



Too tired to engage? the impact of emotional exhaustion on outsourced employees with job satisfaction as a mediating variable

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ABSTRACT

Employee engagement is essential to enhancing organizational performance; however, it may be adversely affected by emotional exhaustion, particularly among outsourced workers who often face unique challenges in the workplace. Although employee engagement plays a critical role, there has been insufficient focus on how emotional exhaustion diminishes engagement, particularly among outsourced industrial workers who often encounter intense job demands and limited support. This research seeks to investigate the influence of emotional exhaustion on employee engagement, with job satisfaction considered as a mediating factor. This research explores how emotional exhaustion impacts employee engagement, with job satisfaction functioning as an intermediary in the relationship. The focus is on outsourced personnel working in the Inventory Unit at PT Semen Padang. Utilizing a quantitative method and survey data from 52 outsourced workers, This research utilizes Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to analyze the relationships between variables. The analysis indicates that emotional exhaustion does not directly influence engagement. Instead, it significantly lowers job satisfaction, which subsequently enhances engagement demonstrating a full mediation effect. align with the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) model, emphasizing the buffering function of job satisfaction against the negative impact of emotional stress. Practical implications include the need for management to enhance psychological support, stress management, and communication to improve employee satisfaction and engagement. Future research is recommended to explore additional variables and diverse employee populations to deepen the understanding of factors influencing engagement.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Employee well-being has emerged as a growing priority for organizations across the globe, particularly amid the intense competition and rapid changes characteristic of the modern

business landscape. Modern organizations are not only expected to achieve financial goals but also to create supportive and healthy workplaces that promote the physical and psychological health of their workforce. Employees with high levels of well-being tend to exhibit greater energy, enhanced focus, and better resilience against workplace stressors, which collectively contribute to improved productivity and overall organizational success (Islami et al., 2024). This growing awareness has encouraged companies to invest in strategies and policies that prioritize employee well-being as a key factor in sustaining competitive advantage.

Employee engagement, a concept closely tied to overall well-being, refers to how emotionally, cognitively, and physically committed individuals are to their job roles and the organization they serve (Shuck & Wollard, 2010). Engagement reflects a constructive and satisfying psychological state at work, marked by high energy (vigor), strong commitment (dedication), and deep immersion (absorption) in job activities. Organizations with highly engaged employees tend to enjoy lower turnover rates, higher job satisfaction, greater innovation, and improved financial outcomes (Harter et al., 2002; Macey & Schneider, 2008). Despite its recognized importance, engagement remains vulnerable to various workplace challenges, including excessive workload, poor leadership support, inadequate recognition, ambiguous roles, and work-life imbalance (Saks, 2006).

A key factor that can undermine employee engagement is emotional exhaustion a condition characterized by feeling emotionally worn out and depleted due to prolonged contact with job related stress and social strain at work. (Sihaloho & Indawati, 2021). Emotional exhaustion is commonly considered the central element of burnout and has been empirically associated with lower motivation, decreased focus, and a decline in job performance. (Indhumathi, 2023; Menon & Priyadarshini, 2018; Trần & Tiêu, 2020). At the point employees experience elevated degrees of emotional exhaustion, individuals tend to be less inclined to invest energy and enthusiasm in their work, which leads to decreased engagement and increased absenteeism and intention to resign (Gustina et al., 2022; Khulub et al., 2012).

The causes of emotional exhaustion are multifaceted, including persistent job stress, overwhelming job demands, insufficient coping resources, poor organizational support, interpersonal conflicts, and monotony in work tasks (Sumri & Mokhtar, 2023; Santika & Sudibia, 2017). These factors not only disrupt employee's emotional well-being but also erode their ability to effectively perform and contribute to organizational goals. This problem is especially prevalent among outsourced employees, who often face unique challenges such as limited access to organizational resources, lower job security, restricted involvement in decision-making, and weaker social integration within the company (Ibrahim & Hussein, 2024). These limitations intensify the likelihood of emotional exhaustion and negatively influence both job satisfaction and employee engagement within this group of workers (Habibi et al., 2024).

