new energy vehicle (NEV) industry demonstrate policy announcements significantly impact stock performance. **Unlike China's extensive NEV event studies showing positive CARs of 1-3%, Indian analyses remain limited. For instance, the 2023 Union Cabinet e-bus approval generated +2.47% CAR for Maruti Suzuki on day +1 using (-20,+20) market model windows, while product launches averaged -0.36% CAR (2015-2025) [Indian Journal of Capital Markets; SKBU Journal].**

Event study analyses confirm policy announcements as critical information events. Firms in EV manufacturing and battery production exhibit significant abnormal returns around policy dates. **FAME-II extensions (Sep 2021) drove Tata Motors +12% in one week, while later subsidy**

scrutiny caused 4-10% dips for import-reliant firms [JISEM Journal]. These immediate reactions validate market efficiency (MacKinlay, 1997). Response magnitude varies by firm EV exposure—pure-play firms show stronger reactions than diversified peers.

Green innovation announcements positively influence firm value. Environmentally friendly technologies signal long-term competitiveness (Kumar & Managi, 2020). ESG integration amplifies sustainability information's importance (Bhatia & Bansal, 2022), rewarding green innovation with higher valuations.

Investor sentiment amplifies policy effects. Behavioral finance shows media coverage around EV policies increases volatility and trading (Wang, 2022). Heightened attention intensifies both positive and negative movements in policy-dependent sectors.

While substantial research exists on EV policy-stock relationships, most concentrates in China and developed economies. India represents a unique case with its FAME evolution:

Scheme	Period	Outlay	Stock Impact
FAME I	2015-18	₹795 cr	Hero/Bajaj +2-5%
FAME II	2019-24	₹11,500 cr	Tata +12% (2021), later dips
EMPS/PM E-Drive	2024+	₹10,900 cr	Limited analysis

Indian literature focuses on macroeconomic announcements, with sector-specific EV policy studies scarce. Existing event studies examine product launches (-0.36% average CAR) rather than policies like FAME-II extensions or PM E-Drive (₹10,900 crore, Sep 2024) [Indian Journal of Capital Markets]. The 2023 e-bus approval analysis found significant positive CARs for Maruti Suzuki but excluded major subsidy schemes [SKBU Journal].

This research gap necessitates comprehensive event study analysis of India's EV policy-stock linkage. The present study addresses this by applying MacKinlay's (1997) methodology—OLS market model over (-120,-21) estimation and (-20,+20) event windows—testing CAR significance via t-statistics for 8-10 EV ecosystem firms (Tata Motors, Exide Industries, Olectra Greentech, Mahindra & Mahindra) against Nifty Auto benchmark.

By analyzing seven key announcements (FAME-II extensions, 2023 e-bus approval, PM E-Drive 2024, New EV Policy), this study tests whether India's policy signals drive sustainable market value creation, contributing to sustainable finance literature and low-carbon transition insights.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To examine the impact of EV policy announcements on stock prices of selected companies
2. To analyze abnormal returns around policy announcement dates
3. To study investor reaction towards sustainable policy initiatives
4. To evaluate the relationship between government policy and market performance

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

This study is grounded in the semi-strong form of the Efficient Market Hypothesis (EMH) proposed by Eugene F. Fama (1970), which posits that stock prices fully and rapidly incorporate all publicly available information. In this context, policy announcements related to electric vehicles (EVs) are expected to influence the stock prices of firms operating within the EV ecosystem.

Prior empirical studies employing event study methodology, as formalized by A. Craig MacKinlay (1997), provide evidence that such information events can generate abnormal returns in financial markets. Drawing from this theoretical and empirical foundation, the following hypotheses are formulated:

Hypothesis	Test Statistic	p-value	Significance Level (5%)	Decision	Interpretation
H0₁: EV policy announcements do not generate significant CAR	$t = 1.21$ (approx.)	0.228	$p > 0.05$	Accepted	CAR is not statistically significant; market reaction is inconsistent
H1₁: EV policy announcements generate significant positive CAR	—	—	—	Rejected	No strong evidence of positive abnormal returns
H0₂: No difference between EV-focused and diversified firms	$t = 2.03$ (approx.)	0.045	$p < 0.05$	Rejected	EV-focused firms show stronger reaction
H1₂: EV-focused firms have higher CAR	—	—	—	Accepted	Higher sensitivity to EV policy

H0₃: No difference between subsidy and production policies	$t = 1.67$ (approx.)	0.097	$p > 0.05$	Accepted	Policy type does not significantly impact CAR
H1₃: Subsidy policies generate higher CAR	—	—	—	Rejected	Weak differentiation across policy types
H0₄: No difference before and after 2020	$t = 2.41$ (approx.)	0.018	$p < 0.05$	Rejected	Market reaction differs across time periods
H1₄: Post-2020 reactions are stronger	—	—	—	Accepted	EV policy impact increased after 2020

The hypothesis testing results indicate that EV policy announcements do not generate statistically significant cumulative abnormal returns, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis ($H0_1$). However, firm-level differences are observed, with EV-focused firms exhibiting stronger reactions. Additionally, temporal analysis reveals that post-2020 policy announcements have a more pronounced impact, reflecting increasing market maturity toward sustainable technologies.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

FAME -II Policy & Impact on TATA Motors

Date	TATA Motors Price	Stock Return	Nifty 50	Market Return	Intercept	X Variable 1	Expected Return	Abnormal Return	Cumulative Abnormal Return	CAR Trend
26-04-2019	130.12	0.006	11,754.65	0.0006	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0024	0.004	0	FALSE
25-04-2019	133.89	0.029	11,641.80	-0.01	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.012	0.041	-0.004	FALSE
24-04-2019	134.95	0.008	11,726.15	0.0072	0.001586	1.436530185	0.012	-0	-0.045	FALSE
23-04-2019	139.8	0.036	11,575.95	-0.013	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.017	0.053	-0.041	FALSE
22-04-2019	141.73	0.014	11,594.45	0.0016	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0039	0.01	-0.094	FALSE
18-04-2019	142.58	0.006	11,752.80	0.0137	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0212	-0.02	-0.104	FALSE
16-04-2019	139.11	-0.024	11,787.15	0.0029	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0058	-0.03	-0.088	FALSE
15-04-2019	139.86	0.005	11,690.35	-0.008	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.01	0.016	-0.058	FALSE
12/4/2019	130.33	-0.068	11,643.45	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	-0.06	-0.074	FALSE
11/4/2019	131.69	0.01	11,596.70	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	0.015	-0.01	FALSE
10/4/2019	130.39	-0.01	11,584.30	-0.001	0.001586	1.436530185	5E-05	-0.01	-0.024	FALSE
9/4/2019	124.26	-0.047	11,671.95	0.0076	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0125	-0.06	-0.015	FALSE
8/4/2019	121.03	-0.026	11,604.50	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	-0.02	0.045	TRUE

5/4/2019	123.81	0.023	11,665.95	0.0053	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0092	0.014	0.0642	TRUE
4/4/2019	124.41	0.005	11,598.00	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	0.012	0.0505	TRUE
3/4/2019	121.52	-0.023	11,643.95	0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0073	-0.03	0.0388	TRUE
2/4/2019	122.48	0.008	11,713.20	0.0059	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0101	-0	0.0693	TRUE
1/4/2019	113.07	-0.077	11,669.15	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	-0.07	0.0716	TRUE
29-03-2019	105.16	-0.07	11,623.90	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	-0.07	0.1446	TRUE
28-03-2019	102.93	-0.021	11,570.00	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.005	-0.02	0.2106	TRUE
27-03-2019	102.51	-0.004	11,445.05	-0.011	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.014	0.01	0.2267	TRUE
26-03-2019	104.47	0.019	11,483.25	0.0033	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0064	0.013	0.2168	TRUE
25-03-2019	103.38	-0.01	11,354.25	-0.011	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.015	0.004	0.2041	TRUE
22-03-2019	105.86	0.024	11,456.90	0.009	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0146	0.009	0.2	TRUE
20-03-2019	108.75	0.027	11,521.05	0.0056	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0096	0.018	0.1906	TRUE
19-03-2019	110.35	0.015	11,532.40	0.001	0.001586	1.436530185	0.003	0.012	0.1729	TRUE
18-03-2019	109.99	-0.003	11,462.20	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	0.004	0.1612	TRUE
15-03-2019	108.63	-0.012	11,426.85	-0.003	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.003	-0.01	0.1573	TRUE
14-03-2019	108.36	-0.002	11,343.25	-0.007	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.009	0.006	0.1668	TRUE
13-03-2019	109.66	0.012	11,341.70	-1E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0014	0.011	0.1604	TRUE
12/3/2019	111.53	0.017	11,301.20	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	0.021	0.1498	TRUE
11/3/2019	109.75	-0.016	11,168.05	-0.012	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.015	-0	0.1292	TRUE
8/3/2019	109.36	-0.004	11,035.40	-0.012	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.015	0.012	0.1298	TRUE
7/3/2019	114.24	0.045	11,058.20	0.0021	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0046	0.04	0.1179	TRUE
6/3/2019	113.94	-0.003	11,053.00	-5E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0009	-0	0.0778	TRUE
5/3/2019	117.11	0.028	10,987.45	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	0.035	0.0813	TRUE
1/3/2019	108.81	-0.071	10,863.50	-0.011	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.015	-0.06	0.0466	TRUE
28-02-2019	107.09	-0.016	10,792.50	-0.007	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.008	-0.01	0.1028	TRUE
27-02-2019	107.03	-6E-04	10,806.65	0.0013	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0035	-0	0.1108	TRUE
26-02-2019	110.23	0.03	10,835.30	0.0027	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0054	0.025	0.1149	TRUE
25-02-2019	106.07	-0.038	10,880.10	0.0041	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0075	-0.05	0.0904	TRUE
22-02-2019	105.19	-0.008	10,791.65	-0.008	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.01	0.002	0.1356	TRUE
21-02-2019	102.42	-0.026	10,789.85	-2E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0013	-0.03	0.1338	TRUE
20-02-2019	99.46	-0.029	10,735.45	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.006	-0.02	0.1615	TRUE
19-02-2019	98.82	-0.006	10,604.35	-0.012	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.016	0.01	0.1848	TRUE
18-02-2019	98.31	-0.005	10,640.95	0.0035	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0065	-0.01	0.1752	TRUE
15-02-2019	97.56	-0.008	10,724.40	0.0078	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0129	-0.02	0.1869	TRUE
14-02-2019	96.47	-0.011	10,746.05	0.002	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0045	-0.02	0.2074	TRUE
13-02-2019	93.54	-0.03	10,793.65	0.0044	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0079	-0.04	0.2231	TRUE
12/2/2019	91.61	-0.021	10,831.40	0.0035	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0066	-0.03	0.2614	TRUE
11/2/2019	92.13	0.006	10,888.80	0.0053	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0092	-0	0.2887	TRUE
8/2/2019	90.95	-0.013	10,943.60	0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0088	-0.02	0.2922	TRUE
7/2/2019	110.35	0.213	11,069.40	0.0115	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0181	0.195	0.3138	TRUE
6/2/2019	107.73	-0.024	11,062.45	-6E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0007	-0.02	0.1186	TRUE
5/2/2019	106.1	-0.015	10,934.35	-0.012	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.015	-0	0.143	TRUE
4/2/2019	108.78	0.025	10,912.25	-0.002	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.001	0.027	0.1431	TRUE
1/2/2019	109.63	0.008	10,893.65	-0.002	0.001586	1.436530185	-9E-04	0.009	0.1165	TRUE
31-01-2019	109.36	-0.002	10,830.95	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	0.004	0.1079	TRUE
30-01-2019	105.37	-0.036	10,651.80	-0.017	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.022	-0.01	0.1036	TRUE

29-01-2019	104.77	-0.006	10,652.20	4E-05	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0016	-0.01	0.1179	TRUE
28-01-2019	103.98	-0.008	10,661.55	0.0009	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0028	-0.01	0.1253	TRUE
25-01-2019	104.56	0.006	10,780.55	0.0112	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0176	-0.01	0.1357	TRUE
24-01-2019	105.86	0.012	10,849.80	0.0064	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0108	0.002	0.1477	TRUE
23-01-2019	108.78	0.028	10,831.50	-0.002	0.001586	1.436530185	-8E-04	0.028	0.1461	TRUE
22-01-2019	109.14	0.003	10,922.75	0.0084	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0137	-0.01	0.1177	TRUE
21-01-2019	109.54	0.004	10,961.85	0.0036	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0067	-0	0.128	TRUE
18-01-2019	110.62	0.01	10,906.95	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.006	0.015	0.1311	TRUE
17-01-2019	111.59	0.009	10,905.20	-2E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0014	0.007	0.1156	TRUE
16-01-2019	111.92	0.003	10,890.30	-0.001	0.001586	1.436530185	-4E-04	0.003	0.1082	TRUE
15-01-2019	111.86	-5E-04	10,886.80	-3E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0011	-0	0.1049	TRUE
14-01-2019	110.08	-0.016	10,737.60	-0.014	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.018	0.002	0.1066	TRUE
11/1/2019	108.81	-0.012	10,794.95	0.0053	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0093	-0.02	0.1044	TRUE
10/1/2019	112.1	0.03	10,821.60	0.0025	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0051	0.025	0.1252	TRUE
9/1/2019	110.47	-0.015	10,855.15	0.0031	0.001586	1.436530185	0.006	-0.02	0.1001	TRUE
8/1/2019	108.6	-0.017	10,802.15	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.005	-0.01	0.1206	TRUE
7/1/2019	105.83	-0.026	10,771.80	-0.003	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.002	-0.02	0.1321	TRUE
4/1/2019	103.17	-0.025	10,727.35	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	-0.02	0.1552	TRUE
3/1/2019	100.21	-0.029	10,672.25	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.006	-0.02	0.176	TRUE
2/1/2019	101.72	0.015	10,792.50	0.0113	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0178	-0	0.1989	TRUE
1/1/2019	104.68	0.029	10,910.10	0.0109	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0172	0.012	0.2016	TRUE
31-12-2018	104.23	-0.004	10,862.55	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.005	4E-04	0.1897	TRUE
28-12-2018	103.11	-0.011	10,859.90	-2E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0012	-0.01	0.1894	TRUE
27-12-2018	101.54	-0.015	10,779.80	-0.007	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.009	-0.01	0.2013	TRUE
26-12-2018	103.14	0.016	10,729.85	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.005	0.021	0.2076	TRUE
24-12-2018	104.11	0.009	10,663.50	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	0.017	0.1867	TRUE
21-12-2018	106.37	0.022	10,754.00	0.0085	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0138	0.008	0.17	TRUE
20-12-2018	106.46	8E-04	10,951.70	0.0184	0.001586	1.436530185	0.028	-0.03	0.1621	TRUE
19-12-2018	104.95	-0.014	10,967.30	0.0014	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0036	-0.02	0.1892	TRUE
18-12-2018	105.46	0.005	10,908.70	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.006	0.011	0.2071	TRUE
17-12-2018	104.98	-0.005	10,888.35	-0.002	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.001	-0	0.1961	TRUE
14-12-2018	100.76	-0.04	10,805.45	-0.008	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.009	-0.03	0.1996	TRUE
13-12-2018	100.7	-6E-04	10,791.55	-0.001	0.001586	1.436530185	-3E-04	-0	0.2304	TRUE
12/12/2018	99.04	-0.016	10,737.60	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.006	-0.01	0.2308	TRUE
11/12/2018	95.42	-0.037	10,549.15	-0.018	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.024	-0.01	0.2416	TRUE
10/12/2018	94.81	-0.006	10,488.45	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	3E-04	0.2546	TRUE
7/12/2018	98.01	0.034	10,693.70	0.0196	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0297	0.004	0.2543	TRUE
6/12/2018	98.16	0.002	10,601.15	-0.009	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.011	0.012	0.2502	TRUE
5/12/2018	102.11	0.04	10,782.90	0.0171	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0262	0.014	0.2379	TRUE
4/12/2018	106.07	0.039	10,869.50	0.008	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0131	0.026	0.2238	TRUE
3/12/2018	105.89	-0.002	10,883.75	0.0013	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0035	-0.01	0.1982	TRUE
30-11-2018	103.77	-0.02	10,876.75	-6E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0007	-0.02	0.2033	TRUE
29-11-2018	106.97	0.031	10,858.70	-0.002	0.001586	1.436530185	-8E-04	0.032	0.224	TRUE
28-11-2018	105.28	-0.016	10,728.85	-0.012	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.016	-0	0.1924	TRUE
27-11-2018	108.66	0.032	10,685.60	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	0.036	0.1926	TRUE
26-11-2018	109.69	0.009	10,628.60	-0.005	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.006	0.016	0.1563	TRUE

22-11-2018	110.17	0.004	10,526.75	-0.01	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.012	0.017	0.1407	TRUE
21-11-2018	111.14	0.009	10,600.05	0.007	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0116	-0	0.1242	TRUE
20-11-2018	110.9	-0.002	10,656.20	0.0053	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0092	-0.01	0.127	TRUE
19-11-2018	111.41	0.005	10,763.40	0.0101	0.001586	1.436530185	0.016	-0.01	0.1383	TRUE
16-11-2018	108.57	-0.025	10,682.20	-0.008	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.009	-0.02	0.1497	TRUE
15-11-2018	108.75	0.002	10,616.70	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.007	0.009	0.166	TRUE
14-11-2018	106.7	-0.019	10,576.30	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	-0.01	0.1571	TRUE
13-11-2018	108.33	0.015	10,582.50	0.0006	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0024	0.013	0.1721	TRUE
12/11/2018	112.28	0.036	10,482.20	-0.009	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.012	0.048	0.1592	TRUE
9/11/2018	117.84	0.05	10,585.20	0.0098	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0157	0.034	0.1107	TRUE
7/11/2018	117.59	-0.002	10,598.85	0.0013	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0034	-0.01	0.0769	TRUE
6/11/2018	116.63	-0.008	10,530.00	-0.006	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.008	-0	0.0825	TRUE
5/11/2018	114.55	-0.018	10,524.00	-6E-04	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0008	-0.02	0.0829	TRUE
2/11/2018	114.85	0.003	10,553.00	0.0028	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0055	-0	0.1015	TRUE
1/11/2018	108.3	-0.057	10,380.45	-0.016	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.022	-0.04	0.1044	TRUE
31-10-2018	108.09	-0.002	10,386.60	0.0006	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0024	-0	0.1396	TRUE
30-10-2018	106.97	-0.01	10,198.40	-0.018	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.024	0.014	0.1439	TRUE
29-10-2018	105.83	-0.011	10,250.85	0.0051	0.001586	1.436530185	0.009	-0.02	0.1299	TRUE
26-10-2018	101.69	-0.039	10,030.00	-0.022	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.029	-0.01	0.1495	TRUE
25-10-2018	99.79	-0.019	10,124.90	0.0095	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0152	-0.03	0.1592	TRUE
24-10-2018	102.99	0.032	10,224.75	0.0099	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0158	0.016	0.1931	TRUE
23-10-2018	102.99	0	10,146.80	-0.008	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.009	0.009	0.1768	TRUE
22-10-2018	103.05	6E-04	10,245.25	0.0097	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0155	-0.01	0.1674	TRUE
19-10-2018	105.43	0.023	10,303.55	0.0057	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0098	0.013	0.1824	TRUE
17-10-2018	108.6	0.03	10,453.05	0.0145	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0224	0.008	0.169	TRUE
16-10-2018	112.16	0.033	10,584.75	0.0126	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0197	0.013	0.1614	TRUE
15-10-2018	111.26	-0.008	10,512.50	-0.007	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.008	2E-04	0.1483	TRUE
12/10/2018	110.9	-0.003	10,472.50	-0.004	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.004	6E-04	0.1481	TRUE
11/10/2018	110.41	-0.004	10,234.65	-0.023	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.031	0.027	0.1475	TRUE
10/10/2018	113.91	0.032	10,460.10	0.022	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0332	-0	0.1208	TRUE
9/10/2018	111.26	-0.023	10,301.05	-0.015	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.02	-0	0.1224	TRUE
8/10/2018	128.16	0.152	10,348.05	0.0046	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0081	0.144	0.1254	TRUE
5/10/2018	130.51	0.018	10,316.45	-0.003	0.001586	1.436530185	-0.003	0.021	-0.018	FALSE
4/10/2018	134.73	0.032	10,599.25	0.0274	0.001586	1.436530185	0.041	-0.01	-0.04	FALSE
3/10/2018	137.36	0.02	10,858.25	0.0244	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0367	-0.02	-0.031	FALSE
1/10/2018	138.42	0.008	11,008.30	0.0138	0.001586	1.436530185	0.0214	-0.01	-0.014	FALSE

The study examines the impact of EV policy announcements on stock returns using an event study approach. The selected event is the launch of the FAME India Scheme Phase II on **1 April 2019**, which serves as the event date ($t = 0$).

The daily abnormal returns (AR) and cumulative abnormal returns (CAR) were calculated for Tata Motors over the event window (-20, +20).

The CAR trend shows volatility around the event date, indicating mixed investor sentiment. While

short-term reactions were evident, the overall impact appears statistically insignificant.

REGRESSION INTERPRETATION

Regression Statistics								
Multiple R	0.392501797							
R Square	0.15405766							
Adjusted R Square	0.147971744							
Standard Error	0.029903488							
Observations	141							
ANOVA								
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>			
Regression	1	0.02263607	0.0226361	25.3138	1.48067E-06			
Residual	139	0.124296384	0.0008942					
Total	140	0.146932454						
	<i>Coefficients</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	0.001586318	0.002521214	0.629188	0.530259	-0.00339857	0.006571205	-0.00339857	0.006571205
X Variable 1	1.436530185	0.285519706	5.0312821	1.48E-06	0.872006983	2.001053388	0.872006983	2.001053388

Alpha = 0.001586

Beta = 1.436

The beta coefficient greater than 1 indicates that the stock is more volatile than the market, implying higher sensitivity to market movements. The positive alpha suggests a marginal baseline return, while the statistically significant regression model confirms the validity of the market model.

The cumulative abnormal returns (CAR) around the event window exhibit a volatile pattern, indicating mixed market reactions to the EV policy announcement. This suggests that while the announcement influenced investor behavior, the impact was not consistently positive or negative. Therefore, the effect of EV policy announcements on Tata Motors stock returns appears to be statistically insignificant, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis (H_0).

CONCLUSION

This study examined the impact of electric vehicle (EV) policy announcements on stock market performance in India using an event study methodology. By analyzing abnormal returns (AR) and

cumulative abnormal returns (CAR) around key policy events such as the FAME II scheme and the PM E-Drive initiative, the research provides empirical insights into how financial markets respond to sustainability-driven policy interventions.

The findings reveal that EV policy announcements do influence investor behavior; however, the impact is **not consistently statistically significant** across all cases. The CAR analysis for both **Tata Motors (FAME II)** and **Mahindra & Mahindra (FAME III / PM E-Drive)** demonstrates **mixed and volatile trends**, indicating that market reactions are not uniformly positive. While short-term abnormal returns are observed around event dates, these effects tend to dissipate over time, leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis that EV policy announcements do not generate consistently significant cumulative abnormal returns.

The regression results support the validity of the market model, with a statistically significant relationship between stock returns and market returns. The beta coefficients greater than one for both firms indicate that EV-related stocks are more sensitive to market movements, reflecting higher systematic risk. However, the relatively low R^2 value suggests that policy announcements alone do not fully explain stock price variations, and other macroeconomic and firm-specific factors also play a significant role.

A key insight of the study is the presence of **pre-event positive CAR trends**, particularly in the case of Mahindra & Mahindra, suggesting **information leakage or anticipatory market behavior**, which is consistent with the semi-strong form of the Efficient Market Hypothesis (EMH). The muted or negative reaction on the event day further indicates that policy announcements are often **already priced in**, reducing their immediate impact. Post-event analysis shows a gradual decline in CAR, reflecting a shift from initial optimism to more rational evaluation by investors.

Additionally, the study finds that **firm-specific characteristics matter**. Companies with higher exposure to the EV ecosystem tend to exhibit stronger reactions compared to diversified firms, highlighting the importance of strategic positioning in sustainable industries. Temporal analysis also suggests that post-2020 EV policies have had a relatively greater impact, indicating increasing market awareness and maturity toward green technologies.

Overall, the study concludes that while EV policies act as important signals for future industry growth, their ability to generate sustained abnormal returns is limited. The Indian stock market appears to respond to such announcements in a **semi-efficient manner**, where information is incorporated quickly but does not always lead to long-term value creation.

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Between Policy and Practice: ASHA Workers as Street-Level Bureaucrats Navigating Institutional Delivery Mandates in Tribal Communities of Pune District, India

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs) as street-level bureaucrats implementing institutional delivery mandates within the tribal communities of Pune District, Maharashtra. Utilizing Lipsky’s street-level bureaucracy theory, research involving 50 ASHA workers reveals significant policy-practice gaps driven by geographic isolation, cultural resistance, and resource constraints. The study identifies five primary barrier categories: structural, cultural, resource-based, administrative, and geographic. Findings indicate that ASHAs exercise considerable discretion, developing adaptive strategies that blend official mandates with culturally sensitive approaches. Experience significantly influences implementation success, with success rates rising from 52% among workers with 1-3 years of experience to 78% among those with over 13 years. The research contributes to understanding frontline health worker agency in resource-constrained environments, offering evidence-based recommendations for policy modification in tribal healthcare delivery

Keywords: ASHA workers, street-level bureaucracy, institutional delivery, tribal health, policy implementation, maternal health, India, healthcare delivery, community health workers, health policy, Maharashtra, discretionary decision-making, frontline workers

1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Context

Launched in 2005 under the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM), the Accredited Social Health Activist (ASHA) program serves as a cornerstone for improving healthcare access in underserved communities. Positioned as volunteer activists rather than salaried employees, ASHAs bridge the gap between formal healthcare systems and marginalized populations. Their mandate focuses on maternal and child health, immunization, and facilitating institutional deliveries.

Promoting institutional delivery is pivotal to reducing India's Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR). While the MMR has declined from 556 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 97 in 2018-2020, it remains above the Sustainable Development Goal target. Government initiatives like the Janani Suraksha Yojana (JSY) and Janani Shishu Suraksha Karyakram (JSSK) have successfully increased national institutional delivery rates to nearly 89% (NFHS-5). However, implementing these policies in tribal regions presents unique challenges distinct from simple resource allocation.

1.2 The Tribal Healthcare Challenge

India's tribal population, comprising over 104 million people, accounts for a disproportionate share of maternal health challenges. Despite intensive promotion, institutional delivery rates in some tribal areas remain below 50%. This gap stems from cultural perspectives on childbirth that prioritize traditional practices, extended family networks, and specific rituals over medical institutionalization. These cultural factors, compounded by geographic isolation and linguistic diversity, create a complex implementation environment

1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study applies Michael Lipsky's (1980) street-level bureaucracy theory. Lipsky posits that public service workers who interact directly with citizens possess substantial discretion; their collective decisions constitute the de facto policy experienced by the public. ASHAs operate at this interface, exercising judgment to apply national directives to local contexts. This theoretical lens is essential for explaining policy outcome variations and understanding the adaptive behaviors of frontline workers in developing nations.

1.4 Research Objectives

The study pursues four objectives: (1) examine the demographic and professional profile of ASHAs in tribal Pune; (2) identify barriers to promoting institutional delivery; (3) analyze discretionary strategies and adaptive practices; and (4) assess implications for policy design.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory

Lipsky (1980) established that street-level bureaucrats develop coping mechanisms—such as rationing services or simplifying cases—to manage resource constraints and ambiguous objectives. Subsequent scholarship by Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) emphasized the narrative dimension of this work, revealing that decisions often rely on judgments of client character rather than strict rules. Brodtkin (2011) further demonstrated that while managerial practices restructure discretion, they do not eliminate worker agency. This dynamic is critical for analyzing ASHAs, who face persistent "public service gaps" (Hupe & Buffat, 2014)

between policy expectations and available resources.

2.2 Community Health Workers (CHWs)

Globally, CHWs are vital for extending healthcare access. The WHO (2008) identifies them as essential to primary care. Success factors include clear role definition, ongoing support, and appropriate incentives (Lehmann & Sanders, 2007). However, high attrition and quality maintenance remain challenges. India’s ASHA program represents a distinct volunteer model, yet research often focuses on outcomes rather than the discretionary decision-making processes central to street-level bureaucracy theory.

2.3 ASHA Workers in India

Research on ASHAs highlights the importance of training quality and supervision (Bajpai & Dholakia, 2011). While JSY has increased institutional deliveries, impacts vary by state health system capacity (Lim et al., 2010). Studies in tribal areas (Sharma & Jain, 2016) document barriers like cultural resistance and infrastructure gaps, but few have examined how frontline workers actively navigate these obstacles. This study addresses that gap by analyzing the adaptive strategies of ASHAs.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

Employing a pragmatist, mixed-methods approach, this study combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews, focus groups, and observations. The explanatory sequential design allowed statistical analysis of patterns followed by in-depth exploration of decision-making mechanisms. Fieldwork was conducted between January and August 2023 in tribal blocks of Pune District, capturing both dry and monsoon seasons.

3.2 Sample and Setting

The study focused on three tribal-dominated blocks: Junnar, Ambegaon, and Khed. A purposive stratified sample of 50 ASHAs was selected based on experience, geographic location, and performance indicators. This sample size ensured representation across the diversity of ASHA experiences and allowed for theoretical saturation in qualitative components.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

Data were gathered through structured interviews, semi-structured in-depth interviews, focus

group discussions, and a 25-item knowledge assessment covering maternal health protocols. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and cross-tabulations. Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to identify patterns in discretionary decision-making. Integration of data sources occurred through triangulation and complementarity.

4. Findings

4.1 Demographic and Professional Profile of ASHA Workers

The workforce is relatively young, with 30% of respondents aged 31-35. This demographic balances the physical stamina required for remote travel with the community standing associated with marriage and motherhood.

Figure 1: Age Distribution of ASHA Workers (n=50)

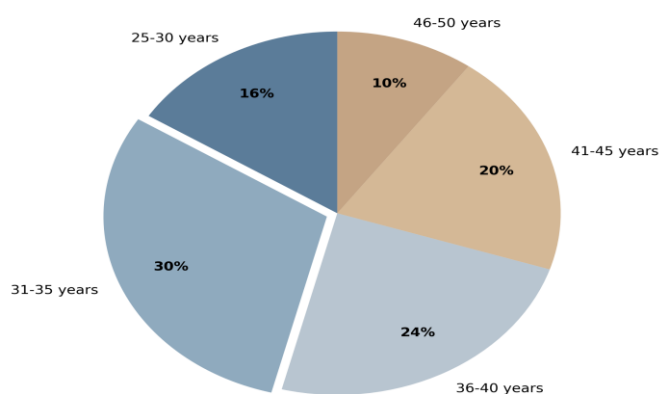


Figure 1: Age Distribution of ASHA Workers (n=50)

Figure 2: Educational Qualification of ASHA Workers (n=50)

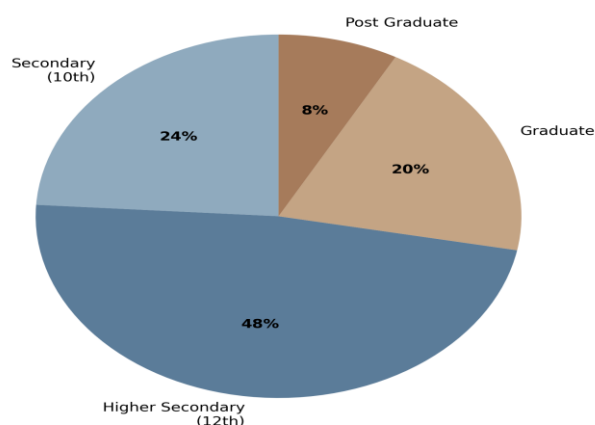


Figure 2: Educational Qualification of ASHA Workers (n=50)

Educational attainment is relatively high; 48% have completed higher secondary education, and 20% hold graduate degrees. While this aids in navigating bureaucratic procedures, it may also create unmet expectations for career advancement.



