

The Impact of Employee Retention Motives on Employee Retention Intention: An Empirical Study of Job Satisfaction in the Apparel Manufacturing Industry in Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

Employee retention is a critical challenge for the apparel manufacturing industry in Sri Lanka. This study examines the impact of employee retention motives on employee retention intention, focusing on the mediating role of job satisfaction. Utilizing Herzberg's two-factor theory, social exchange theory, and job embeddedness theory, this research explores compensation, rewards, work environment, and work-life balance as key retention motives. The study employs a quantitative approach, analyzing data from 386 sewing machine operators. The findings reveal significant relationships between retention motives and retention intention, mediated by job satisfaction and moderated by job embeddedness. All variables recorded Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the acceptable threshold of 0.70, confirming the internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scale and correlation matrix reveals significant positive relationships with all variables with the strongest between job satisfaction and retention intention ($r=0.60$, $p=0.001$). The study findings reveal that there is a significant relationship employee retention motives (compensation, rewards, work environment and work life balance) and job satisfaction which strongly contributes to retention intention. Additionally, job satisfaction serves as a critical mediator, which explains how retention motives impact retention intention. Furthermore, job embeddedness moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and retention intention, revealing that employees who feel well-connected and well-suited to their roles are more inclined to remain with the organization. As a recommendation for improving retention strategies in the Sri Lankan apparel industry, organizations should offer competitive salaries, benefits, and incentive programs aligned with industry standards. Recognition initiatives, such as Employee of the Month and service awards, enhance job satisfaction and boost morale. A safe, compliant, and comfortable work environment, along with flexible work arrangements, supports work-life balance and further strengthens retention efforts

KEYWORDS: Job embeddedness, Rewards, Work environment, Work life balance

Introduction

Employee retention is a significant concern for businesses globally, particularly in labor-intensive industries like apparel manufacturing. High turnover rates can lead to disruptions in production, increased costs, and a loss of valuable skills and knowledge.

Understanding the factors that influence employee retention is crucial for developing effective strategies to keep valuable employees within the organization. In Sri Lanka, the apparel sector is a major economic contributor, accounting for nearly 44% of total exports and employing over 300,000 individuals directly (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2022). However, high employee turnover poses a threat to productivity and profitability, making it essential to understand and address the factors influencing retention. Despite its economic significance, the industry faces high employee turnover, disrupting production schedules and causing skill shortages (Biron and Boon, 2013). Retaining skilled workers is crucial for sustaining a competitive advantage in this labor-intensive sector (Hom *et al.*, 2017).

The demographic profile of the workforce in Sri Lanka's apparel industry is critical aspect to consider. The sector predominantly employs women, particularly from rural areas, who often migrate to urban centers for employment. This migration has significant social implications, affecting family structures and community dynamics. Therefore, we need to address not only economic and job-related factors but also social and familial considerations (Gajaweera and Kottegoda, 2018). Government policies and initiatives have also influenced industry's development and workforce management practices. Various policy measures aimed at enhancing labor rights, improving working conditions, and promoting vocational training have been implemented to support the industry's growth (Ministry of Industry and Commerce, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these policies in addressing the root causes of high employee turnover remains a topic of ongoing debate. Research in the field of human resource management has consistently highlighted the importance of employee engagement, job satisfaction, and organizational commitment in reducing turnover (Allen *et al.*, 2010). Studies specific to Sri Lanka's apparel sector suggest that enhancing these factors through strategic HR practices can significantly improve retention rates (Wickramasinghe and Jayaweera, 2011). This includes adopting holistic approaches that integrate financial rewards, career development, work-life balance, and supportive work environments.

Research Gap

Theoretical and empirical gaps exist in understanding the factors affecting employee retention in Sri Lanka's apparel industry. While there is extensive research on employee retention in general, specific studies focusing on the Sri Lankan apparel industry are limited. Existing literature lacks comprehensive models integrating job satisfaction and job embeddedness as mediators and moderators in the retention process (Kumar *et al.*, 2021). This study addresses this gap by exploring the impact of compensation, rewards, work environment, and work-life balance on employee retention intentions (Ghosh *et al.*, 2013), with job satisfaction as a mediator and job embeddedness as a moderator. The empirical gap is evident in the lack of studies that examine the combined effects of these factors on retention intentions, particularly in the context of Sri Lanka's apparel industry. Furthermore, the role of job satisfaction as a mediator and job embeddedness as a moderator in the relationship between retention motives and retention intention has not been extensively studied.