Understanding the mechanisms through which emotional exhaustion affects engagement is essential for developing effective interventions. In this context, job satisfaction plays a pivotal mediating role. Job satisfaction can be defined as overall emotional reactions workers have toward their professional roles experiences, indicating how fulfilled and satisfied they feel with different aspects of their job (George & Jones, 2012). Employees with high job satisfaction tend to demonstrate stronger commitment and engagement, even in the presence of workplace stressors (Huang et al., 2016). Conversely, emotional exhaustion often leads to dissatisfaction as employees struggle to meet job demands and derive less enjoyment from their roles (Lee et al., 2019; Allam et al., 2023). Interestingly, some studies indicate that despite emotional exhaustion, certain employees, particularly those in outsourced positions, may report moderate satisfaction due to extrinsic rewards such as competitive salaries, recognition, or emotional attachment to the organization.

This research focuses on outsourced employees working in the Inventory Unit of PT Semen Padang, a key area responsible for managing the receipt, storage, and maintenance of inventory items. This unit requires a high degree of accuracy, speed, and coordination, reflecting the demanding nature of the job. The decision to focus on outsourced employees within this specific unit is based on their essential role in maintaining operational continuity while facing substantial job pressures and structural limitations. According to the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), excessive job demands without adequate resources to cope can result in emotional exhaustion and decreased engagement. Outsourced personnel primarily supplied through PT Pasoka Sumber Karya often lack access to core organizational support systems, have minimal job security, and are typically excluded from formal communication and decision-making channels. These characteristics amplify their exposure to psychological strain.

Preliminary interviews conducted with several outsourced workers also revealed signs of low engagement, such as feelings of being undervalued, lack of constructive feedback, and discomfort in interacting with supervisors. Additionally, sudden policy changes like overtime reductions were reported to further exacerbate dissatisfaction. Organizational policies, such as sudden reductions in overtime, exacerbate dissatisfaction and emotional strain. These findings emphasize the need to examine how emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction together influence employee engagement in outsourced workforces. Hence, this study deliberately targets this workforce segment to generate context-specific insights into engagement dynamics in outsourced industrial settings.

Through examining how job satisfaction functions as an intermediary linking emotional exhaustion and employee engagement, this study seeks to fill a notable gap in existing studies, especially concerning outsourced employees a workforce group that continues to grow globally. The results will provide valuable insights for both theory and practice, offering human resource managers evidence-based strategies to enhance engagement, reduce burnout, and improve the well-being of outsourced employees, ultimately contributing to organizational effectiveness and sustainability.

The theoretical foundation of this study draws on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory developed by Bakker & Demerouti (2007) which proposes that every job consists of two primary elements, job demands and job resources. Job demands encompass physical, psychological, and emotional challenges that require ongoing effort and are linked to both physiological and mental strain. Conversely, job resources consist of organizational, social, or personal assets that help employees fulfill work requirements, reduce the impact of demands, and boost motivation. When workplace demands surpass the resources at hand, this imbalance can trigger emotional exhaustion, subsequently diminishing employee engagement. However, sufficient job resources can mitigate such negative effects. In this context, job satisfaction serves as an important mediator that may influence how emotional exhaustion impacts engagement outcomes.

Based on this explanation, the hypotheses that can be proposed in this study are as follows: Based on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) theory (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), emotional exhaustion arises when job demands exceed available resources, leading to reduced psychological energy and lower employee engagement. Several studies have confirmed that high emotional exhaustion diminishes engagement by weakening employees' motivation and focus (Indhumathi, 2023; Gustina et al., 2022). H1: Emotional exhaustion has a negative effect on employee engagement.

Emotional exhaustion also negatively influences job satisfaction, as prolonged stress and mental fatigue reduce employees' ability to derive positive experiences from their work (Maslach & Leiter, 2008; Lee et al., 2019). However, external factors like salary or recognition may moderate this effect in certain cases (Zhao & Nuangjamnong, 2023). H2: Emotional exhaustion has a negative effect on job satisfaction.