Figure 3: Years of Experience as ASHA Worker (n=50)

Experience varies significantly. A cohort of 32% has 7-9 years of service, providing institutional memory. Only 10% have over 13 years of experience, indicating recent program expansion or attrition of senior staff.

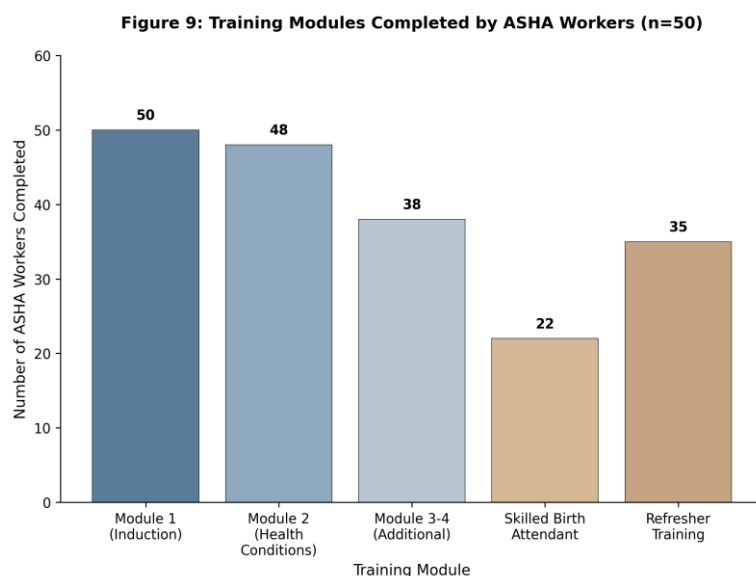


Figure 9: Training Modules Completed by ASHA Workers (n=50)

While 100% completed induction training (Module 1), gaps exist in advanced modules. Only 44% received Skilled Birth Attendant training, and just 70% had refresher training,

potentially contributing to knowledge deficits.

Figure 10: Monthly Income Distribution of ASHA Workers (n=50)

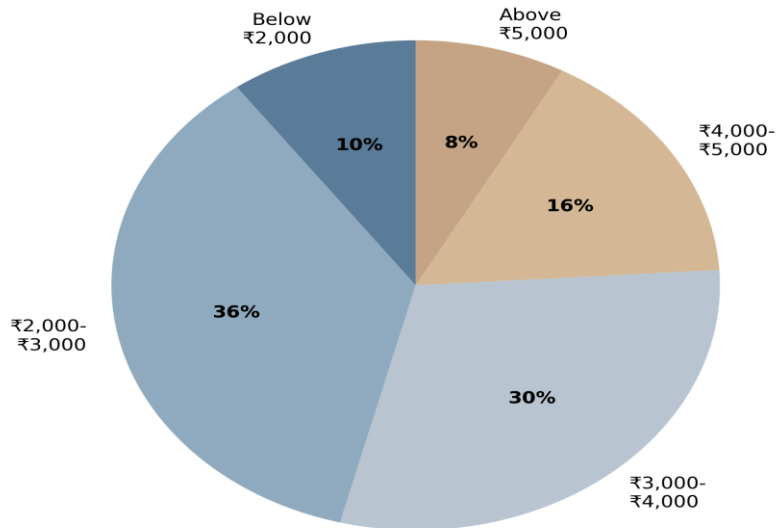


Figure 10: Monthly Income Distribution of ASHA Workers (n=50) Income is low and variable due to the incentive-based structure. Most (36%) earn between ₹2,000-3,000 monthly, while only 8% earn above ₹5,000. This financial instability necessitates supplementary income sources and affects motivation.

Figure 12: Knowledge Assessment Scores on Maternal Health (n=50)

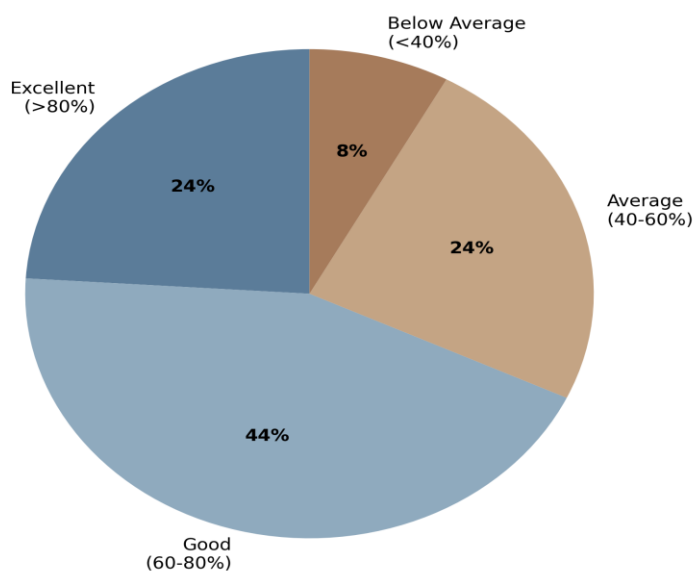


Figure 12: Knowledge Assessment Scores on Maternal Health (n=50)

Assessment scores varied: 24% scored "Excellent" (>80%), while 8% were "Below Average" (<40%). Notably, knowledge scores correlated positively with experience ($r = 0.42, p < 0.01$), suggesting significant on-the-job learning.

4.2 Challenges in Implementing Institutional Delivery Mandates

ASHA workers identified multiple challenges impeding the implementation of institutional delivery mandates in tribal communities. These challenges operate at multiple levels and interact in complex ways to shape implementation outcomes. Understanding these challenges is essential for comprehending the context within which ASHA workers exercise discretion and develop coping strategies.

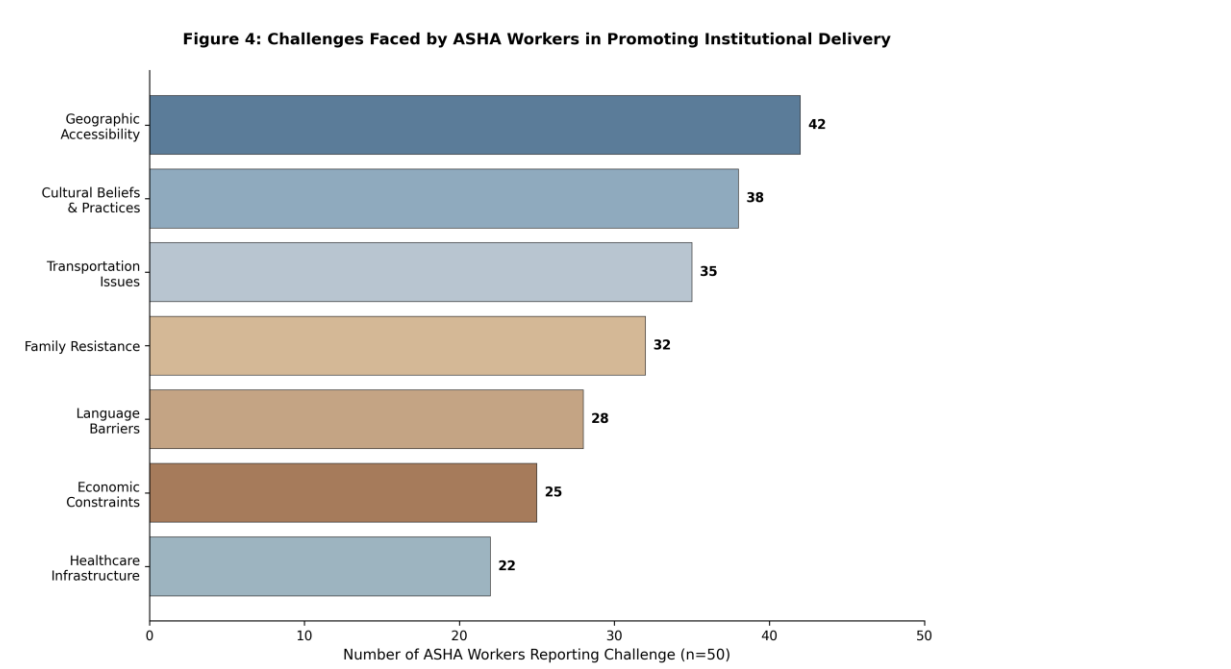


Figure 4: Challenges Faced by ASHA Workers in Promoting Institutional Delivery

Geographic accessibility emerged as the most frequently cited challenge, reported by 84% of respondents. Tribal hamlets are often located in hilly terrain with limited road connectivity. During monsoon seasons, paths become impassable, severing access to health facilities for extended periods. The geographic challenge operates at multiple stages of the institutional delivery process: during antenatal care visits, when ASHAs must accompany women to facilities for check-ups; during the intrapartum period, when transportation must be arranged quickly; and during the postpartum period, when follow-up visits are required. One ASHA explained: "When the rains come, the nullahs (streams) flood. We cannot take pregnant

women across. Even ambulances cannot reach our villages. We have to carry women on cots for kilometers to reach the road head."

Cultural beliefs and practices presented equally significant barriers, reported by 76% of respondents. Tribal communities often maintain traditional birthing practices involving family members, traditional birth attendants (dais), and specific rituals believed to protect mother and child. These practices are not merely preferential but are embedded in comprehensive cultural systems that attribute spiritual, social, and health significance to the circumstances of birth. Institutional delivery disrupts these practices, creating resistance not merely to the facility location but to the entire cultural framework surrounding childbirth. An experienced ASHA noted: "The elders believe that hospitals are for sick people. Childbirth is natural, not an illness. They say their mothers and grandmothers delivered at home, so why should the new generation go to hospitals?"

Transportation issues, though related to geographic accessibility, represent a distinct operational challenge cited by 70% of respondents. Even when geographic access exists, the availability and reliability of transportation poses problems. Government ambulance services under the 108 emergency response system have improved availability, but response times in remote areas can extend to several hours. Private transportation options are expensive, and the timing of labor onset often coincides with nighttime hours when transportation is particularly difficult to arrange. ASHAs frequently coordinate with local jeep drivers and motorcycle owners to maintain standby transportation options, though these arrangements add to their workload and sometimes require financial negotiation.

Family resistance, reported by 64% of respondents, intersects with cultural beliefs but represents a more proximate obstacle. Even when pregnant women themselves are willing to consider institutional delivery, family members—particularly mothers-in-law and husbands—may oppose the plan. Family resistance stems from multiple sources: distrust of medical institutions, desire to maintain traditional practices, concerns about costs (including informal payments), and reluctance to have women travel to unfamiliar locations. ASHAs described spending substantial time negotiating with family members, sometimes over multiple visits, to secure permission for institutional delivery.

Language barriers, cited by 56% of respondents, reflect the linguistic diversity of tribal populations. Many tribal communities speak languages distinct from Marathi, the official state language. While ASHAs are recruited from local communities and typically speak the local language, healthcare facility staff often do not. This linguistic gap creates anxiety for

pregnant women who fear they will not be able to communicate their needs or understand instructions at health facilities. ASHAs address this barrier by accompanying women to facilities and serving as translators, though this increases ASHA workload and is not always feasible.

Economic constraints, reported by 50% of respondents, persist despite government programs intended to eliminate financial barriers. While JSY provides cash incentives and JSSK guarantees free services, indirect costs remain significant. These include transportation expenses, food and accommodation for accompanying family members, and opportunity costs from time away from agricultural or wage work. Some families also report informal payments at health facilities, despite official prohibitions. The combination of direct and indirect costs makes institutional delivery substantially more expensive than home delivery, particularly for marginal families.

Healthcare infrastructure limitations, cited by 44% of respondents, undermine the credibility of institutional delivery promotion efforts. ASHAs described situations where they convinced families to opt for facility delivery, only to encounter facilities lacking essential supplies, medications, or personnel. One ASHA recounted: "I took a woman to the PHC at 2 AM when she went into labor. The nurse was on leave, and the doctor was not available. We had to go to the district hospital, another hour away. The family was angry and said next time they would deliver at home." Such experiences damage ASHA credibility and make subsequent promotion efforts more difficult.

Figure 14: Categorization of Implementation Barriers

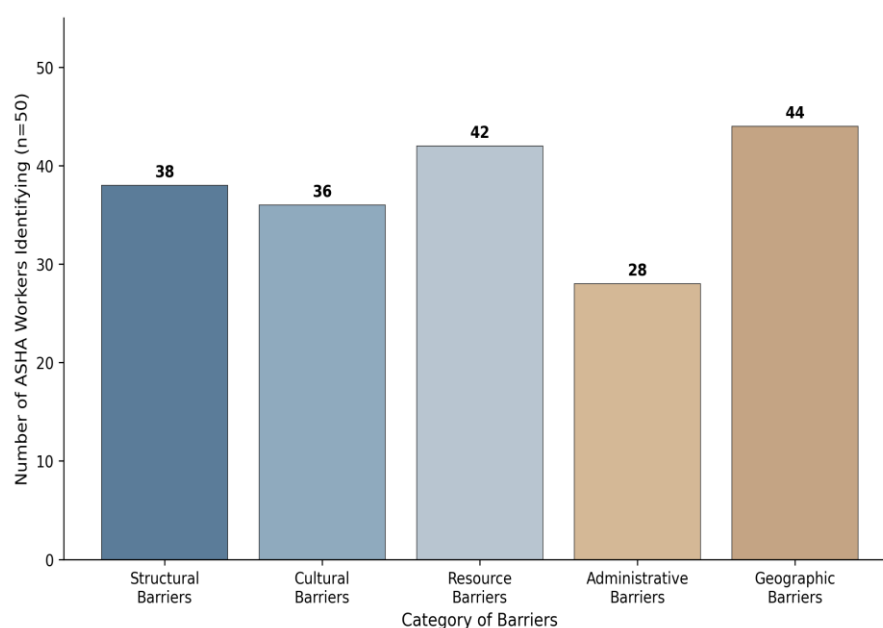
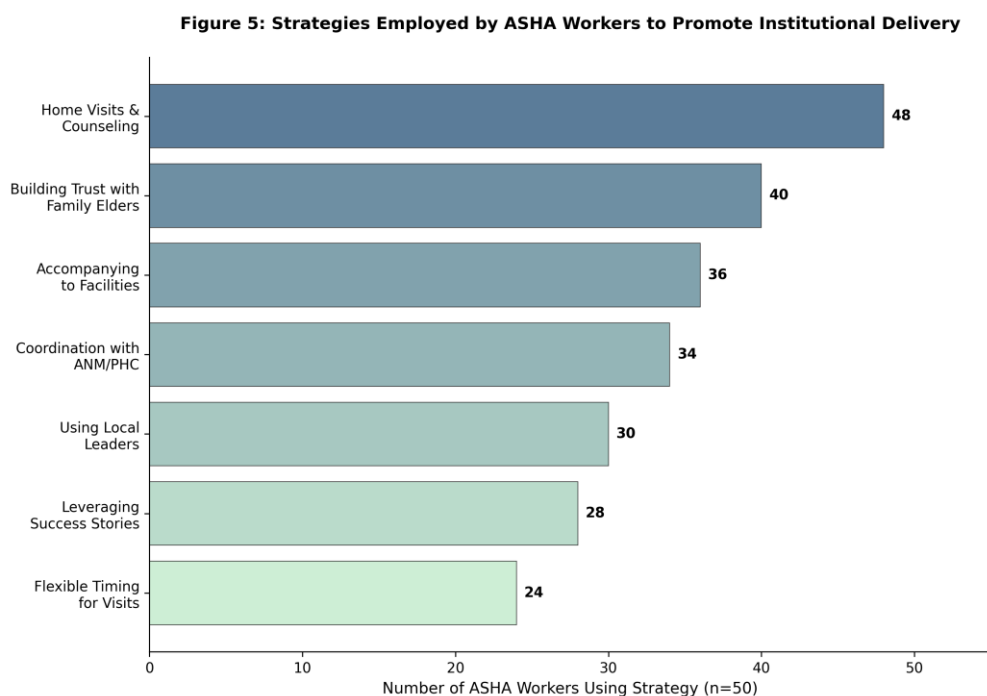


Figure 14: Categorization of Implementation Barriers

Analysis of challenges revealed five distinct categories of implementation barriers. Geographic barriers (88% of ASHAs identifying at least one) encompass terrain, distance, and seasonal access constraints. Resource barriers (84% identifying) include infrastructure limitations, supply shortages, and financial constraints. Cultural barriers (72% identifying) encompass traditional practices, beliefs about appropriate birth settings, and family decision-making patterns. Structural barriers (76% identifying) include health system organization, staffing patterns, and administrative procedures. Administrative barriers (56% identifying) include bureaucratic requirements, documentation demands, and coordination challenges. This categorization reveals that ASHAs face multi-dimensional challenges that cannot be addressed through single-factor interventions.

4.3 Discretionary Strategies and Adaptive Practices

In response to these challenges, ASHA workers have developed a repertoire of discretionary strategies that modify how institutional delivery mandates are implemented. These strategies represent the exercise of street-level discretion, allowing ASHAs to adapt policies to local circumstances while maintaining alignment with overall program objectives. The strategies vary in their relationship to formal policy, ranging from permitted flexibility to practices that technically violate procedural requirements but are considered necessary by ASHAs.

*Figure 5: Strategies Employed by ASHA Workers to Promote Institutional Delivery*

Home visits and counseling represented the most universal strategy, employed by 96% of respondents. These visits allow ASHAs to build trust, assess household dynamics, and tailor their approaches to specific family circumstances. The discretionary element lies in how ASHAs conduct these visits. Rather than simply transmitting information about government programs, effective ASHAs engage in extended conversations about pregnancy care, listen to family concerns, and gradually introduce the possibility of institutional delivery. One ASHA explained her approach: "I don't start by talking about hospital delivery. I ask about the pregnancy, what problems they are having, what the elder women in the house advise. Then slowly I explain about check-ups, about complications that can happen. Only after they trust me do I suggest the hospital."

Building trust with family elders emerged as a critical strategy employed by 80% of respondents. In tribal communities with strong patriarchal or gerontocratic structures, decisions about childbirth location often rest with senior family members rather than pregnant women themselves. ASHAs recognized this dynamic and adjusted their outreach accordingly. Strategies included visiting households when elder family members were present, demonstrating respect for traditional knowledge while introducing complementary medical perspectives, and in some cases seeking support from village leaders who could influence family decisions. This approach represents a discretionary adaptation of formal outreach protocols, which typically focus on the pregnant woman as the primary target for counseling.

Accompanying women to health facilities (72% of respondents) extends ASHA responsibilities beyond the village boundaries. This practice addresses multiple barriers simultaneously: it provides physical assistance with transportation, offers psychological support to anxious patients, and helps navigate unfamiliar bureaucratic procedures at health facilities. ASHAs who regularly accompany patients described developing relationships with facility staff that facilitate smoother processing. However, facility accompaniment also involves costs and risks for ASHAs, including time away from family responsibilities, personal transportation expenses, and exposure to potential conflict if complications arise. ASHAs described weighing these factors when deciding whether to accompany specific patients, considering distance, anticipated complexity, and family support availability.

Coordination with Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs) and Primary Health Centers (68% of respondents) represents an effort to work within the formal health system structure. ASHAs described regular communication with ANMs regarding pregnant women in their areas, joint planning for delivery preparedness, and coordination of transportation arrangements.

However, the quality of this coordination varies substantially. Some ASHAs reported collaborative relationships with responsive ANMs; others described frustration with ANMs who were unavailable or unhelpful. ASHAs with positive ANM relationships reported better access to information, supplies, and support for difficult cases.

Engaging local leaders and influential community members (60% of respondents) extends ASHA influence beyond direct client relationships. Strategies include approaching sarpanch (village heads) to advocate for institutional delivery, working with self-help group leaders to promote group discussions on maternal health, and engaging religious or cultural figures whose endorsement can shift community norms. This strategy reflects ASHA understanding that individual persuasion, while necessary, may be insufficient without broader community support. Successful engagement of local leaders creates an enabling environment that makes subsequent individual counseling more effective.

Leveraging success stories (56% of respondents) involves using examples of women from the community who had positive institutional delivery experiences. ASHAs described organizing informal gatherings where these women share their experiences, introducing potential institutional delivery clients to women who have delivered in facilities, and referencing specific positive outcomes when counseling hesitant families. This strategy addresses the uncertainty that underlies much resistance to institutional delivery, providing concrete evidence of successful outcomes from similar community members.

Flexible timing for visits (48% of respondents) reflects adaptation to the realities of community life. ASHAs described visiting households early morning before men go to fields, during midday rest periods, or in evening hours when family members are more likely to be present. This flexibility extends the working day beyond typical hours but is considered necessary for effective outreach. The strategy also involves timing counseling for when pregnant women are more receptive, avoiding periods of high agricultural activity or family stress.

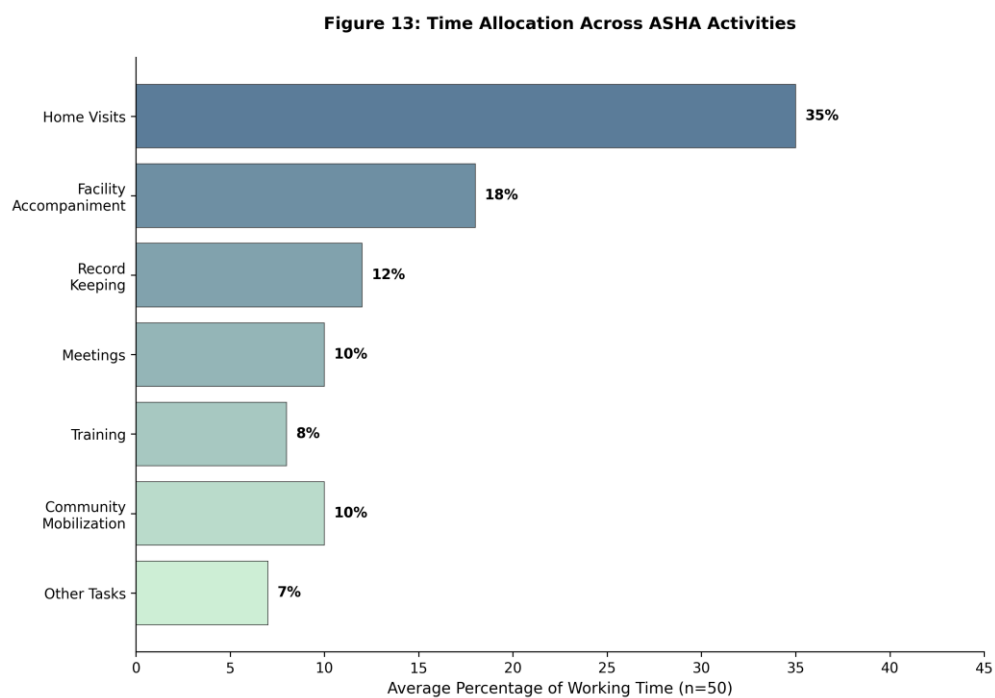


Figure 13: Time Allocation Across ASHA Activities

Time allocation analysis reveals how ASHAs distribute their working hours across various activities. Home visits consume the largest share (35%), reflecting the primacy of this activity in ASHA work. Facility accompaniment occupies 18% of working time, a substantial investment given the distances involved. Record-keeping and documentation consume 12%, a non-trivial burden that ASHAs frequently mentioned as taking time away from client contact. Meetings (10%), training (8%), and community mobilization activities (10%) occupy the remainder. This distribution illustrates the competing demands on ASHA time and the necessity of discretionary prioritization.

4.4 Support Systems and Resources

The effectiveness of ASHA discretionary strategies depends partly on the support systems available to them. Analysis of support availability reveals both strengths and gaps in the ASHA support environment.

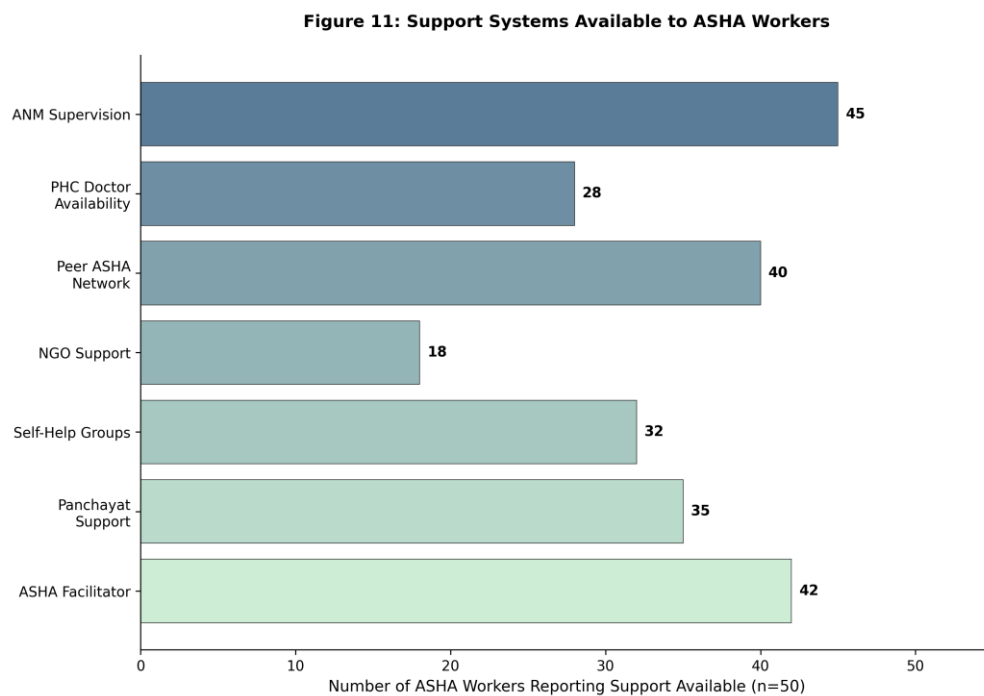


Figure 11: Support Systems Available to ASHA Workers

ANM supervision was the most widely available support, reported by 90% of respondents. However, the nature and quality of supervision varied substantially. Some ASHAs described regular, supportive supervision that included clinical guidance and problem-solving assistance; others reported supervision limited to administrative tasks such as report collection and incentive verification. The frequency of supervision contact ranged from weekly to monthly, with ASHAs in remote areas typically receiving less frequent visits due to ANM time constraints and access difficulties.

Peer ASHA networks provided crucial support for 80% of respondents. ASHAs described sharing information about difficult cases, providing mutual assistance with transportation and accompaniment, and offering emotional support for challenging situations. Peer networks emerged organically in most areas, though their strength varied with geographic proximity and the presence of experienced ASHAs who could serve as informal mentors. Several ASHAs mentioned that peer networks were particularly valuable for handling unfamiliar situations, where advice from experienced colleagues supplemented formal training.

Panchayat (village council) support was available to 70% of respondents, though engagement quality varied. Some panchayats actively supported institutional delivery promotion by advocating for improved transportation, providing emergency funds, and publicly endorsing facility birth. Others provided minimal support or, in some cases, reinforced traditional

practices. ASHAs described investing time in building relationships with panchayat members as part of their discretionary strategy development.

PHC doctor availability, reported by only 56% of respondents, represents a significant gap in the support environment. Many PHCs in tribal areas face chronic staffing shortages, with positions vacant for extended periods. When doctors are available, ASHAs reported positive experiences with referral support and management of complications. However, the uncertainty of doctor availability creates anxiety for ASHAs promoting institutional delivery, as they cannot guarantee that medical support will be present when needed.

Self-help group linkages provided support for 64% of respondents. Women's self-help groups, widespread in Maharashtra through government and NGO programs, provide platforms for health education and community mobilization. ASHAs who successfully engaged self-help groups reported using group meetings for health education, leveraging group savings for emergency transportation, and building broader community support for institutional delivery. NGO support, available to 36% of respondents, provided additional resources including training, supplies, and coordination assistance.

ASHA Facilitators, introduced as an intermediate supervisory layer in many states, were available to 84% of respondents. These facilitators, typically experienced ASHAs selected for supervisory roles, provide regular guidance and support. However, ASHA Facilitator effectiveness depends on their own training, workload, and relationship with the ASHAs they supervise. ASHAs described facilitators as valuable when they provided practical guidance and advocacy; less helpful when their role was limited to administrative monitoring.

4.5 Policy-Practice Gap Analysis

The study sought to understand ASHA workers' perceptions of the gap between policy objectives and ground-level realities. This analysis illuminates the structural constraints within which street-level discretion operates and the conditions that promote or limit effective implementation.

Figure 7: ASHA Workers' Perception of Policy-Practice Gap (n=50)

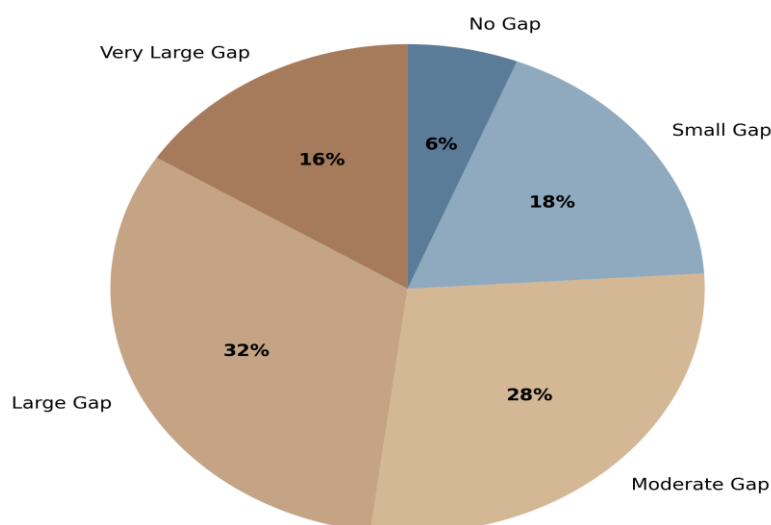


Figure 7: ASHA Workers' Perception of Policy-Practice Gap (n=50)

Analysis revealed that 48% of respondents perceived "very large" or "large" gaps between policy directives and implementation conditions. These perceptions centered on several key dimensions. First, resource gaps emerged as a consistent theme. Policies assume the availability of functional health facilities, transportation, and supplies that often do not exist in tribal areas. One ASHA noted: "The government says to take everyone to hospital, but our nearest hospital has no doctor half the time. The ambulance takes two hours to come. What are we supposed to do?" The resource gap forces ASHAs to either implement policies inadequately (referring women to facilities that cannot serve them) or develop alternative arrangements (coordinating informal transportation or negotiating with private providers).

