

Investigating the nexus between strategic human resource management practices and employee engagement

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Abstract

This study explores the relationships between strategic human resource management practices and employees' work engagement in Bangladesh's ready-made garment (RMG) industry. The study collected data through a self-administered questionnaire survey from 178 employees from 12 RMG firms located in Chittagong employing convenient sampling technique. The partial least squares technique was utilized to examine the validity and reliability of data and to test the proposed hypotheses. The findings reveal that four out of five hypotheses were accepted. Particularly, results demonstrated that recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensation directly impacted work engagement. These are essential strategic human resources management (SHRM) practices to foster employee work engagement in the Bangladeshi RMG industry. This study contributes to the SHRM-work engagement literature by providing further evidence about predictors of work engagement in the manufacturing sector in a developing economy. The study also explains the implications for theory and practice and limitations and directions for future studies.

Keywords Strategic HRM, Employee engagement, RMG industry

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

Employee work engagement (WE) is considered a critical force of sustainable business performance (Strom, Sears, & Kelly, 2014). It has been related to organisational and individual outcomes such as increased organisational development, less employee turnover, better customer satisfaction, cost-effectiveness, business competitiveness, and higher profitability (Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015). On the other hand, lack of employee engagement causes competitive disadvantage, lower productivity, increased costs, and decreased turnover for the organisation. However, there has been poor engagement among employees in today's organisations (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015). The findings of a study sampled from 140 countries have demonstrated that there is 13% of



global average work engagement (Gallup, 2013). For example, the US employees were reported to have a 30% engagement, followed by a 24% in Australia, 11%, 7%, and 6% in Korea, Japan, and China, respectively (Gallup, 2013). Thus, studies exploring factors influencing employee work engagement are essential (Blomme, Kodden, & Beasley-Suffolk, 2015).

Human resource management (HRM) practices, particularly strategic HRM, has been regarded as a vital force to drive work engagement (Tensay & Singh, 2020) because it focuses on ensuring sustainable organisational performance (Huselid & Becker, 2011). A meta-analysis of 300 published articles on strategic HRM also stressed the significance of strategic HRM practices on positive organisational outcomes (Paauwe, 2009; Becker & Huselid, 2006). In particular, the research evidenced that the recruitment and selection process, training and development (Khan, Hoque, & Shahabuddin, 2019; Uddin, Khan, Uddin, & Solaiman, 2015), appraisals, employee participation, and pay for performance were found to drive organisational performance (Huselid & Becker, 2011; Adresi & Darun, 2017). Similarly, a Bangladeshi study on some selected private commercial banks also reported a positive relationship between strategic HRM practices and firms' financial performance (Khatoon, Amin, & Hossain, 2013). However, previous studies highlighted the role of strategic HRM practices on organisational commitment (Adresi & Darun, 2017), social support sources and WE (Nasruddin, Ling, & Khan, 2019), strategic HRM and organisational performance (Tensay & Singh, 2020), leadership and WE (Choi, Tran, & Park, 2015), and strategic HRM and resilience (Bouaziz & Hchicha, 2018). Few studies dedicated to examining the role of strategic HRM practices on employee WE. Moreover, the findings of previous studies are also inconsistent in this regard (Tensay & Singh, 2020).

Employee work engagement is essential to attain desired organisational goals. Engagement facilitates employees' attitudes and behaviour towards their performance. Hence, it is vital to explore the pathways to boost up WE among employees. Recent scholarship has demonstrated the necessity of antecedents of work engagement (Tensay & Singh, 2020). Thus, this study investigates the role of strategic HRM practices on engagement work engagement of employees in the ready-made garment industry in Bangladesh. This study mainly aims to provide empirical evidence on the influence of strategic HRM practices and then identify and explore the relationships between strategic HRM practices and employee work engagement in Bangladesh.