The high turnover rates in Sri Lanka's apparel industry necessitate practical solutions for improving retention. This study aims to develop actionable insights for industry stakeholders to enhance employee retention strategies. The practice gap lies in the lack of effective retention strategies that address the specific needs and challenges of the apparel industry in Sri Lanka. By identifying the key factors influencing retention and providing practical recommendations, this study aims to bridge this gap and contribute to the development of more effective retention strategies.

Problem Statement

High employee turnover in Sri Lanka's apparel industry disrupts productivity and increases operational costs. Understanding the retention motives and their impact on retention intention is crucial for developing effective retention strategies. The problem statement of this study is: "What are the employee retention motives that influence retention intention among sewing machine operators in the Sri Lankan apparel industry, and how do job satisfaction and job embeddedness mediate and moderate this relationship?"

Literature Review

As a theoretical background of study, employee retention is a multifaceted issue influenced by a variety of factors. To understand the mechanisms behind employee retention and turnover, several theories provide valuable insights. This study focuses on Herzberg's two-factor theory, social exchange theory, and job embeddedness theory to explore the relationship between employee retention motives and retention intention.

Herzberg's two-factor theory, also known as the motivation-hygiene theory, was developed by Frederick Herzberg in 1959. The theory distinguishes between two categories of factors that influence job satisfaction and dissatisfaction: motivators and hygiene factors (Herzberg *et al.*, 1959). Social exchange theory (SET) is a social psychological and sociological perspective that explains social change and stability as a process of negotiated exchanges between parties. The theory was first developed by George Homans in 1958 and later expanded by others, including Peter Blau and Richard Emerson (Cropanzano and Mitchell, 2005). Job embeddedness theory, introduced by Mitchell *et al.* (2001), provides a comprehensive framework for understanding why employees stay with an organization. The theory focuses on the connections and relationships that influence employees' decision to stay, highlighting the importance of social and psychological factors in retention.

Overview of the Empirical Justification

To develop effective retention strategies, it is essential to understand the empirical evidence supporting the relationship between various retention motives and employee retention intention. This section reviews the empirical findings related to compensation and rewards, work environment, work-life balance, and career development. Compensation and rewards are among the most critical factors influencing employee retention.

Competitive compensation packages, including salaries, bonuses, and benefits, play a significant role in attracting and retaining employees. Research indicates that inadequate compensation can lead to job dissatisfaction and increased turnover rates (Ma *et al.*, 2022). The work environment significantly impacts employee satisfaction and retention. A positive work environment, characterized by safety, comfort, and low-stress levels, enhances employees' well-being and reduces turnover intentions (Sivapragasam and Raya, 2018). On the other hand, a negative work environment, marked by poor working conditions, high stress, and lack of support, can lead to job dissatisfaction and increased turnover.

Work-life balance is another critical factor influencing employee retention. In today's fast-paced work environment, where employees often juggle multiple responsibilities, maintaining a balance between work and personal life is essential for overall well-being and job satisfaction. Supporting work-life balance through flexible working hours, adequate leave policies, and other initiatives helps employees manage their personal and professional responsibilities, reducing burnout and stress (Kossek *et al.*, 2011).

Methodology

Conceptual Framework

The methodology aims to provide a structured approach to investigate the impact of employee retention motives on retention intention, with a focus on the mediating role of job satisfaction and the moderating role of job embeddedness. By adopting a quantitative research approach, the study seeks to generate empirical evidence that can inform strategies for improving employee retention in Sri Lanka's apparel manufacturing industry. The conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) integrates Herzberg's two-factor theory, social exchange theory, and job embeddedness theory to examine the relationships between retention motives, job satisfaction, and retention intention. Herzberg's two-factor theory provides insights into the intrinsic and extrinsic factors influencing job satisfaction. Social exchange theory highlights the importance of reciprocal relationships between employees and organizations, while job embeddedness theory emphasizes the connections and relationships that influence employees' decision to stay with an organization.

The framework posits that compensation, rewards, work environment, and work-life balance are key retention motives that directly impact job satisfaction. Job satisfaction, in turn, influences retention intention. Additionally, job embeddedness is proposed to moderate the relationship between job satisfaction and retention intention, suggesting that employees with strong links, good fit, and high perceived sacrifice are more likely to stay with the organization.