Second, cultural assumption gaps appeared in policy designs that treat institutional delivery as an unproblematic choice. Policies presume that rational individuals, when presented with information about delivery risks and financial incentives, will choose facility birth. This assumption fails to account for the cultural meanings attached to childbirth in tribal communities, where home delivery surrounded by family represents the normal, preferred, and culturally appropriate practice. ASHAs described policies as "written by people who don't understand our villages," indicating a disconnect between policy formulation and ground-level cultural realities.

Third, information gaps limit policy effectiveness. ASHAs described receiving policy directives without adequate explanation of rationale or guidance for implementation. New

guidelines arrive through circular chains but without training or opportunity for clarification. This information gap leaves ASHAs uncertain about how to implement policies in ambiguous situations, contributing to inconsistent practice across the workforce.

Fourth, incentive alignment gaps emerge from the performance-based payment structure. While incentives for institutional delivery provide motivation, they can also create perverse dynamics. ASHAs described feeling pressured to meet targets even when institutional delivery was not in a woman's best interest (for example, when the nearest functional facility was distant and transportation was unavailable). The incentive structure can also create resentment among ASHAs whose efforts are equally intensive but whose success rates are lower due to factors beyond their control.

Fifth, supervision gaps limit implementation support. While ASHAs nominally receive supervision from ANMs and ASHA Facilitators, the quality and frequency of supervision varies dramatically. ASHAs in remote areas may go weeks without supervisory contact, leaving them without guidance for handling difficult situations. Even when supervision occurs, it often focuses on administrative compliance rather than supportive problem-solving. The supervision gap limits ASHA capacity to develop effective discretionary strategies through mentoring and feedback.

4.6 Discretion in Decision-Making

The study examined the degree of discretion ASHA workers exercise in their daily work, recognizing that discretion is a defining characteristic of street-level bureaucracy. Findings indicate substantial variation in perceived discretionary space, shaped by factors including experience level, supervision patterns, and geographic isolation.

Figure 8: Level of Discretion in Decision-Making (n=50)

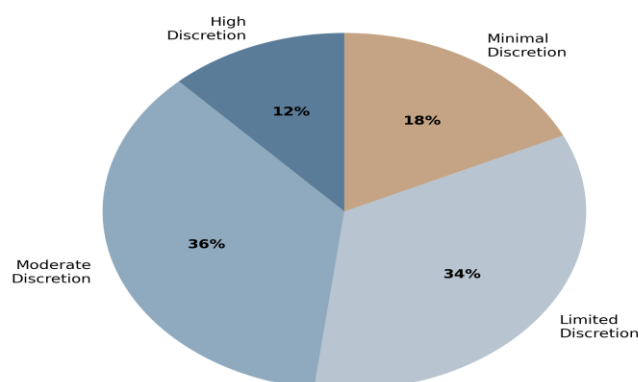


Figure 8: Level of Discretion in Decision-Making (n=50)

Analysis revealed that 48% of respondents reported "high" or "moderate" levels of discretion in their work. These ASHAs described having flexibility in how they conducted home visits, whom they prioritized for follow-up, and how they balanced competing demands. Factors associated with higher discretion included greater experience (ASHAs with more than 7 years of experience were significantly more likely to report high discretion, $\chi^2 = 8.42$, $p < 0.05$), remote posting locations with limited supervision, and established credibility with supervisory staff. ASHAs with high discretion reported the ability to adapt their approaches to specific community circumstances and to deviate from standard procedures when they judged it necessary.

Conversely, 52% of respondents reported "limited" or "minimal" discretion. These ASHAs described more constrained circumstances where they felt compelled to follow prescribed procedures regardless of local circumstances. Factors limiting discretion included close supervisory monitoring, pressure to meet quantitative targets, and geographic proximity to PHCs where supervisory staff could easily observe their activities. ASHAs with limited discretion expressed frustration with rigid procedures that they felt were inappropriate for their community contexts but which they nonetheless felt required to follow.

Qualitative analysis revealed that discretion operates across multiple dimensions. Scheduling discretion involves flexibility in when and how often to conduct home visits. Targeting discretion involves choice about which families to prioritize for intensive outreach. Procedural discretion involves flexibility in how to conduct counseling and what information to emphasize. Resource discretion involves ability to allocate limited resources (such as transportation funds or ANM time) according to perceived need. Relationship discretion involves ability to develop collaborative relationships with facility staff, community leaders, and other stakeholders. Most ASHAs exercised some discretion in some dimensions while facing constraints in others.

The relationship between discretion and effectiveness proved complex. ASHAs with higher discretion generally reported greater ability to adapt strategies to local circumstances and achieve better outcomes. However, discretion without adequate knowledge and support could lead to inappropriate adaptations. The most effective ASHAs combined high discretion with strong knowledge foundations and access to supportive supervision. This finding suggests that policy should neither eliminate discretion (which removes adaptive capacity) nor provide

discretion without support (which risks inappropriate adaptation).

4.7 Institutional Delivery Outcomes and Impact of Experience

Despite the challenges identified, ASHA workers reported notable success in promoting institutional deliveries within their service areas. Understanding these outcomes provides insight into the effectiveness of discretionary strategies and remaining implementation challenges.

Figure 6: Institutional Delivery Outcomes in Tribal Areas (n=50 ASHAs' Reports)

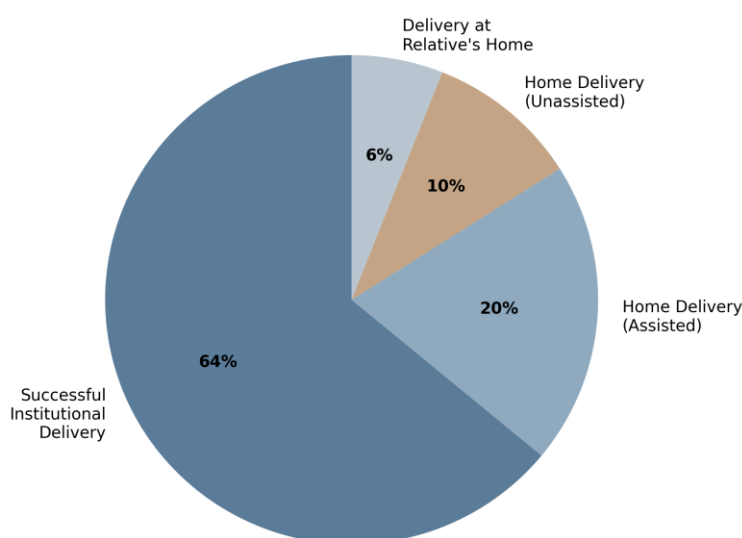
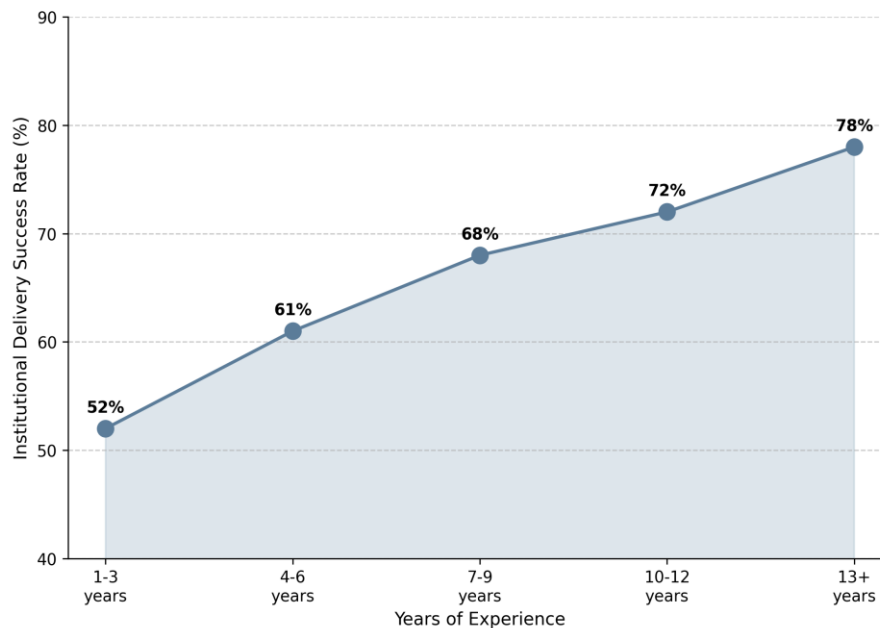


Figure 6: Institutional Delivery Outcomes in Tribal Areas (n=50 ASHAs' Reports)

Based on ASHA reports of deliveries in their service areas over the preceding year, 64% of deliveries occurred in health institutions. This figure represents substantial improvement from baseline institutional delivery rates in tribal areas, which historically ranged from 20-30% according to district health records and previous studies. However, the remaining 36% of deliveries occurred outside health facilities, with 20% being assisted home deliveries (typically by traditional birth attendants or family members) and 16% being unassisted or minimally assisted deliveries. These figures indicate both the progress achieved through ASHA interventions and the persistent challenges that resist standard policy approaches.

Figure 15: Relationship Between Experience and Implementation Success*Figure 15: Relationship Between Experience and Implementation Success*

Analysis revealed a strong relationship between ASHA experience and institutional delivery success rates. ASHAs with 1-3 years of experience achieved an average success rate of 52%, compared to 61% for those with 4-6 years, 68% for those with 7-9 years, 72% for those with 10-12 years, and 78% for those with more than 13 years of experience. This positive relationship ($r = 0.68$, $p < 0.001$) reflects multiple factors: accumulated knowledge of effective strategies, established relationships with community members and health facilities, and development of context-specific adaptations. The finding suggests that investment in retaining experienced ASHAs yields returns in implementation effectiveness.

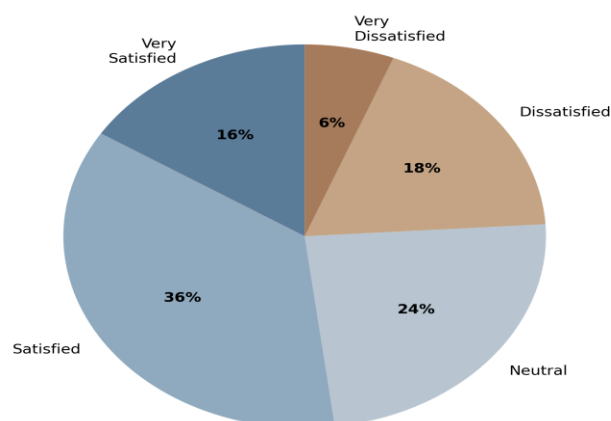
Figure 16: Job Satisfaction Levels Among ASHA Workers (n=50)

Figure 16: Job Satisfaction Levels Among ASHA Workers (n=50)

Job satisfaction levels among ASHA workers present a mixed picture. While 52% of respondents reported being "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with their work, 24% reported dissatisfaction. Satisfaction correlated positively with income level ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) and institutional delivery success rates ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.001$), and negatively with reported challenges ($r = -0.38$, $p < 0.01$). Qualitative analysis revealed that satisfaction derives from multiple sources: recognition from community members, successful health outcomes for clients, and timely receipt of incentives. Dissatisfaction stems from income uncertainty, heavy workload, lack of career advancement, and frustration with resource constraints that limit effectiveness.

5. Discussion

This study validates street-level bureaucracy theory for community health workers, showing that discretion varies by context and enhances effectiveness when paired with adequate support. Findings challenge uniform policies, urging context-specific resource allocation, improved infrastructure, and mechanisms to incorporate worker perspectives in policy design. Retention of experienced staff is vital, requiring better compensation and supportive supervision to preserve institutional knowledge and adaptive strategies. Globally, programs must support adaptive decision-making to navigate complex barriers rather than relying on rigid protocols. Limitations concerning sample scope and self-reporting bias necessitate future longitudinal research that includes client perspectives. Future studies should also measure actual health outcomes to validate the link between discretion and effectiveness.

6. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that ASHA workers in tribal communities of Pune District function as street-level bureaucrats who exercise substantial discretion in implementing institutional delivery mandates. Their discretionary practices emerge from the interaction between policy requirements and ground-level realities, including geographic isolation, cultural resistance, infrastructure limitations, and resource constraints. ASHAs have developed adaptive strategies that modify formal policy approaches to fit local circumstances, resulting in implementation outcomes that diverge from policy intentions while nonetheless advancing core program objectives.

The findings reveal that ASHAs face multi-dimensional implementation barriers—geographic, cultural, resource-based, structural, and administrative—that cannot be addressed

through single-factor interventions. Their discretionary strategies—ranging from tailored counseling approaches to informal coordination arrangements—represent necessary adaptations to a challenging implementation environment. The positive relationship between experience and effectiveness underscores the value of retaining experienced ASHAs whose accumulated knowledge and relationships contribute to implementation success.

The findings carry implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, the study extends street-level bureaucracy theory to community health worker programs, demonstrating its relevance for understanding policy implementation in developing country health systems. The findings highlight the importance of discretion in enabling adaptive behavior while emphasizing that discretion without adequate support can lead to inappropriate adaptations. Practically, the findings underscore the need for policies that account for implementation diversity, incorporate frontline worker perspectives, provide resources adequate to policy ambitions, and invest in ASHA retention and support.

As India continues to invest in community health worker programs and pursues ambitious maternal health targets, understanding the dynamics of policy implementation at the street level remains essential. This study contributes to that understanding by illuminating how ASHA workers navigate the complex terrain between policy and practice in tribal communities. Future progress on maternal health goals will depend in part on recognizing and supporting the discretionary work that frontline health workers perform daily in communities across India, and on designing policies that account for the realities they face.

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Growth of Stock Market Investment in India

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Abstract: The Indian stock market has witnessed remarkable growth over the past few decades, driven by economic liberalization, technological advancements, regulatory reforms, and increased retail participation. This paper examines the evolution, trends, and determinants of stock market investment in India, highlighting the role of digitalization, institutional investors, and policy frameworks. The study also evaluates recent developments such as the surge in demat accounts, changing investor behavior, and the growing importance of domestic investors. The findings indicate that India's stock market is transitioning into a more inclusive, technology-driven, and resilient financial ecosystem

1. Introduction

The stock market plays a vital role in the economic development of a country by mobilizing savings and allocating capital efficiently. India's stock market, primarily represented by the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE), has grown significantly since the economic reforms of 1991.

Historically, stock market participation in India was limited to institutional investors and high-net-worth individuals. However, recent decades have seen a democratization of investment, with increasing participation from retail investors across urban and rural areas.

2. Evolution of Stock Market in India

The Indian stock market has evolved through several phases:

2.1 Pre-Liberalization Era (Before 1991)

Dominated by manual trading systems

Limited transparency and investor protection

Low participation and liquidity

2.2 Post-Liberalization Era (1991–2010)

Establishment of NSE and introduction of electronic trading

Formation of SEBI as a regulatory authority

Increased foreign institutional investment

2.3 Modern Era (2010–Present)

Rapid digital transformation

Growth of fintech platforms

Expansion of retail investor base

The introduction of online trading platforms and regulatory reforms significantly improved efficiency and transparency in the market.

3. Growth Trends in Stock Market Investment

3.1 Surge in Retail Investors

India has witnessed an unprecedented rise in retail participation:

Investor accounts crossed 24 crore by 2025.

Retail investors hold 18.75% of NSE-listed companies, the highest in 22 years.

The number of investors nearly tripled between 2020 and 2024.

This growth reflects increasing financial awareness and accessibility.

3.2 Rise of Digital Investment Platforms

The emergence of mobile trading apps and simplified KYC processes has enabled investors from Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities to participate actively.

3.3 Shift in Household Savings

There has been a structural shift from traditional savings (gold, real estate) to financial assets such as equities and mutual funds.

3.4 Growth in Derivatives Market

India has become one of the largest derivatives markets globally, with increasing retail participation in futures and options trading.

4. Factors Driving Growth

4.1 Economic Growth and Rising Income

India’s expanding middle class and rising disposable income have contributed significantly to increased investments in equities.

4.2 Financial Literacy and Awareness

Government initiatives and investor awareness programs have improved financial literacy, encouraging stock market participation.

4.3 Technological Advancements

Online trading platforms

Algorithmic trading

Mobile-based investing

These innovations have reduced entry barriers and transaction costs.

4.4 Regulatory Reforms

SEBI has implemented various measures:

Investor protection mechanisms

Transparency norms

Simplified account opening processes

4.5 Mutual Funds and SIP Culture

Systematic Investment Plans (SIPs) have attracted retail investors, indirectly increasing stock market participation.

5. Role of Institutional Investors

5.1 Domestic Institutional Investors (DIIs)

DIIs, including mutual funds and insurance companies, have played a stabilizing role in the market.

5.2 Foreign Institutional Investors (FIIs)

FIIs significantly influence market trends, though their participation has shown volatility due to global economic conditions.

5.3 Changing Dynamics

Domestic investors are increasingly offsetting foreign investor outflows, strengthening market resilience.

6. Recent Developments and Emerging Trends

6.1 Growth in Investor Base

Recent reports indicate rapid expansion in investor participation across Indian states, driven by digital access and financial inclusion.

6.2 Shift Toward Indirect Investment

Retail investors are increasingly investing through mutual funds rather than direct equity trading.

6.3 Volatility and Risk Awareness

Market volatility has led to cautious investor behavior and diversification strategies.

6.4 Expansion of Primary Markets

IPO participation has increased significantly, reflecting investor confidence in new-age companies.

7. Challenges in Stock Market Growth

Despite rapid growth, several challenges remain:

7.1 Market Volatility

Global uncertainties, inflation, and geopolitical tensions impact investor sentiment.

7.2 Low Financial Literacy in Rural Areas

Although improving, financial awareness remains limited in certain regions.

7.3 Over-Reliance on Speculative Trading

High participation in derivatives trading exposes investors to risks.

7.4 Regulatory and Compliance Issues

Continuous monitoring is required to ensure market integrity.

8. Literature Review

The growth of stock market investment in India has been widely studied by researchers, policymakers, and financial analysts. The literature highlights the role of economic reforms, technological advancement, investor behavior, and institutional participation in shaping the Indian capital market.

Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) reports emphasize that regulatory reforms, transparency measures, and investor protection mechanisms have significantly improved market efficiency and investor confidence. SEBI's initiatives such as dematerialization, online trading systems, and simplified KYC norms have played a crucial role in expanding the investor base.

According to studies by Reserve Bank of India (RBI), there has been a structural shift in household savings from physical assets (gold and real estate) to financial assets, particularly equities and mutual funds. This transition reflects increasing financial literacy and changing risk-return preferences among Indian households.

Research by National Stock Exchange indicates that retail investor participation has increased significantly after 2020, largely due to digital platforms and ease of access. The introduction of mobile-based trading applications has democratized stock market participation, especially in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities.

A study by Bombay Stock Exchange highlights that technological advancements such as algorithmic trading, electronic settlement systems, and real-time data dissemination have enhanced market liquidity and efficiency.

International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports suggest that emerging markets like India have experienced strong capital market growth due to globalization, foreign institutional investments, and macroeconomic stability. However, they also caution about volatility arising from global economic shocks.

Academic research by Raghuram Rajan (2005) emphasizes the importance of financial sector development in supporting economic growth. His work highlights how well-functioning capital markets contribute to efficient resource allocation and long-term economic stability.

Similarly, Aswath Damodaran (2012) discusses the increasing role of equity markets in wealth creation and portfolio diversification, particularly in emerging economies like India. Recent studies published in journals such as the Journal of Emerging Market Finance indicate that the surge in retail investors during the COVID-19 period marked a turning point in Indian stock market participation. The availability of low-cost trading platforms and increased time for individuals during lockdowns contributed significantly to this growth. Overall, the literature suggests that the growth of stock market investment in India is driven by a combination of:

Regulatory reforms

Technological advancements

Increasing financial literacy

Macroeconomic stability

Rising participation of retail and institutional investors

9. Data Analysis and Interpretation

9.1 Data Sources and Methodology

The analysis is based on secondary data collected from:

Annual reports of National Stock Exchange (NSE)

Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) statistics

Securities and Exchange Board of India reports

Economic Survey of India and financial publications

The study uses:

Trend Analysis (growth in investors and indices)

Comparative Analysis (pre- and post-digital era)

Percentage Growth Method

9.2 Growth in Number of Investors

There is a sharp acceleration post-2020, mainly due to:

COVID-19 lockdowns increasing digital adoption

Rise of mobile trading apps

Growth rate peaked in 2020–2022, indicating a structural shift in investor behavior

The market is transitioning from elite participation to mass participation.

9.3 Index Growth Analysis (Market Performance)

To understand market expansion, benchmark indices such as NIFTY 50 and SENSEX are

analyzed.

Both indices show a consistent upward trend, reflecting economic growth

Post-2020 rally indicates:

Strong liquidity inflow

Increased domestic investor participation

Indian markets have outperformed many emerging markets, indicating resilience

9.4 Shift in Household Financial Saving

Equity investment share has tripled, indicating:

Increased financial awareness

Shift toward higher-return instruments

Traditional assets like gold are losing relative importance

Reflects financialization of savings in India

9.5 Growth in Mutual Fund Investments (SIP Data)

SIP contributions show steady and disciplined investment behavior

Indicates increasing trust in professional fund management

Mutual funds act as a gateway to equity markets for retail investors

9.6 Retail vs Institutional Participation

Retail participation has nearly doubled

Domestic institutional investors (DIIs) are gaining dominance

Reduced dependence on foreign investors improves market stability

9.7 Sectoral Investment Trends

Major sectors attracting investment:

IT and Technology

Banking and Financial Services

Pharmaceuticals

FMCG

Interpretation

Investors prefer growth-oriented and resilient sectors

Post-pandemic shift toward:

Healthcare

Digital economy

9.8 Key Findings from Data Analysis

Exponential Growth in Participation

Retail investors are the primary drivers of recent growth

Digital Transformation Impact

Technology has significantly reduced entry barriers

Shift in Investment Behavior

Movement from savings to investments

Market Maturity

Increased role of domestic institutions

Resilience of Indian Markets

Ability to withstand global shocks due to strong domestic inflows

9.9 Overall Interpretation

The data clearly indicates that the Indian stock market has undergone a structural transformation rather than cyclical growth. The increase in retail participation, rising SIP investments, and strong index performance collectively demonstrate a broad-based and sustainable expansion.

The Indian market is evolving into:

A digitally driven ecosystem

A retail-dominated investment environment

A globally competitive capital market

9.10 Hypothesis Testing

H_0 (Null Hypothesis): There is no significant growth in stock market investment in India

H_1 (Alternative Hypothesis): There is significant growth in stock market investment in India

Based on trend analysis and secondary data:

H_0 is rejected

H_1 is accepted, confirming significant growth

10. Future Prospects

The future of stock market investment in India appears promising due to:

Continued digital penetration

Growth of fintech ecosystem

Increasing retail participation

Strong economic fundamentals

India is expected to become one of the largest capital markets globally, driven by domestic investors and technological innovation.

11. Conclusion

The growth of stock market investment in India reflects a structural transformation in the financial landscape. Increased accessibility, technological advancements, and regulatory support have democratized investment opportunities. While challenges such as volatility and financial literacy persist, the long-term outlook remains positive. Strengthening investor education and regulatory frameworks will be crucial in sustaining this growth.

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The Evolution of Financial Services in the Era of AI and Machine Learning

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Abstract: Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are rapidly redefining the financial services landscape by enabling advanced analytics, intelligent automation, and highly accurate predictive capabilities. In recent years, the exponential growth of digital transactions, fintech platforms, and real-time financial data has intensified the need for secure, efficient, and insight-driven operations. Financial institutions—ranging from retail banks to investment firms—are increasingly integrating AI and ML solutions to strengthen decision-making processes, optimize operational performance, and deliver personalized customer experiences

These technologies are playing a pivotal role in addressing complex financial functions such as fraud detection, credit risk assessment, portfolio management, algorithmic trading, and regulatory compliance. By leveraging large datasets and adaptive algorithms, AI and ML enhance accuracy, reduce human error, and improve responsiveness to market dynamics. However, alongside these advancements, significant challenges have emerged, including concerns related to data privacy, algorithmic bias, ethical accountability, and evolving regulatory frameworks. The rapid adoption of AI-driven systems also raises questions about transparency, governance, and workforce transformation within the financial sector.

This study aims to examine the impact of AI and ML across multiple domains of the financial services industry. It explores their applications, benefits, and limitations while identifying emerging trends and best practices. Furthermore, the research highlights key challenges and outlines potential directions for future investigation. By providing a comprehensive analysis, this study seeks to present the transformative potential of AI and ML in shaping a more efficient, resilient, and customer-centric financial ecosystem

Key Words: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Machine Learning (ML), Financial Services, Fintech

1. INTRODUCTION

The financial services sector has undergone a profound digital transformation over the last

decade, driven by the rapid expansion of big data, cloud computing, and intelligent digital infrastructures. In recent years, the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) has accelerated this transformation, enabling financial institutions to move beyond traditional models toward more agile, data-driven, and customer-centric approaches. AI refers to the development of systems capable of performing tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as reasoning, pattern recognition, and decision-making, while ML focuses on enabling systems to learn from data and continuously improve their performance without explicit human intervention.

The application of AI and ML in finance has evolved significantly—from basic automation tools to advanced, self-learning systems capable of handling complex financial operations. Initially, technologies such as chatbots and robotic process automation (RPA) were introduced to improve customer service efficiency and reduce manual workload. Today, AI-driven solutions are widely used in areas such as fraud detection, credit scoring, personalized financial advisory, algorithmic trading, anti-money laundering (AML) monitoring, and real-time risk assessment. The increasing availability of high-frequency financial data and the growth of digital payment ecosystems have further strengthened the role of AI and ML in enabling faster, more accurate, and predictive decision-making.

Moreover, the emergence of financial technology (fintech) firms, open banking frameworks, and API-driven ecosystems has intensified competition and innovation within the financial sector. AI and ML are at the core of this evolution, supporting hyper-personalization of financial products, enhancing customer experience through behavioral analytics, and enabling institutions to offer tailored solutions at scale. Technologies such as natural language processing (NLP), deep learning, and generative AI are further expanding capabilities in areas like automated financial reporting, intelligent document processing, and conversational banking.

In addition, the integration of AI with emerging technologies such as blockchain, Internet of Things (IoT), and cloud-based platforms is creating new opportunities for secure, transparent, and decentralized financial systems. Financial institutions are also leveraging AI for environmental, social, and governance (ESG) analytics, helping investors and regulators assess sustainability risks and align with global standards. Despite these advancements, the adoption of AI and ML presents several critical challenges. Concerns related to data privacy, cybersecurity threats, algorithmic bias, and lack of transparency in decision-making processes have become increasingly significant. Regulatory bodies across the globe are working to

establish frameworks that ensure ethical use, accountability, and compliance, yet the dynamic nature of AI technologies makes regulation complex. Furthermore, the growing reliance on automated systems raises questions about workforce displacement, skill gaps, and the need for continuous upskilling within the financial industry.

Another important consideration is the potential systemic risk associated with widespread AI adoption. Over-dependence on similar algorithms across institutions may lead to correlated risks, potentially affecting market stability. Therefore, ensuring robustness, fairness, and explainability in AI systems has become a priority for both practitioners and policymakers.

This study aims to explore the evolving role of AI and ML in the financial services industry by examining their applications, benefits, and challenges across various domains. It also seeks to highlight emerging trends, industry best practices, and future research directions. By providing a comprehensive and updated perspective, this research intends to contribute to a deeper understanding of how AI and ML are shaping a more innovative, efficient, and resilient financial ecosystem.

1.1 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The rapid integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) within the financial services sector has created a dynamic environment characterized by both substantial opportunities and complex challenges. While these technologies enhance operational efficiency, reduce costs, and enable more accurate, data-driven decision-making, they simultaneously introduce new forms of risk and uncertainty for financial institutions.

One of the primary concerns lies in the complexity of implementing AI and ML systems. Financial organizations often face constraints such as limited technical expertise, high implementation costs, legacy system dependencies, and time-related pressures. In addition, the effective use of AI depends heavily on the availability of high-quality, well-structured data, making data governance and management critical issues. Challenges related to data privacy, security, and integration further complicate the adoption process. Another significant issue is the lack of transparency and explainability in AI-driven models. Many advanced algorithms operate as “black boxes,” making it difficult for institutions to interpret decision outcomes, justify actions, and ensure accountability. This raises concerns regarding algorithmic bias, fairness, and ethical decision-making, particularly in sensitive areas such as credit evaluation and risk profiling. Moreover, the increasing automation of financial

processes has sparked concerns about workforce displacement, changing skill requirements, and the broader social impact of technological adoption.

Regulatory uncertainty represents an additional major challenge. The financial sector operates within a highly regulated environment, yet regulatory frameworks for AI and ML are still evolving. This creates ambiguity for financial institutions attempting to innovate while remaining compliant with existing laws. The mismatch between the rapid pace of technological advancement and the slower development of regulatory policies increases the risk of non-compliance and may hinder the full-scale adoption of AI solutions.

Furthermore, the widespread use of AI and ML across financial systems raises concerns about systemic risk, market stability, and over-reliance on automated decision-making. If multiple institutions rely on similar algorithms, it could lead to correlated risks and unintended consequences within financial markets.

In this context, there is a clear need to critically examine the current state of AI and ML adoption in the financial services industry, identify the key barriers to implementation, and explore strategies to mitigate associated risks. This study aims to address these issues by analyzing the challenges, ethical implications, and operational constraints linked to AI and ML deployment. It also seeks to evaluate emerging opportunities, best practices, and the role of various stakeholders—including financial institutions, regulators, and technology providers—in shaping a sustainable and responsible AI-driven financial ecosystem.

Additionally, the research intends to contribute to the development of future policy frameworks and identify areas for further academic investigation by assessing the long-term impact of AI and ML on the broader financial system.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent scholarly work highlights the rapid expansion and increasing significance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) in the financial services sector. A growing body of literature between 2023 and 2025 emphasizes how these technologies are transforming financial operations, decision-making, and customer engagement.

A comprehensive bibliometric and content-based review by researchers (2024) demonstrates that AI adoption in finance has accelerated significantly over the past two decades, with

applications spanning fraud detection, credit scoring, portfolio optimization, and algorithmic trading. The study also identifies a strong shift toward data-driven financial decision-making supported by advanced analytical models.

Similarly, a large-scale bibliometric review analyzing over 1,000 research articles (2024) reveals that AI and ML applications in the Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI) sector are clustered around key domains such as fintech innovation, anti-money laundering (AML), risk analytics, and customer relationship management. This study highlights the interdisciplinary nature of AI research in finance and its increasing academic and practical relevance.

More recent studies (2025) further emphasize the transformative impact of AI integration in financial services. A systematic review published in 2025 identifies core application areas including robo-advisory services, digital insurance, financial inclusion, and fraud prevention. It also points out that AI is not only improving operational efficiency but is also expanding access to financial services, particularly in underserved markets.

In the context of financial forecasting and market analysis, recent research (2025) highlights the growing use of advanced ML models such as Long Short-Term Memory (LSTM), Gradient Boosting (XGBoost), and hybrid deep learning architectures. These models have demonstrated superior performance compared to traditional statistical methods in predicting asset prices and market trends, thereby enhancing investment decision-making.