The ready-made garment (RMG) has emerged as a vital factor for the

socio-economic development of Bangladesh that accounts for 84% of the total country's export earnings. RMG sector employs 4.2 million workforces and has made Bangladesh one of the top manufacturers worldwide, followed by China. In 2018 RMG export grew to USD 34.133 billion with an 11% contribution to the national GDP (BGMEA, 2020). The sector has greater potentiality than others regarding foreign exchange earnings, employment, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, and contribution to the national economy. However, to attain a stronger competitive position and sustainable competitive position in the global market, employees need to demonstrate greater engagement (Soundararajan & Brmmer, 2018). Previous studies in the RMG sector highlighted the link between SHRM practices and environmental performance (Uddin, 2021) and compliance-related issues (Akbar & Ahsan, 2019; Tate & Bals, 2016; Ashwin, Kabeer, & Schüßler, 2020). In addition, previous studies suggested that SHRM practices be effective for sustainable performance (Uddin, 2021). Thus, this study investigates the role of SHRM practices on employee work engagement in the garment industry in Bangladesh. Notably, this study investigates five SHRM practices, such as recruitment and selection, employee training, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensations since they are highly cited. It is also because these are core HRM practices, as suggested by previous studies (Huselid & Becker, 2011).

1.1. Theoretical background

The ability-motivation-opportunity (AMO) theory and the social exchange theory (SET) are utilised as the theoretical underpinning for this research investigating strategic HRM practices in the RMG sector in Bangladesh. AMO theory assumes that HRM practices influence peoples' ability, motivation, and opportunity to improve employee and organisational performance (Appelbaum, Bailey, Berg, & Kalleberg 2000). The AMO theory is extensively used in the field of HRM. It provides a broader understanding of how HRM practices, particularly strategic HRM practices, facilitate engagement through improving energy, skills, and resources (ability), employees' enthusiasm and interest (motivation), and their ability to make decisions to create and mobilise their resources (opportunities) (Bakker & Bal, 2010; Chacko & Conway, 2019). This indicates the justifications of the proposed framework underpinned by the AMO theory. Thus, this study argues that SHRM practices develop employees' abilities, motivate them, and offer opportunities to better engage with their job responsibilities. Previous studies to study the role of HRM practices on environmental performance in

the Bangladeshi RMG sector also applied AMO theory.

In addition, social exchange theory (SET) also serves as a theoretical underpinning to study employee engagement. SET postulates that employee engagement towards their job duties can be improved by understanding that SHRM practices stimulate employees to utilise their energy and abilities in their job roles that enable them to work with greater concentration and dedication to accomplish their job (Bakker & Bal, 2010). Previous studies have acknowledged that SHRM practices influence peoples' attitudes by moulding their perceptions towards their job (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). The employee-SHRM linking could be regarded as a social exchange dynamic between employee and work engagement since the employees' psychological attributes after establishing such link. The research framework proposed in this study justifies the concept of reciprocity of SET by illustrating that effective SHRM practices influence employees to return something in the form of greater work engagement to the organisation. Recent scholarship, guided by SET, has also revealed the importance of SHRM practices to provide a congenial work ambience for employees who demonstrate greater engagement to their job (Harden, Boakye, & Ryan, 2018). This study includes training, appraisals, employee participation, and pay for performance as essential SHRM practices to investigate their influence on employee work engagement. This research has included these practices since they are the most cited SHRM practices in the literature (Adresi & Darun, 2017; Menguc, Auh, Yeniaras, & Katsikeas, 2017).

2. Literature

2.1. Work Engagement

Work engagement (WE) refers to a progressive, satisfying, work-related state of mind characterised by vigor, dedication, and absorption (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). Vigor is defined as high levels of energy and mental resilience while working. Dedication is the sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride and challenge. Finally, absorption is being fully concentrated and deeply immersed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly, and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work" (Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá, & Bakker, 2002: 74-75). Although there is limited research on the link between strategic HRM and employee work engagement, previous studies have demonstrated mixed evidence about the relationship between SHRM practices and employee work engagement (Ancarani, Mauro, & Giammanco, 2019; Bailey, Madden, Alfes, & Fletcher, 2015; Bhatti, Hussain, & Al Doghan, 2017).

2.2. Strategic HRM practices

Strategic HRM practices can be defined as the structure of proactive plan and activities about deploying human resources to allow an organisation to attain its goals (Wright & McMahan, 1992). Strategic HRM practices indicate the utilisation and interventions to attain organisational visions by outlining proactive action plans (3). Strategic HRM practices improve and advance the productivity and efficiency of human resources and proper utilisation of human resources, which is regarded as a critical source of sustainable competitive advantage as suggested by RBV (Adresi & Darun, 2017). Previous studies have advocated that a set of SHRM practices such as recruitment and selection, employee training, performance appraisals, employee participation, and Compensation contribute to employee work engagement (Harden, Boakye, & Ryan, 2018). Nevertheless, research linking SHRM practices and work engagement are limited (Armstrong & Taylor, 2014).