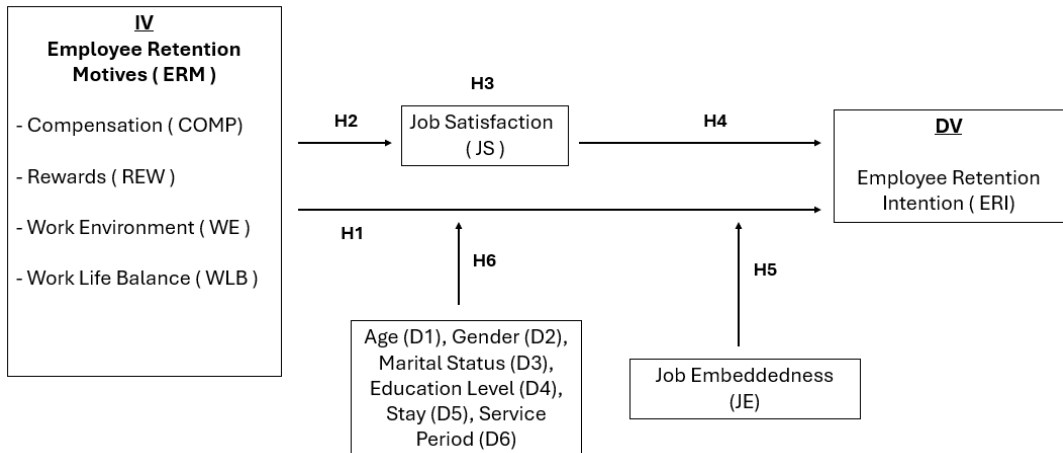


Figure 3.1: Conceptual Framework (Source: Author developed)

Hypothesis Development

Based on the theoretical framework, the following hypotheses were formulated to examine the direct and indirect effects of retention motives on retention intention, mediated by job satisfaction and moderated by job embeddedness:

H1: There is a positive impact of ERM's on the ERI.

H2: There is a positive impact of ERM's on job satisfaction.

H3: The relationship between ERM's and ERIs mediating by job satisfaction.

H4: There is a positive impact of job satisfaction on the ERI.

H5: The relationship between ERM's and ERI is moderated by the job embeddedness of the employees.

H6: The relationship between ERMs and ERI is moderated by the demographic characteristics of the employees.

Research Approach

A quantitative research approach was employed to collect and analyze data. This approach was chosen for its ability to provide objective, measurable, and generalizable findings. Structured questionnaires were used to gather data from sewing machine operators in Sri Lanka's apparel industry. The data collected was then analyzed using appropriate statistical methods to test the hypotheses and examine the relationships between variables.

Research Paradigm

The study follows a positivist paradigm, which emphasizes objective measurement and statistical analysis to test hypotheses and generate empirical evidence. The positivist paradigm is appropriate for this study as it allows for the systematic investigation of the relationships between retention motives, job satisfaction, and retention intention, and the testing of theoretical predictions using quantitative data.

Research Design

The research design includes cross-sectional data collection and analysis, using SEM to examine the relationships between variables. A cross-sectional design was chosen to capture data at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of the current state of employee retention motives, job satisfaction, and retention intention in the apparel industry. SEM was employed to test the hypothesized relationships and to provide a comprehensive understanding of the direct and indirect effects of retention motives on retention intention.

Data Collection and Developing Survey Instrument

The primary data was collected through structured questionnaires, with items adapted from validated scales. The survey instrument was designed to capture data on the key variables and was pre-tested and refined based on pilot study feedback. The questionnaire was designed to include items that measure compensation, rewards, work environment, work-life balance, job satisfaction, retention intention, and job embeddedness. Each item was rated on a Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. A stratified random sampling method was used to select participants from different apparel manufacturing companies in Sri Lanka. The sample was stratified based on factors such as company size, location, and employee demographics to ensure a representative sample. Finally, the refined questionnaires were distributed to the selected participants through both online and paper-based formats. Participants were provided with clear instructions on how to complete the survey and are assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

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Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical methods, including correlation analysis, regression analysis, and SEM. Descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, and frequencies, were calculated to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample and the distribution of responses for each variable. The reliability of the survey instrument was assessed using Cronbach's alpha to ensure internal consistency. Construct validity was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to confirm the structure of the measured variables.

Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between the key variables and to identify potential multicollinearity issues. Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the direct effects of compensation, rewards, work environment, and work-life balance on job satisfaction, and the direct effect of job satisfaction on retention intention. SEM was employed to test the hypothesized relationships between retention motives, job satisfaction, job embeddedness, and retention intention. SEM allows for the examination of both direct and indirect effects, as well as the testing of mediation and moderation effects.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

The descriptive analysis provides insights into the demographic profile of the respondents, including age, gender, education level, and years of service in the apparel industry (Table 4.1). Most of the respondents are aged between 25 and 34 years (38.8%), with a nearly equal distribution of males (49.1%) and females (50.9%). Most respondents have completed secondary education (54.3%), and a significant portion have been employed in the apparel industry for 4-6 years (36.0%) (Table 4.1)

Table 4.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age	Below 25	75	19.4
	25-34	150	38.8
	35-44	100	25.8
	45 and above	61	15.8
Gender	Male	190	49.1
	Female	196	50.9
Education Level	Primary Education	34	8.8
	Secondary Education	210	54.3
	Tertiary Education	142	36.8
Years of Service	Less than 1 year	50	12.9
	1-3 years	112	29.0
	4-6 years	139	36.0
	More than 6 years	85	22.1

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the survey instrument is assessed using Cronbach's alpha, which measures internal consistency. All variables show Cronbach's alpha values above the acceptable threshold of 0.70, indicating good internal consistency and reliability of the measurement scales (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2: Reliability Analysis of Key Variables

Variable	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Compensation	5	0.84
Rewards	5	0.86
Work Environment	5	0.81
Work-Life Balance	5	0.79
Job Satisfaction	5	0.88
Retention Intention	5	0.85

Inferential Analysis

Inferential statistical methods, including correlation and regression analysis, were used to examine the relationships between retention motives, job satisfaction, and retention intention.

Table 4.3: Correlation Matrix

Variable	Compensation	Rewards	Work Environment	Work-Life Balance	Job Satisfaction	Retention Intention
Compensation	1	0.52**	0.48**	0.45**	0.53**	0.47**
Rewards	0.52**	1	0.50**	0.46**	0.54**	0.49**
Work Environment	0.48**	0.50**	1	0.49**	0.56**	0.50**
Work-Life Balance	0.45**	0.46**	0.49**	1	0.57**	0.52**
Job Satisfaction	0.53**	0.54**	0.56**	0.57**	1	0.60**
Retention Intention	0.47**	0.49**	0.50**	0.52**	0.60**	1

Note: ** $p < 0.01$

The correlation matrix shows significant positive correlations between all variables. The highest correlation was observed between job satisfaction and retention intention ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.01$), indicating a strong relationship between these variables (Table 4.3).

Regression Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to test the direct effects of compensation, rewards, work environment, and work-life balance on job satisfaction, and the direct effect of job satisfaction on retention intention. All independent variables have significant positive effects on job satisfaction, with work-life balance showing the highest beta value ($\beta = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$). Job satisfaction also has a significant positive effect on retention intention ($\beta = 0.60$, $p < 0.001$) (Table 4.4).

Table 4.4: Regression Analysis Results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	Beta	t-value	p-value
Job Satisfaction	Compensation	0.28	5.64	0.000
	Rewards	0.30	6.10	0.000
	Work Environment	0.32	6.58	0.000
	Work-Life Balance	0.35	7.21	0.000
Retention Intention	Job Satisfaction	0.60	12.45	0.000

In this study, compensation, rewards, work environment and work life balance were identified as the immediate antecedents of intention to retain. These results are well in line with the findings of Dechawatanapaisal (2017), Jaiswal (2020), Rakawuri (2021), Tirta and Enrika (2020) who investigated the relationship between employee retention motives as compensation, rewards, work environment and work life balance and relationship between retention motives and intention to retain in a different context. In other words, attributes of employee retention motives are positively and significantly relating to the intention to retain. Moreover, as explained earlier in another study carried by Alniacik *et al.* (2011), Herzberg *et al.* (1959), Stello (2011), suggested that values which are attributes of employee retention motives influence positively and significantly in varying degrees to job satisfaction (JS).

Structural Equation Modeling

SEM is employed to test the hypothesized relationships between variables, providing a comprehensive understanding of the direct and indirect effects of retention motives on retention intention. The SEM results confirm that all hypothesized relationships are significant. The model fit indices indicate a good fit to the data, with RMSEA below 0.05 and CFI and TLI values above 0.95 (Table 4.5).