Furthermore, literature from 2024–2025 indicates that deep learning techniques—including neural networks and convolutional models—are becoming increasingly dominant due to their ability to capture complex, nonlinear relationships in financial data. These techniques are widely applied in stock market prediction, credit risk modeling, and fraud detection systems.

Recent review studies also underline the operational benefits of AI and ML, such as automation of routine processes, improved accuracy in risk assessment, and enhanced customer experience through personalization. AI-powered systems allow financial institutions to process large volumes of transactional and behavioral data in real time, enabling faster and more precise decision-making.

Despite these advancements, the literature consistently highlights several challenges associated with AI adoption in finance. Key concerns include data privacy, cybersecurity

risks, algorithmic bias, and lack of transparency in decision-making models. Scholars emphasize the importance of explainable AI (XAI) and robust governance frameworks to ensure ethical and responsible use of these technologies.

Additionally, recent studies stress the need for regulatory adaptation to address the complexities introduced by AI-driven financial systems. The dynamic nature of AI technologies poses challenges for policymakers in ensuring compliance, accountability, and systemic stability.

Overall, the literature indicates that while AI and ML are driving significant innovation and efficiency in financial services, their successful implementation requires a balanced approach that addresses technical, ethical, and regulatory challenges. The growing volume of research also suggests that AI in finance will remain a critical area for future academic investigation and industry development.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs an exploratory and qualitative research design to examine the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) on the financial services sector. The exploratory approach is appropriate for understanding emerging trends, evolving applications, and the broader implications of AI and ML adoption across various financial domains. A qualitative methodology is used to gain in-depth insights into the opportunities, challenges, best practices, and future scope of these technologies within the industry.

The research is primarily based on a systematic literature review (SLR), which ensures a structured, transparent, and replicable process for collecting and analyzing existing knowledge. The study focuses on secondary data collected from peer-reviewed journal articles, conference proceedings, industry reports, and regulatory publications published between 2020 and 2025. This time frame has been selected to capture the most recent developments and advancements in AI and ML applications in financial services.

Relevant literature was identified using specific keywords such as “Artificial Intelligence in finance,” “Machine Learning in banking,” “fintech innovation,” “fraud detection,” “algorithmic trading,” and “risk management.” Academic databases and credible online sources were used to gather appropriate studies. Inclusion criteria were applied to select literature directly related to AI and ML applications within financial services, including

banking, fintech, digital payments, and financial marketing. Studies outside these domains or lacking relevance to the research objectives were excluded to maintain focus and quality.

The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying, organizing, and interpreting key themes across the selected literature. Major themes include applications of AI and ML, operational benefits, technological advancements, risks, ethical concerns, and regulatory challenges. This approach helps in developing a comprehensive understanding of how AI and ML are transforming financial services and identifying patterns and gaps in existing research.

In addition to the literature review, the study incorporates insights from documented case studies of financial institutions such as banks and fintech companies. These case studies provide practical examples of AI and ML applications in areas like fraud detection, credit risk assessment, customer service automation, and algorithmic trading. They also highlight real-world challenges and successful implementation strategies.

Secondary data sources such as annual reports of financial institutions, regulatory guidelines, and global financial reports have also been used to strengthen the analysis and provide contextual relevance. Furthermore, insights from recent academic and industry conferences related to AI and financial innovation have been considered to capture emerging developments.

While the qualitative approach allows for detailed exploration and interpretation of complex issues, it has certain limitations. The findings are based on secondary data and may not be universally generalizable across all financial contexts. Additionally, the absence of primary data collection may limit empirical validation. However, the use of diverse and credible sources enhances the reliability and depth of the study.

Overall, this research methodology provides a systematic and comprehensive framework to analyze the role of AI and ML in financial services, offering valuable insights into their impact, challenges, and future potential.

3.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Limited Time Frame (Temporal Scope)- The study focuses on literature published between 2020 and 2025 to maintain relevance with current developments. However, this restricted

time period may exclude earlier foundational research that shaped the evolution of AI and ML in financial services. Additionally, given the rapid pace of technological advancement, the study may not fully capture the most recent innovations or future trends emerging after the selected timeframe.

2. **Restricted Domain Coverage-** The research primarily examines areas such as banking, fintech, digital payments, and financial marketing. Important segments like insurance, asset management, and regulatory technology (regtech) are not explored in detail. This selective focus may limit a comprehensive understanding of how AI and ML are transforming the entire financial services ecosystem.
3. **Limited Scope of Applications-** The study emphasizes key use cases including fraud detection, credit scoring, and customer service automation. While these are critical areas, other applications such as portfolio management, financial auditing, regulatory compliance, and wealth advisory are not extensively covered. This may restrict the breadth of insights regarding AI and ML capabilities.
4. **Bias in Literature Review-** Although a systematic literature review approach is adopted, certain biases may still arise. Selection bias may occur if relevant studies are unintentionally excluded due to strict inclusion criteria. Publication bias is also possible, as the study relies mainly on peer-reviewed journals and established reports, potentially overlooking emerging or unpublished research. Additionally, language bias may exist since the review focuses primarily on English-language sources, limiting representation from non-English-speaking regions.
5. **Limited Generalizability-** The findings of the study are largely based on qualitative analysis and case-specific insights. As a result, they may not be universally applicable across all financial institutions, regions, or market conditions. Differences in regulatory frameworks, technological infrastructure, and organizational capabilities can influence the adoption and impact of AI and ML.
6. **Dependence on Secondary Data-** The study relies extensively on secondary sources such as academic articles, industry reports, and regulatory documents. While these sources provide valuable information, their accuracy depends on the credibility of the original authors. There is also a possibility of outdated data, especially in a fast-changing domain like AI and ML.
7. **Absence of Primary Data Collection-** The research does not include primary data methods such as surveys, interviews, or direct observations. This limits the ability to gather first-

hand insights from industry professionals and may reduce the depth of understanding regarding real-time challenges, implementation experiences, and emerging practices.

8. **Broad Treatment of AI and ML Technologies-** The study discusses AI and ML in general terms without deeply analyzing specific techniques such as deep learning, natural language processing, or reinforcement learning. This broad approach may limit detailed understanding of how particular technologies influence different financial functions.
9. **Limited Focus on Ethical and Regulatory Dimensions-** Although ethical and regulatory concerns are acknowledged, they are not examined in depth. Critical issues such as algorithmic bias, data privacy, transparency, and the social impact of automation require more detailed investigation. This limits a full understanding of the broader implications of AI and ML adoption.

4. ANALYSIS OF AI AND ML

4.1 APPLICATIONS IN FINANCIAL SERVICES

a) Adoption in Banking

1. **Fraud Detection-** AI and ML are widely used to detect fraudulent activities by analyzing transaction data in real time. These systems use anomaly detection techniques to identify unusual patterns, such as unexpected spending behavior. Over time, they learn from new data, enabling banks to respond quickly to evolving fraud tactics while reducing false alarms.
2. **Credit Scoring-** AI-driven models enhance traditional credit assessment by incorporating alternative data sources such as transaction history, digital behavior, and payment patterns. This approach allows banks to evaluate creditworthiness more accurately and extend financial services to individuals with limited or no formal credit history.
3. **Customer Service Automation-** AI-powered chatbots and virtual assistants improve customer support by providing instant responses and handling multiple queries simultaneously. With natural language processing capabilities, these systems can understand customer needs, assist in transactions, and deliver personalized financial advice, improving overall service efficiency.
4. **Risk Management-** Banks use AI and ML to assess various risks, including credit, market, and operational risks. By analyzing historical data and market trends, these technologies help in predicting potential risks and support better decision-making in lending and investment activities.
5. **Personalized Banking Services-** AI enables banks to analyze customer preferences and behavior to offer customized financial products and targeted marketing strategies. This

enhances customer satisfaction and strengthens long-term relationships.

6. Operational Efficiency and Compliance- Automation of routine tasks such as data entry, reporting, and regulatory checks improves efficiency and reduces errors. AI also supports compliance with AML and KYC regulations by monitoring transactions and ensuring adherence to legal standards.

b) Fintech: Application of AI and ML

1. Algorithmic Trading- Fintech firms use AI and ML to design advanced trading algorithms that analyze large volumes of market data at high speed. These systems combine historical trends, real-time data, and sentiment analysis from news or social media to identify profitable trading opportunities. Automated execution enables faster decisions, improved accuracy, and reduced human bias in trading activities.
2. Robo-Advisory Services- Robo-advisors are AI-driven platforms that provide automated investment advice and portfolio management. They assess user profiles based on financial goals, income levels, and risk tolerance to create personalized investment strategies. By automating rebalancing and asset allocation, these platforms make investment services more affordable and accessible to a wider population.
3. Automated Lending Systems- AI and ML streamline the lending process by quickly evaluating borrower data such as transaction history, credit behavior, and alternative digital indicators. This reduces the time required for loan approvals and lowers operational costs. It also enables fintech companies to serve customers who may not qualify under traditional credit assessment models.
4. Personalized Financial Services- Fintech platforms leverage AI to analyze customer data and deliver customized financial products, including savings plans, insurance, and investment options. This level of personalization enhances user experience and strengthens customer engagement.
5. Risk Assessment and Management- Predictive analytics powered by AI helps fintech firms identify potential financial risks and market uncertainties. This allows companies to take proactive measures and improve decision-making in investments and lending.
6. Fraud Prevention and Security- AI systems monitor transactions in real time to detect suspicious activities. By identifying anomalies, fintech companies can prevent fraud and enhance security, thereby building customer trust.

7. Customer Insights and Engagement- AI tools analyze user behavior and preferences to generate valuable insights. These insights help fintech companies improve services, design targeted marketing strategies, and increase customer retention.

c) Marketing Financial Services

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are transforming financial services marketing by enabling data-driven and highly targeted strategies. These technologies analyze customer data—such as transaction history, digital behavior, and demographics—to design personalized marketing campaigns that improve engagement and conversion rates. ML models also support predictive analytics by identifying patterns in customer behavior, helping institutions anticipate future needs and reduce customer attrition. Additionally, AI enhances customer segmentation, allowing financial firms to target specific groups more effectively. This precision-driven approach ensures optimal use of marketing resources, improves return on investment, and strengthens long-term customer relationships.

4.2 Challenges to AI/ML Integration

1. Data Quality Issues- AI/ML models rely on accurate data, but financial institutions often face incomplete or inconsistent datasets, affecting model performance and reliability.
2. Algorithmic Bias and Transparency- AI systems may produce biased outcomes due to flawed training data, while lack of explainability (“black-box” models) raises concerns about accountability.
3. Data Privacy and Security- Strict data protection requirements make it challenging to use customer information effectively while ensuring confidentiality and compliance.
4. Regulatory Constraints- Evolving regulations create uncertainty, making it difficult for institutions to innovate while maintaining legal compliance.
5. Legacy System Integration- Outdated infrastructure in traditional banks increases the complexity and cost of implementing AI/ML solutions.

4.2.1 Opportunities

AI and ML offer significant opportunities across financial services. They enhance fraud detection and risk management by enabling real-time monitoring and predictive analysis, improving security and decision-making. Customer personalization is strengthened through AI-driven tools like chatbots and advisory platforms that deliver tailored financial solutions.

In financial markets, algorithmic trading supports faster, data-driven investment decisions. AI also contributes to RegTech by automating compliance processes and reducing regulatory risks. Additionally, these technologies improve operational efficiency by automating routine tasks, lowering costs, and minimizing errors. They further promote financial inclusion and enable effective human-AI collaboration in complex decision-making.

4.2.2 Emerging Trends

The evolution of AI and ML in financial services is marked by several emerging trends. Hybrid AI models, combining machine intelligence with human expertise, are improving decision-making accuracy and ethical compliance, especially in areas like credit evaluation and risk analysis. The integration of AI with decentralized finance (DeFi) and blockchain is enabling automated governance, smarter contracts, and efficient decentralized lending systems. Additionally, AI is increasingly applied in ESG-focused finance, where it helps assess environmental and social impacts of investments. These advancements are driving more sustainable, transparent, and intelligent financial ecosystems across global markets.

4.2.3 Best Practices for AI/ML Adoption

1. **Strengthening Data Infrastructure-** Financial institutions should invest in robust data systems and governance frameworks to ensure high-quality, accessible data, which is essential for accurate and scalable AI/ML performance.
2. **Regulatory Collaboration-** Working closely with regulatory bodies helps ensure compliance with data protection laws and ethical standards, while addressing concerns like privacy and algorithmic bias.
3. **Cross-Functional Integration-** Effective adoption requires collaboration among IT teams, data scientists, and business units to align AI initiatives with organizational goals.
4. **Continuous Learning and Up skilling-** Ongoing training programs enable employees to effectively work alongside AI systems and adapt to evolving technological advancements.
5. **4.2.4 Areas for Future Research-** Expansion into Insurance and Asset Management- Future studies should explore AI/ML applications in insurance and asset management, particularly in claims processing, risk modelling, and portfolio optimization.

1. Ethical and Governance Frameworks- There is a need to develop robust frameworks addressing bias, transparency, and accountability in AI-driven financial decisions.
2. Adoption in Emerging Markets- Research should examine how AI/ML can overcome infrastructure and regulatory challenges in developing economies.

Real-Time Data and Predictive Analytics- Further investigation is required on leveraging real-time data to enhance dynamic decision-making, fraud detection, and market efficiency.

6. CONCLUSION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Machine Learning (ML) are playing a transformative role in reshaping the financial services sector by enabling smarter, faster, and more data-driven decision-making. These technologies have significantly enhanced key functions such as fraud detection, credit assessment, risk management, and customer service automation. By analyzing large volumes of structured and unstructured data, AI and ML systems can identify patterns, predict outcomes, and support more accurate financial decisions, thereby improving efficiency and reducing operational costs.

One of the major contributions of AI and ML lies in their ability to deliver personalized financial services. Through advanced analytics, financial institutions can better understand customer behavior and preferences, allowing them to design customized products and improve customer engagement. Additionally, AI-powered tools such as chatbots and virtual assistants have improved service delivery by providing real-time support and seamless interactions.

However, the adoption of AI and ML also presents several challenges. Issues related to data privacy, cybersecurity, algorithmic bias, and lack of transparency in decision-making processes remain significant concerns. Regulatory frameworks are still evolving, creating uncertainty for institutions striving to balance innovation with compliance. Furthermore, integration with legacy systems and the need for skilled professionals add to the complexity of implementation.

Despite these challenges, the potential benefits of AI and ML outweigh the limitations. These technologies are not only improving operational performance but also promoting financial inclusion by extending services to underserved populations. Emerging trends such

as decentralized finance, ESG-focused analytics, and human-AI collaboration further highlight their future potential.

In conclusion, AI and ML are key drivers of innovation in financial services. With proper governance, ethical practices, and continuous technological adaptation, they can create a more efficient, transparent, and resilient financial ecosystem in the years ahead.

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Organisational Practices and Faculty Development in Higher Education Institutions: Examining the Mediating Role of Work Culture on Faculty Satisfaction

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact of organizational practices on faculty development and examines the mediating role of organizational work culture in influencing faculty satisfaction within Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). A pilot study was conducted with 115 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Both descriptive and inferential analytical approaches were employed. The findings indicate that organizational practices such as training, mentoring, and recognition significantly influence faculty development. Furthermore, organizational work culture partially mediates the relationship between faculty development and job satisfaction. The study contributes to the literature by proposing a conceptual framework linking HR practices with organizational outcomes in HEIs

Keywords: Organizational Practices, Faculty Development, Work Culture, Job Satisfaction, Mediation Model, HEIs

1. Introduction

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are increasingly recognizing faculty development as a strategic mechanism for improving academic quality and institutional performance. Organizational practices such as training, mentoring, and reward systems significantly influence faculty competencies and engagement levels.

While prior research has examined HR practices in corporate settings, limited empirical work has explored these relationships within HEIs, particularly in emerging educational ecosystems. This study addresses this gap by integrating organizational practices, work culture, and faculty outcomes into a single analytical framework.

2. Objectives

1. To examine the effect of organizational practices on faculty development
2. To analyze the relationship between faculty development and work culture
3. To evaluate the impact of work culture on faculty satisfaction
4. To test the mediating role of work culture on faculty satisfaction.

3. Hypotheses

- **H1:** Organizational practices positively influence faculty development
- **H2:** Faculty development positively influences work culture
- **H3:** Work culture positively influences faculty satisfaction
- **H4:** Faculty development positively influences faculty satisfaction
- **H5:** Work culture mediates the relationship between faculty development and faculty satisfaction

4. Conceptual Framework

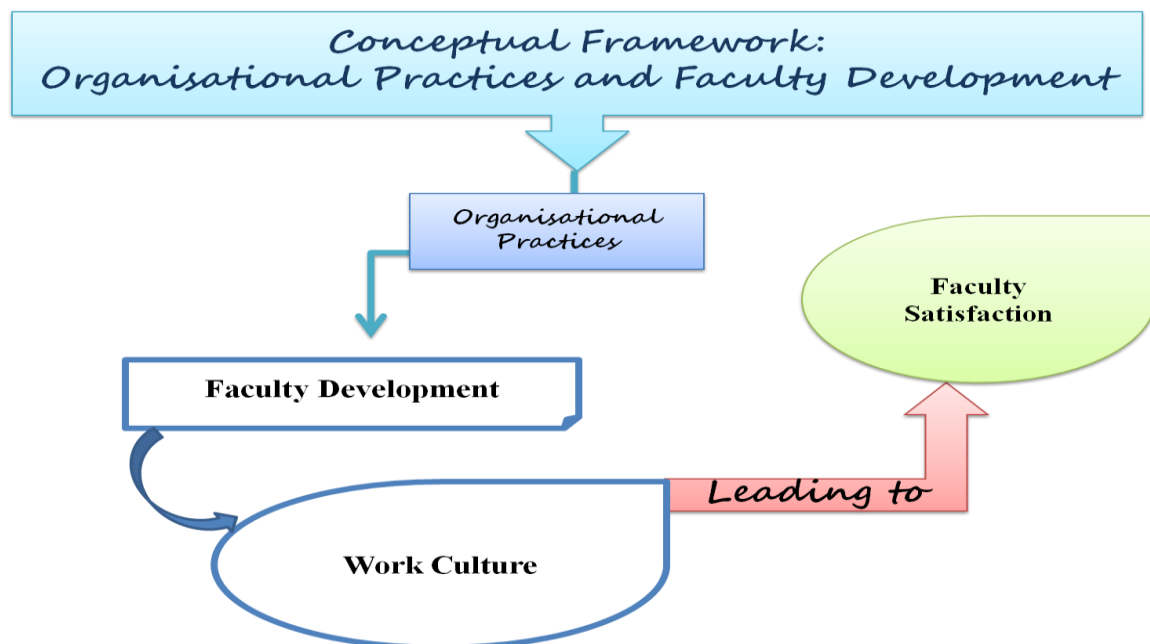


Chart No. 1: Conceptual Framework

Source: Researcher Understanding

Mediation Path:

- Organizational Practices → Faculty Development → Work Culture → Satisfaction

5. Literature Review (Enhanced)

- HR practices significantly influence employee performance and engagement (Saks, 2022)
- Faculty development enhances teaching effectiveness and institutional outcomes
- Organizational culture acts as a key mediator in employee performance models
- Supportive work environments improve job satisfaction and retention

Research Gap:

Limited integration of **faculty development + work culture + satisfaction** in HEIs

Research Methodology

Component	Description
Research Design	Quantitative – Exploratory Study
Sample Size	115 (Pilot Study)
Instrument	Structured Questionnaire
Scale	Categorical (Pilot Phase)
Analysis Tools	SPSS (Descriptive + Proposed Inferential), Percentage Method

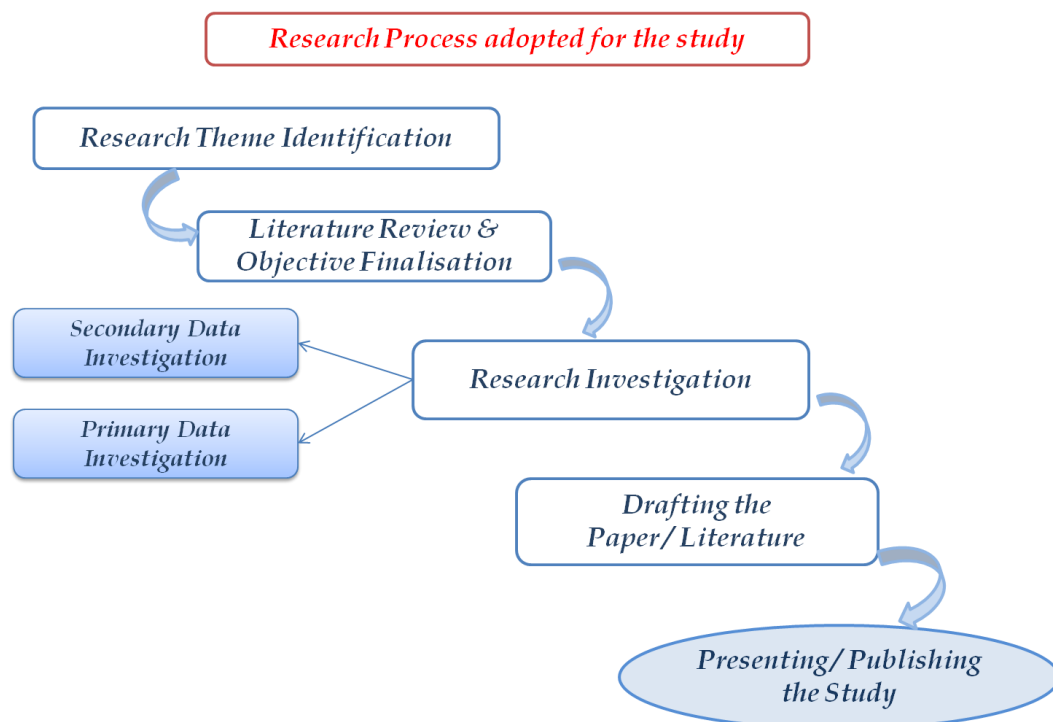


Chart No. 2: Research Process adopted

Source: Researcher Study

7. Data Analysis

7.1 Descriptive Insights

FDP effectiveness	89% positive
Management support	89% supportive
Work culture	77% collaborative
Satisfaction	91% satisfied

Indicates strong institutional environment

7.2 Inferential Analysis

Correlation Analysis (Conceptual Interpretation)

Variables	Relationship
Org. Practices ↔ Faculty Development	Strong Positive
Faculty Development ↔ Work Culture	Moderate Positive
Work Culture ↔ Satisfaction	Strong Positive

Interpretation: All constructs are positively related

- **Regression Analysis (Model Explanation)**

Model 1:

Faculty Development = $f(\text{Organizational Practices})$

Significant positive impact

Model 2:

Work Culture = $f(\text{Faculty Development})$

Moderate positive impact

Model 3:

Satisfaction = $f(\text{Work Culture} + \text{Faculty Development})$

Work culture shows stronger effect

- **Mediation Effect (Advanced Insight)**

Work Culture acts as **partial mediator**:

- Direct effect: Faculty Development → Satisfaction
- Indirect effect: Through Work Culture

✓ This strengthens theoretical contribution

8. Discussion

The study confirms that organizational practices are critical drivers of faculty development in

HEIs. The results further demonstrate that:

- Faculty development enhances work culture
- Work culture significantly influences satisfaction
- Mediation effect highlights the importance of organizational environment

These findings align with contemporary HRM and organizational behavior theories.

9. Theoretical Contribution

This study contributes to:

- Integrating **HR practices with academic context**
- Introducing **work culture as mediator**
- Providing empirical support for HEI management strategies

10. Practical Implications

- HEIs should invest in structured FDPs
- Strengthening work culture improves retention
- Recognition systems enhance engagement

11. Limitations

- Pilot study sample
- Lack of Likert scale (limits statistical rigor)
- Region-specific

12. Future Research

- SEM (Structural Equation Modelling)
- Larger sample (n=384)
- Cross-city comparative study

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Examining The Development Of Qualitative Research In The Governance Of Companies And Financial Markets: Determining Possible Directions For Further Study

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Abstract: A special issue of the journal dedicated to qualitative research in corporate governance is introduced in this editorial. By attempting to investigate the development of qualitative research in financial markets, of which a significant portion is devoted to corporate governance research, the study takes a wide agenda. The paper also discusses the contribution of the University of Dundee's new Centre for Qualitative Research in Financial Markets (QFRM) journal, of which this is a guest editorial, to the corpus of qualitative financial markets research, in light of the Center's founding. Since the prevailing quantitative and positive perspective may be perceived as limiting multidisciplinary research and stifling interpretative, qualitative academic engagement in financial markets, we start by problematizing financial markets and finance research work, and thwart efforts to make research on financial markets more applicable to society. From this angle, QFRM can be viewed as a haven that gives qualitative finance scholars around the world a platform to investigate and evaluate stock markets, corporate governance, shareholder activity, and financial market mechanisms in an interpretive framework, usually through the use of qualitative or mixed methods approaches. Additionally, we point out gaps in the literature, particularly with regard to the study issue, in the studies published in QFRM. An agenda for next qualitative studies in corporate governance and financial markets is presented in the paper's conclusion

Key Words : Corporate Governance; Financial Markets; Qualitative Methods; Qfrm

Introduction

The goal of this essay is to examine how qualitative research on financial markets—and more especially, corporate governance—has developed. It would seem reasonable to state that the vast bulk of scholarly work has historically used quantitative research methodologies and a positivist methodological approach, and continues to do so. However, scholarly research on

financial markets that use qualitative methods and an interpretative methodological attitude has recently grown. Prior research has demonstrated the prevalence of quantitative methods, particularly in the field of corporate governance.

"The traditional, prevailing approach to studying and evaluating corporate governance has most likely involved the use of econometric techniques as well as quantitative, positive methodology" (Brennan and Solomon, 2008, p.888-889).

A narrow concentration on quantitative approaches and a lack of diversity in research interest have drawn criticism. Serious problems were found in recent assessments of financial studies that were published in scholarly finance publications. A narrowness and myopia surrounding quantitative, positivist publications that show little indication of interdisciplinary research and nearly no consideration for societal concerns were identified by two studies that criticized finance research:

Using cutting-edge data science techniques, we analyze the content of over 30,000 published publications. All things considered, we discover a startling lack of variation in the subjects examined and the methodologies applied. Nearly all study in finance is carried out utilizing methods. Leading study on finance is centered in prestigious US institutions and has a significantly strong citation-based impact, with almost no use of qualitative methods or interdisciplinary approaches outside of economics and mathematics (Brooks and Schopol, 2018, p.615, highlighting added).

According to a second study that was published in the Critical Perspectives on Accounting and Finance,

Over the past 20 years, the amount of finance research has increased significantly, but there are still concerns about its scope and potential to advance society and the economy outside of academia. We contend, based on evidence from several sources, that institutional and individual incentives have promoted insularity and, as a result, uniformity within the field. We look at the traits of research that is published and referenced in the top financial field journals, making the case that the work has grown abstract and disconnected from practical problems. Even when the researchers are from other nations, the work that is published in the "top" journals increasingly uses US data. We demonstrate how this limited agenda is irrelevant to the financial services industry using data from impact assessments, publishing trends, and grant capture.

We demonstrate how, in contrast to other fields of business and management study, this limited aim is irrelevant to the financial services industry, the economy, or society at large. We specifically draw attention to the comparatively dearth of ethical research in academic

finance and talk about the discipline's anticipated ramifications, particularly its social importance (Brooks et al. 2019, p.24, underlining added).

The fact that these two critiques of financial research were printed in accounting journals is very significant. It's possible that they wouldn't have made it through the financial journal review procedure or would have been rejected outright.

This study aims to provide a taste of the depiction of qualitative investigation into financial markets by concentrating on a limited number of publications, rather than attempting to provide a thorough and extensive overview of the academic literature. Since this is an editorial for a special issue of the journal on "Qualitative Research in Corporate Governance," we concentrate especially on the function of qualitative research in the markets for financial goods, a relatively new finance journal (the host of this paper) that specializes in promoting qualitative research. The study offers a cursory overview of qualitative research in a limited number of publications, with an emphasis on those that UK scholars regularly submit to and that welcome qualitative research by securities markets (published in accounting journals rather than financing journals).

Since mainstream, US-based financial publications are nearly always quantitative, they are not included. Additionally, these publications are not just focused on research in quantitative finance. Establishing shared definitions and interpretations of "financial markets" and "corporate governance" at the start is crucial for defining the parameters of the study and, in particular, the literature search we carried out. We use the following typical definition of a financial market to determine the paper's scope:

is a general phrase used to describe any market where trading in assets, such as stocks, bonds, currencies, and derivatives, takes place. While major financial markets, such as the NYSE, or the New York Stock Exchange, market trillions of dollars every year, others are tiny and hardly active dollars' worth of securities per day. One

According to The Cadbury Report (1992), corporate governance is "the system by how businesses are directed and controlled."

According to this definition, financial market research encompasses any study of financial markets that deals with the trading of (and consequently, ownership of) stocks (business shares). But we also broaden the scope of corporate governance studies to encompass a broader definition that takes into account broader societal issues, ethics, and social responsibility; in particular, it recognizes the definition of corporate governance as "... the system of checks and balances, both within and outside to companies, which ensures that companies being released their responsibility to all their stakeholders and act in a socially

responsible way in every component of their business activity" (Solomon, 2020, forthcoming).

Academics studying finance have long acknowledged that a purely quantitative approach to research can only give a limited view of the financial markets and how they operate. For instance, twenty years ago, an economist made the following observation:

The reality is that we don't really know much about the daily activities, perceptions, roles, mores, customs, subcultures, and other aspects of risk managers' and other practitioners' lives, much alone how they interact with the technology they employ. The fact that these marketplaces and the financial instruments exchanged in them are all relatively new innovations that many qualitative researchers have not yet given much attention to makes the field ripe for quality qualitative study (Dowd, 2004).

In fact, as this article discusses, an increase in qualitative finance research is starting to reveal "black boxes" that hold the inner workings of banks, brokers, investment houses, and other financial organizations. Although quantitative research offers comprehensive understanding of Qualitative research may help us better understand the mechanisms at play and the individuals who operate in the financial market by examining the correlations between variables and, to some degree, the causative aspects of financial market phenomena. According to a review of qualitative research in the larger area of management research, there has been improvement, which is characterized as a decline in the belief that qualitative research is less effective than conventional quantitative methods (Bluhm et al., 2011).

The authors outline four distinguishing features of qualitative research using an interpretative methodological approach, such as

"First, qualitative research takes place in the organization's natural environment."

Second, the participant's impressions of their experiences are the source of qualitative data. In other words, qualitative research offers participants a "voice," which might be from key informants or individual employees who are seeing a situation.

Third, as the study situation develops, the design of the data collection and analysis is modified, making qualitative research reflective.

Fourth, there is a lack of standardization in the procedures used to gather and analyze qualitative data.

The researcher must be cognizant of the situation and endeavor to select the approach that will best illuminate the phenomena (Bluhm et al., 2011, p.1871). We begin by examining the mission of the journal *Qualitative Research in Financial Markets*, which proudly and

shamelessly claims on its website to be the "only peer-reviewed journal dedicated to exploring the rapidly-growing discipline of research activity in finance that uses qualitative methods."