2.3. Recruitment and selection and employee work engagement

Recruitment and selection aim to acquire a competent and skilled workforce and ensure the right person in the right place. It also addresses the future demand for organisational HR cost-effectively (Fan, Cui, Zhang, Zhu, Hartel & Nyland, 2014). Recruitment and selection is a crucial aspect to decide between hiring an organisational workforce. The importance of recruitment and selection lies with the fact that recruitment obtains information about potential candidates while selection ensures appointing the right person for the right job (Kotze, 2018). Previous studies have provided mixed findings, although empirical evidence linking recruitment and selection and work engagement are scarce. However, Darrag and Mohamed (2010) have demonstrated that effective employee work engagement substantially influences how employees are engaged with their job.

On the contrary, Loganathan and Dharmaraj (2017) reported no significant role of recruitment and selection on the level of work engagement. However, some studies have shown a positive relationship between recruitment and selection and employee engagement with their work duties (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). Therefore, the importance of recruitment and selection regarding its influence on engagement lies in ensuring the correct placement of employees in their proper job. Thus, the study proposes the following hypothesis:

H1 There is a positive relationship between recruitment and selection and employee work engagement.

2.4. Employee training and employee work engagement

The training aims to improve the skills and competencies of employees to accomplish their job duties and responsibilities properly (Kotze, 2018). Considering this, employees are regarded as a vital resource of companies, and hence organisations invest in training and development programs to increase employees' efficiency and contributions to organisational productivity (Jimenez & Valle, 2012). Appropriate training programs overcome complexities and challenges in the way of demonstrating desired performance. Training rationalises the significance and potentiality of employees in understanding their job tasks that escalate their engagement toward the job (Lamba & Choudhary, 2013). The training fosters employee capability and a sense of promising career that motivates individuals to demonstrate better engagement with their job tasks (Guest, 2017). Previous studies have evidenced that training interventions improve employees' engagement, leading to improved organisational performance (Bimpitsos & Petridou, 2012). A similar finding has been demonstrated by Paşaoğlu (2015), who has shown that training results in increased work engagement among employees. Other studies furthermore concluded that training makes employees instrumental in elevating their understanding of the work process and developing their engagement. Other studies accordingly reported a positive association between training and work engagement (Paşaoğlu, 2015). Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H2 Employee training has a positive influence on employee work engagement.

2.5. Performance appraisal and employee work engagement

Performance appraisal has been a necessary antecedent for fostering employee work engagement (Ancarani, Di Mauro, Giammanco, & Giammanco, 2017). Considering its importance, organisations pay much attention to designing and implementing a practical performance appraisal framework to increase employee involvement with their job tasks (Chen & Eldridge, 2010). It is due in part to a systematic process that examines every employee's strengths and weaknesses that enable them to contribute to the organisation's overall development. In line with this, previous studies have investigated the role of performance appraisals on employee engagement (Kampkötter, 2017), which depicted a significant impact on the level of employee engagement. Other studies, such as Ancarani, Mauro, and Giammanco (2019), reported that performance-based rewards and incentives inspire employees to exhibit their competencies at their work. Performance appraisal also enables people to have greater autonomy, control over their job

tasks, and empowerment (Ancarani, Mauro, & Giammanco, 2019, Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). In addition, numerous studies have provided evidence that performance appraisal stimulates employees to positively cope with workplace dynamics and adjust to changed work units and roles (Seibert, Wang, & Courtright, 2011). Moreover, performance appraisal enables employees to feel competent, show better engagement with their jobs, and perform better with their lower intention to leave (Meyerson & Kline, 2008). The evidence further reveals that PA makes employees work meaningful and improves their attachment and motivation, ultimately driving work engagement (Huber & Schubert, 2019).

H3 Performance appraisal is positively related to employee work engagement.