Conversely, job satisfaction as a form of job resource has been shown to foster stronger emotional commitment and active participation in the workplace, which in turn enhances engagement (Saks, 2006; Yao & Methavasarithak, 2023). H3: Job satisfaction has a positive effect on employee engagement. Following the JD-R model, job satisfaction may serve as a mediating variable that helps explain how emotional exhaustion impacts engagement. When satisfaction is preserved, the negative effect of exhaustion on engagement may be reduced (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004). H4: Job satisfaction mediates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee engagement.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study utilizes a quantitative approach with a descriptive-analytical framework to examine how emotional exhaustion affects employee engagement, with job satisfaction serving as an intervening variable. The study was carried out among outsourced staff working in the Inventory Unit at PT Semen Padang, Indonesia. This methodology was selected to enable the objective assessment of relationships among variables through the use of numerical data and statistical techniques.

The choice of Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) over other SEM techniques is based on its suitability for exploratory research with small sample sizes, non-normal data, and complex models. PLS-SEM also emphasizes prediction and theory development, aligning well with the goals of this study.

Data were gathered through a structured questionnaire utilizing a five-point Likert scale ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. The questionnaire items were formulated based on well-established theoretical indicators for each construct. Emotional exhaustion was assessed via three dimensions adapted from Maslach & Jackson (1981) model: emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and decreased personal achievement. Job satisfaction was evaluated using nine facets outlined by Spector (2014), covering aspects such as compensation, opportunities for promotion, supervision quality, benefits, contingent rewards, workplace procedures, coworker relations, nature of the work itself, and communication. Employee engagement was measured following Kahn (1990) framework, which includes emotional, cognitive, and physical dimensions.

To minimize careless responses, the questionnaire included detailed instructions and a minimum time requirement for completion. Additionally, responses were screened for patterns such as straight-lining and unusually short completion times. The population of the study consisted of 52 outsourcing employees from ten operational sub-units under the Inventory Unit. Given the relatively small population size, a total sampling technique was employed, in which every individual within the population was selected to participate as a research respondent. The response rate reached 100%, as all members of the population (52 individuals) completed and returned the distributed questionnaire. This reflects a high level of participant engagement and the user-friendly nature of the online format.

To facilitate practical and efficient data gathering, the survey was administered online through Google Forms, allowing participants to respond at their own pace without interrupting their work routines. Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was validated by subject-matter experts and tested through a small-scale pilot study to ensure clarity and relevance. Instrument reliability was confirmed using Cronbach's Alpha, with a threshold of 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency.

The data analysis involved both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and overall response patterns. For inferential analysis, Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) was employed using SmartPLS software. This method was selected as it allows for the concurrent assessment of the measurement model (outer model) and the

structural model (inner model), thereby supporting hypothesis testing and analysis of mediation effects. Although this study does not incorporate control variables such as tenure, age, or organizational culture, the potential influence of these factors is acknowledged as a limitation. Future studies are encouraged to include such controls to improve explanatory power.

Hypotheses were tested by examining t-statistics and p-values, with a t-value greater than 1.96 (at a 5% significance level) indicating significant relationships. Job satisfaction's mediating function was evaluated using path analysis, which explored both its direct and indirect influences. The R^2 values were applied to determine the extent to which the independent variables account for variability in the dependent variables. The chosen methodological approach offers a solid basis for examining the impact of emotional exhaustion on employee engagement, with job satisfaction acting as a mediator, especially among outsourced personnel in demanding industrial environments.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Description of Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 52 outsourcing employees working in the Inventory Unit of PT Semen Padang. The respondents were categorized based on gender and work unit. In terms of gender distribution, the workforce was predominantly male, with 48 male employees (92%) and only 4 female employees (8%). This reflects the general trend in operational outsourcing roles, which are often filled by men due to the physical nature of the work involved. In terms of work placement, the majority of respondents (26 employees or 50%) were assigned to the *Curah* unit, making it the largest concentration of outsourcing personnel in the inventory division. This was followed by the *OPS* unit with 8 employees (15%), *Suku Cadang* with 7 employees (13%), and *Barang Umum* with 5 employees (10%). The *EMKL* unit accounted for 4 employees (8%), while the smallest number of respondents, 2 employees (4%), were assigned to *Bukit Putus*. This distribution highlights the operational structure within the Inventory Unit, where most outsourced workers are concentrated in the *Curah* unit, likely due to its higher logistical and handling demands, while smaller units such as *Bukit Putus* and *EMKL* maintain more specialized or support-based functions.