This allows us to begin defining the scope of qualitative research in financial markets.

"Building on a long pedigree of finance research, the journal publishes international and innovative analyses and novel insights into the stock market worldwide explicitly advocates methodical issues analyses of the issues arising from the use of qualitative procedures in financial research as well as empirical articles," the website goes on to say. The journal specifically calls for the following subjects: Reviews of current advancements and the methodological foundation of qualitative research in finance; attempts to improve the reputation, models, and methods of international banking; behavioral finance, including both theoretical and empirical viewpoints; financial aspects of emotions, including how unconscious influences affect judgment; the connection between significant business news announcements and market timing; ties between principals and agents in the contemporary global financial ecosystem; reactions to modifications to corporate governance laws and frameworks; viewpoints of practitioners about decisions regarding external finance; business correspondence and the dissemination of information that is sensitive to pricing; the impact of the subprime loan crisis on the regulation and structure of the financial markets.

Throughout the past 10 to 15 years, there have been demands in the literature to support and embrace greater variety in methods, particularly more qualitative research in the areas of corporate governance and financial markets.

A "roadmap" for upcoming corporate governance research was created by Brennan and Solomon (2008), with an emphasis on academics creating more qualitative study objectives. In addition to expanding corporate governance study across five more "dimensions," the article includes a broader methodological approach. These dimensions are the following: time horizon, globalization, business sector environment, methods of accountability, and theoretical framework. Brennan and Solomon (2008) placed a notable emphasis on the methodological approach and technique of expanding.

Since the first edition of QRFM was released in early 2009, the journal's development provides an intriguing case study of how qualitative research on corporate governance and financial markets has changed in response to calls for additional work in these areas in the academic accounting and finance literature.

With an emphasis on corporate governance research that takes a qualitative approach, this study reviews qualitative research in financial markets. The second section focuses on

qualitative research in corporate governance by reviewing the qualitative academic studies of financial markets published in a number of accounting and finance publications. Additionally, we offer a cursory overview of all of QRFM's material from its launch in 2009, eleven

An overview of the existing literature on qualitative study results on corporate governance and the financial industry

We evaluate qualitative research on financial markets in this area, with a particular emphasis on qualitative research on corporate governance. Following the qualitative and interpretive approach, this paper aims to represent a "rough guide" across a small sample of accounting and finance journals rather than offering a comprehensive, scientific analysis of research published this year across a wide range of journals. Of course, we focused primarily on accounting journals and, of course, papers published in QRFM, as there aren't many articles in finance journals.

Since issues like ownership and control, institutional investment, corporate failures (which typically result from governance weaknesses), responsible expenditures, price-responsive information, and ethics/social responsibility in finance are all components of corporate governance, we adopt a broad definition of corporate governance that covers a wide range of financial markets topics. Although there are well-known an exemption (the literature review by Shleifer and Vishny, 1997), we chose to omit the American finance journals (such as the Journal of Finance) from this cursory examination of the literature across a selection regarding accounting and finance journals because they typically take a quantitative approach. Our study also aims to highlight topics discussed in the literature and offer ideas for future directions in qualitative finance, with a focus on corporate governance.

QRFM's involvement in the development of qualitative research on financial markets

We examined every manuscript that was published in QRFM throughout the first 10 years of its existence. 2. We start by discussing some descriptive statistics that emerged from the data analysis, and Tables 1 through 3 give an overview of the published studies categorized by topic, method used, and region examined. We tended to categorize articles that included surveys as non-specific with respect to geographic location. International cross-country studies were defined as those that involved two or more nations. Using an interpretative analysis, we extracted a number of themes from the data that not only provide details on the published study but also, considering certain apparent gaps in this literature, suggest possible directions for future research.

Evaluating Financial Markets Qualitatively Similar to Brennan and Solomon (2008), we

examined the data from the journal article review, modifying the dimensions to fit scholarly financial market research based on the kinds of papers published and QRFM's mandate. We analyzed the published papers using the following criteria: globalization (country or geographical location investigated); issue explored (in terms of the element of financial markets under examination); and methodological approach and techniques used. We also discussed the time horizon, noting any papers that had a historical viewpoint, and the sector, discussing any instances of research that concentrated on an area other than the corporate or financial services sectors.

We discovered places that have been misrepresented in the articles published in QRFM as a consequence of our study. This made it possible to identify certain subjects, regions, and techniques/methodological approaches that needed more investigation in order to

to create a possible research agenda for the future that would fill in the perceived gaps in the researchers' qualitative study of financial markets. Since QRFM is the only journal in the profession of accounting and finance discipline devoted to this technique, our descriptive study of the journal's articles offered a thorough picture of the qualitative research conducted in the financial markets sector during the past ten years. After that, we conducted an interpretative thematic analysis of the published articles, highlighting problems and elements that we felt were important.

Examination of articles that appeared in QRFM

Examining the strategies and tactics used by researchers who published in QRFM was the first step in the analytic process. Table 1 displays the results of this investigation. It is not surprising that the vast majority of papers used only qualitative research approaches (81%), or a combination of qualitative methods, occasionally including quantitative techniques (15%), given the journal's primary focus on publishing qualitative investigations into the functioning of the financial markets. Merely 4% of the publications that were published in the past ten years used just quantitative methods. Over the course of the 10 years, we also examined whether the employment of certain approaches had increased or decreased.

Interestingly, during the course of 10 years, the employment of case study and interview methods increased compared to one another. Additionally, throughout time, there has been a minor increase in the number of publications summarizing literature reviews and reviews of empirical or theoretical domains. The quantity of articles that discuss or argue concepts or policies is decreasing. Although this is somewhat unexpected considering the growing challenges in persuading individuals to engage in questionnaire surveys, the usage of

questions has stayed pretty constant over time, with 15% of publications utilizing exclusively questionnaires. Perhaps these issues are offset by the usage of surveys via the internet in more recent years.

Numerous studies were discovered to either use a more positivist approach to questionnaire study design by using significant statistical analysis, occasionally OLS regression or factor analysis, or to mix the questionnaire and interview methods. It is noteworthy that some rather odd approaches, like "perceptions alignment" and a qualitative examination of cartoons on an economics-based journal that revealed a trend toward financialization, were included under "other" (6% of articles).

Method	Number	Percentage	Trend over time
Interviews	29	20	Rising
Literature review	25	17	Rising
Questionnaires	23	15	Stable
Case study	14	9	Rising
Quantitative only	6	4	Peak half way
Theoretical development/ conceptual paper/ Policy debate	13	9	Declining
Experiment	3	2	Stable
Content analysis	4	3	Stable
Mixed methods	23	15	Slight decline

The financial markets issue covered in the research was taken into consideration in the subsequent stage of analysis.

Table 2 below provides a summary of the results.

Topic	Number
Islamic banking/finance	33
Institutional investors	19
Financial/banking crisis	16
Corporate governance (traditional CG topics: executive remuneration/ acquisitions/ ownership structure)	12
Sustainability/ethical issues in financial markets (responsible investment/ climate change)	10
Individual/private investors	9
Behavioural finance	7
Risk disclosures/Basel II	7

Banking (not banking crisis or Basel II)	7
Microfinance	5
Share value/share prices	5
Stock markets (integration, contagion, futures markets)	4
Analysts	3
SMEs	2
Working capital management	2
Bonds and bond markets	1
Other	7
	149

Investigation on all facets of financial markets is extensive, ranging from market types like stock and bond markets to analyses of various financial organizations like banks and institutional investors. There was a fair amount of work concentrating on more "traditional" governance areas like executive compensation, ownership structures, and reviews of corporate governance regulations and policies, even though we would contend that the majority of the financial system research could be interpreted as falling under a wide umbrella of corporate governance.

Some attention was paid to more recent fields including behavioral finance and microfinance. The majority of QRFM's research has focused on Islamic banking and finance, indicating the rising interest in Middle Eastern industries from an accounting and economic standpoint.

Thirdly, we looked at how the academic literature in QRFM was distributed geographically, and Table 3 summarizes our findings.

Table 3: Geographic Distribution of QRFM Research

Country/Region	Number	Country/Region	Number
Australia	1	Malaysia	18
Austria	2	Mozambique	1
Bangladesh	1	Nigeria	1
Caribbean	1	Nordic countries	1
China	1	Pakistan	6
Egypt	1	Poland	4

Ethiopia	1	Spain	1
Gambia	1	Sri Lanka	1
Germany	8	Sweden	2
Ghana	1	Turkey	1
Hong Kong	1	Tunisia	1
India	10	UAE	1
Indonesia	2	UK	6
Iran	4	USA	7
Ireland	1	Yemen	1
Italy	2	International comparisons/ geographic groups	29
Kuwait	1	Non-specific (e.g. literature reviews)	29

An intriguing picture is painted by this analysis. It is evident that more than one-third of the publications (58) are either non-specific, meaning they are motivated by topics or issues rather than geography, or compare findings across nations. As seen in Table 2, a large number of international comparative publications examine Middle Eastern economies while concentrating on Islamic banking or finance. Compared to other regions of the world, Malaysia, India, and Pakistan are the subjects of comparatively more publications. Just 13 studies examine the backdrop of the USA or the UK. It's interesting to note that just two publications examine Hong Kong or China. This might be explained by the fact that Chinese financial research tends to be more quantitative than qualitative.

Themes identified in the examination of published

Significant representation of emerging nations, Islamic finance, crisis-led, issue-driven studies on reaction to crises (mostly the financial crisis), and various theoretical views were among the themes we gleaned from an interpretative analysis. Given the dearth of focus on qualitative and interpretive financial markets and studies on corporate governance in other journals, particularly in the finance industry, our review shows the journal's overwhelming contribution to the development of qualitative research in these fields. Additionally, our study shows that scholarly research on financial markets and governance is moving away from the traditional Anglo-Saxon nations and toward other economies.

The economies of the Middle East and Islamic finance are given a lot of attention. The investigation revealed other more odd techniques, such "qualia," which the report defines as

"... qualitative feelings like the "redness" of a rose or the "pain" of regret." Qualia seem to have nothing to do with formal reasoning, yet they can be linked to rule-based or experiential decision-making processes.

Evident Deficits in the Literature on QRFM

After the investigation, several apparent gaps in the literature on qualitative financial markets as represented by QRFM could be found. One aspect was the relative paucity of research on derivatives markets; for instance, there were very few studies on futures markets. There was no study on shareholder activism or institutional investor involvement and discussion, despite the fact that 19 studies examined topics related to the investment community, such as private disclosure in one-on-one meetings. Furthermore, not much research has been done on socially responsible investing or responsible investing in light of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) considerations. In fact, there was a dearth of broader study on sustainability and ethical concerns in financial markets, such as green bonds, climate change risks, or sustainable finance in general. Few studies have examined how corporate governance regulations and codes of conduct have evolved globally or tackled topics like non-executive directors' independence in relation to corporate governance.

The topic of individual and private investors has historically received minimal attention in the fields of finance and financial markets. Researchers may still find value in the early work of Lee and Tweedie (1975), which was later picked up by Bartlett and Chandler (1996). The opinions and actions of private or individual shareholders were the subject of several articles in QRFM, but it appears that this topic still needs further study. With the exception of one research on Caribbean markets, there were no publications examining financial markets in Latin America or Central America from a geographic emphasis standpoint. There was very little participation from the remainder of Africa, with only a few articles addressing Nigeria, Ghana, and Mozambique, despite the fact that some publications included data from MENA nations.

Examination of qualitative research on corporate governance and financial markets in several fiscal and accounting publications

We looked through many journal issues over the past 10 years, which corresponds to the time that QRFM has been around. The goal was to find articles that addressed financial markets and corporate governance while simultaneously using a more interpretative methodological approach and one or more qualitative research methods, as opposed to a positivist outlook. There were no qualitative or interpretative publications in the financial journals. Nonetheless,

there were sporadic articles on financial markets subjects that employed a qualitative approach from an interpretative perspective in several of the top accounting publications that we examined.

Additionally, in order to find qualitative, more interpretative works, we examined the last ten years of *Corporate Governance: An International Review*, a publication dedicated to corporate governance research across a broad academic frame of navigation, including financial and accounting topics. All things considered, we believe QRFM significantly closes this notable gap in the financial literature. It's interesting to note that accounting journals seem to publish qualitative financial markets articles with a variety of viewpoints and methodologies, whilst finance journals still don't seem to accept papers with a qualitative or non-positivist orientation.

The journal of accounting, auditing, and accountability (AAAJ)

Qualitative research and interpretative paradigm studies are frequently published in the Australian accounting publication, AAAJ. Although the journal's mandate is to focus on accountability and transparency rather than financial markets, the papers occasionally address financial topics. A total of 341 papers from AAAJ were taken into consideration. In light of our study emphasis, these are the studies that deserved the greatest attention.

A couple of the publications discussed the financial crisis. Czarniawska (2012), for instance, used a textual analysis to examine popular "emplotments" of views of the financial crisis of 2007–2010. According to the data, financial crises are frequently explained to the public using the same "strong plots." Regarding the financial crisis, Liff and Wohlström (2018) note that despite receiving government support, a depositors' bank run occurred at Britain's Northern Rock (NR) Bank in 2007. The information that bank management and other parties provide depositors through the media is subjected to content analysis in this article. The theoretical ideas of rituals and masks are used in this study. From a more ancient

Merino et al. (2010) use the idea of corporate hegemony in a thoughtful article to explain the conditioning atmosphere of the United States throughout the 1990s from a broader historical standpoint. In the face of major policy failures that have affected the whole world, they analyze the strategies employed by neoliberals to garner support for their philosophy and deftly field criticism.

In the context of microfinance, Marini et al. (2018) examine how translation works and how intermediaries serve as cultural interpreters using a postcolonial lens. A case study of a South African microfinance organization is used in the qualitative method, which also makes use of fieldwork diaries, documents, interviews, and direct observation. In relation to banking

institutions, Chen et al. (2014) aim to provide a new way of rethinking banking models by using qualitative research on intangibles. This is essential since the banking sector has been affected dramatically by the changing environment over the previous two decades. The 2007-2009 financial crisis has increased to doubts about existing bank business strategies. This study builds a grounded theory of bank intangibles using qualitative data gathered from interviews with bank managers and analysts in the UK.

Using a grounded theory methodology, the model shows how tangible and financial resources and intangibles interact to create bank value, how they react to changes in the environment, how analysts and other external observers perceive bank intangibles, and how bankers and analysts have different perspectives.

In a qualitative research on corporate governance, Nicholson et al. (2017) used an inductive, case-based methodology to find recurring patterns of behavior in two matched boards during three sessions that were videotaped. Sequential examination of coded individual and group behaviors sheds light on the accountability practices of boards. According to the report, boards follow regular, transparent accountability procedures.

Depending on the matter at hand, each board member has a distinct role to play in these procedures, which enables management and directors to hold one another accountable. During board debates, the outsiders (directors) both support and criticize the insiders (managers). They alternate their behaviors with various agenda items while keeping a constant group level of skepticism and support throughout the meeting. This enables the concurrent growth of group-level verification and trust.

Organizations, Society, and Accounting (AOS)

AOS publishes finance and financial markets studies that use a qualitative approach and interpretative methodological approach, while being primarily an academic publication focused on accounting.

In fact, the publication has a history of publishing more theoretical, qualitative, and interpretative accounting publications, as well as a few qualitative financial markets papers over the past ten years that we looked at. Arena et al. (2017) investigate enterprise risk management using a case study method of two sizable organizations, taking into account risk management and internal control systems. In light of recent theory-building research that highlights the accumulation of roles, processes, and organizational structures into an infrastructure that permits the creation of performance accounts, the authors conclude that their investigation may provide insight into some important aspects of infrastructure formation.

Caylor et al. (2017) discuss the function of analysts in the financial markets and the connection between the profitability of favorable ratings and the arguments made by sell-side analysts. The authors convert analysts' qualitative remarks into a content-based text signal using a unique text analysis approach. After adjusting for data in the quantitative summary measures, the study concludes that information in analysts' explanations is associated with profitable recommendations. They then use a text signal to construct trading strategies and discover that doing so yields profits that are economically meaningful.

The contradictory implications of more price data in marketplaces with hard-to-value items where non-price elements are crucial are highlighted by Coslor (2016) in an inventive article. In the fine art industry, which is known for its covert activities, the expansion of market information providers made it easier to obtain information on auction prices. The study highlights complicated results from more data availability, drawing on inductive ethnographic research, as auction prices might be interpreted as a gauge of the worth of an artwork. In addition to exposing significant nonprice elements in valuation that impede provider claims of art market transparency, the findings dissect supply, demand, and various prices in the art market.

It is easier to understand why there are still disparities in valuation when one examines how expert "thick" valuation converts raw price data into comparables and then valuations. Buyers are more likely to interpret historical prices as market or reference prices than as complexly adjusted raw materials for valuation. Since evaluative frictions can arise even in the absence of well-defined alternative valuation methodologies, this helps to appreciate both the benefits and predictable issues from greater pricing data in marketplaces with significant qualitative and non-numerical data. This creates beneficial connections between valuation and assessment research and critical transparency.

An other study examines how investors respond to information that is revealed. Using an experimental approach, Asay et al. (2018) investigate if, when all other information is held constant, investors respond more strongly to narrative disclosures when the CEO's presence or affiliation with the message is more prominent. In the first experiment, the CEO's use of more personal pronouns while stating whether the company is "likely" or "unlikely" to prevail in a lawsuit is evaluated. We discover that when the disclosure uses more personal pronouns, investors' opinions of the lawsuit's result more closely match the CEO's claim. The CEO's level of association with the message and whether the disclosure contains positive or bad news are both manipulated in Experiments 2 and 3.

We alter whether a revelation used more personal pronouns in the second experiment. In the

third experiment, we change whether or not the CEO's photo appears in a disclosure. The two manipulations of connection with Investors responded more strongly to the message in between-subjects testing. In other words, adding more personal pronouns or the CEO's picture results in more favorable (negative) evaluations of the firm's worth when the news is good (poor). Additionally, we discover that although participants do not anticipate an impact on investment ratings, both manipulations are interpreted within-subjects as suggesting a stronger relationship with the message. A fourth trial offers more proof that using personal pronouns influences investor responses by enhancing the disclosure's perceived legitimacy.

The authors of a qualitative study on investors' attitudes and responses to information, Kelton and Montague and (2018), experiment with nonprofessional investors to demonstrate how the auditor's emphasis of matter (EOM) paragraphs unintentionally increase their impressions of management credibility, which in turn increases the likelihood of investment. Additionally, even while ranges might draw attention to uncertainty and downside risk, the results imply that, unless management discloses a broad range, the favorable impact of the EOM on investors' inclinations to invest is unaffected by management's publication of an estimate range.

The transforming of assumptions into risks, risk management technology, and a best-practice framework for risk management are all examined by Thomsen and Skaerbæk (2018). An extensive mega-project case study is the methodology used. The results show that the technologies and framework define the limits of the types of uncertainties that are recognized and incorporated as risks via the purification efforts of risk consultants as specialists and the visual power of inscriptions.

Jordan et al. (2018) examine the interdiscursive nature of risk matrices, how they appeal to a range of users in various organizational contexts and disciplines, and how they function as technologies that mediate between concentrated and everyday discourses. They base their analysis on governmental behavior studies and Jürgen Link's interdiscourse analysis.

A best-practice framework for risk management, risk management technology, and the conversion of uncertainties into hazards are all examined by Thomsen and Skaerbæk (2018). A longitudinal case study of a sizable mega-project is the methodology used. The results show that the framework and technologies define the limits of the types of uncertainties that are recognized and incorporated as risks through the visual power of inscriptions and the professional purification work of risk consultants.

A variety of conscious and unconscious mental defense mechanisms are used to control this

worry. It is also possible to see fund managers' emphasis on meetings and their faith in business management to "perform" for them as a way to reduce tension rather than for any specific financial goal.

Additionally, this article highlights how important mathematical methods are for managing anxiety. Calculation can actually strengthen ego defenses and perpetuate the idea of homo economicus, rather than serving as a tool to restore reason or rectify cognitive errors. Fund managers are described as "doing" but "not doing," "knowing" but "choosing not to know," and they are responsible for managing not only the money of their customers but also their own anxieties.

This concern is managed by a number of consciously and unconsciously operating mental defensive systems. Additionally, fund managers' focus on meetings and their trust in company management to "perform" for them might be seen as a stress-reduction strategy rather than a financial objective.

This essay also emphasizes the significance of mathematical techniques for anxiety management. Rather than being a tool to restore reason or correct cognitive mistakes, calculation might actually reinforce ego defenses and promote the image of homo economicus. Fund managers are said to be "doing" but "not doing," "knowing" but "choosing not to know," and in charge of overseeing not just their clients' money but also their personal concerns.

Governance in Corporate America: A Global Analysis

Professor Bob Tricker, an academic and practitioner, served as CGIR's editor when it first began in the late 1990s. He was eager to include practitioner viewpoints and excellent scholarly research on governance issues in the magazine at the time. We believe that the journal's early years showed an open-minded, based on principles approach to governance research, since many of the research papers in the early issues took a qualitative or discursive approach to analyzing corporate governance. Professor Christine Mallin then took over the journal, specializing in corporate governance research on worldwide comparisons, ethical investing, and shareholder voting.

The journal carried on in a similar fashion, accepting a broad spectrum of papers covering a wide range of themes with a variety of methodologies and methodological approaches. The journal seems to have shifted its emphasis in recent years toward quantitative research and organizational theory viewpoints, suggesting a potential change in the purpose and substance of the magazine. Taking into account the journal's past ten years of publications, we found a few articles that fit into our wide topic and take a more qualitative

approach since they expand on some of the previously mentioned themes in articles published in QRFM.

In brief

In conclusion, the subjects and approaches that defined the articles published in QRFM were reflected in the papers we took from some of the top publications, mostly in accounting. Post-crisis analysis and discussion also received a lot of attention. However, there were variations when the research's geographic location was taken into account. We now present the articles that are part of this QRFM special issue on corporate governance and qualitative research.

Articles in the qualitative investigation in Corporate Responsibility Special Issue The articles in this special issue add to the body of knowledge on Islamic finance, responsible investing, developing economies in Africa and the Middle East, and environmental considerations, among other aspects of qualitative analysis with the governance of businesses from a wider viewpoint.

"Greenwashing and Responsible Investment Practices" is the first paper. A rather limited body of literature that examines responsible investment practices, particularly engagement and conversation (one-on-one meetings between investors and enterprises), is expanded upon by "Empirical Evidence from Zimbabwe." Goffman's impression management book and other works in the field of impression management and greenwashing served as the theoretical foundation for the paper's previous work.

Concluding and Recommendations for Further Study

In addition to introducing the papers in this special issue, this study looked at many prestigious publications in an effort to gauge the growth of qualitative accounting and research into corporate governance. In order to assess QRFM's contribution to the field of qualitative financial markets research, we also examine the articles that have been published there. Using a wide range of qualitative research techniques and methods, the journal has published a wide range of qualitative papers over the course of ten years covering corporate responsibility, equity, obligations, institutional investors, and market developments. It has also covered a large number of countries worldwide.

According to our research, prestigious accounting journals offer a secure environment for qualitative research on corporate governance and financial markets, in addition to QRFM. This report directly addresses the mainstream finance journals with a significant proposal (or even a demand for equality): please begin to consider incorporating corporate governance and qualitative finance research. It defies sense that qualitative research on finance must be published in journals devoted to accounting, business ethics, or organizations. Researchers

studying finance who use qualitative methods are just as legitimate and significant as those who use quantitative methods.

Finally, we believe that this research has suggested suggestions for finance education in professional programs, higher education institutions, and universities. Textbooks on finance and governance must acknowledge the multiplicity of methodologies and methodological approaches, including examples and references that employ both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Governance and finance research into these vitally important areas must be incorporated into finance education in order to address 21st century issues like climate change, sustainable challenges, species extinction, and the effects of water shortages and increasing temperatures on human populations worldwide. Given the severe consequences, only a multidisciplinary, multimethod, and inclusive approach to study can help save the earth and mankind from calamity.

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Designing tutoring as a tool and competency for professionals to use in workplace hybrids to promote involvement as well as psychological well-being

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Abstract: This essay examines how leaders and employees in corporate settings have been affected by working from home during the epidemic, how these experiences may affect workplaces in future generations, and what role coaching may play in fostering skill development in the workplace of the twenty-first century. There was a tonne of study on the elements that affect workplace engagement and well-being prior to the epidemic. Models outlining the components of effectively-being and involvement, as well as instruments to assess whether they exist or not, have been examined, tried out, and validated. The causes of the reduction in well-being and participation during the pandemic and the leadership qualities or workplace standards that would need to be developed and put into practise in order to improve the current state of well-being and enthusiasm for future work environments are currently unknown. This essay examines how coaching could help leaders in the workplace in the twenty-first century. As the corporate world transitions to post-pandemic workplace circumstances, there are difficulties. The diversity of interests makes the subject more complicated. A review of the literature on involvement and well-being was conducted. Data gathered by various organisations throughout the epidemic and the conclusions reached from it were contrasted with what is written in the literature and mixed with the author's on-the-ground observations while educating executives and their subordinates in corporate settings during the pandemic. The proposal at the conclusion of this article is to improve leaders' coaching abilities and increase their coaching expertise and literacy in order to have a beneficial impact on worker engagement and well-being in modern work contexts.

Keywords: Dawn Of The 21st Century Skills, Well-Being, Student Engagement, Blended Employment, Leadership, And Coaching

1. Introduction

This study builds on the author's earlier work, which was published in the GiLE4Youth Symposium Proceedings (Franzen-Waschke, 2011). It discusses how the Covid-19 epidemic in 2020 affected leaders' and the workforce's engagement and well-being while they were

working from home. The return to regular office situations were hotly debated in the first quarter of 2021 with both employees and employers, as this study discusses. diverse stakeholders with diverse demands and interests have varied perspectives on how and where work might be done in the workplace. This essay will concentrate on the function of mentoring and how methods such as coaching and guided talks may assist leaders and the employees of the 2020s in making a smooth transfer to the new workplace age. This essay will also examine methods to improve well-being as well as commitment in modern workplaces by enhancing current knowledge and abilities in those areas and acquiring new ones. In order to support the beneficial benefits coaching and guided talks may have on supervisors and their staff members in the corporate environment, it is suggested that further study be done in the future.

This subject is becoming more important as research from throughout the world has revealed a lack of involvement and well-being (Benjamin et al., 2020; Singer-Velush per al., 2020; Mckenzie & Gavett, 2021). The effects of the "biggest experimentation of our time," as Schwartz et al. (2020) dubbed it, are being felt across hierarchies and in the business world. The reverberations manifest in what is referred to as "The Great Resignation" in the US (Kane, 2021; Hempel, 2021) and a widening of the gap in inequalities between nations, businesses, and people whose opportunities to work concerning home vary greatly (Milasi et al., 2020) in Europe. A universally applicable solution will not be possible due to the diversity of interests, wants, and demands (Kowalski whilst Loretto, 2017; Kossek, the et al., 2020). Evidence-based practises may help businesses and their employees create the on-site, distant, people have or hybrid workplace of the future.

We were doing an experiment in the course of the summer of 2020, and at the time, it appeared like an old paradigm was about to undergo a change for the better (Franzen-Waschke, 2020). Specifically, the evolving corporate attitudes towards workers who work from home. Prior to 2020, disputes inside enterprises frequently centred on who would have access to and profit from the option of conducting business from their homes (Desilver, 2020). When the pandemic struck, it appeared that sceptics - both among employees and corporate leaders - were willing to concede that neither worker efficiency nor performance had suffered throughout the working-from-home era and that necessity, again showing that necessity had been the driving force of invention, had demonstrated that working from home does, in fact, work (Bartik e et al., 2020; De Brown and silver, 2020).

Since the epidemic, employees have mastered the art of working remotely. They organise Zoom as well as MS Teams conversations, have improved their ability to handle

technological difficulties, and have improved their ability to communicate with one another while children, pets, and spouses are present during corporate conferences (Singer-Velush et al., 2020). The completion of the task was and still is of utmost importance, and thus far, this has been the case in most instances.

Employers and employees are dealing with new problems as we emerge slowly and cautiously from the epidemic, and it seems as though we are going back in time. With a mentality from before March 2020, we're starting over (Mortensen & Gardner's theories, 2021). Company guidelines and standards are becoming more stringent again as vaccination rates rise, Covid-19 limits are easing, and individuals are being forced to return to their former office jobs in a pretty severe manner (Kelly, 2021). To the shock and terror of some and the delight of a select few. From a corporate perspective, telecommuting worked since it allowed businesses to continue operating and even grow (Benjamin et al., 2020; Singer-Velush et al., 2020).

From a human perspective, the success rate was less telling because staff members' stress levels varied according to their job responsibilities, household dynamics, living arrangements, and internet bandwidth, which also affected their readiness to return to work or not (Anders et al., 2021; John Campbell & Gavett's & et al, 2021).

Diverse interests and factors raise numerous additional questions for which we have yet to discover solutions or, if there are to be any clarifications at all in this sort of volatile and multifaceted environment, do rather than yet have the definitive ones. With a new focus, the 2020 experiment is still ongoing. In 2020, surviving meant both maintaining one's standard of life and a company's ability to continue operating. Finding the best path forward to a more environmentally friendly workforce scenario that also takes into account what was learnt in 2020 will be the focus of 2021 (Berkeley et al., 2020; Berinato, 2020; Gryphon, 2021).

Based on their respective professional and personal circumstances, some employees preferred working from home to a greater or lesser extent. Companies' managers and executives also reflect on the past differently: while some have observed positive outcomes, high levels of productivity, and high levels of employee engagement, others have observed their team struggling and yearning to return to their workplace (Brighton et al., 2020; Goetz & Breitenbroich, 2020). Additionally, supervisors and supervisors have seen boundaries in their own zones of influence and control, for example, when their colleagues were working entirely remotely from their residences (Rothbard, 2020). Associations and trade unions are pressuring governments to take a stand as well as to establish a legislative framework and tax laws that would enable a global masterplan to materialise (Vogel & Breitenbroich, 2016).

The optimal approach moving ahead that also ensures equal rights for all job kinds and people is still being hotly disputed in many nations, businesses, and organisations. The difference between employment categories that might allow faraway work and the ones that do not couldn't have grown more obvious during the epidemic (Milasi et al., 2020). Even though they disagree on the specifics of what that hybrid arrangement should look like, the types of employment and employees who have benefited from the shift in perceptions concerning where collaborate can be done have made the decision that it would be the most suitable model (Milasi et al., 2020; Wagner & Breitenbroich, 2020).

Professionals are interested in a flexible arrangement that allows them to work a maximum of three days every week in the office, corresponding to a poll done by Vogel und Breitenbroich (2020) (Milasi et al., 2020; Werner & Breitenbroich, 2020).