2.6. Employee participation and employee work engagement

Employee participation is regarded as a crucial SHRM practice that encourages employees to accept job duties and responsibilities for better performance (Adresi & Darun, 2017). Employee participation enables employees to keep pace with contemporary business development. The significance of participation in terms of contributing to engagement with work lies with the fact that it facilitates information sharing, flexible job design, and valuable complaint handling procedure, which might improve involvement (Pak & Kim, 2018, Jiang, Lepak, Hu, & Baer, 2012). In addition, participating employees may perceive a sense of being heard, respected, recognised, and empowered in the decision-making process, which increase their involvement in the job tasks (Fan, Cui, Zhang, Zhu, Hartel, & Nyland, 2014). Numerous studies have reported a positive association between employee participation and work engagement (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011). A recent study conducted by Zhang, Zhang, Dallas, Xu, & Hu, (2018) has shown that participation develops self-determination and willingness to work, ultimately fostering work engagement. Participation facilitates employees to experience lower absenteeism and intention to leave and greater satisfaction with work, which amplifies their work engagement, according to a study of nurses in India (Rastogi & Saikia, 2019). Therefore, the following hypothesis was included:

H4 Employee participation has a positive impact on employee work engagement.

2.7. Compensation and employee work engagement

There is increasing importance among HR managers about compensation practices on employee engagement (Lim & Ling, 2012). Compensation includes pay, leaves, various allowances, and incentives for employee of an

organisation (Chacko & Conway, 2019). Employees are intended to more engaged with their work when there are effective compensation practices for employees. A competitive compensation structure and payment system are vital since they can increase employee involvement with their work, improving organisational performance and competitiveness (Lawler, 1990). Pay for performance is positively related to the successful accomplishment of goals and objectives. A company's competitive pay structure creates a strong sense of gratification that would lead to better engagement with work (Kotze, 2018). A similar finding was reported by Kooij, Jansen, Dijkers & Lange (2010), who explored a robust positive correlation between the reward system of HR dimensions and employees' engagement. Another academic scholarship has also demonstrated a significant association between organisational benefit policies and work engagement among health professionals (van den Berg, Mastenbroek, Scheepers, & Jaarsma, 2017). Hence, this research aims to examine the following hypothesis:

H5 Compensation is positively related to employee work engagement.

3. Method

3.1. Data collection and procedure

Data were collected from employees of 12 ready-made garments (RMG) firms operating in Chattogram because it is the commercial capital and the second-largest city in the country, where there are 510 big RMG factories (BGMEA, 2020). Each selected firm was contacted via email and/or telephone to contact the HR manager and sought their support to survey at their convenient times. They were briefed about the nature and purpose of data collection and assured the confidentiality of the responses provided. Further, respondents were invited through email/phone/social media. After getting consent from the respondents to participate in the survey, the questionnaire link was sent to them via email and/or social media (i.e., Whatsapp/messenger). A letter highlighting the purposes and objectives of the study was attached with a link where the author made a gentle approach to respondents. The respondents were also assured about complete anonymity and confidentiality and their right to withdraw from the survey without further consequence. After one week of sending the link, we sent a reminder link to the participants to collect maximum responses.

Before conducting the survey, the study conducted a self-administered pilot study including 40 responses from 8 firms taking five from each. The slight modifications were brought in the scale in order to increase scale validity and reliability.

By utilising a convenient sampling technique, a total of 320 employees were approached to attend the survey. This study employed convenience sampling because it is incredibly speedy, easy, readily available, and cost-effective. Convenient sampling is also proper when the researchers need to develop hypotheses for future research (Henry, 1990). However, 225 respondents actively participated in the survey and filled up the questionnaire, out of which 47 were eliminated, making 178 complete and useable responses with a response rate of 79.11%. The partial least-squares (PLS) method was used to investigate the role of SHRM practices on employee work engagement by PLS 3. Details of the sample profile are provided in Table 2. Overall, the sample could be reported as employees with higher education, young, young, and medium experience in their present job.

3.2. Measures

The details about designing the questionnaire are presented in Table 1. All the items were adapted from the literature to investigate the latent variables depicted in the proposed model (Figure 1). All the SHRM constructs were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5), indicating lower values as lower levels of agreement and vice versa. Work engagement construct was studied using a seven-point Likert scale ranging from "never" (1) to "always" (7). In addition, the scale included gender, marital status, age, education, job title, and length of service as socio-demographic variables of the respondents.