3.2 Validity and Reliability Test

The assessment of convergent validity relies on the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) value. Each construct in this study has an AVE greater than 0.5, indicating that the constructs demonstrate satisfactory validity and are considered acceptable.

Table 1. Average variance extracted (AVE)

	Average variance extracted (AVE)
EE	0.799
JS	0.646
EEg	0.654

The AVE values for all constructs surpass the accepted minimum threshold of 0.50, demonstrating adequate convergent validity. This suggests that the indicators employed in the research are well correlated and effectively represent the underlying latent variables.

The construct EE (Emotional Exhaustion) recorded the highest AVE value at 0.799, suggesting a strong degree of shared variance among its indicators. This indicates strong internal reliability and coherence within the construct. The construct JS (Job Satisfaction) also demonstrated adequate convergence, with an AVE of 0.646, confirming that the items reliably measure the underlying satisfaction dimension. Similarly, the

construct EEg (Employee Engagement) showed an AVE of 0.654, supporting the interpretation that the indicators cohesively represent the engagement construct.

These results suggest that the model demonstrates strong structural validity and that the latent variables in the study are statistically consistent. The AVE values confirm that the theoretical concepts have been accurately translated into measurable constructs, which are distinct enough to justify proceeding with advanced analyses such as structural equation modeling or path analysis.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha

	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)
EE	0.968	0.971	0.973
JS	0.954	0.957	0.959
EEg	0.964	0.965	0.968

The values of Cronbach's Alpha and Composite Reliability (CR) for the three latent variables analyzed demonstrate the internal consistency and unidimensionality of each construct. A high Cronbach's Alpha suggests that the indicators in each construct reliably capture a common latent dimension same underlying factor, while Composite Reliability further supports this by taking into account the factor loadings of the indicators. In this study, all constructs exceed the commonly accepted reliability threshold of 0.70, demonstrating that the instruments used are statistically robust with minimal random measurement error.

From a measurement perspective, the high internal reliability scores suggest that respondents consistently interpreted the scale items. For instance, the EE construct (Emotional Exhaustion) recorded the highest alpha (0.968) and CR (0.971), encompassing multiple dimensions such as fatigue, emotional depletion, and stress. The internal coherence of this construct indicates that respondents perceived these facets as part of a unified concept rather than separate elements. Similarly, the JS construct (Job Satisfaction), with $\alpha = 0.954$ and $CR = 0.957$, shows that respondents viewed various satisfaction indicators like work conditions, remuneration, and recognition as integrated components of overall job satisfaction. Finally, the EEg construct (Employee Engagement) reported reliability values ($\alpha = 0.964$; $CR = 0.965$), reinforcing the view that motivation, commitment, and involvement were regarded as interconnected dimensions.

This consistently strong internal reliability across all constructs reinforces the soundness of the theoretical framework and confirms the stability and coherence of the model structure, offering a reliable basis for conducting subsequent hypothesis evaluations and structural analysis

3.3 R-Square (R^2) Test

Once the outer model evaluation is complete, the next step involves assessing the inner model. The R-square value represents how much of the variation in the dependent variable can be accounted for by the independent variables. A higher R^2 value signifies stronger predictive capability of the model.