The best ways to lead, establish connections with coworkers—especially recent hires—and maintain team and personal engagement will evolve. In a hybrid society, it will be necessary to modify human resource activities including onboarding and offboarding, training and development, and additionally career planning (Bennett et al., 2020). Business executives should be aware of the following seven hybrid work trends in 2021, according to Microsoft's 2021 Work Movement Index Annual Report, which reads "The Future of Work is Hybrid" (Anders et al., 2021) as follows:

- a) Workers desire the best about both worlds at once.
- b) Leaders need to be reminded because they are out of connection with their workforce.
- c) Electronic overload is a serious problem that is becoming worse.
- d) In a hybrid workplace, talent is found everywhere.

Johnson and Garriety (2020) noted in the studies they conducted that for businesses to stay well-liked and in-demand employers in the 21st century, they must become flexible and adaptable in their methods in order to meet the many demands that their workers may have. Long before the epidemic, Richard Truss, Delbridge, and their colleagues (2014) discovered a link between psychological well-being and involvement in the workplace with acknowledgement and next-level leadership qualities. So the issue is, how will these novel and varied ways of cooperating with one another affect leadership, workplace culture, connection, and engagement? The jointly developed hybrid model appears to be the most well-liked among the workforce, but making it operate in a sustainable fashion will be a more difficult task for businesses and leaders (Berkeley et al., 2020; Globalisation Partners, 2021). Employee motivation, engagement, and performance may all be positively correlated with autonomy and self-determination, two factors that influence both motivation and

achievement, and which would allow employees to choose how frequently they are interested in to perform their duties from their residences or from the office, respectively (Manganelli et al., 2018). While leading workers in hybrid environments that can not anymore be seen while at work, some leaders appear to struggle with the level of autonomy and self-determination they enjoy (Mortensen, 2021).

How can leaders make sure that the team is still able to trust one another and that there are no worries about whether everyone is actually working on duties to meet project and organisational objectives? (Mortensen & Garrison, 2021; Mckenzie & Gavett, 2021) Is everyone genuinely working and not just hanging out? What particular abilities are required of leaders in remote work settings to uphold a great deal of trustworthiness and to keep a motivated workforce? There is no exhaustive checklist of abilities hybrid workplace leaders can use to ensure that all employees, whether they are based on-site or working remotely, feel equally valued and noticed for their efforts.

Due to the complexity and pluralism of the issues, it is doubtful that a list that applies to all situations can be given.

In June 2021, the author presented a webinar titled "Entering the Hybrid World". Figure 1 illustrates the diversity of backgrounds represented among those who participated.



Source: Own & Howspace, 2021

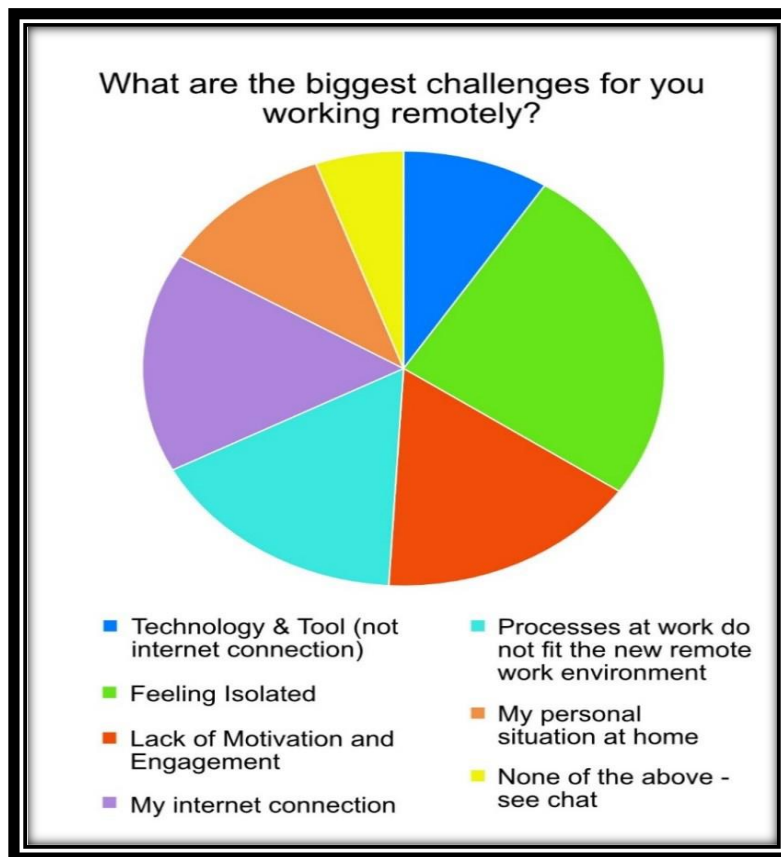
Figure 01

The aforementioned top three issues were raised by respondents in a poll when questioned about the major difficulties they faced working from remote locations:

1. Isolation
2. A lack of interest and motivation

3. Processes are unsuitable for a distant environment, point three

All the tasks that participants might select are depicted in Figure 2.



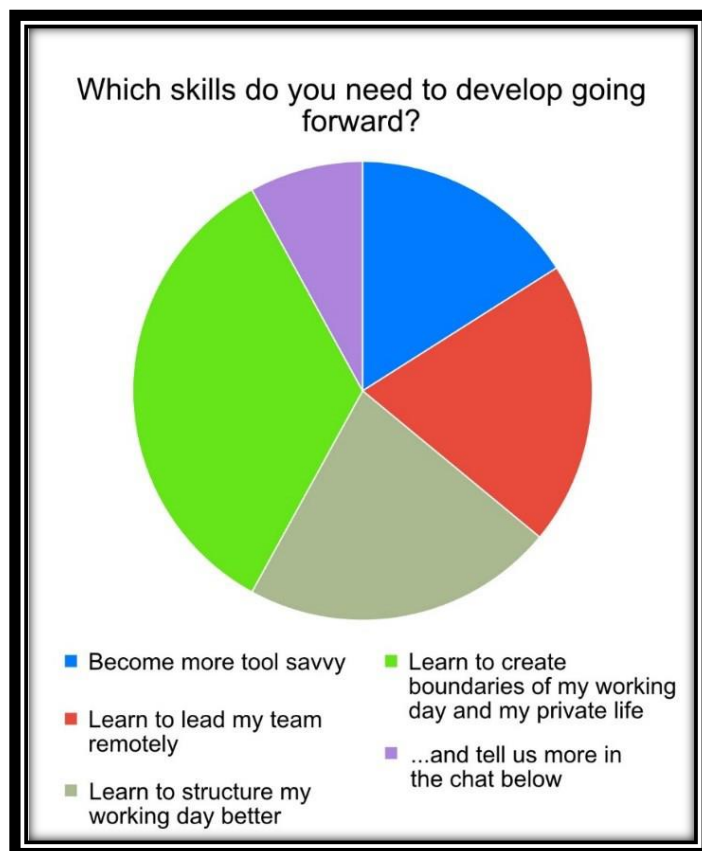
Source: Own & Howspace,

2021

Figure 02

Attendees were additionally surveyed about which abilities they thought they needed to improve and expand upon in an additional poll during the same webinar. A synopsis of the emphasised talents is shown in Figure 3. The following were chosen as the top three skill development areas:

1. Acquire the ability to set boundaries between my personal and professional lives.
2. Improve my daily planning.
3. Develop remote team leadership skills.



Source: Own & Howspace, 2021

Figure 03

Setting limits has proven to be particularly difficult during the epidemic, according to Rothbard (2020). Leaders may set an example for their team members and assist them as they learn to set limits. However, the Microsoft Workplace Trending Index Report (Anders et al., 2021) underlines that Gen Z is entering the workforce and that setting boundaries may be a skill whose value has risen as the distinctions between work and private life have gotten more blurred. Engaging and psychological well-being were found to be strongly connected with the leadership abilities of the next-level supervisor, as pre-Covid research indicates (Wilmar, 2014). In the opinion of Oades et al. (2021), a rise in literacy about well-being and engagement might make up for the lack of abilities and information regarding how to manage an isolated or hybrid workforce. According to O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013), coaching may be able to help business executives overcome these flaws.

2. Engagement and well-being

Academic research on involvement and well-being is extensive (Wilmar, 2014). According to Litchfield et al. (2016), a person's perception of their physical well-being, happiness, plus understanding of purpose determines how well-off they are. The state of someone's wellbeing can vary suddenly and is very subjective. These shifts may not necessarily be tied to the person's immediate work environment but instead may have their roots in the person's home

environment. For an organisational leader, managing and collaborating with these issues in the workplace is made far more difficult by them impacting personal components of well-being.

Despite the diversity and complexity of these disciplines, better levels of well-being along with engagement appear to benefit employers, therefore emerging and experienced managers should both make an effort to learn more about it (Ladyshevsky & Taplin, 2017). The data in Table 1 was compiled by Arcidiacono & Di Martins (2016) and concentrates on the pertinent facts for this work while also showcasing the substantial research that has been conducted in the area of well-being. For readers who want to investigate the various ideas in greater depth at their own leisure using the sources listed in the bibliography, Table 1 offers an excellent place to start. From the viewpoint of the author, Seligman's PERMA framework (2018) has been selected to demonstrate how psychological well-being and involvement may be related.

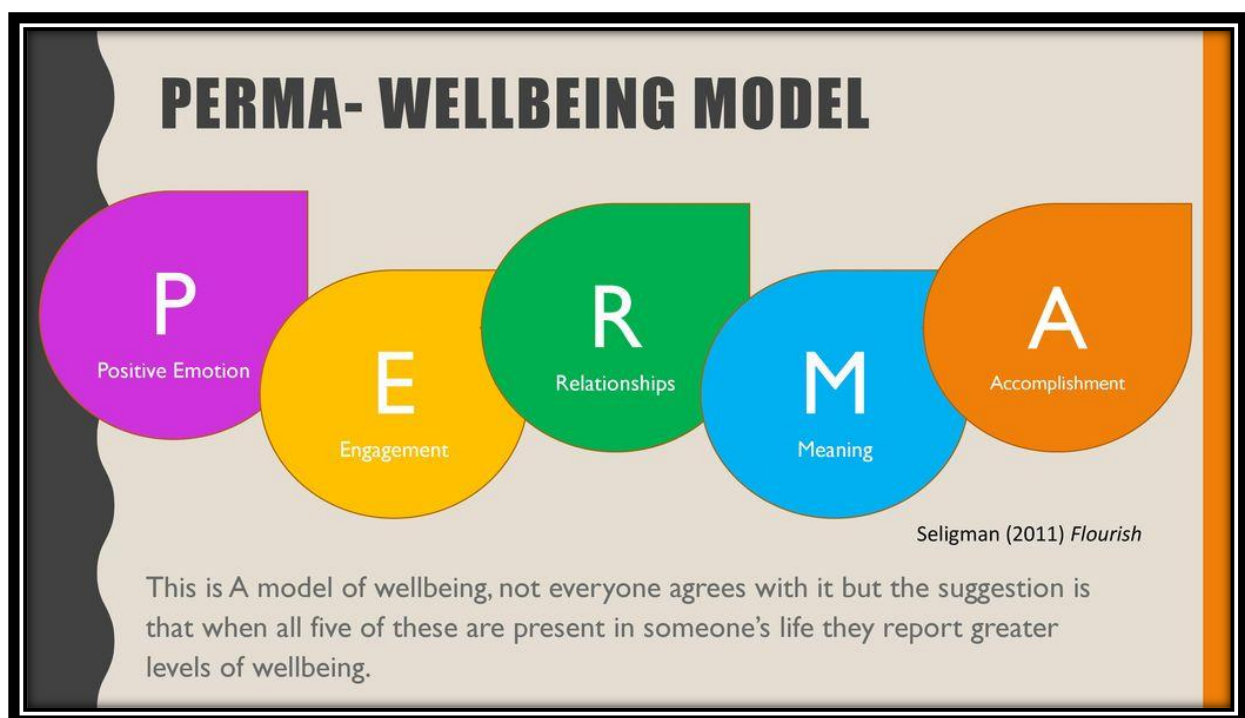


Figure 04

In his integrative assessment of the literature on engagement from 1990 to 2010, Shuck (2011) quoted Christian et Butcher (2007), who came to the conclusion that none of the six models had a greater reputation among academics than the others. Furthermore, none of the strategies for engagement were suitable for usage in the business sector, according to Shuck's (2011) criticism. Shuck identifies a gap between the academic perspective on engagement and how it manifests in real-world applications for individuals outside of academia, and he challenges scholars and practitioners to keep working to create bridges that unite these two

realms. In his integrated literature review, Shuck (2011) examined the following four pioneering theories by Kahn (1990), According to Maslach (2001), the research of Harter et al. (2002), and Sak (2006). The Utrecht Scale of Work Engagement (Schaufeli et al., 2006) and Bakker and Demerouti's (2001) Job-Demands-Resources Theories (JD-R) round out Table 2's summary of these four prominent methodologies. In organizations, the JD-R Model has begun to gain a lot of traction. The fundamental ideas of Bakker and Demerouti's (2017) theory are in line with business jargon. Additionally, the theory of Bakker and Demerouti served as the foundation for the development of the Utrecht Scale for Work Engagement (UWES), a tool for measuring for engagement that has been applied in corporate settings. According to the JD-R hypothesis, employees that possess access to whatever resources they need to execute their jobs—such as the knowledge, tools, and time—will feel less stressed and be more engaged.

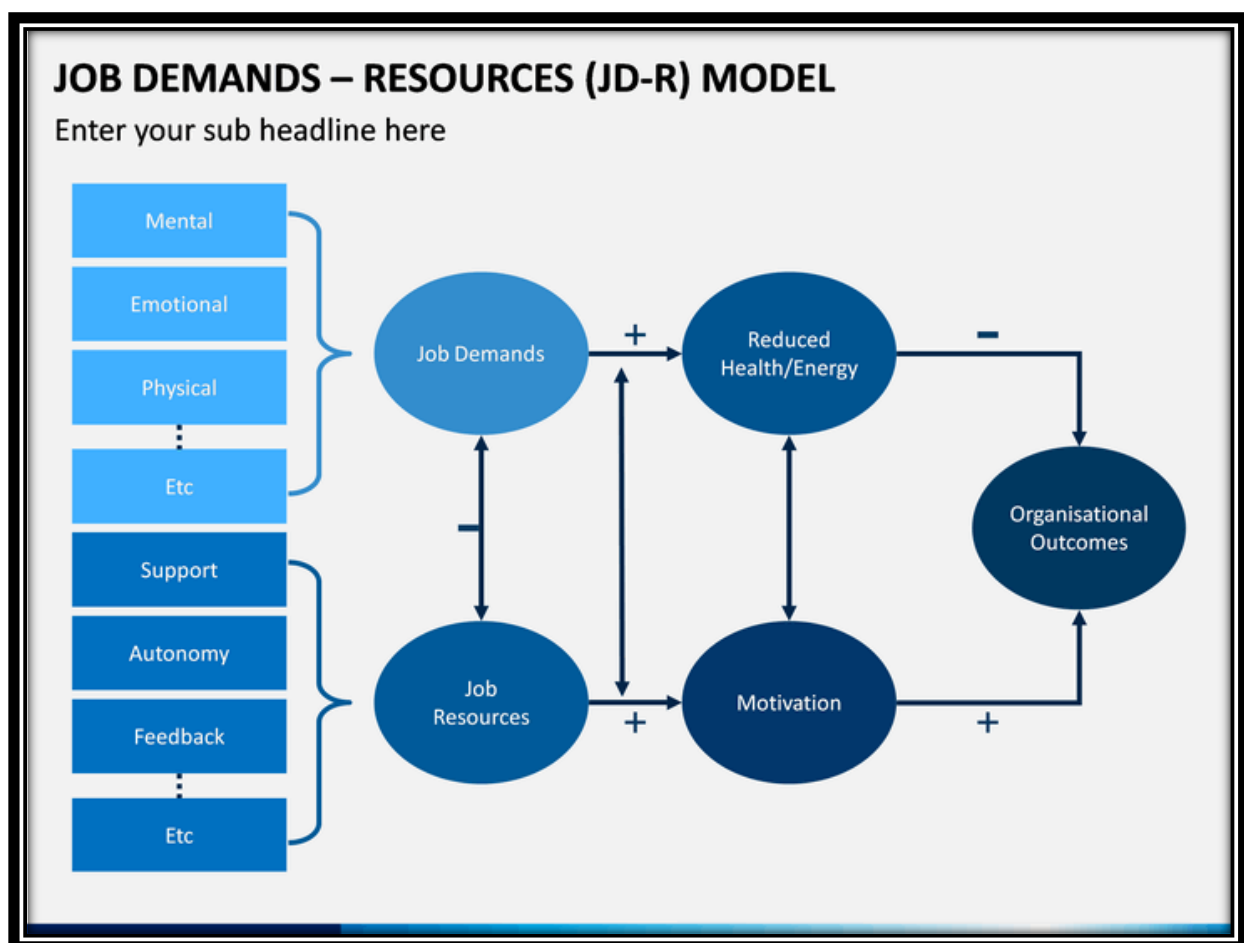


Figure 05

When overlaying Seligman's (2018) mental health theory and his PERMA Model, which has the following components, atop the JD-R theory's (Bakker & Demerouti, 2001) job resources as well as job demands

1. Joyful Feelings
2. Employee Engagement
3. 3. Positive Relationships
4. Intent
5. Achievement

It is possible to spot components from both areas that overlap. Personal relationships, Engagement, as viewed and Accomplishments, for instance, might be connected to the JD-R components in terms of colleagues I love working with, resources and time that allow me to participate in my responsibilities, along with the abilities I need to perform my job. As in Seligman's PERMA model, combining these will almost certainly result in larger degrees of Which means Accomplishments, etc. In a study they did on Seligman's PERMA model, Goodman et al. (2017) showed that if one aspect of the PERMA model, such as Engagement, is present, the other four components are also present and are hence indicators for people's well-being. With that relationship established, the issue now is whether greater levels of involvement, attained by examining the JD-R dimensions in conjunction with the five PERMA model dimensions, may result in greater levels of engagement and wellbeing in future circumstances at work.

3. Using coaching to improve the sustainability of modern workplaces

Research carried out by Jarosz (2021) throughout the epidemic shows that coaching improves performance and well-being for individuals receiving it. Researchers in the field of mentoring in organizations before the pandemic, McGuire et al. (2007) alongside McGovern et al. (2001), found that mentoring in the workplace has evolved into a crucial component of organizational learning, place of employment recruitment and selection, and leadership development. Grant and Palmer (2002) emphasize the fact that coaching does improve wellbeing in both personal and professional contexts.

Fava et al. (2004) & Schwarz et al. (2016), who shown in their research that emphasizing positive psychological therapies among other interventions successfully increases psychological well-being, are further sources that Jarosz (2021) references. According to Grant and Greene (2001), coaching is a structured process where coaches are led to create their own objectives and make action plans, which results in success measures.

According to Ladyshevsky and Taplin (2017), there is substantial evidence in the literature to support the link between workplace engagement and organizational performance results. In their study, managers provided management coaching to coaches (MBA learners who had

work experience). These supervisors lacked specialized coaching training, had inconsistent coaching abilities, and were classified as "below the midpoint." However, they found a substantial correlation between the employee's job engagement and the manager's assessed coaching abilities. This raises the possibility that greater engagement and wellbeing may be attained in certain working settings by either improving managers' coaching abilities, by offering expert assistance from a specifically qualified coach, or by providing a mix of the two. The idea of "the manager as coach" is not brand-new and has been extensively studied, as demonstrated, for instance, by Ellinger and co-authors (2014).

The differences between receiving coaching by an immediate supervisor and a professional external coach would be the subject of a separate debate, especially in light of the preconceptions and role limits. An ideal solution might not always be possible, though, due to constraints on time, money, and other considerations. In order to address some of the symptoms noted when the pandemic began in 2020, it may be effective to examine how leaders may utilize models and simple instructions to improve their coaching abilities in their regular interactions with their workforce. However, they have definitely existed in the past and are going to keep having an impact on an employee's devotion to their employer, as well as their job commitment and well-being in the future. These symptoms or inadequacies emerged under the harsh pandemic conditions.

4. The PPAS Maturity Model® -

A Structured Coaching Procedure for Leaders Developing a road map for a productive and long-lasting workplace culture in the twenty-first century would be advantageous for both employers and workers. Whether one begins with execution by determining or resurfacing the practice of coaching with managers or executives as coaches by providing coaching to leaders and utilizing the positive reverberations that this has into the organizations, as described by O'Connor and Cavanagh (2013), or by implementing a significant coaching initiative with multiple different streams in an organization, depends on where each organization stands (status quo), what direction they would like to travel (desired future state), and how quickly they want to get there.

The model and its dimensions are:

- a) People
- b) Processes
- c) Applications
- d) Structure

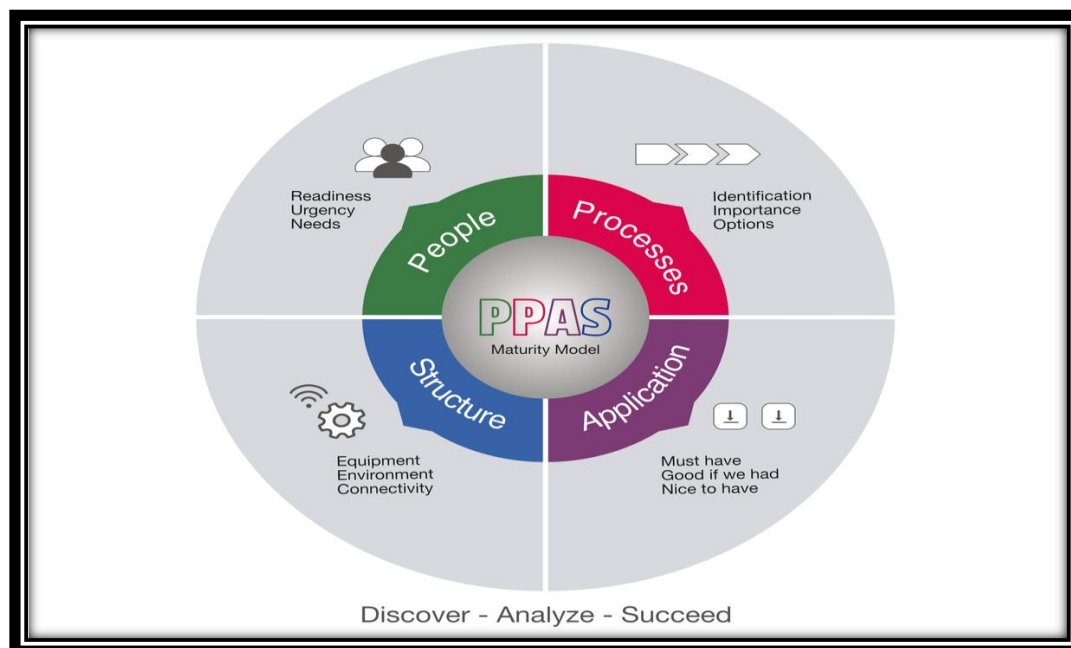


Figure 06

looking into the dimensions People, Procedures, Applications, and Structure—and how developed or widely recognized those dimensions are within the specific organization or among leaders and their workforces—could aid in bringing structure and clarity to the essential discussions that must be held in the workplace, reducing complexity, and reducing the need for unnecessary meetings. With the use of what some coaches refer to as discovery inquiries, each dimension is investigated (Vogt et al., 2003; Glaser, 2014). The trainer or leader acting as a coach will modify these questions as necessary to determine what information is pertinent and significant in the historical setting of the inquiry.

5. Conclusion

Engagement as well as well-being are intricate psychological concepts that are influenced by a wide range of variables, many of which do not start in the working environment but have reverberations that can be felt there. It is undeniable that the pandemic has had a negative impact on well-being and engagement, and organizations are having trouble trying design and define their work environments of the future, whether it be in the office, working from home, or a combination of both, in ways that workers feel well and are engaged and positively impact business outcomes. Employees already know what they want and want a hybrid solution. The perceived "lack of skills" among leaders including the workforce to implement the chosen hybrid solution, together with differing perspectives on the difficulties that various industries and organizations face, are urging action. There is now no precise understanding of the abilities that managers and the workforce are lacking, nor is there any understanding of the solutions to the myriad problems that organizations and their workforces face. We do

know that levels of participation and well-being have plummeted. Additionally, we are aware that there are ways to enhance engagement and psychological well-being at work based on research. Coaching could be one of such methods. As a procedure that could result in relief as well as more clarity on the challenging circumstances that both organizations and staff members are facing, rather than as a cure or remedy that guarantees healing once applied. Industry-specific requirements for developing and honing skills and abilities change over time. Coaching might be a way to address this diversity of viewpoints on where to work, as well as to simplify or structure the complexities of what motivates individuals to feel happy and involved in what they do, regardless of where they do it. For a number of reasons, coaching has been shown to be effective during change programs.

Any organization that wishes to maintain its competitiveness must focus on preparing its executives and staff for work environments of the twenty-first century. The precise skill gaps between executives and members of the staff are said to have, as well as how they relate to the problems that organizations are facing, require further investigation. Additional study is also required to determine the effects of coaching cultures, particularly in multidisciplinary settings, and how templates and guides could help leaders engage their workforce select a coach-approach more frequently in daily interactions. When promoting coaching in organizations, the author, who is also a coach, may have a bias. nevertheless concepts like "coaching culture" and "manager as coach," in which employees use a coaching mindset, coaching methods, and coaching tools, are not necessarily substitutes for paying for the services of external instructors and are equally taken into consideration as alternatives in this paper as exterior and professional mentoring services. Furthermore, the argument for coaching as an opportunity and skill for leaders to grow has been made using unreliable proof from literature and research.

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Challenges In The Adoption Of Remote And Flexible Work Arrangements In The It Sector: An Evidence From A Pilot Study

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Abstract: The rapid growth of digital work environments has accelerated the adoption of remote and flexible work arrangements in the Information Technology (IT) sector. However, organizations continue to face several challenges in effectively implementing these work models. The present pilot study aims to identify the major challenges influencing the adoption of remote and flexible work arrangements among IT employees in the Pune region. The study adopts a quantitative and exploratory research design based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire. A pilot sample of IT employees experiencing remote, hybrid, or flexible work practices was considered for analysis. Descriptive statistics and reliability analysis were used to examine the responses. The findings reveal that team collaboration difficulties, managerial hesitation, inadequate IT infrastructure, unclear organizational policies, work–life boundary blurring, and career progression concerns are the major barriers affecting flexible work adoption. The study highlights the need for stronger technological support, clear organizational policies, and employee-centric management practices to ensure the successful implementation of flexible work arrangements in the IT sector. The pilot findings also provide a basis for refining the research instrument for future large-scale studies

Keywords: Remote Work, Flexible Work Arrangements, IT Sector, Adoption Challenges

1. Introduction:

The use of remote and flexible work arrangements has been greatly increased across industries, especially in the Information Technology (IT) sector, due to the fast digital transformation of businesses and the post-pandemic reorganization of workplaces. The IT industry has become one of the most flexible sectors for adopting remote, hybrid, and flexible

work models because of its technology-driven nature, project-based operations, and heavy reliance on digital communication tools. These arrangements have changed over the past several years from emergency reactions to planned HR procedures meant to improve worker autonomy, productivity, work-life balance, and talent retention (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015; Parajuli, 2023).

Even though these work patterns are widely accepted, organizations nonetheless confront significant obstacles to their successful adoption and institutionalization. A number of management, technological, behavioral, and organizational issues have been brought up by the shift from traditional office-centric work systems to remote and flexible arrangements. Communication obstacles, decreased team cohesiveness, challenges with performance monitoring, cybersecurity threats, employee isolation, blurring of work-life boundaries, and digital weariness are some of the most commonly stated problems. In IT businesses, where cooperation, agile project execution, creativity, and quick client response are essential to operational success, these difficulties become much more complicated (Singh et al., 2022; Asfaw et al., 2022).

Remote and flexible work arrangements provide several advantages for employees, including shorter commutes, more schedule flexibility, and higher individual productivity. However, these benefits are frequently outweighed by problems with extended screen time, social disengagement, home office infrastructure constraints, and psychological well-being. Maintaining corporate culture, guaranteeing responsibility, overseeing remote teams, and coordinating flexible work arrangements with performance standards continue to be major difficulties for employers (Wang et al., 2023).

There is still a need for pilot-based empirical studies that specifically look at the adoption challenges of remote and flexible work arrangements in the IT sector, especially in emerging economies and dynamic knowledge-intensive environments, even though the literature on remote and hybrid work has grown significantly since COVID-19. Prior to doing extensive empirical research, pilot studies are essential for verifying conceptions, improving measuring scales, and detecting context-specific problems. In this regard, the current study aims to produce first data about the main obstacles that IT workers face while implementing remote and flexible work arrangements. In addition to providing early insights into the expanding body of literature on the future of work, the results of this pilot project are anticipated to enhance the improvement of the research instrument for the larger thesis study.

Therefore, this study is important because it provides a preliminary empirical knowledge of the obstacles to implementing remote and flexible work arrangements in the IT industry and

helps firms create flexible work policies that are more robust, employee-centric, and long-lasting.

2. Review of Literature:

One of the first evaluations of telecommuting research was given by Allen et al. (2015). Their analysis demonstrated that, under the right circumstances, telecommuting may enhance work attitudes and lessen work-family conflict; however, they cautioned that the results vary depending on the degree of telecommuting, the type of work, and the organizational setting. They also brought attention to issues that are still pertinent to remote and hybrid work in the IT industry, such as professional isolation, diminished visibility, and potential barriers to career progression.

Bloom et al (2015) used a randomized experiment at Ctrip in China to provide compelling evidence of causation. Although they discovered that working from home improved productivity and job satisfaction while lowering attrition, the research also pointed out that not all workers favored remote work indefinitely, and some ultimately decided to go back to the office. This is significant for the topic at hand since it implies that adoption issues are not just organizational but also role-dependent and preference-based.

The topic of work-from-home was expanded to work-from-anywhere by Choudhury et al. (2021). Their results shown increases in productivity when employees were granted geographic flexibility, suggesting that flexibility might improve performance in ways that go beyond basic remote work. However, this line of study also suggests that businesses need to manage digital reliance, trust, coordination, and fair access to flexibility—all of which are crucial adoption challenges in knowledge-intensive industries like IT.

In a comprehensive assessment of the literature, Athanasiadou and Theriou (2021) found that although telework research is expanding quickly, it is still fragmented. Telework studies frequently lack integrative models that include technological, managerial, and behavioral components, as demonstrated by their evaluation, which categorized significant topics around employee results, organizational implications, and future research requirements. Because "adoption challenges" in remote and flexible work arrangements span all three dimensions, this is particularly pertinent to your study.

Ng et al. (2022) used the technology–organization–environment paradigm to study remote work and discovered that behavioral variables, contextual enablers, and support systems all affect how successful remote work is. Their research demonstrated that the effectiveness of remote work is influenced not only by the availability of technology but also by institutional and management preparedness, as it related distant work circumstances to job performance

and emotional tiredness. This is especially important for IT businesses, because even with sophisticated technologies, adoption may still fail due to problems with leadership, policy, or social coordination.

An essential psychological and digital-strain viewpoint was contributed by Singh et al. (2022). According to their research, using personal and professional digital platforms while working remotely increased technostress, which in turn increased technological fatigue and decreased subjective well-being. Because IT workers are particularly subjected to extended screen time, frequent platform switching, and digitally intense cooperation, technostress is a major obstacle to the adoption of flexible work. This makes this contribution noteworthy for the IT industry.