Table 1: Constructs and their sources

Constructs	No. of items	Sources
Recruitment and selection	05	Edgar & Geare (2005)
Employee training	06	Karatepe & Vatankhah (2014)
Performance appraisal	06	Kuvaas (2006)
Employee participation	04	Dhiman & Mohanty (2010); Daley & Vasu (2005)
Compensation	06	Kinnie, Hutchinson, Purcell, Rayton & Swart (2005) and Kooij, Jansen, Dijkers, & Lange, (2010)
Employee work engagement	09	(Schaufeli, Bakker, & Salanova, 2006)

4. Analysis

4.1. Sample profile

The sample predominantly comprised of males (87.64%). Of those who participated in the survey, 82.6% were married, and 17.4% were unmarried. Most of the respondents' (91%) were less than 40 years of old. Regarding education, a majority of the participants were postgraduate degree holders. Regarding designation, 63.4% of respondents were officers, followed by assistant managers (23.6%) and managers (13%). The data about the length of service reveals that about 66% of respondents' length of service ranged between three and ten years and 23% had less than three years, whereas only above 10% had experienced above ten years of work. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Sample demographics

Particulars		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	156	87.64
	Female	22	12.36
Marital status	Married	147	82.6
	Unmarried	31	17.4
Age	Below 30 years	78	43.82
	30-35 years	52	29.2
	36-40 years	32	18
	41 years and above	16	9
Education	Graduate	60	33.71
	Postgraduate	111	62.35
	Above postgraduate	07	3.94
Designation	Manager	23	13
	Assistant Manager/Supervisor	42	23.6
	Officer	113	63.4
Length of service	Below three years	41	23.03
	3-6 years	62	34.84
	7-10 years	56	31.46
	11 years and above	19	10.67

N = 178

4.2. Confirmatory factor analysis

Table three demonstrates results about the measurement model, which includes composite reliability (CR), average variance extracted (AVE), and

the correlations of variables. Since all the underlying constructs were examined through a proven measure, thus confirming the content validity of the measure. As depicted in Table 3, the findings demonstrate that CR for all the constructs was greater than the threshold limit of 0.70 that assured the divergent validity of the scale (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017). Besides, the results indicate that all the AVE values for all underlying constructs are higher than the cut-off value of 0.50, which provides further evidence that the amount of unexplained variance is less than the amount of explained variance, therefore establishing the convergent validity of the measure. Furthermore, the Cronbach's alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.795 to 0.927, which were greater than the recommended value of 0.70 (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017), confirming the variables' internal consistency.

Table 3: Validity and reliability

Constructs	Composite reliability	The average variance extracted (AVE)	Mean	Std. Dev.	Cronbach's alpha (α)
Recruitment and selection	0.837	0.628	3.869	0.61	0.873
Employee training	0.913	0.564	4.027	0.816	0.904
Performance appraisal	0.866	0.681	3.795	0.764	0.795
Employee participation	0.905	0.719	3.892	0.608	0.882
Compensation	0.927	0.605	3.964	0.714	0.826
Employee work engagement	0.894	0.673	5.217	0.835	0.927

This study further examined discriminant validity applying the Hetero-trait Mono-trait (HTMT) model, which suggested an acceptable value of less than 0.90 (Henseler, Ringle, & Sarstedt, 2015). As depicted in Table 4, results reveal that all the HTMT values across the underlying variables are lower than the recommended value of 0.90, revealing that correlations of indicators across the variables are smaller than the correlations of indicators within the same construct. Therefore, discriminant validity was confirmed.

Table 4: Discriminant validity (HTMT)

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
1. Recruitment and selection					
2. Employee training	0.734				
3. Performance appraisal	0.688	0.792			
4. Employee participation	0.637	0.734	0.769		
5. Compensation	0.562	0.686	0.627	0.746	
6. Employee work engagement	0.485	0.593	0.536	0.617	0.735

In addition, this study also examined various indices to evaluate a model fit. The results revealed a Standardised Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) value of 0.078, which was less than 0.08 and demonstrated a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998). Hence, the result demonstrated that the discrepancy between the implied and the observed correlations was not significant. Further, the findings reported a Normed Fit Index (NFI) value of 0.93, indicating an adequate fitness of the proposed model. Moreover, all the VIF values were reported to be less than 5, revealing the absence of multicollinearity (Hair, Hult, Ringle, Sarstedt, & Thiele, 2017).