Table 3. R-square

	R-Square	R-square adjusted
JS	0.742	0.737
EEg	0.707	0.695

The inner model analysis shows that the R-square (R^2) value for Job Satisfaction (JS) is 0.742, while for Employee Engagement (EEg), it is 0.707. These figures suggest the model has strong explanatory capability, with over 70% of the variance in each endogenous variable accounted for by the exogenous variables within the model.

Specifically, 74.2% of the variation in job satisfaction can be explained by emotional exhaustion. Meanwhile, 70.7% of the variation in employee engagement is accounted for by emotional exhaustion and job satisfaction. The adjusted R^2 values, being marginally lower than the R^2 values, indicate that the model avoids overfitting and maintains its statistical validity.

According to Hair et al., (2019) suggest that in behavioral research, an R^2 value of 0.67 or above is generally regarded as indicating strong explanatory power. Thus, the R^2 values obtained in this study fall into the strong predictive category, confirming the model's adequacy in explaining the structural relationships between constructs.

3.4 Hypotesis Test

Hypothesis testing is performed by comparing the T-statistic values derived from bootstrapping in SmartPLS 4 software with the critical values found in the T-distribution table.

Table 4. Direct Effect Hypothesis Test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EE -> JS	-0.862	-0.867	0.050	17.105	0.000
EE -> EEg	-0.113	-0.113	0.164	0.693	0.489
JS -> EEg	0.741	0.747	0.161	4.613	0.000

The hypothesis testing in this study was conducted using the bootstrapping technique in the SmartPLS 4 software, by comparing the T-statistic values against the critical value of 1.96, and observing the corresponding p-values to determine statistical significance.

For Hypothesis 1 (H1), which proposed that emotional exhaustion negatively affects employee engagement, the analysis showed a path coefficient (O) of -0.113, indicating a negative direction. However, the T-statistic was only 0.693, and the p-value was 0.489 (greater than 0.05), meaning the result is not statistically significant. Therefore, H1 is not supported, suggesting that emotional exhaustion does not have a direct significant effect on employee engagement. This result implies the possible presence of an indirect effect through a mediating variable, such as job satisfaction.

In contrast, Hypothesis 2 (H2), which proposed that emotional exhaustion negatively affects job satisfaction, was strongly supported. The path coefficient was -0.862, with a T-statistic of 17.105 and a p-value of 0.000, both indicating a highly significant negative relationship. This finding confirms that the higher the level of emotional exhaustion experienced by employees, the lower their level of job satisfaction.

For Hypothesis 3 (H3), which stated that job satisfaction has a positive effect on employee engagement, the path coefficient was 0.741, with a T-statistic of 4.613 and a p-value of 0.000. These results show a strong and statistically significant positive effect, supporting H3. This implies that employees who are more satisfied with their jobs are more likely to be engaged in their work.

Overall, these findings highlight that while emotional exhaustion does not directly impact employee engagement, it significantly reduces job satisfaction, which in turn positively influences employee engagement indicating the potential mediating role of job satisfaction in the overall model.

Table 5. Indirect Effect Hypothesis Test

	Original sample (O)	Sample mean (M)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (O/STDEV)	P values
EE -> JS -> EEg	-0.638	-0.645	0.137	4.647	0.000

In addition to testing direct effects, this study also examines indirect effects through the mediating variable, job satisfaction. The analysis was conducted using the

indirect effect output from bootstrapping in SmartPLS. According to standard criteria, an indirect effect is considered statistically significant when the T-statistic > 1.96 and the p-value < 0.05 .

The results of the mediation analysis show that emotional exhaustion indirectly affects employee engagement through job satisfaction, with a path coefficient (original sample) of -0.638 , a T-statistic of 4.647 , and a p-value of 0.000 . These results confirm that the indirect effect is negative and statistically significant.