Table 4.5: SEM Model Fit Indices and Path Coefficients

Model Fit Indices	Value
Chi-square (χ^2)	245.30
Degrees of Freedom (df)	150
p-value	0.000
RMSEA	0.045
CFI	0.97
TLI	0.96
SRMR	0.035

The path coefficients show that all retention motives significantly influence job satisfaction, which in turn significantly affects retention intention. Additionally, job embeddedness has a significant moderate effect on the relationship between job satisfaction and retention intention (Table 4.6). The findings of this study reveal two key relationships: first, that job satisfaction positively mediates the link between employee retention motives and retention intention; and second, that job embeddedness significantly moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and retention intention. These results are consistent with and expand upon previous research.

Table 4.6: SEM Path Coefficients

Path	Coefficient	t-value	p-value
Compensation → Job Satisfaction	0.24	4.98	0.000
Rewards → Job Satisfaction	0.26	5.32	0.000
Work Environment → Job Satisfaction	0.28	5.65	0.000
Work-Life Balance → Job Satisfaction	0.30	6.01	0.000
Job Satisfaction → Retention Intention	0.58	11.98	0.000
Job Embeddedness → Retention Intention (moderating effect)	0.15	3.10	0.002

Regarding job satisfaction, this study supports Berry (1981) internal marketing perspective, which frames employees as internal customers and jobs as internal products that should fulfill their professional needs and aspirations. When organizations focus on satisfying these internal demands, employees are more likely to develop a strong intention to stay. Mak and Sockel (2001) also emphasized the importance of job satisfaction as an indicator of latent motivation, influencing retention through variables such as burnout, loyalty, and intent to leave. Our findings confirm this relationship by empirically showing how job satisfaction bridges the gap between motivational drivers and actual retention intentions. McGuire (2003) further highlighted that satisfaction stems from respect, recognition, and organizational commitment, not just financial incentives, and that such satisfaction fosters long-term employee retention. The present study reinforces this notion by demonstrating the mediating strength of satisfaction in retention-focused frameworks.

Moving beyond the mediating role of satisfaction, this study uniquely contributes to literature by identifying the moderating role of job embeddedness. In alignment with Mitchell *et al.* (2001), our results show that employees who are embedded in their organizations through strong social and professional links, alignment or fit with organizational values, and perceived sacrifices associated with leaving experience a stronger positive relationship between satisfaction and retention intention. That is, even when employees are satisfied, their intention to stay is further solidified when they are deeply embedded within the organizational structure and culture. Young (2013) similarly emphasized that job embeddedness alongside job satisfaction, engagement, and commitment serves as a strong predictor of employee retention. This study corroborates Young's findings while extending the understanding by positioning job embeddedness as a moderator, illustrating how it enhances the impact of satisfaction on retention.

In summary, the current study not only confirms well-established theories of job satisfaction as a key retention factor but also expands the retention model by introducing job embeddedness as a contextual amplifier. These findings highlight the importance of a dual approach: cultivating both satisfaction through internal motivation and embeddedness through structural and cultural alignment, especially in dynamic and labor-intensive sectors like the apparel industry.

Recommendations

To attract and retain skilled employees, organizations should implement competitive salary packages and reward benefits. Enhancing the work environment is essential for improving employee satisfaction and reducing turnover. Ensure the workplace is safe and complies with all health and safety regulations. A safe and comfortable work environment reduces the risk of accidents and injuries, making employees feel secure. Supporting work-life balance is critical for enhancing job satisfaction and retention. Organizations should implement the flexible working hours which Offer flexible working hours and remote work options to help employees balance their personal and professional responsibilities. Flexibility in scheduling can reduce stress and improve job satisfaction.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that compensation, rewards, work environment, and work-life balance are significant predictors of job satisfaction, which in turn significantly influences retention intention. The SEM results confirm the hypothesized relationships and demonstrate the importance of job embeddedness as a moderating factor. Additionally, job satisfaction serves as a crucial mediator, explaining how retention motives impact retention intention. Furthermore, job embeddedness moderates the relationship between job satisfaction and retention intention, indicating that employees with strong connections and a good fit are more likely to stay with the organization.

The study concludes that effective retention strategies must address compensation, rewards, work environment, and work-life balance to enhance job satisfaction and retention intention. Specifically, organizations in the Sri Lankan apparel industry should focus on Providing competitive compensation and comprehensive benefits, developing recognition and reward programs that acknowledge employee contributions, improving working conditions, safety measures, and stress management programs, introducing flexible working hours and adequate leave policies to support employees' personal and professional lives. By addressing these factors, organizations can significantly improve employee retention, reduce turnover rates, and enhance overall productivity and profitability.

Conflict of Interest

The authors have declared there is no conflict of interest.

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