4.3. Hypotheses testing

The results of hypotheses testing are presented in Table 5. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between SHRM practices (recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, employee participation, and Compensation) and employees' work engagement in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. However, results reported an insignificant impact of employee training on work engagement. Overall, out of five hypotheses, four hypotheses were supported (H1, H3, H4, and H5), while one hypothesis (H2) was not supported. The findings of path analysis also demonstrate that Compensation ($\beta = 0.228, p < 0.05$) shows the greatest influence on employee work engagement followed by the performance appraisal ($\beta = 0.215, p < 0.05$). Further, it is noticed from findings that employee participation ($\beta = 0.194, p < 0.05$), and recruitment and selection ($\beta = 0.187, p < 0.05$) also showed direct significant impact on the level of employee engagement. Thus, hypotheses H1, H3, H4, and H5 were accepted, whereas H2 was not accepted. The t-statistics of all the significant SHRM practices were also greater than 1.96 at a 5% level of significance, while the t-statistic of employee training was less than 1.96.

Table 5: Results of hypotheses testing

Hypotheses	Path coefficients	T-Stats	p-values	Results
H1 (<i>Recruitment and selection – employee work engagement</i>)	0.187	5.138	0.001	Supported
H2 (<i>Employee training – employee work engagement</i>)	0.091	1.237	0.12	Not supported
H3 (<i>Performance appraisal – employee work engagement</i>)	0.215	4.394	0.027	Supported
H4 (<i>Employee participation – employee work engagement</i>)	0.194	5.928	0.003	Supported
H5 (<i>Compensation – employee work engagement</i>)	0.228	7.192	0.013	Supported

These results are partially consistent with previous studies. For example, Paul and Anantharaman (2004) explored a significant positive relationship between training and engagement, while this study reported no significant association between these two. Consistent with our findings, some studies (Şendoğdu, Kocabacak, & Guven, 2013) reported a positive relationship between other SHRM practices except training and work engagement. Thus, it can be suggested that recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, employee participation, and Compensation are significant predictors driving employees' work engagement in the RMG sector. These findings can be generalised for other RMG factories located across the country since all RMG firms are regulated by the same rules and regulations prevailing in the country. Moreover, the findings can be applicable for other manufacturing industries as all the study reports four significant core SHRM practices that are widely applied in other industries in Bangladesh and beyond.

5. Discussion

This study empirically examines the relationships between SHRM practices and work engagement in the largest manufacturing sector such as RMG in a developing country context. So far researcher's knowledge goes; this research is one of the few research-works that systematically investigates the role of crucial SHRM practices on employee work engagement at the individual level in the RMG industry in Bangladesh. A critical review of previous studies demonstrates that the association between SHRM practices regarding their influence on work engagement is understudied, particularly in the developing economy context such as Bangladesh. Thus, this study attempts to contribute to the existing literature by filling this research gap. Five hypotheses were proposed and tested to demonstrate that the SHRM practices significantly positively influence work engagement.

Under the central lens of AMO and the SET theories, this research proposed and explored significant positive relationships between SHRM practices and work engagement. In particular, the high engaged SHRM practices regarding recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, employee participation, and Compensation were reported to impact employee engagement levels possessed by employees positively. It could be suggested that HR professionals and practitioners should especially highlight the proper execution of HRM practices and procedures since these generate a high level of work involvement among employees. As most of the participants of this study included relatively young and had a moderate length of services, their preference to organise practical training needs to be

considered such that training would improve employee attachment with work. This is in line with the suggestions put forward by (Ancarani, Di Mauro, Giammanco, & Giammanco, 2017; Ancarani, Mauro, & Giammanco, 2019) that relevant training interventions might impact the engagement level of employees.

Bangladesh is an emerging economy in the South-Asian region with the potential RMG industry that makes an 11% contribution to the national GDP of the country (BGMEA, 2020). The industry also has greater potentiality regarding foreign exchange earnings, employment, poverty alleviation, women's empowerment, and contributions to the country's socio-economic development. In order to promote this industry and increase its competitiveness in the global market, formulating and implementing SHRM practices leveraging employee engagement is essential. It is also essential since RMG is a labour-intensive industry where a high level of employee involvement appears essential to facilitate the industry's survival in a competitive environment.

This research provided better insights and understanding about effective SHRM practices of Bangladeshi employees in the country's largest manufacturing sector. The study offers pieces of evidence about how various aspects of SHRM adopted by RMG firms can improve employee work engagement. For example, previous studies reported that the sense of attachment with their job tasks could better be facilitated by adopting SHRM practices (Al-Refaie, 2015) as evidenced by this study. Guided by the findings of this research, the findings might help RMG firms practically better understand the antecedents of work engagement with regards to HRM practices by giving a solid theoretical framework.