Thus, Hypothesis 4 is supported, indicating that job satisfaction significantly mediates the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee engagement. Although emotional exhaustion does not directly influence engagement, it can reduce engagement indirectly by lowering job satisfaction. This finding highlights the importance of job satisfaction as a key psychological mechanism linking emotional strain and employee involvement. The

findings of this research highlight several important relationships. Notably, emotional exhaustion did not show a significant direct impact on employee engagement. This aligns with the findings of Kusumawati et al. (2020), who argued that emotional exhaustion does not directly reduce engagement, as other variables such as job satisfaction may mediate this relationship. Similarly, Khairana et al. (2024) found that exhaustion indirectly affects employees' intention to stay through engagement, highlighting the role of mediating variables. Perepelkin & Wilson (2023) also emphasized that burnout does not directly lower engagement but may trigger disengagement in the absence of adequate psychological or organizational resources.

Emotional exhaustion significantly and negatively affected job satisfaction, which supports the Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) theory proposed by Bakker & Demerouti (2007). According to this theory, excessive job demands like emotional stress can reduce satisfaction if adequate resources are lacking. Supporting studies include Gunawan & Made (2016), Santika & Sudibia (2017), Wayan et al. (2015) and Sihaloho & Indawati (2021), all of which found that emotional exhaustion significantly reduces job satisfaction across various sectors.

Job satisfaction showed a significant positive influence on employee engagement. This result supports Kahn (1990), who emphasized job satisfaction as a key driver of engagement. Similar results were reported by Azzahra & Wijayanto (2021), Barreto & Mayya (2024), and Firdausi et al. (2024), who found that satisfied employees are more motivated, loyal, and actively involved in their work.

job satisfaction significantly mediated the relationship between emotional exhaustion and employee engagement. This mediation effect confirms the JD-R theory's proposition that job satisfaction acts as a buffer, reducing the adverse impact of emotional strain on engagement. Firdausi et al. (2024) and Barreto & Mayya (2024) both highlighted the importance of job satisfaction in sustaining engagement even under stress, emphasizing the role of supportive work environments and recognition systems.

It is important to note that these findings are context-specific and derived from a sample of outsourced employees in the Inventory Unit of PT Semen Padang. The nature of outsourced work in this unit characterized by physically demanding tasks, standardized operations, and hierarchical supervision may influence the levels of emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction, and engagement differently compared to other units or companies. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing these results to outsourced workers in other organizational contexts, especially those with different job demands, organizational cultures, or levels of autonomy. Future studies are encouraged to replicate this research across various outsourcing environments to validate and extend the applicability of these findings.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings show that emotional exhaustion does not directly and significantly affect employee engagement among outsourcing employees at PT Semen Padang. Rather, emotional exhaustion significantly diminishes job satisfaction, which then strongly and positively affects employee engagement. This indicates that emotional fatigue alone is not sufficient to disengage employees unless it also leads to dissatisfaction with their jobs. Additionally, the findings highlight the important mediating function of job satisfaction in the link between emotional exhaustion and employee engagement. This implies that organizations should prioritize employees' psychological well-being by creating a supportive workplace that boosts satisfaction. By doing so, companies can lessen the harmful effects of emotional demands and help maintain engagement levels. These results also align with the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) framework, which posits that job resources, such as satisfaction, can mitigate the negative consequences of job demands like emotional exhaustion. Management should prioritize psychological welfare by implementing stress management programs, emotional skills training, and fair reward systems, while fostering open communication to enhance job satisfaction. Future research should consider expanding variables to include organizational support, work-life balance, work culture, and workload, and explore different employee groups and industries to increase the generalizability and depth of understanding of factors influencing employee engagement. This study has some limitations that should be noted. The research was limited to outsourcing employees at PT Semen Padang, which restricts the generalizability of the findings to other companies or sectors with different characteristics. Additionally, only three main variables were examined, excluding other potentially influential factors such as organizational support and work-life balance. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design of the study captures data at a single point in time, limiting the understanding of long-term dynamics between variables. Therefore, these limitations suggest the need for cautious interpretation of the results and encourage future research to expand the scope, variables, and methodology to provide more comprehensive insights.

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