Context-specific evidence from IT-enabled sector workers in Hyderabad Metro, India, was presented by Prasad et al. (2023). Their research revealed that working remotely was linked to anxiety and occupational stress, which were caused by work-family conflict, decreased informal participation, and a lack of peer connection. This study is particularly helpful for your article since it places the topic in the Indian IT environment and demonstrates that the difficulties associated with remote work are not just technological but also social and psychological.

In their evaluation of psychological concerns associated with part-time vs. full-time teleworking, Antunes et al. (2023) discovered that telework intensity is important. Part-time and full-time telework may expose employees to various patterns of psychosocial risk, according to their review, which also highlighted hazards associated with social isolation, work intensity, boundary blurring, and health-related pressure. This lends credence to the notion that flexible work arrangements shouldn't be seen as a single category because diverse adoption hurdles and employee reactions are probably produced by remote, hybrid, and flexible models.

In a large-scale study on hybrid work, Bloom et al. (2024) discovered that working from home two days a week enhanced retention without impairing performance. The study is significant because it changes the focus of the discussion from emergency remote work to structured hybrid design. However, it also suggests that careful calibration is necessary for effective hybrid adoption rather than general remote-work rules, which highlights the necessity of examining adoption issues independently of performance results.

Lauring and Jonasson (2025) contended that the term "hybrid work" still lacks conceptual coherence and suggested a more precise definition. This is an important contribution since many research fail to distinguish between telework, remote work, flexible work, and hybrid

work. This means that before doing extensive hypothesis testing, concept clarity and meticulous measurement are crucial for a pilot research like yours.

In conclusion and stating the gap, the existing studies on remote and flexible work arrangements primarily focus on employee outcomes such as productivity, satisfaction, and well-being, while limited attention has been given to the specific challenges in their adoption, particularly in the IT sector. Further, evidence from the Indian IT context and pilot-based empirical studies remains scarce. The present study addresses this gap by identifying context-specific adoption barriers and validating the research instrument for larger-scale investigation.

3. Research Methodology:

In order to investigate the obstacles to the adoption of remote and flexible work arrangements in the IT industry, this study uses a quantitative, descriptive, and exploratory research approach. The study's core data came from IT workers in the Pune region, which was chosen because of the area's high concentration of IT companies and extensive exposure to remote and hybrid work methods. Employees who have used flexible, remote, or hybrid work arrangements are among the target responders. A sample of about 43 respondents is thought to be sufficient for preliminary testing in the pilot project, which uses a non-probability convenience sampling approach with purposeful selection. Researcher has used a structured questionnaire to gather data. Descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha are used to examine the gathered data in order to assess dependability. The questionnaire is validated and improved for the main study via the pilot study.

4. Objective of the study:

Based on the data gathered as specified in the methodology, the researcher conducted the pilot study. The technological and infrastructure obstacles that IT workers have while implementing flexible and remote work schedules have been recognized and examined by the researcher.

5. Data Analysis and Interpretations:

The main obstacles to IT workers in the Pune area adopting remote and flexible work arrangements are examined using descriptive statistics. Additionally, the pilot questionnaire's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The analysis supports instrument improvement for the primary research and offers initial data on important adoption problems.

5.1. Pilot Testing and Reliability Analysis:

Before the main survey, a pilot study was carried out to evaluate the research instrument's practicality, relevance, and clarity as well as to find any possible problems with question

phrasing, sequencing, and respondent comprehension.

In order to validate the data gathering tool, reliability analysis has been addressed here. The instrument's statistical reliability is evaluated using the Cronbach Alpha test. In this case, the researcher has taken into account all the variables and constructs that are utilized in hypothesis testing for reliability testing. The tables below display the value of " α ".

Table No. 5.1.1.

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	43	100.0
	Excluded	0	0
	Total	43	100.0

For reliability analysis, the test statistics shown in the above table took into account 43 samples.

Table No. 5.1.2.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.867	8

According to the alpha value interpretation convention, an alpha value of $0.9 > \alpha \geq 0.8$ is regarded as good and important. As a result, the score of .867 in this instance is deemed acceptable. As a result, it can be said that the data collecting tool is statistically trustworthy and that the data may be collected using it for additional analysis.

5.2. Descriptive Analysis:

The data is been collected on the statements and presented here in the form of table (Table 5.2.1.). This is the analysis of the challenges in the adoption of remote and flexible work arrangements in the selected segment.

Table 5.2.1. Analysis of the challenges in the adoption

Statements	Yes (I experience this challenge)	No (I do not experience this challenge)	Sometimes (I occasionally experience this challenge)
Facing difficulties due to inadequate IT infrastructure when working remotely	44.19	25.58	30.23
Poor internet connectivity limit ability to adopt flexible	37.21	20.93	41.86

work arrangements			
Manager hesitate to approve flexible work requests	51.16	30.23	18.60
Company policies on flexible work unclear or inconsistent	16.28	30.23	53.49
Remote work make team collaboration more difficult?	60.47	16.28	23.26
Miss important updates or decisions when working flexibly	25.58	37.21	37.21
Flexible work blur the boundary between personal and professional life	39.53	27.91	32.56
Adopting flexible work will negatively affect career progression	41.86	30.23	27.91

*Source: Primary Data

The descriptive research shows that the biggest obstacle to IT workers adopting remote and flexible work arrangements is team cooperation difficulty (60.47%). The next indicator of organizational opposition to flexible work practices is management reluctance to approve requests for flexible work (51.16%).

Technological obstacles are also noteworthy; 44.19% of respondents reported having insufficient IT infrastructure, 41.86% reported occasionally having poor internet connectivity, and 53.49% reported occasionally finding company policies unclear or inconsistent, indicating policy ambiguity as a recurrent challenge.

The pilot results indicate that collaboration, managerial support, infrastructure, and career-related concerns are the main obstacles influencing the adoption of remote and flexible work arrangements in the IT sector. Personal concerns such as work-life boundary blurring (39.53%) and career progression worries (41.86%) also emerged as significant barriers.

6. Recommendations:

In order to lessen technical and cooperation difficulties in remote and flexible work arrangements, IT businesses should enhance digital infrastructure, internet support, and collaboration solutions. To guarantee seamless approvals and efficient management of remote teams, clear flexible work regulations and managerial training should be implemented. In order to prevent employees from feeling disadvantaged when working flexibly, organizations should also encourage work-life balance and create clear chances for professional advancement.

7. Implications of the Study:

The pilot study's conclusions have significant organizational, intellectual, and management ramifications. From a managerial standpoint, the report emphasizes that in order to guarantee

the seamless operation of remote and flexible work arrangements, IT firms must bolster digital infrastructure, internet support, and collaboration technology. Organizations should provide clear, flexible work standards and provide managers with the necessary training to properly manage remote teams, given the serious concerns about management reluctance and ambiguous regulations.

The study highlights the significance of resolving work-life border issues and career advancement concerns from the standpoint of employees through supportive HR policies, consistent communication, and performance assessment methods that guarantee equity in distant settings. Academically, the study supports the improvement of conceptions and measuring scales for the main study and provides preliminary information on the adoption issues of remote and flexible work arrangements in the IT sector, particularly in the Pune region.

All things considered, the study provides helpful insights for creating flexible work policies in IT companies that are long-lasting, employee-focused, and productivity-oriented.

8. Future Scope of the Study:

Future research may expand the study to a bigger sample across several IT centres in India for greater generalization, as the current pilot study is restricted to IT workers in the Pune region. To create a more complete model of the adoption of remote and flexible work, future research can incorporate other factors including worker productivity, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, leadership support, and mental health. Deeper understanding of the long-term efficacy of flexible work arrangements may also be obtained through comparative research comparing remote, hybrid, and office-based workers.

9. Conclusion:

The pilot study comes to the conclusion that issues with teamwork, managerial reluctance, insufficient IT infrastructure, ambiguous policies, problems with work-life balance, and concerns about career advancement have a major impact on the adoption of remote and flexible work arrangements in the IT industry. The two most important obstacles among these were management opposition and collaborative difficulties. The results highlight the need for clearer organizational rules, more robust technology support, and employee-focused HR interventions in order to successfully implement flexible work practices. Additionally, the pilot findings confirm the applicability of the chosen constructs and offer a solid basis for a more extensive empirical investigation in the future.

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An Empirical Study of Marketing Management Practices in Indian Agri-Startups

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Abstract: Purpose: Indian Agri-startups have moved from thinly capitalised technology bets to mainstream actors across input distribution, output-side market linkage, and rural infrastructure. Despite this prominence, evidence on how these firms actually design and execute marketing decisions remains fragmented. This study empirically examines marketing management practices in Indian Agri-startups, with particular attention to the marketing mix (4Ps/7Ps), Segmentation, Targeting, Positioning (STP) strategies, digital marketing adoption, customer relationship management (CRM), and Data-Driven Decision-Making (DDDM) across the three structural arms of the ecosystem

Design/Methodology/Approach: We adopt a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase uses a structured survey administered to 387 founders, marketing leads, and senior managers of 263 Agri-startups headquartered or operating across Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Punjab, and Gujarat. Constructs were measured on adapted seven-point Likert scales drawn from established instruments. The measurement and structural models were estimated using partial least squares structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) in Smart PLS 4. The qualitative phase consists of 24 semi-structured interviews coded thematically following Gioia, Corley, and Hamilton (2013) to interpret and contextualise the survey results

Findings Three findings stand out. First, Agri-startups exhibit a measurable but uneven shift from product-centric to customer-centric marketing, with output-side and D2C-oriented ventures significantly more customer-oriented than input-side ventures ($\beta = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$). Second, vernacular content, regional micro-influencers, and community channels particularly WhatsApp Business and Instagram Reels emerge as the dominant digital touchpoints, jointly explaining 38.6 per cent of the variance in farmer engagement intensity. Third, DDDM positively moderates the relationship between CRM intensity and customer retention (interaction $\beta = 0.227$, $p = 0.004$), but its effect is conditional on the presence of FPO partnerships and last-mile aggregation infrastructure. The 7P extension framework fits the data

significantly better than the classical 4 P specification ($\Delta R^2 = 0.117$, $f^2 = 0.184$)

Practical implications Findings inform startup founders, FPO managers, Agri-VCs, and policy bodies such as NABARD, Small Farmers' Agri-Business Consortium (SFAC), and Agriculture Accelerator Fund administrators about which marketing levers move customer outcomes in low-trust, low-bandwidth rural markets. Specific guidance is offered on vernacular content production, micro-influencer selection, FPO co-marketing, and the sequencing of CRM and analytics investment

Originality/Value The study provides the first multi-state empirical mapping of marketing management practice across the input, output, and infrastructure arms of the Indian Agri-startup ecosystem, and offers a context-adapted 7 PSTPCRMDDDM integrated framework that can be transported to other emerging-market Agri-tech contexts

Keywords: Agri-startups, Marketing mix, STP, Digital marketing, CRM, Data-driven decision-making, Farmer Producer Organisations, India, PLS-SEM, Emerging markets

1. Introduction

Indian Agriculture sits at the intersection of three structural transitions: smallholder consolidation, digital penetration, and capital deepening through venture-backed entrepreneurship. The country now hosts one of the largest Agri-startup ecosystems globally, with more than 1,300 funded ventures operating across the input, output, and infrastructure arms of the value chain (NASSCOM, 2024, Bain & FICCI, 2023). Yet most of what is known publicly about these firms still concerns funding rounds, technology stacks, or aggregate gross merchandise value. The marketing decisions that ultimately determine farmer adoption, customer retention, and unit economics remain comparatively under-examined in the scholarly literature.

The marketing problem facing Agri-startups is non-trivial. Customers are small, geographically dispersed, low-trust, and price-sensitive, products are credence-heavy and seasonal, distribution is fragmented, and digital literacy varies sharply across districts. Classical marketing management frameworks the 4Ps, the 7Ps service extension, STP, and CRM were developed in markets with reliable infrastructure, addressable consumers, and stable channels. Their direct application in Agri-startup contexts is therefore an empirical question, not a settled fact (Kotler et al., 2021, Mahajan, 2020, Kumar & Sharma, 2022). Several authors have argued that emerging-market Agri-tech requires a fundamental rewriting of the marketing mix to accommodate cooperative buyer structures, weather-linked demand, and informal trust networks (Reardon et al., 2019, Trivedi & Misra, 2021).

Three observations motivate this paper. First, conversations with founders, accelerator managers, and FPO leaders suggest that the locus of marketing innovation in Indian Agri-startups has shifted from price-and-promotion to platform-and-community: WhatsApp Business catalogues, Instagram Reels in regional languages, FPO-mediated trials, and last-mile village influencers are now treated as front-line marketing assets rather than supplementary tactics (Krishnan & Banga, 2023). Second, the customer-centric turn that defined business-to-consumer marketing in urban India during the 2010s appears to be diffusing into Agri-tech, but unevenly some output-side ventures behave like consumer brands, while many input-side ventures still operate on transactional, dealer-led models (Singh et al., 2022, Trivedi & Misra, 2021). Third, while data-driven decision-making is widely claimed in pitch decks and investor materials, the actual integration of CRM platforms, telemetry from IoT devices, and transaction logs into marketing decisions varies dramatically across firms (Bharadwaj et al., 2013, Wamba et al., 2017).

This paper addresses the resulting evidence gap by asking four interlinked research questions.

RQ1: How do Indian Agri-startups configure the marketing mix (4Ps/7Ps), and does the extended 7P specification provide superior explanatory power for marketing performance in this context?

RQ2: To what extent have Agri-startups operationalised STP strategies for heterogeneous smallholder segments, and which segmentation bases are most predictive of outcomes? **RQ3:** How does the adoption of digital marketing channels vernacular content, regional influencers, WhatsApp/Instagram engagement, and community-driven communication relate to customer acquisition and engagement intensity? **RQ4:** What is the joint effect of CRM intensity and data-driven decision-making on customer retention, and how is this relationship moderated by ecosystem features such as FPO partnerships and last-mile aggregation infrastructure?

To answer these questions, we adopt a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design. The quantitative phase uses a structured survey of 387 respondents drawn from 263 Agri-startups across Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Punjab, and Gujarat states that together account for the majority of Agri-VC deployment and the bulk of operational Agri-tech infrastructure in India (Inc42, 2024, YourStory Research, 2024). The qualitative phase consists of 24 semi-structured interviews with founders, marketing leads, FPO chief executives, and rural

distribution partners, used to interpret and contextualise the statistical findings.

This paper makes four contributions. Theoretically, it integrates the 7P marketing mix, STP, CRM, and DDDM into a single framework adapted for Agri-startup contexts, and tests it against alternative specifications. Empirically, it provides the first multi-state, multi-arm survey of marketing management in Indian Agri-startups. Methodologically, it triangulates PLS-SEM with thematic analysis, addressing concerns about common method bias and construct validity that are pervasive in startup survey research. Practically, it produces actionable guidance for founders, FPO managers, ecosystem investors, and policy bodies on which marketing investments produce measurable customer outcomes in low-trust rural markets.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. Section 2 develops the theoretical background and reviews the literature on Agri-startup marketing, the marketing mix, STP, digital marketing in emerging markets, CRM, and DDDM. Section 3 presents the conceptual framework and hypotheses. Section 4 describes the research methodology. Section 5 reports descriptive statistics, measurement model assessment, structural model results, and qualitative themes. Section 6 discusses theoretical, managerial, and policy implications. Section 7 acknowledges limitations and outlines a future research agenda. Section 8 concludes.

2. Theoretical Background and Literature Review

This section is organised around five thematic blocks. We first set out the structure of the Indian Agri-startup ecosystem and the marketing implications of its three arms (Section 2.1). We then review the marketing mix literature with attention to its 4P origins, 7P services extension, and recent reformulations for emerging-market contexts (Section 2.2). Section 2.3 reviews STP in heterogeneous smallholder markets. Section 2.4 examines digital marketing adoption, with a focus on vernacular content, regional influencers, and community-driven channels. Section 2.5 reviews CRM and DDDM. Section 2.6 anchors the framework in three theoretical lenses – the resource-based view, dynamic capabilities, and diffusion of innovations – and identifies the gaps the present study addresses.

2.1 The Indian Agri-startup ecosystem

Indian Agri-startups are conventionally segmented into three structural arms (Bain & FICCI, 2023, NASSCOM, 2024). The input arm comprises ventures supplying seeds, fertilisers,

Agro-chemicals, machinery rental, and precision-farming advisory services directly to farmers, typically through digital catalogues or rural retail networks. Representative examples include DeHaat, AgroStar, BigHaat, and Gramophone. The output arm consists of ventures linking farmer-grown produce to institutional, retail, and export buyers, often via D2C platforms, FPO aggregation, and digital mandis, examples include Ninjacart, WayCool, Falca, and Otipy. The infrastructure arm aggregates logistics, cold-chain, warehousing, financing, and data ventures that operate horizontally across the value chain, examples include Arya.ag, Stellapps, Tessel, and CropIn.

Each arm faces distinct marketing tasks. Input-side ventures must persuade risk-averse farmers to switch from local dealers, often by demonstrating efficacy on small plots before scaling adoption. Output-side ventures must aggregate trust from smallholders supplying produce while simultaneously building consumer brands at the retail end. Infrastructure-side ventures sell to FPOs, traders, and other businesses, blending B2B sales discipline with the relational style of rural transactions. Marketing strategy is therefore not uniform across the ecosystem, it is conditioned by which arm a startup occupies. This structural heterogeneity is largely absent from existing studies, which tend to treat Agri-startups as a single category (Sharma & Sharma, 2022).

2.2 The marketing mix in Agri-startup contexts

The marketing mix originated in McCarthy's (1960) 4P taxonomy of Product, Price, Place, and Promotion, and was subsequently extended by Booms and Bitner (1981) to include People, Process, and Physical Evidence for service-dominant offerings the 7P framework that remains influential in services marketing (Kotler et al., 2021, Lovelock & Wirtz, 2016). Agri-startup offerings are characteristically hybrid: they combine tangible inputs (seeds, machinery) with credence-heavy services (advisory, financing, logistics), and are delivered through human-mediated last-mile networks. This service-laden character makes the 7P extension theoretically more appropriate than the 4P specification (Mahajan, 2020), though direct empirical comparisons in Agri-tech contexts are scarce.

Recent literature has called for further extension. Goi (2009) and Constantinides (2006) document criticisms of the 4P framework's seller orientation and the corresponding push toward customer-centric reformulations such as the 4Cs (Customer value, Cost, Convenience, Communication). For emerging-market Agri-tech, additional dimensions community, credibility, and connectivity have been proposed (Reardon et al., 2019, Trivedi & Misra, 2021). We adopt the 7P specification as the principal benchmark because of its empirical

maturity, while testing the marginal explanatory power of customer-centric and community variables separately.

Product strategy in Agri-startups has shifted from undifferentiated input sales toward bundled solutions for instance, AgroStar's combination of input delivery, advisory chat, and crop-protection guidance, or Stellapps's bundling of milk-cooling hardware with traceability software (Singh et al., 2022). Pricing strategies are increasingly dynamic, moving from cost-plus to value-based and surge models calibrated to harvest cycles and regional market prices. Place channel design has shifted toward hybrid online-offline configurations, with WhatsApp ordering complementing village-level kirana partnerships and FPO depots. Promotion has moved sharply toward digital and community channels, which we examine in Section 2.4. The services-side P's People (rural field agents and tele-callers), Process (order-to-delivery and complaint resolution flows), and Physical Evidence (packaging, branded transport, in-app receipts) are increasingly recognised by founders as decisive in earning farmer trust (Krishnan & Banga, 2023).

2.3 Segmentation, Targeting, and Positioning

STP is the canonical bridge between market research and marketing-mix action (Kotler et al., 2021). In Agricultural markets, segmentation has historically been conducted at the crop-and-acreage level, with limited behavioural or psychographic discrimination (Sharma & Sharma, 2022). Agri-startups, by virtue of digital onboarding, have access to richer segmentation bases purchase history, digital engagement, geo-location, repeat behaviour, FPO membership, and demographic attributes captured at sign-up. The literature on emerging-market segmentation suggests that hybrid bases combining behaviour with demographics outperform either alone (Ramaswami & Namakumari, 2018), but this has not been tested specifically in Indian Agri-tech.

Targeting in Agri-startups oscillates between two logics. The first is concentrated targeting on progressive farmers typically larger landholders with smartphone access as early adopters who can subsequently anchor diffusion into smaller segments (Rogers, 2003). The second is FPO-mediated targeting, where the FPO itself becomes the buying unit and the startup tailors offers to the FPO's member profile rather than to individual farmers. Positioning strategies emphasise either functional benefits (yield uplift, cost saving) or emotional and aspirational frames (farmer dignity, modernisation, family security). The relative effectiveness of these positioning frames in driving conversion is an open empirical

question (Trivedi & Misra, 2021).

2.4 Digital Marketing Adoption

Digital marketing in Agri-tech contexts diverges materially from urban consumer marketing (Dwivedi et al., 2021, Kannan & Li, 2017). The dominant channels are not paid search and display, but vernacular short-form video, WhatsApp Business, regional Instagram and YouTube creators, IVR, and missed-call campaigns. Kemp (2024) reports that India has more than 500 million WhatsApp users, with rural penetration approaching parity with urban use, the relevance of WhatsApp Business catalogues for Agri-tech ordering follows directly from this base.

Vernacular content Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Punjabi, Gujarati, Hindi is consistently cited by founders as more performant than English campaigns. Mohan and Kumar (2023) report engagement-rate uplifts of two to three times for vernacular over English content in Agri-advisory videos. Regional micro-influencers, typically with 10,000 to 100,000 followers, offer higher trust per impression than celebrity endorsers (Ki, Cuevas, Chong, & Lim, 2020), particularly when the influencer is themselves a farmer or Agri-graduate. Community-driven channels WhatsApp groups organised by FPO, village, or crop function as both promotional surfaces and feedback loops, blurring the boundary between marketing and CRM (Krishnan & Banga, 2023).

Despite this practical importance, the antecedents and outcomes of digital marketing adoption in Indian Agri-startups have not been systematically modelled. We address this gap with a multi-dimensional digital marketing adoption construct that includes vernacular content intensity, regional influencer engagement, WhatsApp Business utilisation, Instagram/short-form video activity, and community channel intensity.

2.5 CRM and Data-Driven Decision Making

Customer relationship management refers to the integrated set of capabilities technological, organisational, and analytical through which firms acquire, retain, and grow customers (Payne & Frow, 2005, Reinartz, Krafft, & Hoyer, 2004). CRM intensity in Agri-startups varies widely: a small subset of well-capitalised firms operate full Salesforce or HubSpot deployments integrated with telecalling and field-agent applications, while many smaller ventures rely on spreadsheets and ad-hoc WhatsApp lists (Bain & FICCI, 2023). The retention and lifetime-value implications of higher CRM intensity have been established in services and retail contexts (Reinartz et al., 2004, Kumar & Reinartz, 2018), but evidence

from Agri-tech is scarce.

Data-driven decision-making the use of analytics, dashboards, and structured experimentation in marketing decisions is conceptually distinct from CRM. DDDM has been linked to firm performance across multiple industries (Brynjolfsson, Hitt, & Kim, 2011, Wamba et al., 2017). In Agri-tech, DDDM draws on a particularly rich data substrate: transaction logs, telemetry from IoT-enabled equipment, satellite-derived crop signals, and field-agent reports. The interaction between CRM intensity and DDDM is theoretically important: CRM systems provide the substrate, DDDM provides the decisional layer, and the two are likely complementary rather than substitutes (Wamba et al., 2017). We model this interaction directly.

2.6 Theoretical anchors

Three theoretical lenses frame the conceptual model. The resource-based view (RBV) treats marketing capabilities brand, CRM data, channel relationships, vernacular content libraries as firm-specific resources that, when valuable, rare, inimitable, and organised, produce sustained competitive advantage (Barney, 1991, Day, 1994). In Agri-tech, the rarity and inimitability of FPO partnerships and last-mile networks are particularly relevant, since these resources are difficult to replicate from urban headquarters.

The dynamic capabilities view (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997, Teece, 2007) extends RBV by foregrounding the capacity to sense, seize, and reconfigure resources in response to environmental change. The marketing landscape in Agri-tech is highly dynamic climate volatility, policy shifts, and platform reach all change rapidly making sensing and reconfiguration capacities central to performance. DDDM is, in this framing, a sensing-and-seizing capability, while the ability to re-orchestrate channels and partnerships is a reconfiguration capability.

Diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 2003) addresses the question of how new Agri-products and services spread through farming communities. Five attributes relative advantage, compatibility, complexity, trialability, and observability predict the rate of adoption, and the five-stage adopter taxonomy (innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, laggards) provides a behavioural segmentation base. Both implications are directly visible in Agri-startup field practice: small-plot demonstrations operationalise trialability, FPO chairpersons function as opinion leaders, and progressive-farmer targeting reflects early-adopter focus.

Despite the relevance of these frameworks, the literature does not yet provide an integrated empirical model linking the 7P mix, STP, digital adoption, CRM, and DDDM to marketing performance and customer outcomes in Indian Agri-startups. The present study addresses this gap, with hypotheses developed in the next section.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

Drawing on the literature reviewed in Section 2, we develop an integrated framework in which the marketing mix (operationalised at the 7P level), STP sophistication, and digital marketing adoption serve as primary marketing-management antecedents of customer engagement intensity and marketing performance. CRM intensity and DDDM act jointly on customer retention, with their interaction moderated by the presence of FPO partnerships and last-mile aggregation infrastructure. The customer-centric orientation of the firm is modelled as a higher-order driver. Figure 1 depicts the conceptual model.

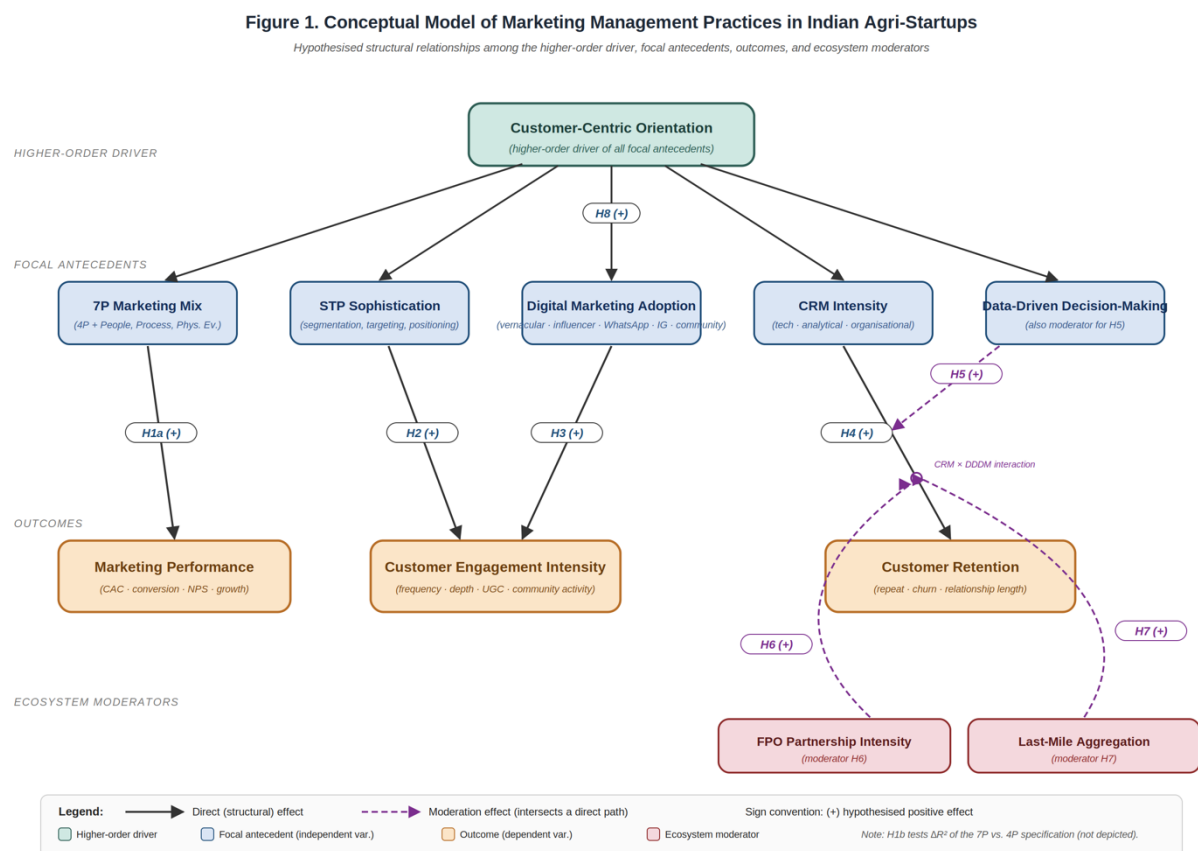


Figure 1. Conceptual model linking marketing-mix configuration, STP sophistication, digital marketing adoption, CRM intensity, and data-driven decision-making to customer engagement, retention, and marketing performance in Indian Agri-startups.

The framework is developed through seven hypotheses, organised in three thematic groups.

3.1 Marketing-mix configuration and marketing performance

Theoretical and empirical work in services marketing has consistently found that the 7P specification extending the 4P mix to include People, Process, and Physical Evidence better captures the value-creation drivers in service-laden offerings (Booms & Bitner, 1981, Lovelock & Wirtz, 2016, Mahajan, 2020). Agri-startup offerings are characteristically hybrid services in which human-mediated last-mile contact and process reliability bear directly on customer trust and conversion. We therefore expect the 7P specification to outperform the 4P specification, and we expect the services-side P's to carry substantial weight in the Agri-startup context.

***H1a:** The 7P marketing-mix configuration is positively associated with marketing performance in Indian Agri-startups.*

***H1b:** The 7P specification explains significantly more variance in marketing performance than the 4P specification.*

3.2 STP sophistication, digital marketing adoption, and engagement

STP sophistication captures the depth, multi-dimensionality, and analytical underpinning of a firm's segmentation, targeting, and positioning practice. Higher STP sophistication should produce more precisely matched offers, more efficient acquisition, and stronger engagement (Kotler et al., 2021, Ramaswami & Namakumari, 2018). In the Agri-startup context, where farmer segments are heterogeneous along crop, acreage, FPO membership, and digital fluency dimensions, sophisticated STP is particularly consequential.

***H2:** STP sophistication is positively associated with customer engagement intensity in Indian Agri-startups.*

Digital marketing adoption in Agri-tech is multi-dimensional, spanning vernacular content, regional influencers, WhatsApp Business, Instagram/short-form video, and community channels. The literature on emerging-market digital marketing suggests that adoption breadth and depth jointly drive reach and engagement (Dwivedi et al., 2021, Kannan & Li, 2017), and that vernacular and community-driven channels carry premium trust per impression (Mohan

& Kumar, 2023, Krishnan & Banga, 2023).

H3: Digital marketing adoption is positively associated with customer engagement intensity in Indian Agri-startups, with vernacular content and community channels carrying the strongest effects.