5.1. Implications for theory

This study provides some theoretical contributions. First, since this study is the first of its kind to test this theoretical framework in terms of empirical evidence from Bangladesh, it contributes to a deeper understanding of employee work engagement in RMG industries. Second, based on the SET and AMO theories, this study hypothesised that SHRM practices (i.e., recruitment and selection, employee training, performance appraisal, employee participation, and compensations) would positively impact employee work engagement. The results revealed that four SHRM practices except employee training demonstrated a significant impact on work engagement.

Third, guided by the SET and AMO theories, SHRM practices have been

proposed as a valuable way of transforming employees into competent, motivated, capable, and unique resources that may promote organisational goals (Ancarani, Di Mauro, Giammanco, & Giammanco, 2017; Ancarani, Mauro, & Giammanco, 2019). The findings imply that SHRM practices may develop highly engaged employees through SHRM practices, which might eventually help firms attain desired corporate performance. However, this research contributes to the field of SHRM. It ascertains four essential SHRM practices (i.e., recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, employee participation, and Compensation) capable of influencing employees to respond by demonstrating greater engagement with work roles towards accomplishing organisational goals and beneficial behaviors to both employees themselves and organisations.

Fourth, the findings reveal that employee training has no significant impact on employee work engagement. This might be due to the lack of adequate training programs leading to employees' work engagement (Bhatti, Hussain, & Al Doghan, 2017), especially in the Bangladeshi context. Furthermore, even if firms have useful training programs in their HRD process, only those employees in various departments might be affected. Finally, the positive relationships between four SHRM practices (i.e., recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, employee participation, and Compensation) indicate that seemingly RMG firms in Bangladesh have adopted SHRM practices to attain the desired level of employee engagement at workplaces. This indicates the importance of SHRM practices in terms of fostering employee work engagement. However, these findings suggest that SHRM practices help organisations to recruit and develop employees with a greater work engagement that may provide the firms with a sustainable competitive advantage.

5.2. Implications for practice

In addition to the theoretical implications, the findings reveal numerous implications for practitioners and policymakers. This section explains the key aspects for RMG firms and policymakers guided by our findings. The findings intend to provide a guide for RMG firms through illustrating a valuable outcome of implementing strategic HRM practices on employee work engagement. Due to the importance of driving employees towards their work engagement and the other issues raised recently, the SHRM practices play a crucial role in fostering employee work engagement. Thus, by implementing strategic HRM practices in the RMG industry, the practitioners could develop human resources and adopt SHRM practices to

attain employee engagement. The findings imply that RMG firms in Bangladesh that implemented strategic HRM practices had fostered employee work engagement. SHRM practices complement firms with significant work engagement. Once organisational management aims to improve employee engagement, the firms should shape their workplace culture and formulate policies by implementing strategic HRM practices. As a result, employees feel the significance of being engaged and committing to their work duties and responsibilities.

Finally, the RMG firms in Bangladesh are reported to have poor work engagement, yet this is the largest manufacturing sector contributing to the country's socio-economic development. This study highlights that strategic HRM practices may help firms in achieving greater work engagement of employees. Because of this, companies should spend every effort to develop a highly engaged workforce so that superior performances could be obtained. Therefore, RMG firms should be cautious while formulating and implementing their HRM policies and practices, leading to increased work engagement. Particularly, HR managers should highlight recruitment and selection, performance appraisal, employee participation, and Compensation as essential SHRM practices to foster employee engagement with their job duties.

5.3. Limitations and direction for future studies

This research collected data from employees in the RMG companies located in Chittagong. Future scholars may extend their works to other industries and countries to examine the proposed theoretical framework. Such extended studies may provide more generalised findings to explore a holistic SHRM practice – engagement model. Besides, future studies can do comparative research drawing a sample from other manufacturing and service industries such as steel and cement industries, Chittagong and healthcare and hospitality sectors to assess any variations of findings. The data were collected through convenient sampling from the RMG industry of Bangladesh. Hence, relatively bigger sample size may provide a more authentic insight into SHRM practices' role on employees' work engagement. Future studies may also include moderating variables such as gender mediating variable such as work environment to examine the mechanisms by which SHRM practices influence work engagement.

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