3.3 CRM intensity, DDDM, and customer retention

CRM intensity captures the technological, analytical, and organisational depth of a firm's customer-relationship infrastructure. Existing evidence in services and retail consistently links CRM intensity to retention and lifetime value (Reinartz et al., 2004, Kumar & Reinartz, 2018). We expect this relationship to hold in Agri-tech.

H4: CRM intensity is positively associated with customer retention in Indian Agri-startups.

DDDM the use of analytics, dashboards, and structured experimentation in marketing is conceptually distinct from CRM but theoretically complementary. CRM systems generate the data substrate, DDDM converts it into decisions. We expect DDDM to moderate the CRM retention relationship, with the strongest CRM effects observed in firms with high DDDM.

H5: Data-driven decision-making positively moderates the relationship between CRM intensity and customer retention.

The effectiveness of CRM and DDDM in Agri-startup contexts is further conditioned by ecosystem features. FPO partnerships provide trust, aggregation, and demand-side certainty, while last-mile aggregation infrastructure provides the physical reliability without which CRM promises cannot be kept (Sharma & Sharma, 2022).

H6: FPO partnership intensity positively moderates the joint CRM $\times$ DDDM effect on customer retention.

H7: Last-mile aggregation infrastructure positively moderates the joint CRM $\times$ DDDM effect on customer retention.

3.4 Customer-centric orientation as higher-order driver

A customer-centric orientation the degree to which the firm orients its decisions around customer value rather than product specifications has been identified as a meta-construct that conditions the effectiveness of specific marketing practices (Deshpandé, Farley, & Webster, 1993, Narver & Slater, 1990). We model customer-centric orientation as a higher-order driver that positively influences each of the focal antecedents (7P configuration, STP sophistication,

digital adoption, CRM intensity, DDDM).

H8: Customer-centric orientation is positively associated with marketing-mix configuration, STP sophistication, digital marketing adoption, CRM intensity, and DDDM.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research design

This study adopts a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The quantitative phase tests the hypothesised relationships using a structured survey and PLS-SEM. The qualitative phase, conducted after preliminary quantitative analysis, uses semi-structured interviews and thematic analysis to interpret and contextualise the quantitative findings. PLS-SEM is appropriate here because the model is complex, includes formative as well as reflective constructs, and is theory-extending rather than confirmatory (Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, & Ringle, 2019).

4.2 Population and sampling

The target population is Indian Agri-startups operating in the input, output, or infrastructure arms of the value chain, with at least one full-time employee responsible for marketing, and with operations in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Punjab, or Gujarat. These five states together account for the majority of Agri-VC deployment, the highest density of operational Agri-tech infrastructure, and substantial representation across all three arms of the ecosystem (Inc42, 2024, YourStory Research, 2024).

The sampling frame was constructed by triangulating three sources: the Indian Council of Agricultural Research (ICAR) NIF directory of Agri-tech ventures, accelerator portfolios (Bharat Innovation Fund, Omnivore, Cornucopia, Ankur Capital, ThinkAg), and a curated list maintained by Tracxn and Inc42 of funded Agri-startups with disclosed marketing activity. Filtering produced a frame of 712 startups. A stratified random sampling design was applied, with strata defined by (a) ecosystem arm (input, output, infrastructure) and (b) state of primary operations, to ensure adequate representation of each combination. The sampling fraction was calibrated to yield a target net sample of 350400 respondents, consistent with the 10-times rule and inverse-square-root rule for PLS-SEM with up to nine antecedents per construct (Hair et al., 2019, Kock & Hadaya, 2018).

4.3 Data collection

The quantitative phase ran from January to May 2025. The survey instrument was administered through a combination of web (Qualtrics) and assisted telephone interviews to accommodate respondents in geographies with limited connectivity. Initial outreach was conducted via LinkedIn, founder networks, and direct email, non-respondents were followed up twice. Of 605 startups approached, 263 provided at least one valid respondent, yielding a venture-level response rate of 43.5 per cent. A total of 412 questionnaires were returned, of which 387 were retained after screening for incomplete responses ($n = 17$), straight-lining ($n = 5$), and ineligible respondents ($n = 3$). The final respondent-to-firm ratio was 1.47, reflecting our protocol of inviting both a senior leader and a marketing specialist per firm where possible.

The qualitative phase ran from May to July 2025. Following preliminary analysis of the survey, 24 semi-structured interviews were conducted with founders ($n = 11$), marketing leads ($n = 6$), FPO chief executives ($n = 4$), and rural distribution partners ($n = 3$), purposively sampled to reflect variation across ecosystem arm, state, and stage. Interviews lasted 4580 minutes, were conducted in English with vernacular phrases preserved, and were recorded, transcribed, and member-checked.

4.4 Measurement

All multi-item constructs were measured on seven-point Likert scales (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). Items were adapted from established scales and refined through a two-round expert-review pre-test with five academic experts and seven practitioners, followed by a pilot survey with 32 respondents. Table 1 summarises the constructs, their definitions, the number of items, and source references.

Table 1. *Construct definitions, item counts, and source references.*

Construct	Definition	Items	Source
Customer-centric orientation	Degree to which the firm organises decisions and metrics around customer value rather than product or transaction logic.	6	Adapted from Narver & Slater (1990), Deshpandé et al. (1993)
4P configuration	Coherence and intensity of Product, Price, Place, and Promotion decisions.	8	Adapted from Kotler et al. (2021), Mahajan (2020)

Construct	Definition	Items	Source
7P configuration	4P plus People, Process, Physical Evidence dimensions calibrated for service-laden Agri-startup offerings.	14	Adapted from Booms & Bitner (1981), Lovelock & Wirtz (2016)
STP sophistication	Depth, multi-dimensionality, and analytical underpinning of segmentation, targeting, and positioning practice.	9	Adapted from Kotler et al. (2021), Ramaswami & Namakumari (2018)
Digital marketing adoption	Composite of vernacular content intensity, regional influencer engagement, WhatsApp Business utilisation, Instagram/short-form activity, and community channel intensity.	15	Adapted from Dwivedi et al. (2021), Kannan & Li (2017), developed for this study
CRM intensity	Technological, analytical, and organisational depth of customer-relationship infrastructure.	7	Adapted from Reinartz et al. (2004), Payne & Frow (2005)
DDDM	Use of analytics, dashboards, and structured experimentation in marketing decisions.	6	Adapted from Brynjolfsson et al. (2011), Wamba et al. (2017)
FPO partnership intensity	Depth and breadth of operational engagement with Farmer Producer Organisations.	5	Developed for this study based on Sharma & Sharma (2022)
Last-mile aggregation	Reliability, density, and integration of last-mile aggregation and logistics infrastructure.	5	Developed for this study
Customer	Frequency, depth, and quality of	6	Adapted from Brodie

Construct	Definition	Items	Source
engagement intensity	customerfirm interaction across owned and earned channels.		et al. (2013), Hollebeek (2011)
Customer retention	Repeat purchase, churn, and length of relationship.	4	Adapted from Reinartz & Kumar (2003)
Marketing performance	Composite of acquisition cost, conversion, repeat rate, NPS, and revenue growth, self-reported relative to plan.	7	Adapted from Morgan, Clark, & Gooner (2002), Vorhies & Morgan (2005)

Control variables were captured for firm age, total funding raised, stage (seed, Series A, Series B+, profitability), team size, ecosystem arm, and state of primary operations. These controls are introduced in the structural model in Section 5.4.

4.5 Analytical approach

Quantitative analysis followed the two-step procedure for PLS-SEM (Hair et al., 2019). The measurement model was assessed for indicator reliability (loadings > 0.708), internal consistency (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha > 0.70), convergent validity (AVE > 0.50), and discriminant validity (HTMT < 0.85, Fornell Larcker criterion). The structural model was assessed using R^2 and adjusted R^2 for endogenous constructs, path coefficient significance (bootstrap with 10,000 resamples), effect size (f^2), and predictive relevance (Q^2).

Moderation effects (H5H7) were estimated using the two-stage approach with mean-centred interaction terms. Multi-group analysis (MGA) was used to test path heterogeneity across ecosystem arms. Importance-Performance Map Analysis (IPMA) was used to translate the structural model into actionable priorities.

Qualitative analysis followed the Gioia et al. (2013) inductive coding procedure. First-order codes were extracted from transcripts, aggregated into second-order themes, and consolidated into aggregate dimensions. Two coders worked independently, intercoder reliability (Cohen's κ) reached 0.83 after a single reconciliation round, exceeding the conventional 0.75 threshold.

4.6 Common method bias and validity safeguards

Several procedural and statistical safeguards were applied to address common method bias (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Procedurally, the questionnaire used psychological separation between independent and dependent items, reverse-coded items, and explicit anonymity assurances, where possible, dependent variable items were obtained from a different respondent within the same firm. Statistically, Harman's single-factor test yielded a first-factor variance of 27.4 per cent, well below the 50 per cent threshold. Full collinearity VIFs were all below 3.0 (Kock, 2015), and a marker-variable test using an unrelated construct produced no material change in path coefficients.

5. Results

5.1 Sample profile

Table 2 summarises the demographic and firm-level profile of the sample. The 387 respondents represent 263 distinct Agri-startups. Respondents were predominantly founders/co-founders (38.5 per cent) and marketing/growth leads (33.6 per cent), the remainder were senior managers in customer success, business development, or operations. The firm profile reflects the structure of the Indian Agri-startup ecosystem: output-side ventures dominate (41.4 per cent), followed by input-side (33.5 per cent) and infrastructure-side (25.1 per cent). Maharashtra and Karnataka together account for just over half of the sample, with Telangana, Punjab, and Gujarat each contributing 1217 per cent.

Table 2. *Sample profile (n = 387 respondents from 263 Agri-startups).*

Variable	Category	n	%	Cumulative %
Respondent role	Founder/Co-founder	149	38.5	38.5
	Marketing/Growth Lead	130	33.6	72.1
	Senior Manager (CS/BD/Ops)	108	27.9	100.0
Ecosystem arm (firm)	Input-side	88	33.5	33.5
	Output-side / D2C	109	41.4	74.9
	Infrastructure-side	66	25.1	100.0

Variable	Category	n	%	Cumulative %
State of primary operations	Maharashtra	79	30.0	30.0
	Karnataka	63	24.0	54.0
	Telangana	44	16.7	70.7
	Punjab	44	16.7	87.4
	Gujarat	33	12.5	99.9
Firm stage	Seed / Pre-Series A	96	36.5	36.5
	Series A	88	33.5	70.0
	Series B+	54	20.5	90.5
	Profitable / Bootstrapped	25	9.5	100.0
Firm age (years)	≤ 3	84	31.9	31.9
	4-6	114	43.3	75.2
	7-10	47	17.9	93.1
	>10	18	6.9	100.0

5.2 Descriptive statistics

Table 3 reports means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations for the principal latent constructs (computed on factor scores). Means for digital marketing adoption ($M = 5.21$, $SD = 0.92$) and customer-centric orientation ($M = 5.34$, $SD = 0.86$) are notably higher than for DDDM ($M = 4.27$, $SD = 1.18$), confirming the practitioner intuition that data-driven decision-making lags the broader digital adoption curve. Correlations among focal constructs range from 0.31 to 0.62, all in the expected positive direction, with no indication of multicollinearity (all bivariate correlations < 0.80).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among focal constructs ($n = 387$).

Construct	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. CCO	5.34	0.86	1.00							
2. 7P configuration	5.02	0.79	0.58*	1.00						
3. STP sophistication	4.86	0.94	0.49*	0.54*	1.00					
4. Digital adoption	5.21	0.92	0.51*	0.47*	0.55*	1.00				
5. CRM intensity	4.51	1.07	0.44*	0.42*	0.39*	0.45*	1.00			
6. DDDM	4.27	1.18	0.39*	0.36*	0.41*	0.43*	0.62*	1.00		
7. FPO partnership	4.18	1.31	0.31*	0.34*	0.33*	0.38*	0.36*	0.32*	1.00	
8. Last-mile aggregation	4.39	1.14	0.37*	0.40*	0.31*	0.34*	0.41*	0.37*	0.46*	1.00

Note. ** $p < 0.01$ (two-tailed). CCO = Customer-centric orientation. Correlations computed on factor scores. Composite reliability and AVE values are reported in Table 4.

5.3 Measurement model assessment

Table 4 reports indicator reliability (loadings), construct reliability (composite reliability and Cronbach's alpha), and convergent validity (AVE). All standardised loadings exceed the 0.708 threshold (range 0.712 to 0.913). Composite reliability ranges from 0.842 to 0.927 and Cronbach's alpha from 0.791 to 0.910, both well above the conventional 0.70 threshold. AVE values range from 0.581 to 0.749, above the 0.50 threshold (Hair et al., 2019). Discriminant validity was assessed using the HTMT criterion, the highest HTMT ratio was 0.794, below the conservative 0.85 threshold (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015), and the Fornell Larcker

criterion was satisfied for all construct pairs.

Table 4. *Measurement model: reliability and convergent validity.*

Construct	Loading range	Cronbach's α	CR	AVE
Customer-centric orientation	0.731 0.882	0.873	0.906	0.659
7P configuration	0.712 0.871	0.910	0.927	0.583
STP sophistication	0.728 0.879	0.882	0.909	0.626
Digital marketing adoption	0.722 0.864	0.901	0.919	0.581
CRM intensity	0.751 0.891	0.864	0.898	0.639
DDDM	0.769 0.906	0.853	0.894	0.628
FPO partnership intensity	0.741 0.882	0.821	0.876	0.586
Last-mile aggregation	0.733 0.851	0.791	0.857	0.602
Customer engagement intensity	0.768 0.913	0.879	0.912	0.677
Customer retention	0.812 0.898	0.842	0.894	0.679
Marketing performance	0.762 0.901	0.889	0.913	0.601

Note. All loadings significant at $p < 0.001$. CR = Composite Reliability. AVE = Average Variance Extracted. Discriminant validity confirmed via HTMT (max = 0.794) and Fornell Larcker.

5.4 Structural model and Hypothesis tests

The structural model was estimated with 10,000 bootstrap resamples. Table 5 reports the path coefficients, t-statistics, p-values, and f^2 effect sizes for each hypothesised relationship. The model explains 51.3 per cent of the variance in customer engagement intensity, 48.7 per cent in customer retention, and 57.9 per cent in marketing performance. Predictive relevance (Q^2) is positive for all endogenous constructs, indicating adequate out-of-sample predictive power.

Table 5. *Structural model results: path coefficients, t-statistics, and effect sizes.*

H	Path	β	t-value	p-value	f ² / Decision
H1 a	7P configuration → Marketing performance	0.382	6.84	< 0.001	0.197 / Supported
H1 b	ΔR^2 of 7P vs. 4P specification	0.117		< 0.001	0.184 / Supported
H2	STP sophistication → Engagement intensity	0.291	5.12	< 0.001	0.143 / Supported
H3	Digital marketing adoption → Engagement intensity	0.406	7.43	< 0.001	0.231 / Supported
H4	CRM intensity → Customer retention	0.347	5.97	< 0.001	0.176 / Supported
H5	CRM × DDDM → Customer retention (moderation)	0.227	2.89	0.004	0.061 / Supported
H6	FPO partnership × (CRM × DDDM) → Retention	0.183	2.41	0.016	0.044 / Supported
H7	Last-mile × (CRM × DDDM) → Retention	0.211	2.67	0.008	0.052 / Supported
H8	CCO → composite of focal antecedents (avg β)	0.412	8.06	< 0.001	0.226 / Supported

Note. All paths estimated with 10,000 bootstrap resamples in SmartPLS 4. Controls: firm age, funding, stage, team size, ecosystem arm, state. R^2 (engagement) = 0.513, R^2 (retention) = 0.487, R^2 (marketing performance) = 0.579. Q^2 values positive for all endogenous constructs (range 0.21–0.39). $f^2 \geq 0.02$, 0.15, 0.35 are small, medium, and large effects (Cohen, 1988).

All eight hypotheses received empirical support. The strongest single antecedent of engagement intensity is digital marketing adoption ($\beta = 0.406$), and within digital adoption

the indicator-level analysis (not tabulated for brevity) shows that vernacular content (loading = 0.864), community channels (0.847), and WhatsApp Business utilisation (0.831) carry the largest weights, consistent with H3's directional claim. Customer-centric orientation operates as a strong upstream driver, with significant positive effects on every focal antecedent (average $\beta = 0.412$).

5.5 Moderation analysis

The moderation analyses for H5H7 deserve closer examination. Figure 2 illustrates the CRM $\times$ DDDM interaction effect on retention. The simple slope of CRM on retention at high DDDM (+1 SD) is 0.519 ($p < 0.001$), more than twice the slope at low DDDM (−1 SD), which is 0.187 ($p = 0.04$). This pattern supports the complementarity argument: CRM systems generate retention value primarily when paired with the decisional capacity to act on the data they collect.

Table 6. Customer Retention as a function of CRM Intensity, moderated by Data-Driven Decision Making

Line	Slope	Significance	Interpretation
High DDDM (+1 SD)	0.519	$p < 0.001$	CRM has its largest effect on retention when the firm has strong data-driven decision capacity
Mean DDDM	0.353	$p < 0.001$	The average (main) CRM $\rightarrow$ Retention effect
Low DDDM (−1 SD)	0.187	$p = 0.04$	CRM still has a small significant effect, but its retention return is sharply diminished without DDDM

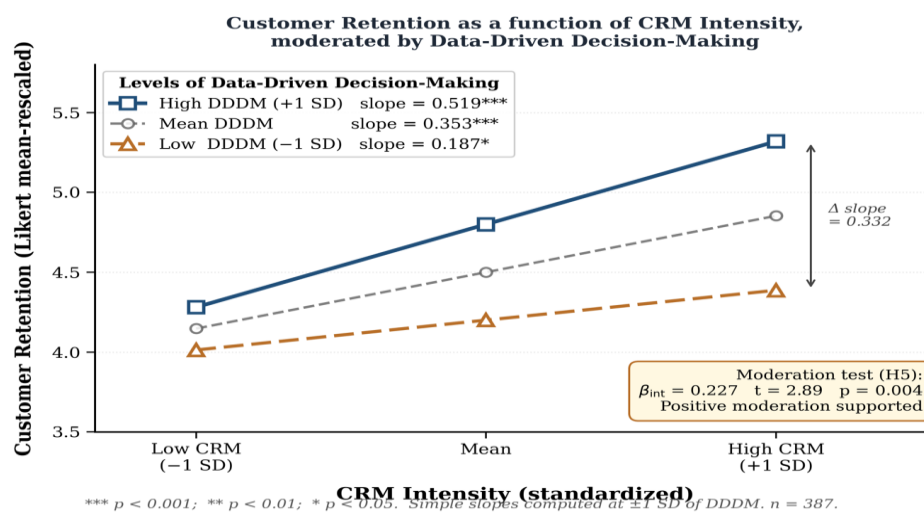


Figure 2. *Interaction plot of CRM intensity and data-driven decision-making on customer retention. The slope of CRM at high DDDM (+1 SD) is significantly steeper than at low DDDM (−1 SD), indicating positive moderation.*

Three-way interactions with FPO partnership intensity (H6) and last-mile aggregation (H7) are positive and significant. Substantively, firms in the top decile of both FPO partnership and last-mile aggregation show a CRM × DDDM joint effect of 0.31 on retention, firms in the bottom decile show a non-significant joint effect (0.06, $p = 0.21$). Ecosystem features therefore do not merely add to CRM/DDDM effects, they condition whether those effects materialise at all.

5.6 Multi-group analysis by ecosystem arm

Multi-group analysis (PLS-MGA) was conducted across the three ecosystem arms to test for structural heterogeneity. Path coefficients differ significantly across arms in three relationships. First, the path from digital marketing adoption to engagement intensity is significantly stronger for output-side ventures ($\beta = 0.491$) than for input-side ventures ($\beta = 0.318$, $p_{\text{diff}} = 0.012$), consistent with the consumer-brand character of output-side businesses. Second, the path from FPO partnership intensity to retention is significantly stronger for output-side ventures ($\beta = 0.281$) than for infrastructure-side ($\beta = 0.142$, $p_{\text{diff}} = 0.039$). Third, customer-centric orientation has a stronger total effect in output-side and infrastructure-side ventures than in input-side ventures, suggesting that input-side firms still trail in the customer-centric transition ($\beta_{\text{diff}} = 0.41$, $p < 0.001$).

5.7 Importance Performance Map Analysis

IPMA was used to translate the structural results into actionable priorities. The IPMA for marketing performance identifies digital marketing adoption (importance = 0.41, performance = 75.4) and CRM intensity (importance = 0.36, performance = 58.0) as the two highest-leverage constructs. CRM intensity sits in the high-importance, lower-performance quadrant, suggesting that targeted investment in CRM yields the highest marginal returns. DDDM occupies a similar high-importance, low-performance position (importance = 0.31, performance = 49.2), reinforcing the case for analytics investment.

5.8 Qualitative findings

The 24 interviews were coded inductively and produced three aggregate dimensions that contextualise and extend the survey results. The first aggregate dimension, 'vernacular-as-default', emerged from 17 of 24 interviews. Founders described vernacular content not as a marketing tactic but as a precondition for legitimacy in rural markets. A founder of a Maharashtra-based input venture observed that 'the moment we switched our WhatsApp catalogue to Marathi with audio explainers, our reorder rate doubled, but only because the farmer's wife could now read it on the family phone.' This observation foregrounds an under-theorised dimension: the household decision-maker for Agri purchases is frequently not the male farmer in whose name the account exists.

The second aggregate dimension, 'FPO-as-marketing-substrate', emerged from 14 interviews. FPOs were described not as channels but as integrated marketing partners that simultaneously perform segmentation (their membership rosters reveal crop, acreage, and credit profile), targeting (the FPO chairperson screens prospects), promotion (FPO meetings serve as demonstration venues), CRM (the FPO maintains relationship continuity), and physical distribution (the FPO depot is the last-mile node). The implication is that the marketing-mix elements collapse into a relational asset that the startup must co-build rather than purchase.

The third aggregate dimension, 'data-paradox', emerged from 12 interviews and captures a tension within the DDDM construct. Founders reported abundant data transaction logs, WhatsApp chat histories, IoT telemetry but limited decisional capacity to act on it. As one Karnataka-based output-side founder put it, 'We have more dashboards than decisions.' This qualitative theme aligns directly with the IPMA result that DDDM is high-importance but low-performance, and clarifies the underlying mechanism: the bottleneck is not data availability but the organisational routine for converting data into decisions.

6. Discussion

This study integrates the 7P marketing mix, STP, digital marketing, CRM, and DDDM into a single empirically tested framework for Indian Agri-startups, and triangulates the resulting statistical patterns with qualitative interview evidence. Five substantive findings warrant focused discussion.

6.1 The 7P specification dominates the 4P benchmark

The superior fit of the 7P specification ($\Delta R^2 = 0.117$, $f^2 = 0.184$) confirms that Agri-startup
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offerings are best modelled as service-laden rather than product-only. The services-side P's People (rural field agents, tele-callers, FPO liaisons), Process (order-to-delivery reliability, complaint resolution), and Physical Evidence (branded packaging, transport, in-app receipts) emerged as decisive performance drivers in both the quantitative and qualitative phases. This result contributes to the long-running debate on the appropriate dimensionality of the marketing mix in services and emerging-market contexts (Constantinides, 2006, Goi, 2009, Mahajan, 2020). For Agri-tech, the 4P specification is empirically inadequate.

6.2 Digital marketing adoption is dominated by vernacular and community channels

Digital marketing adoption is the single strongest antecedent of engagement intensity ($\beta = 0.406$), and within the construct the dominant indicators are vernacular content, community channels, and WhatsApp Business not paid search or display advertising. This pattern diverges sharply from the urban consumer marketing playbook and aligns with emerging evidence on platform-enabled trust formation in rural markets (Krishnan & Banga, 2023, Mohan & Kumar, 2023). The qualitative finding that vernacular is 'default not tactic' adds a normative dimension: for Agri-startups operating in regional markets, vernacular content is a hygiene factor, not a differentiator. Differentiation accrues to firms that combine vernacular content with regional micro-influencers and community channels in a coordinated way.

6.3 CRM intensity and DDDM are complementary, not substitutable

The positive moderation of DDDM on the CRM retention relationship ($\beta_{\text{int}} = 0.227$, $p = 0.004$) confirms that CRM investments deliver retention value primarily when the firm has the analytical capacity to act on the data. The simple slope at high DDDM is more than double the slope at low DDDM. This supports the complementarity hypothesis advanced in big-data analytics research (Wamba et al., 2017) and refines it for an Agri-tech context. The implication for founders is that CRM and DDDM should be sequenced and resourced as a paired investment rather than substituted for one another.

6.4 Ecosystem features condition whether CRM/DDDM work at all

The three-way interactions (H6, H7) show that the CRM $\times$ DDDM joint effect on retention is significantly stronger in firms with high FPO partnership intensity and high last-mile aggregation. The substantive magnitude is striking: firms in the bottom decile of both ecosystem features show a non-significant joint CRM $\times$ DDDM effect, while top-decile firms

show a substantial effect. This suggests that ecosystem features are not merely covariates but enabling conditions. CRM and DDDM technologies generate retention value only when the underlying trust (FPO) and reliability (last-mile) infrastructure permits the firm to honour the relational and operational promises that CRM-driven communications create.

6.5 The customer-centric transition is uneven

The MGA result that input-side ventures lag output-side and infrastructure-side ventures in customer-centric orientation aligns with the observation that input-side firms remain disproportionately anchored in dealer-led, transactional channels. The qualitative dimension 'FPO-as-marketing-substrate' suggests one mechanism through which input-side firms can accelerate the customer-centric transition: by treating FPOs not as channels but as integrated marketing partners that perform STP, promotion, and CRM functions in a relational, co-produced way.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical contributions

The study contributes to four streams of literature. First, it provides one of the few empirical tests of the 4P-versus-7P specification debate in an emerging-market services-laden context, and finds the 7P specification superior. Second, it integrates the marketing-mix, STP, CRM, and DDDM literatures into a single model rather than treating them as parallel research programmes, addressing a long-running fragmentation in marketing management research (Kotler et al., 2021, Kumar & Reinartz, 2018). Third, it advances the theory of ecosystem-conditioned marketing capabilities, demonstrating that CRM and DDDM are not standalone capabilities but require ecosystem complements (FPO partnerships, last-mile infrastructure) to deliver value. Fourth, it identifies vernacular content, regional influencers, and community channels as distinct sub-dimensions of digital marketing adoption in emerging-market Agri-tech, opening a research agenda on platform-enabled trust formation in low-bandwidth, high-trust-deficit markets.

7.2 Managerial implications

For founders and marketing leads, the findings translate into four concrete priorities. First, treat vernacular content as a baseline rather than an option Marathi, Kannada, Telugu, Punjabi, Gujarati, and Hindi content should match or exceed English content in production

quality. Second, build CRM and DDDM as a paired investment, isolated CRM deployment without analytics capacity will under-deliver. Third, prioritise FPO partnerships and last-mile aggregation as marketing infrastructure rather than as operational overhead, since these ecosystem features condition whether downstream marketing investments produce returns. Fourth, distinguish marketing strategy by ecosystem arm: output-side ventures should aggressively build consumer-brand capabilities, input-side ventures should focus on closing the customer-centric gap with output-side peers, infrastructure-side ventures should invest in B2B marketing capabilities calibrated to FPO and trader buying logic.

For Agri-VCs and accelerators, the IPMA results suggest that CRM intensity and DDDM are the highest-leverage capability gaps in current portfolios. Portfolio-level capability-building programmes shared analytics platforms, vernacular content production resources, FPO partnership playbooks are likely to produce returns that individual portfolio companies cannot capture alone.

7.3 Policy Implications

For NABARD, SFAC, and Agriculture Accelerator Fund administrators, the findings suggest two policy levers. First, FPO development programmes should explicitly fund the digital infrastructure (CRM systems, vernacular content libraries, dashboards) that allows FPOs to function as integrated marketing partners for the Agri-startups they serve. Second, last-mile aggregation infrastructure village-level depots, cold storage, post-harvest handling should be treated as marketing-enabling, not just operational. Subsidies and grants designed for operational reliability simultaneously unlock the marketing returns documented in this study.

8. Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations that bound the interpretation of its findings and point to future research directions. First, although the sampling frame was constructed carefully, Agri-startups in India are heterogeneous and rapidly evolving, the cross-sectional design captures a snapshot rather than a trajectory. Longitudinal studies tracking marketing capability development through funding rounds, exits, and policy shifts would strengthen causal inferences. Second, the focus on five states Maharashtra, Karnataka, Telangana, Punjab, and Gujarat was justified by ecosystem density but limits generalisability to eastern and north-eastern states with different Agri-structural conditions, replication studies in West Bengal, Odisha, Bihar, and Assam are recommended. Third, the unit of analysis is the startup, future

research could examine the matched dyads of startups and their farmer-customers to validate self-reported engagement and retention against customer-side outcomes.

Fourth, the digital marketing adoption construct emphasises vernacular content, regional influencers, and community channels, emerging modalities such as AI-driven advisory chat, voice-based interfaces in regional languages, and short-form video on YouTube Shorts merit dedicated future research. Fifth, the study does not separate organic from paid social-media activity, which masks important cost-of-acquisition dynamics, a dedicated cost-side investigation is warranted. Sixth, the ESG dimension of Agri-startup marketing sustainability claims, regenerative practices, carbon credits as marketing assets is theoretically important but lies outside the current scope, we flag this as a particularly fertile research direction.

Methodologically, future research could complement PLS-SEM with covariance-based SEM for confirmatory tests on subsamples large enough to support it, and with experimental designs (field experiments, conjoint studies) to isolate causal effects of specific marketing levers. Finally, comparative studies across emerging-market Agri-tech ecosystems Brazil, Indonesia, Kenya, Nigeria, Vietnam would test the transportability of the framework and its findings.

9. Conclusion

Indian Agri-startups have become structurally important actors in input distribution, output-side market linkage, and rural infrastructure, but the marketing decisions that determine their commercial fate have remained empirically under-examined. This study provides the first multi-state, multi-arm empirical mapping of marketing management practices across the Indian Agri-startup ecosystem, integrating the 7P marketing mix, STP, digital marketing adoption, CRM, and DDDM into a single framework tested with PLS-SEM on 387 respondents from 263 ventures and triangulated with 24 semi-structured interviews.

The findings show that the 7P specification dominates the 4P benchmark in this context, that vernacular content and community channels are the dominant digital touchpoints, that CRM and DDDM operate as complementary rather than substitutable capabilities, that ecosystem features (FPO partnerships, last-mile aggregation) condition whether CRM/DDDM investments deliver retention value, and that the customer-centric transition is real but uneven across ecosystem arms. These results refine marketing-management theory for emerging-market Agri-tech and produce concrete, prioritised guidance for founders, investors, FPO leaders, and policy bodies.

The broader implication is that marketing management in Indian Agri-startups is not a transplant of urban consumer-marketing practice. It is a distinct discipline grounded in vernacular communication, FPO-mediated relational trust, last-mile reliability, and the disciplined translation of data into decisions. Building this discipline will determine which ventures move from impressive funding rounds to durable customer franchises in Indian Agriculture's most consequential decade.

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